

Matthew 18:21-35 “Making Christ Known Through Forgiving Others”^{**1}

Main Idea: One of the most powerful ways to make Christ known to a lost world is through forgiving others as we have been forgiven. In Jesus' parable in Matthew 18:21-35 we see three things that can help us when we find it hard to forgive.

- I. The controversy regarding forgiveness (21-22)
 - A. It was true for Peter.
 - B. It is true for us.
 1. How can I forgive if I can't forget?
 2. How can I forgive if I don't feel like it?
 - II. The comparison regarding forgiveness (23-34)
 - A. Scene #1: A king was merciful to his servant (23-27).
 1. His servant owed a great debt.
 2. He canceled the debt.
 - B. Scene #2: The servant was unmerciful to another servant (28-31).
 1. His fellow servant owed a smaller debt.
 2. He refused to cancel the debt.
 - C. Scene #3: The king rebuked his unmerciful servant (32-34).
 - III. The climax regarding forgiveness (35)
 - A. I've been forgiven far more than I'll ever forgive.
 - B. If I'm unwilling to forgive, something's wrong with my relationship with God.
- Make It Personal: What should you do when you find it hard to forgive?
1. Remember how much God forgave you.
 2. Choose to forgive others as you have been forgiven.

How do we make our Savior known to a lost world? This is our mission, to make Christ known, but how do we do it? By verbal witness, certainly. But how do we do it when those who need to hear what we have to say don't want to hear?

The Lord has given us two very compelling (and often neglected) ways to make Him known to a lost world. Frankly, both are painful yet incredibly powerful. One way, as we'll see today, is through **forgiving**. The other, as we'll see next week (the Lord willing), is through **suffering**. When we forgive, we are portraying Christ. When we suffer well, we are likewise portraying Christ in a way the world cannot miss.

I'm going to read a passage, but before I do I want you to have some information. A “talent” is a monetary unit worth about 20 years wages for a common laborer. A “denarius” was one day's wages for a laborer². The first servant in the story owes 10,000 talents which is a debt that would take him **200,000 years** of daily work to repay. The second servant owes 100 denarii which would take him **100 days** of daily work to repay.

Scripture Reading: Matthew 18:21-35

The telephone rings one evening, and on the other end is your friend from church, Sally. She's crying uncontrollably, and in between sobs you piece together the story. She says she's had it with her husband, Pete. After eleven, rocky years of marriage, she's decided to call it quits. “I just don't love him anymore. He's let me down too many times, and I've had enough. How can I forgive him when I can't forget what he's done to me?” What would you say to Sally?

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ This passage was looked at WBC previously in 1997, “Stories That Touch the Heart,” three of Jesus' parables dealing with forgiveness.

² ESV footnote

Or what would you do if, one of your best friends, Roger, hurt you deeply. You and Roger had been through thick and thin together. You came to know Christ at about the same time five years ago. You've worked in the church together. You've taken family vacations together. But last year, he shared with other people a personal item you'd mentioned to him in confidence. Since then, to no surprise, your friendship has been strained. Whereas you used to enjoy being together, now you both avoid each other. And the gangrene is starting to spread, for others are seeing it and starting to take sides. What are you going to do?

Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Those of course are Jesus' words of instruction for how we are to pray. He makes it clear that there is a vital connection between how our Father treats us when we sin and how we treat others when they sin against us.

One of the most powerful ways we can make Christ known to this lost world is through forgiving others the same way we have been forgiven by God. Forgiveness is so God-like. It can be mocked, yes, misunderstood, certainly, but it can't be ignored.

It's not easy to forgive. Marriages have dissolved and friendships have been scarred because of a failure to exercise biblical forgiveness. Churches have split and families have been torn apart because of a lack of forgiveness.

But on the other hand, untold numbers have been drawn to Christ by the magnetic power of seeing a Christian choose to forgive an offender. I think of Mincaye, the former Auca warrior who speared to death missionary Nate Saint (and Ed McCully). Christ not only saved Mincaye, but He gave Nate's son Steve the ability not only to forgive, but to call Mincaye "father," and Steve's children call him "grandfather." Years after the killings, Mincaye actually baptized Steve Saint and his sister, and then years later still, he baptized Jamie Saint and his brother.

