

Bible Stories for Adults

The Unforgiving Servant

Matthew 18:15-35

Opening

Gathering: Why do we find it so difficult to forgive others when they wrong us?

Today's Focus: Jesus teaches us to forgive others just as God has already forgiven us.

Key Verses: *Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.* Matthew 18:18

Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Luke 6:36

Opening Prayer

Lesson

Our Forgiving Father (Luke 15)

What does God require of His people?

Matthew 5:48 = *Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect*

What fraction of God's people can we expect to meet this requirement?

Romans 3:23 = *None, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*

What should be the attitude of those of us who fall short of the requirement?

Luke 15:21 = *Confess our sin and that we don't deserve the blessings of sonship*

How does God respond when a sinner returns to Him?

Luke 15:20 = *He runs to us with His love*

Luke 15:22 = *He forgives us and restores us to full sonship (robe, ring, sandals)*

Luke 15:23 = *He is filled with joy and celebrates the return*

Does God really celebrate the return of one sinner?

Luke 15:7, 10 = *Yes*

How does God celebrate a sinner's return to faith?

Ephesians 2:8-9 = *He gives us the gift of salvation by grace through faith*

How is this gift in contrast to what we really deserve?

Romans 6:23 = *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life*

Our Sinning Brother (Luke 17)

Should we ever expect Satan to stop tempting people to sin?

Luke 17:1 = *No, temptations are bound to come*

How bad is it for someone to tempt a child of God to sin?

Luke 17:2 = *better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone*

What should we do if a brother sins against us?

Luke 17:3 = *Show him his wrong (rebuke him), If he repents, forgive him*

Why did Pharisees teach that righteous people should forgive twice, three times if exceptional?

Amos 2:6a = *They understood this to say God would forgive 3 times and punish on fourth*

What if you forgive him and he does it again?

Luke 17:4 = *Continue forgiving him as he repents, even seven times a day*

Seven = Meant *complete* to the Jew; 3 - Spirit World, 4 - Material World, 3+4=7

If forgiving someone three times was not enough for Jesus, how many was enough?

Matthew 18:21-22 = *70 times 7, unlimited, completely complete, no reasonable limit*

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Jesus' Forgiveness (Luke 5)

Why were the Pharisees upset when Jesus forgave people's sins?

Luke 5:18, 20-21 = Only God can forgive sins against Him, how could Jesus say He could?

Why had Jesus forgiven the man's sins rather than healing his paralysis?

Luke 5:22-26 = He did both to prove that He had authority to forgive sins

What did Jesus do with His authority to forgive sins before he ascended to heaven?

John 20:22-23 = Gave it to His disciples

Why should we take forgiveness of others so seriously?

Matthew 18:18 = *Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven ...*

Office of the Keys (Matthew 16:19)

Why did Martin Luther call this the Office of the Keys?

Matthew 16:19a = *I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven ...*

What is the Office of the Keys? (From Luther's Small Catechism)

It is that authority which Christ gave to His Church to forgive the sins of those who repent and to declare to those who do not repent that their sins are not forgiven.

What does this mean? = Not to decide, but to announce

I believe that, when the called ministers of Christ deal with us by His divine command, especially when they exclude manifest and impenitent sinners from the Christian congregation, and, again, when they absolve those who repent of their sins and are willing to amend, this is as valid and certain, in heaven also, as if Christ, our dear Lord, dealt with us Himself.

The Unrepenting Brother (Matthew 18:15-17)

When you are sinned against, are you to quietly accept it as your own problem?

Matthew 18:15 = No, *go and show him his fault, just between the two of you*

What is the intent of going to your brother, to confront him with his sin?

Galatians 6:1 = No, to restore him gently (Be careful that you aren't tempted)

What if the brother won't listen to you?

Matthew 18:16 = *Take one or two others along* to have witnesses

What is it important to have witnesses?

Deuteronomy 19:15 = Need *the testimony of 2 or 3 witnesses* to establish the truth

Why are witnesses needed to establish the matter? = How much of the problem might be ours?

Luke 6:41-42 = To address only the part of the problem that is the brother's

What if he still won't listen?

Matthew 18:17 = Take it to the church, then treat him like a pagan

What does Jesus mean to treat him like a pagan or a tax collector?

1 Corinthians 5:11-13 = *Expel the wicked man from among you*

Is this expulsion intended as punishment for the evil?

1 Corinthians 5:6-7 = No, but in order to keep the church pure

What should we do if one who has been expelled repents and turns from his sin?

2 Corinthians 2:6-8 = Forgive him and reaffirm your love for him

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Judging Others (*Matthew 7*)

Should we confront our brother with every sin we see, no matter how large or small?

