

L 3 Learning to Forgive

[Matthew 18:21-35](#)

Have you ever been deeply hurt by another person? We all have! It's extremely difficult to forgive someone who hurts us just once. However, what does God expect of us if someone repeatedly hurts us? Peter may have been hurt more than once by the same person. That's probably why he asks Jesus how many times he must forgive someone who sins against him. Then, Peter asks if *seven times* is enough ([Mt 18:21](#)).

Peter probably thinks he is being very generous because the rabbis taught a repeat offender should be forgiven three times. So, Peter doubles that and adds one to it, which seems very generous.

However, how does Jesus respond ([18:22b-c](#))?

That is 490 times, which means as many times as it takes. Peter's thinking is like ours. Our fallen natures are inclined to keep score; we don't like to think in terms of unlimited forgiveness. However, Jesus says forgiveness should have no limit. Peter is thinking in terms of the Law, but Jesus answers in terms of love.

What does the Bible say about love in [1 Corinthians 13:5c-d](#)?

The word translated *thinketh no evil* (**logizomai**, log-id'-zo-my-) is an accounting term that could be translated "**keeps no record of wrongs.**" Love doesn't keep score in the area of wrongs. If we keep score, we haven't really forgiven, so we will become resentful and bitter.

In response to Peter's question, Jesus tells a parable to explain the need for unlimited forgiveness. Jesus says the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wants to settle accounts with his servants who have borrowed money from him.

In the process, one debtor brought before him owes how much ([18:24](#))?

In the Old Testament, a talent was a weight of about seventy-five pounds of silver. However, in the New Testament, a talent was the Roman "talent," which equaled about 6,000 denarii. One denarius, or "penny," was a typical day's wage for an ordinary laborer ([Mt 20:2](#)). Therefore, a talent was about 6,000 working days, or about 19 years' wages. In modern terms, if his average annual income were \$25,000, one talent would be 19 times \$25,000, or \$475,000. So, the servant owes \$475,000 times *ten thousand*, or more than four billion in today's dollars. It would take him approximately 190,000 years to repay his incredible debt. Since there is no possible way the servant can ever repay the debt, the king orders the man and his entire family be sold as slaves ([18:25](#)).

Then, after falling on his knees before the king, what does the debtor say ([18:26c](#))?

How ridiculous! There is no way he can ever repay the debt! This parable reveals **three** things to remember when it comes time to forgive.

Calculate What God has Forgiven You (18:27-30)

In response to his servant's plea, the king takes pity on him and forgives the debt the servant could never repay ([18:27](#)). When we sin, we need to remember this beautiful picture of God's mercy and love. David was guilty of the sins of adultery and of having Bathsheba's husband killed. However, he prays for God to *have mercy* on him according to God's *lovingkindness*, or unfailing love ([Psa. 51:1](#)).

Like the servant in the parable, we all have a sin debt we cannot possibly repay. Thankfully, our forgiveness is not based on the amount of our sin, but on the limitless amount of God's mercy and love.

How does [Ephesians 2:4](#) express this fact?

When we **pridefully minimize** our own sin debt, which has been forgiven, we will have a hard time forgiving others. People who feel they have been forgiven a great sin debt are very generous in extending their forgiveness to others.

However, this was not the case with this servant. He goes out to find a fellow servant who owes him *an hundred pence*. Remember, a *pence*, or denarius, was a day's wage for common laborers. So, the second servant owes about three months' wages, a very small amount compared to what the first servant has been forgiven. Yet, the first servant grabs the second servant and begins choking him and demanding, *Pay me that thou owest* ([18:28](#)).

You might be quick to condemn the first servant, but you may be "choking" someone right now. Not physically, but in your heart, you have your hands around his or her neck, demanding payment of some debt. This is what the Bible calls "**bitterness**," which is the result of refusing to forgive.

However, what does God command in [Ephesians 4:31](#)?

Bitterness is first in the list because everything that follows is the fruit of that horrible sin, which results from refusing to forgive.

The second servant falls down and pleads, *Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all* ([18:29](#)). This is the same plea with which the first servant begged ([18:26](#)). However, the first servant refuses and has the second servant put in prison until he can repay the debt ([18:30](#)).

You may have someone in the “prison” of your heart right now. Do you know how to tell if this is true? Every time you think about that person, you get in a bad mood or relive the hurt. How do you get over this? To learn to forgive, **calculate what God has forgiven you** and...

Consider the Consequences of Refusing to Forgive (18:31-35)

When other servants see what happens, they are *very sorry* and report the incident to the king. He summons the unforgiving servant and calls him *wicked* ([18:31-32](#)). There is not a more horrible, diabolical word in the Bible to describe sin. One consequence of refusing to forgive is we become *wicked*.

Because of the man’s unwillingness to forgive, the angry king sends *him to the tormentors* until he can *pay all that was due unto him* ([18:34](#)). The word translated *tormentors*, or jailers, literally means “torturers.”

How does Jesus sum up this parable about forgiveness in [verse 35](#)?

Besides making us *wicked*, a second consequence of refusing to forgive is mental and emotional torture.

We are tortured by bitterness, which will eat away our happiness, limit our ability to love, and make us miserable. You will never meet a bitter person who is truly happy because one of the first causalities of bitterness is happiness.

More than once Jesus teaches about the seriousness of refusing to forgive. For example, in the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus teaches us to pray *forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors* ([Mt 6:12](#)).

How does He explain what that means in [Matthew 6:15](#)?

God will not give us what we refuse to give to others. When we refuse to forgive, we are showing a lack of appreciation for God’s unending love and mercy in our own lives. God repeatedly warns us about the consequences of refusing to forgive.

For example, what does [James 2:13a](#) warn?

God demands that we forgive because there are such serious consequences for refusing to forgive. I searched the internet for some good quotes about forgiveness.

Here are two I think are really good:

“Forgiveness is a funny thing. It warms the heart and cools the sting” (William Arthur Ward, American scholar, pastor, and author, 1921-1994).

“He who cannot forgive others, breaks the bridge over which he himself must pass...” (George Herbert, English poet and clergyman, 1593-1633).

Jesus says you must forgive *from your hearts* ([18:35](#)). That means not just acting like you have forgiven someone. It means you let them out of the “prison” of your heart. You may say, “Pastor, you just don’t know how much they hurt me or my family.” No, I don’t, but I do know Jesus says it is *wicked* to refuse to forgive. I also know what God says in [Philippians 4:13](#).

Write it below:

God never commands us to do anything He will not give us the power to do ([Eph. 3:20](#)).

Forgiving those who have hurt us is a vital part of kingdom living.”

To learn to forgive,

CALCULATE WHAT GOD HAS FORGIVEN YOU and

CONSIDER THE CONSEQUENCES OF REFUSING TO FORGIVE.