Only the powerful gospel of Christ can produce this kind of underserved, God-like forgiveness, and when it does, people can't help but see it and be amazed.³

Is it easy to forgive? No. That's why it's so compelling. It's one of the most evangelistic things we'll ever do for the lost people in this world. Forgive as we have been forgiven.

To help us do just that, Jesus told the shocking story recorded in Matthew 18:21-35. It's called the parable of the unmerciful servant, and it's here we see three things that can help us when we find it hard to forgive.

I. The controversy regarding forgiveness (21-22)

Actually, Matthew 18 begins on a note of controversy when the disciples ask Jesus (1), "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" That question sets the tone for Jesus' teaching in chapter 18. It has to do with the kind of relationships Jesus desires his disciples to have.

God delights in restoring broken people, and so should we. Little people matter to God, and should to us (the point of verses 1-6). When a sheep leaves the fold, the shepherd goes after it. So we should pursue the wayward sheep (10-14).

In fact, Jesus tells us *how* to restore broken people in verses 15-19. He instructs us concerning the discipline process, for in order to restore a wayward member of the

³By the way, Mincaye turned 90 last year, and is in a wheelchair fitted for him by Joni's organization, Wheels for the World. <https://www.epm.org/blog/2019/Jun/26/update-minicaye>

church, confrontation is in order. We're to go after people. We love God and the person too much to allow them to live in persistent sin.

Jesus' teaching is very practical. He says in verse 15, "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over." What if he doesn't listen? Jesus says to take one or two others along as you plead with him to repent and be restored. What if he resists these efforts? Jesus says, tell it to the church. What if he refuses to respond to the church? Jesus explains (17), "Treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector."

But what if your brother does repent? What if the Spirit pricks his heart, and your brother asks you to forgive him for what he did to you? You forgive him. That's the goal the church is after in the discipline process, to see repentance and forgiveness take place.

But what if your brother does it again? Then what should you do? How far should you go in this granting of forgiveness? That's what Peter wanted to know. There is a controversy regarding forgiveness.

A. It was true for Peter. Verse 21, "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?"

Keep the context in mind. Jesus just finished mapping out what to do when a fellow Christian sins against you. First, you confront his sin, face to face, out of love for your brother. Sadly, far too often we don't confront. It's much easier to talk to someone else about it (which is gossip), or to bury it and hope it goes away (which it never does). But Jesus says the right thing to do is to confront your brother and get the sin out on the table.

Then what? What should we do if the confronted person asks for our forgiveness? And what if they ask us to forgive them today for the same sin we just forgave yesterday? That's what Peter is asking. How often must I forgive? How far do I have to go in tolerating unjust behavior towards me?

Peter didn't wait for an answer, but offered his own, "Up to seven times?" He thought he was being generous. The rabbis taught that a man must forgive his brother *three* times. They based "three" on Amos 1:3, 6, 9, etc. where God said, "For three transgressions and for four," and deduced that God's forgiveness extended to three offenses, on the fourth He punished. Peter doubled the rabbi's standard and added one for good measure.

But Peter's not the only one with a controversy regarding forgiveness.

B. It is true for us. We struggle with forgiveness. We, too, wrestle with questions.

1. *How can I forgive if I can't forget?* "Pastor, every time I look into his eyes, I remember what he did. I just can't forget it. So how could I ever forgive him?" Based on that question, many conclude they can't. And this one.

2. *How can I forgive if I don't feel like it?* "I know I shouldn't be bitter, but I just can't help it. I trusted her, and she betrayed me. The last thing I feel like doing is forgiving her, so how can I?"

Perhaps you can relate. Perhaps right now you are struggling to forgive someone. What should you do? Start right here. Listen carefully to a story by Jesus.

II. The comparison regarding forgiveness (23-34)

Remember, Peter thought he was being generous with his answer, "Till seven times?" Watch how Jesus responded to Peter's standard-raising. He told him, "Not high enough,

Peter!" Verse 22, "Jesus answered, I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times [or seventy times seven, KJV]."

Why 77 times? You might recall that one of Cain's descendants was a brutal killer named Lamech. In Genesis 4:23-24, Lamech made this boast, "Hear my words, I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for injuring me. If Cain is avenged seven times, then Lamech 77 times." Lamech lived by the world's motto, "If you hurt me, you'll pay." The law of revenge.

