

FORGIVE

WEEK TWO:

Who is the Servant and Who is the King

WEEK 2 VERSES:

- Matthew 18:1-17 & 23-35
- Proverbs 30:15
- Psalms 145:9
- Mark 15:34
- Psalms 22:1
- Luke 23:34

WHAT I LEARNED ABOUT GOD'S
FORGIVENESS OF ME & WHERE
I FEEL LED TO EXTEND/SEEK
FORGIVENESS TO/FROM OTHERS...

In this week's message, we explore the parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18. We can learn a lot from this parable, as we see that we have been forgiven of an impossible debt by a generous King. We also see that King, God, desires for us to extend the same mercy He has shown us to others. Realizing the gravity of our own wrongs will destroy any sense of entitlement and humble our hearts. If we are unable to extend forgiveness to others, however, it reveals that we have not understood, or even worse, we have not been truly transformed

by the grace and mercy God has shown us. In either case, we are not experiencing the full effect of the Gospel in our lives, and it is not being demonstrated to others.

Vertical

- In what ways has the weight of your own sin felt like an impossible debt—like 10,000 talents?
- Do you believe that God has truly forgiven you?
- How would you describe the experience of God's mercy and grace?
- Why do you think God wants and expects us to show mercy to others?

Internal

- Who do you identify with in the parable of the unforgiving servant?
- What does our unforgiveness of others say about our understanding of the Gospel?
- How does reflecting on the Cross enable us to forgive others?

Horizontal

- Who have you withheld forgiveness from and why?
- Do you see others' wrongdoings as more or less costly than your own?
- How have you placed yourself in the position of Judge and King?
- What would it mean to release others of their debt?
- Who needs to forgive and release you from a debt?
- Are you, or your community, known for being loving, generous, gracious, and forgiving?

Action Steps

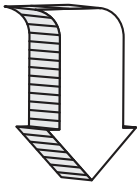
- Thank God each day for His forgiveness, and count the cost of that forgiveness.
- Look into the mirror and assess your own life, where you've been forgiven, and where you are not forgiving of others for less. Write them down and share with someone else.
- Spend time in Scripture exploring God's mercy.
- Pray for God to give you grace and patience that can only grow out of a deep understanding of Jesus' costly mercy for us.
- Review and work through this week's additional resources: "Dimensions of Forgiveness," "The Cost of Forgiveness," and "Q&A with N.T. Wright on Matthew 6:15."

3 TYPES OF FORGIVENESS

DIVINE FORGIVENESS OFFERED

VERTICAL (or "Upward")

God

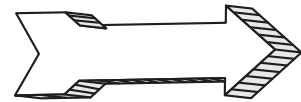


If you repent and receive God's forgiveness > **New Identity**

HUMAN FORGIVENESS OFFERED

HORIZONTAL (or "Outward")

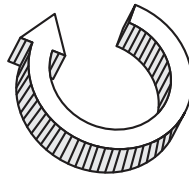
Others



If the wrongdoer repents and receives your forgiveness > **New relationship**

INTERNAL (or "Inward")

You



If you internally forgive, you can seek reconciliation and justice

The dimensions of forgiveness are threefold:

The vertical or upward dimension. The character and reception of God's forgiveness:

- (1) God's salvation is more than past forgiveness but the basis for future forgiveness: justification and adoption.
- (2) The instrument(s) that receive this divine forgiveness and salvation are repentance and faith.

The internal or inward dimension. The character and granting of human forgiveness:

- (1) It is granted before felt because it is a promise and a practice.
- (2) It entails costly suffering, as it absorbs the debt rather than seeking revenge.

The horizontal or outward dimension. The character and extension of human forgiveness:

- (1) It pursues both mercy and justice together and interdependently, since both are forms of love.
- (2) It holds out the offer of a reconciled relationship and, eventually, a restoration of trust.

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RESOURCE:

THE COST OF FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness means giving up the right to revenge, the right to seek repayment from the one who harmed you...it is a form of voluntary suffering.

