

Unit 3 – Theme: Dealing with Messy Relationships

Lesson 3 – FORGIVE

Lesson Passages: Matthew 18:21-28; 32-35

The Question: What makes forgiveness such a big deal?

The Point: Forgiveness restores and strengthens relationships.

Memory Verse: *“Bearing with one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a grievance against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you are also to forgive.”* (Colossians 3:13)

Background: Relationships can be messy. Unit 3 looks at six characteristics we can practice bringing healing to our relationships and prevent further “messiness.” In Lessons 1 and 2, we learned that Jesus calls us to a higher standard. He empowers us to love and encourage others through our words and our lifestyles in a way that strengthens relationships and motivates others toward growth and development. Today, Lesson 3 focuses on forgiveness. In Matthew 18:15-20, Jesus had just given instructions on how to deal with believers who sin against other believers. While reconciliation was the goal, Jesus also covered those times when the sinner might not be willing to be reconciled and the church would need to discipline that person. We will sin against others and others will sin against us for all sin and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). In those moments we can choose to hang onto pride and bitterness, or we can pursue forgiveness and reconciliation.

Lesson Outline:

I. Forgive - And Keep Forgiving (Matthew 18:21-22)

- ❖ Following Jesus’ teaching about seeking reconciliation when wronged by other believers, Peter was prompted to ask this important follow-up question. Peter’s concern was legitimate as Peter might have had some past grudges of his own. People will take advantage of your mercy and kindness. Also, the Jewish rabbis of that day taught that you should forgive someone as many as three times for the same offense, but no more. “Three strikes and you’re out!”
- ❖ Maybe trying to impress Jesus, Peter suggested if he (Peter) should forgive others as many as seven times. The number seven represented completeness and far surpassed the rabbis’ teaching to forgive three times. Jesus replied that Peter (we) should forgive seventy times seven; that is, believers must always practice forgiveness, no matter how many times others sin against them (us). Believers should not keep a record of wrongs (1 Cor. 13:5) but keep on forgiving (limitless).

- ❖ Let us put Jesus' response in perspective. Jesus was not teaching that believers or even unbelievers should remain in abusive relationships or resign themselves to being dehumanized or endangered by another person's constant abusive behavior. Staying in an abusive relationship and seeking reconciliation may not be wise or safe. Forgiving the offender in the privacy of one's own heart allows the injured person to make peace with the past and move forward in life.

Question: What if God put a limit on how many times He forgives you (me)?

Spiritual Truth: Forgiveness is a process, but nothing is too hard for God. "*Great is our Lord and mighty in power; His understanding has no limit.*" (Psalm 147:5).

II. Remember, God Forgave You (Matthew 18:23-27)

- ❖ To help the disciples understand what he meant by unlimited forgiveness, Jesus told them a parable – a story from everyday life that illustrated a spiritual truth. Jesus used the term "the kingdom of heaven or kingdom of God" to indicate that the parable relates to how believers are to behave. Jesus told a story about a servant's accountability to his king. A king in those days had absolute authority over his people or servants, the right to make any decision about them, including sparing or taking their lives. The king wanted to settle accounts with his servants; that is, settle the debts they owed him.
- ❖ One of the king's servants owed him ten thousand talents. A talent was worth 6,000 denarii. Since one denarius was the daily wage of a common laborer in that day; it would take 60 million days of work to earn 10,000 talents. Because he could not pay his debt, the servant and his family were to be sold into slavery. The servant promised to repay the debt if the king gave him some time, but no amount of time would be enough to repay this huge debt. So, the king pitied to the servant and forgave (erased) the debt.
- ❖ What was Jesus trying to teach us? In this parable, the king represents God who has full authority over all people, and the idea of settling accounts represents judgment. A time is coming when each of us will give an account to God for how we lived our lives (Matthew 25; 1 Cor. 3:12-15). This incredible debt represents the debt each of us as sinners owes to God, a debt we could never repay. Like the servant, we have been forgiven this great debt. God paid our sin debt with the blood of Jesus. Because we have been forgiven of so much, we have a duty to forgive those who sin against us. This part of the story also illustrates that while each of us stands alone in our accountability before God, the sins we commit threaten to enslave not only us, but everyone close to us and everything we value. "I'm only hurting myself" is never true. When we forgive others, we set them free; but we also set ourselves free to live in the joy of God's grace and the loving fellowship of His family.

Question: What is your motivation to forgive others who have wronged you?

Spiritual Truth: Forgiveness frees the one offended and the offender. God canceled our debt. He did not give us the punishment we deserved. *“But God commended his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”* (Romans 5:8).

III. Forgive Because God Forgave You (Matthew 18:28, 32-35)

- ❖ After being released from his debt and punishment, the servant went out and found another servant who owed him a hundred denarii. One hundred denarii were about three months’ wages. Although not “chunk change,” the first servant had been forgiven a debt 600,000 times larger than the debt this servant owed him. Unlike the king, the first servant showed no mercy on the servant who owed him money. He publicly grabbed and choked the servant who fell down at his feet and begged for patience and time to repay. However, the first servant would not give this servant the patience and mercy he had begged the king to extend to him. Instead, he had the servant thrown into prison.
- ❖ When the king found out what happened, he was angry and declared the first servant was wicked. The debt owed to the second servant was very small in comparison to what the first servant had owed the king. The king had forgiven the servant at great cost to himself, but the servant failed to make the connection between receiving mercy from his master and giving mercy to his fellow servant. As a result, the king ordered the first servant to be turned over to tormentors, which was a worse punishment than slavery, until he could repay what he owed (basically a life sentence). Forgiveness is more about the character of the forgiver than the one being forgiven. The first servant showed poor character.
- ❖ Through the Great Commandment (Matt. 22:37-39), Jesus created a connection that cannot separate our relationship with God from our relationship with others. When we realize and recognize the debt of sin we owe to God and accept His forgiveness, we will share the gift of grace we have received with others. True forgiveness leads to both gratitude and transformation. God’s compassion toward us is not complete until it transforms our relationships to others.

Question: How different would your life be if God chose to respond to your requests for forgiveness the way you choose to forgive others?

Spiritual Truth: Our forgiveness from God is connected with our forgiveness of others. Truly forgiven people will become forgiving people.