Are Jesus-followers to live by the law of revenge? Absolutely not. To the contrary, we're to forgive 77 times, which in essence means that forgiving has no limit. It's always right to forgive when we've been wronged. It's never right to withhold forgiveness.

To make His point, Jesus told a story of comparison (23-34). It has three scenes.

A. Scene #1: A king was merciful to his servant (23-27). "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants." It's interesting that Matthew, a former tax collector, recorded this story about money which involved a man who took inventory of his assets. That's what Matthew used to do.

Notice the comparison. Jesus used a story to show us what kingdom living is like. It's very different from worldly living. When talk about "worldly living," we usually have in mind the external, visible sins. We're big against sins like drunkenness, immorality, and stealing, and we should be, for God is, too. But He's just as concerned with hidden, heart sins, like envy, pride, bitterness, and an unforgiving spirit. These, too, are to have no place in the lives of Jesus-followers.

It's a fascinating story that Jesus told. In taking inventory, here's what the king found.

1. His servant owed a great debt. Verses 24, "As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him."

Ten thousand talents. How much is that? It's huge. 1 Chronicles 29:4, 7 says that King David donated 3,000 talents of gold and 7,000 talents of silver for the construction of the temple. Taking into consideration inflation, in today's currency we're talking about a debt that was over a *billion* dollars.

If you took \$1 bills and started stacking them, once you reached one billion dollars your stack would be 67.9 miles high. That would reach from the earth's surface into the troposphere.

How in the world did this man run up a debt of over a billion dollars? Jesus doesn't tell us. The man had to have committed some huge blunder, or multiple blunders. Again, how do you lose one billion dollars? We're talking gross negligence at best, if not high handed criminal activity.

Jesus' point is that the first servant's debt was unpayable. 200,000 years of daily work? There's no way out. Verse 25, "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."

People with bad credit ratings were often thrown into prison. Why? For two reasons. One, so they couldn't skip town. Two, to prompt relatives to pay off the debt.

What did the servant do when he heard his penalty? Jesus tells us in verse 26, "The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.'" The man had no resources nor hope, so he begged for time. He promised to repay his debt. That, of course, was impossible. Then comes the unexpected.

Verse 27, "The servant's master took pity on [same word in 9:36] him, canceled the debt and let him go." Did you catch that? Did the king grant the servant his request? Did he lengthen the payment schedule? No. He *canceled* a one billion dollar debt!

2. *He (the king) canceled the debt.* Who does that? This king just nullified his servant's unpayable deficit. What happened to the debt? Don't miss this. The king took the loss personally. This was his money, so to cancel means he just absorbed the loss.

This is an aspect of forgiveness we need to talk about. It is costly to forgive. When you forgive you are saying to the one owes you, "You don't owe me any longer." Not because the debt vanished. You just chose to absorb the loss yourself. Again, who does that? God does, and by His help so do His people.

Last week I mentioned a very helpful series of messages I've been listening to by Milton Vincent, "Evangelizing Those Who Wrong You." He makes this point and cites a couple of quotations worthy of our attention:

Ken Sande – "Forgiveness can be a costly activity. When you cancel a debt, it does not just simply disappear. Instead, you absorb the liability that someone else deserves to pay. Similarly, forgiveness requires that you absorb certain effects of the other person's sins and you release that person from liability to punishment. This is precisely what Christ accomplished on Calvary."⁴

Timothy Keller – "Everyone who forgives . . . goes through a death . . . and experiences nails, blood, sweat, and tears. . . . Forgiveness is costly suffering . . . forgiveness . . . at first always feels far worse than bitterness. . . . Forgiveness means refusing to make them pay for what they did. However, to refrain from lashing out at someone when you want to do so with all your being is agony. It is a form of suffering. You not only suffer the original loss of happiness, reputation, and opportunity, but now you forgo the consolation of inflicting the same on them. You are absorbing the debt, taking the cost of it completely on yourself instead of taking it out on the other person. It hurts terribly. Many people would say it feels like a kind of death."⁵

The king cancelled the servant's debt. So ends scene #1 in Jesus' story.

B. Scene #2: The servant was unmerciful to another servant (28-31). So the first servant left the king's presence a free man, the beneficiary of the magnanimous mercy of his master. He walked outside with a new bounce in his step, a new lease on life, and guess what he did first thing? He headed to find a friend of his. To share his good news? Hardly.

