

How to Develop a Forgiving Heart

Stories to Be Shaped by- part 1

Matthew 18:15-35; Luke 17:3-4

March 27, 2016

DAY 1: Beginning thoughts about forgiveness

1. Forgiveness is one of those qualities that we admire in others, expect from others when we mess up, but find it incredibly difficult to really let go of a grudge, resentment or bitterness when we've been "done wrong" by someone else.

Matthew 18:21 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?"

2. Peter asked Jesus a simple question. In that day, the religious leaders instructed that everyone had an obligation to forgive someone up to three times. Peter doubles that number and adds one.

3. What do you think is motivating Peter to ask that question?

Matthew 18:22 Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

4. Jesus' answer was shocking two thousand years ago, and it's still shocking today. If you've read different translations of this passage, some say "seventy times seven" and some say "seventy-seven." The translators were left with a rather vague Greek phrase, that literally said, "seventy, seven."

5. No matter what the number, the number is staggering! Sometimes the difficult offenses are hard to forgive, and sometimes, the smallest offenses can "get under our goat." What reasons can you think of that make granting forgiveness so difficult?

6. Sometimes it's difficult to forgive because there is something we "gain" by not forgiving.

- I cling to the wrong done to me that "validates" my worth—"I *should* be treated better."
- I cling to the feelings of anger – there is a feeling of justification
- I cling to the feeling of superiority – "I am better than the person who did that to me!"
- I cling to the feelings of what was due me.

7. What do you think makes it difficult for you to forgive someone else?

DAY 2: The king forgives a two BILLION DOLLAR debt

1. Jesus begins a parable to help us understand the nature of forgiveness and to expose why forgiveness is so hard for us.

Matthew 18:23 "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him.

2. The king was owed “ten thousand talents” of money by one of his servants. ONE talent would be worth about twenty years’ wages! If you do the math, you’ll end up with about \$2,000,000,000 (Two BILLION dollars). That is a staggering sum and would have caused the crowd to be aghast at the severity and enormity of the debt!

3. Imagine you had “only” half that debt. What would you be thinking? Feeling? What would have been your state of mind?

Matthew 18:25 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.

4. Debtor’s prison was common in ancient days. If you had been sentenced to debtor’s prison, along with your wife(!) and children(!) what would you have felt? Done?

Matthew 18:26 "The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.'

5. Would that have been a promise you or anyone could have kept?

6. Here comes the first surprising twist in the parable.

Matthew 18:27 The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

7. In the parable, the king represents God. What do you think Jesus is telling us about God from Matt. 18:27?

DAY 3: The horror of unforgiveness

Matthew 18:28a "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii.

1. How much is a hundred denarii? In today's world it would be a debt of a little over \$3,000.

2. After being forgiven a debt he could never repay without having to go to debtors' prison, he remembers somebody that owes him money (\$3,000). He finds the fellow. If you didn't know the rest of this parable, what would you like the forgiven man to do for the fellow that owes him \$3,000?

3. What would you like his *attitude* to be toward the man who owed him \$3,000?

Matthew 18:28b He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded.

4. What reasons can you think of as to why the first servant responded this way to the second servant?

Matthew 18:29 "His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.'

5. If you look at yesterday's devotional, you'll notice that this second servant's appeal is identical to the first servant's appeal to the king! If you had been the first servant, and had acted in the way this fellow did, when you heard the exact same appeal from the second man's lips would that have jarred you?

Matthew 18:30 "But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.

6. This is unforgiveness at its worst. What reasons can you think of as to this man's titanic failure to not forgive his fellow servant?

7. What reason(s) can you think of when it has been difficult for you to forgive someone?

DAY 4: The moral obligation of mercy and forgiveness

1. The second servant is arrested, tried, and convicted. He, and his family are hauled off to debtors' prison. Word gets out...

Matthew 18:31 When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.

2. What would have been your response if you had seen this whole story being played out?

3. The first servant is summoned.

Matthew 18:32 "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to.

4. Here, we see factors that go into forgiveness! Next to the factors listed below, jot down a thought or two as to why these are important:

a. A debt was cancelled.

b. A debt was cancelled **not** because the debt was paid by the debtor

c. Forgiveness lays in the lap of the forgiver, not the one being forgiven.

5. Which of these three factors in forgiveness strikes you the most? Why?

*Matthew 18:33 **Shouldn't you have had** mercy on your fellow servant **just as I had on you?**'*

6. The master tells us an important moral principle. When someone has received mercy that forgives a staggering offense, there is a moral responsibility to become a mercy-giver!

Matthew 18:34 In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

7. Mercy can be removed from us if we refuse to use mercy toward others!

DAY 5: Important lessons from this parable

Matthew 21:35 "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."

- 1 . Jesus adds the final and most poignant lesson of this parable. It's stunning to read.

2. It jolts our often cavalier attitude toward God's forgiveness. It's easy to just "assume" God's forgiveness as if there is no moral imperative that goes with it.

3. It reminds us that the real and powerful source of true forgiveness lies with God, and not with human nature.

4. The more we lose sight of the massive amounts of sin that we've been forgiven, the more our hearts will shrink down upon themselves to a person who cannot forgive even the smallest of offenses. Or worse, we begin to live in our own little world of "perceived" offenses against us. Smaller and smaller we shrink; harder and harder becomes our heart.

5. The scale of difference between the two debts is enormous. What should that say to us?

6. To accept God's forgiveness but then cling on to unforgiveness—Jesus calls "wicked." Does that jolt you? How?

7. Where do we learn to be good forgivers? There is only one place: the cross.

8. From this parable, what has struck you most about:
 - a. Forgiveness?

 - b. God, and His provision to provide for forgiveness in the first place by yielding up His Son?

 - c. You?