When ANY wrong is done, there is always a debt, and there is no way to deal with it without suffering—either you make the perpetrator suffer for it or you forgive and suffer for it yourself. Forgiveness is always costly. So, in forgiveness you pay the debt yourself in several ways:

- 1. You refuse to hurt the person directly.** You refuse vengeance, payback, or the infliction of pain in order to try to relieve the sense of debt you feel. Instead, you are as cordial as possible. Beware of subtle ways that we can try to make others suffer:
 - Making cutting remarks and drag out the past over and over
 - Being far more demanding and controlling with the person than you are with others, all because you feel deep down that they still owe you
 - Punishing them with self-righteous “mercy” that is really a way to make them feel small and to justify yourself
 - Avoiding them and/or being cold to them in overt or more subtle ways
- 2. You refuse to cut the person down to others.** You refuse to diminish them in the eyes of others through innuendo, “spin,” hint, gossip, or direct slander.
 - Don’t run them down to others under the guise of “warning” people about them
 - Don’t run them down to others under the guise of seeking sympathy and support and sharing your hurt
 - Beware of how requests for prayer can be co-opted as a way of hurting others
- 3. You refuse to indulge in ill will in your heart.**
 - Don’t continually replay the “videotapes” of the wrong in your imagination, in order to keep the sense of loss and hurt fresh and real to you so you can stay actively hostile to the person and feel virtuous yourself
 - Don’t vilify or demonize the offender in your imagination. Rather, remember the common sinful humanity you share with them
 - Don’t indulge in “rooting for them to fail,” hoping for their pain. Instead, pray positively for their growth and restoration

Forgiveness is granted *before* it is felt. It is a promise to refrain from the three things above and pray for the perpetrator as you remind yourself of God’s grace to you. Though it is extremely difficult and painful (you are bearing the cost of the sin yourself!), forgiveness will deepen your character, free you to talk to and help the person, and lead to love and peace rather than bitterness.

Adapted from Tim Keller’s *Forgive*

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RESOURCE:

Q & A WITH N.T. WRIGHT ON MATTHEW 6:15

Q: I've got a deep regard for the Sermon on the Mount but I've always been bothered by Matthew 6:15: "But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." Likewise, the Lord's Prayer says: "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us." Is God's forgiveness really contingent on our actions towards each other?

I'm fascinated that the one line of the Lord's Prayer which Jesus takes time to explain immediately afterwards is the part about forgiveness.

There are a lot of other things in the Lord's Prayer that we might wonder why Jesus doesn't explain more fully. For example: "Give us this day our daily bread" – Jesus could have said: "You're going to need this and so make sure you pray about it!" Nor does he choose to explain "deliver us from evil". Yet, Jesus seems to want to rub in this part about forgiveness.

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus is inaugurating God's kingdom "on earth as it is in heaven." That kingdom – God's sovereign rule on earth – is all about forgiveness, reconciliation and healing. It's about the return of all creation from exile, as spoken about in Isaiah 40-55.

If somebody wants to be part of this great new movement – this kingdom of God on earth as in heaven – but decides to say: "Actually, I'm not going to forgive this person or that person", then they're saying something contradictory: "I want to be part of this, but I don't want to be part of it."

This view of the reciprocal nature of forgiveness isn't about God adding terms and conditions (something along the lines of: "By the way, there's a few boxes you've got to tick here"). This is, organically, what the whole business is about. This is a kingdom of forgiveness. If you say: "I want to be part of the kingdom of forgiveness, but I don't want to be part of the kingdom of forgiveness", then you're talking nonsense.

Matthew 18 also helps us to understand this. It's the (very worrying) parable about the servant who owes his master a fantastically large debt, but the master forgives him. Yet the servant then promptly goes out and tries to throttle somebody who owes him a few small coins. The master hears about it and says: "No, it doesn't work that way", and hands him over to the jailers. Then, at the end it says, rather scarily: "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart." (v35).

Here's a metaphor that may help us to understand it: We all have a kind of 'gateway' in our innermost heart and mind and soul, which can open up to receive God's love and forgiveness. And it's the same 'gateway' which opens up to giving love and forgiveness to others. However, if we decide to shut that gate so that we refuse to give love and forgiveness to others, then we cannot receive the love and forgiveness of God either. It's the same gate.

So it isn't a matter of: "If you don't tick this box, God won't tick that box." Rather, it's organically true that, if you're a person of forgiveness, then you're a person of forgiveness! Whereas if you're a person of non forgiveness, you've said: "I don't want to believe in forgiveness." But that means you can't believe in or receive God's forgiveness either.

Ultimately, it's something to do with the deep recesses of our personalities, and whether we choose to be 'forgiveness people' or not.



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