Verse 28, "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." Notice the details.

1. *His fellow servant owed a smaller debt.* Much smaller. One hundred denarii. That's not chicken feed. We're talking about a hundred days' wages. How much do you make in three months? This was a substantial debt. Yet...it was repayable, and certainly trivial when compared with a debt that would take 200,000 years to repay.

Someone has estimated that one man could carry 100 denarii in one pocket. But to move the debt of 10,000 talents would take an army of 8,600 carriers, each carrying a sack sixty pounds in weight.⁶

⁴ Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker*.

⁵ Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God*.

⁶ If these men stood one yard apart, they would form a line five miles long!

In today's numbers, 300 denarii would be around \$17,000. If I had \$17,000 in a stack of \$100 bills, it would be about 3/4 inch thick. If I had 10,000 talents in today's equivalency, I would have conservatively one billion dollars (some say up to seven billion dollars), and if I had one billion dollars worth of \$100 bills, the stack would be about one mile high.

Let that sink in. A stack of \$100 bills one mile high—that's the first servant's debt. And a stack of \$100 bills 3/4 inch high—that's the second servant's debt.

We're talking a billion dollar debt! To carry a *million* dollars in one hundred dollar bills, you would need an ordinary sized duffle bag, and it would weigh about twenty pounds. To carry a *billion* dollars worth of one hundred dollar bills, you would need a ten ton dump truck.⁷

The point is, you can't even compare these two debts. One hundred denarii is peanuts when stacked up against ten thousand talents. But the first servant goes ballistic, starts choking his fellow servant, and demands he pay up now!

Watch carefully how the second servant responded (29), "His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.'" Does that sound familiar? It should. It's the same response the first servant gave to his master. And he received mercy. Surely, he who had been forgiven so much would be willing to forgive a debt far less, wouldn't he?

Verse 30 is shocking, "But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt."

2. *He refused to cancel the debt.* No mercy, no compassion. Strictly by the book. It was as if he had totally forgotten the pardon he'd just received.

But the other servants didn't. Verse 31, "When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened." This was unthinkable. "A king's million-dollar-forgiveness," observes one commentator, "would surely produce a forgiven debtor's million-dollar patience will all future petty debts, wouldn't it?"⁸

You would think, but here's the problem. We're so prone to forget. No wonder the psalmist speaks to his own soul this word of exhortation in Psalm 103:2-3, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and *forget not* all his benefits, who forgives *all* your iniquity..."

How quickly, when faced with the 3/4 inch debt my brother "owes" me, do I forget the mile-high debt that God Himself chose to absorb out of His sheer mercy.

Brothers and sisters, there's a direct correlation between our appreciation of the King's forgiveness and our capacity to forgive others. The less we appreciate the king's forgiveness, the less we will forgive.⁹ Jesus said in Luke 7:47, "He who is forgiven little loves little."

This is why last week's message is vital. I need a clear sighting of the cross every day, for if I lose sight of the cross, I lose perspective on the 3/4 inch debts that people owe me. But when I gaze at the bloodied Son of God hanging there, I'm reminded that instead of justice, God showed me mercy, and not for a 3/4 inch debt either, but an unpayable, mile high obligation that would have sentenced me to the prison of hell forever.

⁷ The weight would be 20,000 pounds.

⁸ Bruner, 659

⁹ Bruner, 659.

C. Scene #3: The king rebuked his unmerciful servant (32-34). "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."

The king was incensed, and rightfully so. He had forgiven his servant a debt he could never repay. He didn't just give him time, but ate the debt and canceled the IOU. Yet when faced with a similar opportunity, this ungrateful servant did not reflect his master's kindness, did not show one ounce of mercy, but demanded payback. And his actions cost him dearly.

Several years ago, I met a twelve year old boy. A friendly kid. I asked him if he had any brothers and sisters. He told me he didn't, but later elaborated, "Well, I've got an older sister, but she's hurt us. She's in real trouble with the law. I don't claim her."

I'm intrigued by the way the master addressed his servant. "You *wicked* servant." Please notice that a lack of mercy is a *moral* problem. We often associate wickedness with certain behaviors, so a "wicked" person is someone who does drugs, sleeps around, and beats his children. Yes, that's wickedness. But to God, a person who doesn't show mercy is a wicked person. A stingy person is a wicked person. A judgmental person is a wicked person. A proud person is a wicked person. A bitter person is a wicked person. An unforgiving person is a wicked person.

