



VERBATIM: Forgiveness

Matthew 18:21-35

Read Matthew 18:21-35 together:

Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times. Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.' So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

Context:

On New Year's Eve 1995, Everett Worthington received a phone call from his brother, informing him that their mother had been murdered. Everett's brother had tried to call his mother all morning; there was no answer. So, he went to her home, but she didn't answer the door either.

A burglary had gone wrong. Two young men had entered the house, expecting it to be empty. When Everett's mother surprised them, they violently beat her to death with a crowbar.

Everett's initial thoughts were all about vengeance. He dreamed of getting 30 minutes in a room with those young men with a baseball bat in his possession. He dreamt of the death penalty for the murderers.

As a Christian, a counselor, and a trained psychologist, Everett faced the challenge of forgiveness like never before.

Content:

In our passage, the Apostle Peter comes to Jesus and asks how many times he should forgive his brother. Peter seems to be trying hard to appear very holy. The rabbis of Peter's day taught that you must forgive your brother three times. Here, Peter asks if he should forgive seven times.

Jesus replies that you should forgive 77 times! Then, Jesus goes on to tell a parable to illustrate this truth. There are two hard lessons we need to learn from this parable: 1) the frequency of offense doesn't nullify our need to forgive, and 2) the size of the offense doesn't nullify our need to forgive.

Forgiveness happens in the heart of the forgiver. It can begin right here and right now. Nobody else needs to be involved: just you and the Lord.

Decide with your heart and will to forgive.

- ? Think of a person who has offended or harmed you. Have you forgiven this person?
- ? If you have not forgiven, why not?
- ? If you have forgiven, how were you able to forgive?

Forgiveness is not waiting for feelings to change. Forgiveness is an act of your mind and will to move.

- ? How does Jesus describe the unforgiving servant?
- ? According to Ephesians 4:32, what is the basis for forgiving others?
- ? What does the sin of unforgiveness tell the world about your view of God's grace?

Extend compassion from your heart.

Notice that the master had "pity" on his servant and forgave the debt. This verb translated here as "pity" is also used in the story of the Prodigal Son (of the father) and the story of the Good Samaritan.

- ? Who do you need to forgive (no need to share openly; take time to consider and write down)?
- ? What did this person (or these people) do to you?

Now, because of God's incalculable grace, will your heart to extend compassion and forgiveness.

Release this person from prison.

The master released the servant from prison. The servant was no longer a slave to his debt. Now, picture a person you need to forgive. That person is locked in your heart - inside that prison. Picture yourself holding the key, opening the prison, and releasing the prisoner. All of this takes place within your heart.

Forgive each person for each wound.

Hopefully, you have decided to move your will and take the important steps in your heart to forgive others. But the work isn't complete yet!

- ? What wrong do you still rehearse in your mind? Confess that bitterness!