Matthew 7:1-2 = *The same way you judge others, you will be judged, same measure*

Does this mean that we should not judge others?

1 Corinthians 6:2-3 = No, God has given us the responsibility to judge with discernment

What parable did Jesus speak that best explains which sins we should bring up?

Matthew 7:3-5 = Leave the speck in a brother's eye when there's a plank in yours

The Forgiving King (*Matthew 18:23-37*)

What parable did Jesus give to show the importance of forgiving others?

Matthew 18:23 = King settling accounts with servants

How much money was owed by the king's servant in the parable?

Matthew 18:24 = About \$20 million, more than he could ever be able to pay back

What was the standard way of dealing with someone who couldn't pay a debt?

Matthew 18:25 = Sell into slavery to pay debt or put in jail until debt is paid

Where did this practice come from? = Numerous examples in Old Testament

Exodus 22:3b = *A thief must make restitution...if he has nothing he must be sold*

How did the king show his mercy with the servant?

Matthew 18:26-27 = He not only let him go, but also completely forgave the debt

The Unforgiving Servant (*Matthew 18:28-34*)

How appreciative was the servant and how long did he remain so?

Matthew 18:28 = On the way out forcefully demanded repayment of about \$17

Did the servant remember the mercy he had received when he had the chance to give it?

Matthew 18:29-30 = No, he had the man thrown in prison

How did the king feel about the servant's response to his mercy?

Matthew 18:31-33 = Very upset that the servant hadn't shown the same mercy

How was the servant then treated in response to the way he had treated the other servant?

Matthew 18:34 = King sent him to be tortured until debt could be repaid (forever)

Our Forgiveness (*Matthew 18:35*)

What is the key message of this parable for us?

Matthew 18:35 = We should not expect or ask God to forgive us if we don't forgive others

How do we regularly ask for this treatment?

Matthew 6:12 = Lord's Prayer, *Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors*

Does God forgive us because we first forgive others, or vice versa?

Ephesians 4:32 = God forgave us first in Christ, we copy that

When will God withhold His forgiveness to us?

Matthew 6:14-15 = When we refuse to forgive others

Does this mean that whether or not God has mercy depends on our desires or efforts?

Romans 9:14-16 = *I will have mercy on whom I have mercy ... It does not depend on man*

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Mercy (*Luke 6:36*)

What is another way to state the message of this parable?

Luke 6:36 = Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful

Was this a new truth introduced by Jesus?

Micah 6:8 = What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy.

And what can we expect by showing mercy to others?

Matthew 5:7 = Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy

What reasons does Paul give for us to show mercy to others?

Colossians 3:12-14 = We are God's chosen, holy and dearly loved, Christ first forgave us

What should we remember when we have opportunities to give mercy and forgiveness to others?

Luke 6:37-38 = God overfills us with His mercy and forgiveness

C. S. Spurgeon: *When you go to God, ask for mercy, not for justice. A mother went to the Emperor Napoleon to ask for mercy for her son. He had committed some breach of the French law, and the emperor replied, "Madam, this is the second time the boy has offended. Justice requires that he should die." She answered, "I did not come to ask for justice. I beg for mercy." He answered, "He does not deserve mercy." "Sire," she said, "it would not be mercy if he deserved it. I ask for mercy." When she put it that way, the emperor replied, "Well, then, I will have mercy."*

Closing Prayer

Response - Consider and meditate on one each day this week

1. How quick am I to forgive someone who wrongs me and then repents?
(Matthew 18:15-22; 6:12-15; Genesis 50:15-21; Luke 17:3-4; 2 Corinthians 2:6-8; Ephesians 4:32)
2. How quick am I to recognize when I have hurt someone and then confess and repent of it?
(Matthew 18:15-17; 5:23-24; Psalm 25:11; 51:4; Luke 15:21; Ephesians 4:25-27; 1 John 1:8-10)
3. How well do I measure up to the standards that I apply to others?
(Matthew 7:1-5; Ezekiel 35:11; Luke 6:37-38; Romans 2:1-4; 1 Corinthians 4:1-5; 6:2-3)
4. When and how has someone shown mercy to me?
(Matthew 18:23-27; 5:7; 1 Samuel 24; Romans 9:14-16; James 5:10-11; 1 Peter 1:3)
5. When and how have I failed to show mercy to someone else?
(Matthew 18:28-35; 6:14-15; 9:10-13; Micah 6:8; Luke 6:36; Colossians 3:12-14; James 2:12-13; 3:17; Jude 22-23)