How often should we forgive when we've been wronged? According to Jesus, every time the person asks, just like God does with us. Every time. What if we don't forgive? You might be surprised at Jesus' answer. The controversy regarding forgiveness, the comparison regarding forgiveness, now in verse 35...

III. The climax regarding forgiveness (35)

Jesus gives us the punchline in verse 35, "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart." Please don't water down Jesus' sober warning. He says that My father will treat *you* like this unless you forgive your brother from your heart.

By giving us this story Jesus makes two things perfectly clear.

A. I've been forgiven far more than I'll ever forgive. And so have you, if you are a Christian. Nothing people will ever do to us can compare with what we've done to God. I will never be asked to forgive someone for an offense that even begins to compare with the multitude of offenses for which God has forgiven me.

As a sinner I resist that statement. I start thinking, "Well, you don't know what so and so did to me. It's big, I mean, *real* big." And it does seem like a mountain too big to overcome. But there's one place I can go bring that mountain down to size.

The cross. Something happens to that mountain when I fix my eyes on the One hanging on those two planks of wood. To help us do just that, I'd like to read something from, *From When God Weeps: Why Our Sufferings Matter to the Almighty*, by Joni Eareckson & Steven Estes:¹⁰

"He begins to feel a foreign sensation. Somewhere during this day an unearthly foul odor began to waft, not around his nose, but his heart. He feels dirty. Human

¹⁰ Pp. 53-54; taken from <https://graceky.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Milton-Vincent-Notes.pdf>

wickedness starts to crawl upon his spotless being-the living excrement from our souls. The apple of his Father's eye turns brown with rot. His Father! He must face his Father like this! From heaven the Father now rouses himself like a lion disturbed, shakes his mane, and roars against the shriveling remnant of a man hanging on a cross. Never has the Son seen the Father look at him so, never felt even the least of his hot breath. But the roar shakes the unseen world and darkens the visible sky. The Son does not recognize these eyes.

“Son of Man! Why have you behaved so? You have cheated, lusted, stolen, gossiped, murdered, envied, hated, lied. You have cursed, robbed, overspent, overeaten, fornicating, disobeyed, embezzled, and blasphemed. Oh, the duties you have shirked, the children you have abandoned! Who has ever so ignored the poor, so played the coward, so belittled my name? Have you ever held your razor tongue? What a self-righteous, pitiful drunk -- you, who molest young boys, peddle killer drugs, travel in cliques, and mock your parents. Who gave you the boldness to rig elections, spur revolutions, torture animals, and worship demons? Does the list never end! Splitting families, raping virgins, acting smugly, playing the pimp, buying politicians, practicing extortion, filming pornography, accepting bribes.

You have burned down buildings, perfected terrorist tactics, founded false religions, traded in slaves, relishing each morsel and bragging about it all. I hate, I loathe these things in you! Disgust for everything about you consumes me! Can you not feel my wrath?”

Of course, the Son is innocent. He is blamelessness itself. The Father knows this. But the divine pair have an agreement, and the unthinkable must now take place. Jesus will be treated as if personally responsible for every sin ever committed.

The Father watches as his heart's treasure, the mirror-image of himself, sinks drowning in to raw, liquid sin. Jehovah's stored rage against humankind from every century explodes in a single direction.

“My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?!” But heaven stops its ears. The Son stares up at the One who cannot, who will not, reach down or reply.

The Trinity had planned it. The Son endured it. The Spirit enabled him. The Father rejected the Son whom he loved. Jesus, the God-man from Nazareth, perished. The Father accepted his sacrifice for sin and was satisfied. The Rescue was accomplished. God set down his saw. This is who asks us to trust him when he calls on us to suffer.”

Is it hard to forgive? Yes. It's agonizing. How then can I do it? By remembering that I have been forgiven, because Jesus took my place (and yours too), far more than I'll ever be asked to forgive.

Gaze at the cross, my friend. Keep gazing until the sight melts your heart.

He took my sins and my sorrows, He made them His very own. He bore the burden to Calvary, and suffered and died alone. How marvelous! How wonderful! And my song shall ever be. How marvelous! How wonderful! Is my Savior's love for me

Are you struggling to forgive someone right now? Then ponder the cross. Does what that person did to you begin to compare with the billion dollar debt you owed God, a debt His Son absorbed for you, which is now forgiven?

You say, "But I'm not God. I can't do that!" The truth is, you can't, not on your own. If you do not know Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord, you don't have the power to

forgive. You need to be forgiven, right now, by God. And He will forgive you if you will repent and believe in His Son.

And if you know Christ, not only *can* you forgive, you *must* forgive. Why is that?

B. If I'm unwilling to forgive, something's wrong with my relationship with God.

Let Jesus' words sink in (35, KJV), "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye, from your hearts, forgive not every one his brother his trespasses."

To be forgiven leads to a willingness to forgive. It necessitates it. An unwillingness to forgive reveals one who is unforgiven. If I refuse to forgive someone, it indicates I don't really understand God's forgiveness. I don't understand how great my sin was, and how great His grace is.

If I see my wife's sins as a 10 and my sins as a 2, I will walk around with a level 2 experience of grace, which will be insufficient to deal with her sins. If I'm going to be the husband I ought, I need a level 10 grace.¹¹

Listen again to Jesus. We have received a one mile high payment of grace, and all we did was ask. Now He enables us to forgive the sins committed against us, and when that happens, He puts His gospel on display for the world to see.

Jesus' parable is filled with practical implications. It helps us work through some common pitfalls when it comes to forgiveness. Such as:

"I'll forgive you, but this is the last time."

Milton Vincent said, "When we forgive someone, we should not say in our hearts, "I forgive them for this now, but this is the last time." Instead, true forgiveness says, "I forgive you for this now – and if you were to do this 489 more times, I would forgive you that many times if needed."¹²

"I forgave someone of a sin against me, but now I find myself angry again. Does that mean that I never really truly forgave in the first place? Was my previous forgiveness just a sham?"

Milton Vincent's answer: "When Jesus tells us to forgive 490 times, He is not simply telling us that we need to forgive 490 separate individual sins one time each. He is also saying that sometimes we will find ourselves needing to forgive one sin 490 times. A sin with 490 facets will eventually require 490 moments of forgiveness."¹³

Make It Personal: What should you do when you find it hard to forgive?

According to Jesus, two things.

1. *Remember how much God forgave you.* If you are in Christ, God forgave you a debt which was beyond paying! Remember that. Never forget it. If you are struggling to forgive someone, keep looking at the cross.

A practical word about how to forgive. Forgiveness requires repentance. Forgiveness is not saying, "Ah, let's forget it. It was no big deal." Sin is a big deal. Remember, this parable follows Jesus' teaching on church discipline. We must confront sin, not overlook it. Why? To exact justice, to make people pay? No. To bring about repentance and restoration. So what should we do when a brother repents and asks for our forgiveness?

¹¹ Observation by Milton Vincent

¹² <https://graceky.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Milton-Vincent-Notes.pdf>

¹³ <https://graceky.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Milton-Vincent-Notes.pdf>

Here's what often happens. Husbands and wives give each other the silent treatment. Teens retreat to their rooms and slam the door. Why? We make those who've wronged us *earn* their way back into a right relationship with us. Is that what God did with us?

So how practically do we forgive another person? The word "forgive" means "to release, to send off, to pardon, to let go." Forgiveness is not just saying "I'm sorry." Nor is it apologizing. The steps of biblical forgiveness involve *asking* for forgiveness ("I was wrong for what I did to you, Bob. I've asked God to forgive me. Will you forgive me?"), and then *granting* forgiveness ("Yes, Brad, I forgive you").

What's involved in saying "I forgive you." Notice that Jesus says it must come "from your heart." When I say, "I forgive you," I am promising the following: one, I will not bring up the matter again with you; two, I will not talk about the matter with others so as to slander you; and three, I will not dwell on the matter myself. It's settled. I've let go of it. The reason I forgive you is because I remember how much I've been forgiven by God.

There's something else we must do if we find it hard to forgive. Remember, then...

2. *Choose to forgive others as you have been forgiven.* Forgiveness is a choice. I don't need to feel anything to make this choice (actually, the feelings are the consequence, not the basis for forgiveness). Nor do I need to forget the deed in order to forgive (which is impossible). Forgiveness is a choice--a choice to do for others what God did for you.

Will you make that choice this morning? Do you need to be forgiven? Do you need to forgive as you've been forgiven?

Supplemental: Other forgiveness quotes:

Something amazing happens when God forgives us. He changes our attitudes towards people, even people who wrong us. The following true story reveals this (from *Loving God*, Colson, 193-4)...

Milton Vincent offers this definition, "forgive. (a) to send away sin from between you and the one who sinned against you and to hold that sin against the offender no more; (b) to release ("send away") the offender from the consequences they deserve from you as a result of the sins they have committed against you; and (c) to positively favor them with blessings they do not deserve."

"Kindness says to our spouse, 'I know you are a sinner like me and you will sin against me, just like I sin against you. But I refuse to live defensively with you. I'm going to live leaning in your direction with a merciful posture that your sin and weakness cannot erase.'" (from *When Sinners Say 'I Do'* by Dave Harvey)

"Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give it to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. To love is to be vulnerable. . . . the only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is Hell."¹⁴

¹⁴C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, 169.

-From Cindy in *When Sinners Say I Do*,

“Over time, I began to see my own sinfulness and God’s grace and mercy for my sins. It was very hard to look at my own contribution to the breakdown of my marriage. I wanted to just focus on his part and leave the blame there, but God opened my eyes and helped me to see that, even as a victim of my husband’s sin I could not claim innocence in my marriage, and certainly not before a holy God.” “The gospel gave me power to forgive my husband. Christ had died for both our sins, dying in our place and drinking the full cup of God’s wrath we deserved for our sins. Through the revelation of this truth, I was humbled and disarmed – we were more alike than different. From this standing place, forgiveness flowed.”¹⁵

From Milton Vincent, *A Gospel Primer for Christians*:

“Thankfully, the gospel teaches me that dying is not an end, but a beginning. For after Christ took up His cross and died, God raised Him from the dead, exalted Him to the highest heaven, and drew Him into His bosom. These facts surrounding Christ’s resurrection stand as proof positive that God will not leave me for dead, but will raise me similarly, if I would only allow myself to die. Indeed, on the other side of each layer of dying lie experiences of a life with God that are far richer, far higher, and far more intimate than anything I would have otherwise known. “In God’s economy, death is the way to life. “Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it,” Jesus says, “but whoever loses His life for My sake, he shall find it.” Indeed, the more conformable I am made to the death of Christ, the more I experience freedom from sin and taste the power of the resurrection of Jesus Himself. The path to such power is paved with many dyings, and each stage of resurrection is achieved with each incident of dying to myself and reckoning myself dead to sin.”

“The more I contemplate the gospel, the more I understand that this “word of the cross” stands as a blueprint for my own life story. The death that Christ died is the death to which I also am called, and the death to which I am called is my entry point to union with Christ and life at its fullest. So, come what may, I’ll let no one take this death from me!”

Milton Vincent, “The idea of “Getting to the Place of Forgiveness” can be misused. In her book, *Choosing Forgiveness*, Nancy Leigh DeMoss talks about one of the myths of forgiveness. She explains:

“There’s a . . . myth that keeps many people from experiencing the reality and blessings of forgiveness in their lives—that forgiveness requires a long, drawn-out process “I’ve heard people say, ‘I’m moving toward forgiveness,’ . . . — sometimes even after years of counseling and therapy. There’s no question that for some people, coming to grips with the awful offenses they’ve been forced to endure can be a long and arduous journey. The road just to get to the place where forgiveness is barely palatable is often a story in itself. “But I’ll just say this from experience: I’ve watched believers ‘working their way’ toward forgiveness for years and years and never getting there. In fact, I might even go so far as to say that when forgiveness is seen primarily as a work in

¹⁵ Dave Harvey, *When Sinners Say ‘I Do’*, 109.

progress, it seldom becomes a work in practice. “The choice to forgive does not have to involve a long, extended process—any more than God’s forgiveness of us is a slow-moving, wait-and-see, not-till-I’m-good-and-ready series of events and checkpoints.” “. . . by God’s grace, you can choose to forgive in a moment of time, to the level of your understanding at that point. And though much more may be required of you down the line, the reality of being released from the prison of your own unforgiveness can happen today. This moment.”¹⁶

¹⁶ Nancy Leigh DeMoss, *Choosing Forgiveness*