

## Matthew 18:21-22 “Learning to Forgive”

8.27.17

Today, as we continue our study of Matthew's Gospel, we're going to move to an area of Jesus' teaching that will impact every single one of us in this room. That area is FORGIVENESS. In fact, I would say to you this morning, that outside of the constant battle we all face with sin, perhaps the most significant issue Christians face in their daily lives is the issue of forgiveness. If you think about it, we are constantly confronted with the need to forgive.

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In fact, I'll say this (and I believe you'll agree): **Forgiveness must be the norm for the Christian's life, or you will not grow in Christ.** It can be said this way: “Either you are a forgiving person, or you are a bitter, resentful person.” So what is forgiveness? Well, here's my definition of Christian forgiveness:

**Forgiveness:** *the intentional and voluntary process by which a victim undergoes a change in feelings and attitude regarding an offense, where the victim let's go of negative emotions such as vengeance, with an increased ability to wish the offender well.*

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Forgiveness has been described as the epicenter of the Gospel. And that's because of what Jesus did on the cross in the greatest act of forgiveness ever performed...showing the world what forgiveness is all about. Yes, forgiveness IS the heart of the Gospel. Truly, if you don't forgive, then you don't understand the Gospel. Because we're going to all be pressed to forgive over and over again... Are you **married**? You'll have to embrace and understand forgiveness over and over. Do you have **children**, you'll have to embrace and understand forgiveness. Do you have **friends**, you'll have to embrace and understand forgiveness.

Oh, you may try to hide it, what? Your unforgiveness... You see, if you're not a forgiving person, it will show. It will show in the fact that you don't have many friends because you've developed a relationship quota. How? A relationship QUOTA? YES! You've come to the place in your life that you simply can't let anyone else in because you have no more room in your soul for anymore forgiveness and so you shut down on people...even the people you love the most!

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It's been said that forgiveness is the highest human virtue. You show me an honorable person, you show me a person with impeccable character, and I'll show you a person who can forgive. But, you show me a person who carries bitterness and resentment in their soul, and I'll show you a person who struggles with people, good character, and with themselves. You show me a person who can't release a vengeful, antagonistic hateful attitude towards somebody, and I'll show you a person who hasn't grasped the power of forgiveness. The very power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

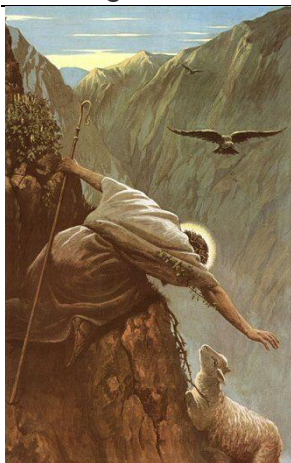
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This morning, we're going to see how Jesus teaches us how to forgive. You may remember, Jesus has been teaching in a home in Capernaum, (most likely Peter's home), and he's got a little boy in his lap and He is teaching on humility.

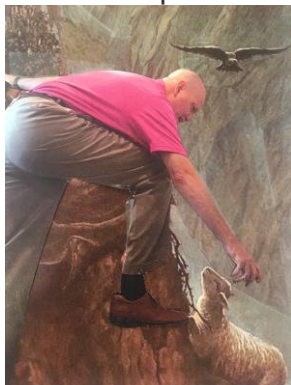


He's been teaching His disciples that they must be humble and trusting like a child to enter the Kingdom of heaven. He's told them a parable about a Shepherd and a sheep that wanders off. He described how the Shepherd went after the sheep, showing tremendous love. And we've shown this depiction of that several times.

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The hard part about that parable, as we learned last week, is the fact we're now in the place of Jesus. (See me...)



and that wayward sheep...is a brother or sister who has sinned against you! Talk about humility! Jesus says, "Go to them and seek to win them back."

We saw that process last week. We're to go to by ourselves, one on one and then, if by chance they won't listen, we take a couple of more seasoned Christians to help...and if they still won't listen, we take it to the church and if they obstinately refuse to listen (even to the church), then we leave them to themselves. We dis-fellowship with them so that in their isolation...like the Prodigal Son...they might come to their senses and return home.

And so we come to our passage today where **Peter then asks, "Uh...Jesus...How many times do we to do this?"**

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### Matthew 18:21-22

<sup>21</sup> 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?" <sup>22</sup> Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times."

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You know Peter (being the spokesperson for the Apostles), he's always asking the hard questions...but, on this one...he thinks he's got right. You see, in the Rabbinical Law of the day, it was said that you only have to forgive someone three times. In fact, first century Rabbi Joseph ben Jehuda said, "If a man commits an offense once, you forgive him. If he commits an offense the second time, you forgive him. If he commits an offense the third time, you forgive him. The fourth you do not forgive him."

So, Peter thought, "I'll double it and add ONE and that'll do the trick." How about that Jesus? Jesus, I'm following your lead! I've watched you show great mercy and kindness over the last 2 ½ years. So, I'll be kind too! Yeah 7 times out to do the trick...that'll do it! See it again...

You know, I think Peter was probably pretty proud of himself, and might have been looking for a pat on the back from Jesus. But, Jesus is going to take Peter's breath away by how he responds to Peter's question. Watch...

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### Matthew 18:22

<sup>22</sup> Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times."

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What does your Bible say in verse 22? Does it say: "77 times" or "70 times 7?" Some translations say 77 times, while others say 70 x 7. So, which is it? Well, I'll be honest with you... I'm not sure why anyone would interpret this as 77 versus 70 x 7, because the Greek seems so clear to me. It's the Greek word:

Heb-DA-May-Can-TOC-keys

**Hebdomēkontakis**: seventy times seven times; countless times

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Every commentary I've looked at says that 70 x 7 is the correct translation and I believe it is as well. But it's that last phrase in the definition that I think is most important: "**countless times.**" That was Jesus' point. He wasn't saying to Peter that we keep some sort of ledger and count up to 490 times and then stop forgiving.

Once again, Jesus is using **hyperbole**...he's exaggerating to make a point. It's like what He was saying about NOT offending a young believer, when He talked about tying a millstone around your neck or cutting off your hand or leg. That's hyperbole. Like, "I'm so hungry I could eat a horse."  
**Jesus was saying, "Peter this is unlimited!"**

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But, you might ask, "What if the person is unrepentant? Am I to be a doormat?" No! That's why Jesus taught what He did prior to this **when He gave the process** of trying to restore an unrepentant person. You go to them and if they won't listen, you take a couple more and then you tell it to the church. The goal is to restore the Brother...but, if they don't listen, you dis-fellowship with them. Let me show this to you...

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We were here last week. Remember the man who was kicked out of the Corinthian church for the sexual affair he was having with his stepmother. Here in 1 Cor. 5, the Apostle Paul describes in verse 11 what we're to do when a person says they're a Christian but act like a non-Christian.

### **1 Corinthians 5:11-13**

<sup>11</sup> But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. <sup>12</sup> For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? <sup>13</sup> God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.”

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BTW...if you say you're a Christian and you are hanging out with people who claim to be Christians and they drink, party, cuss, cheat, lie, steal, have sex outside of marriage...the Bible says you're **not to even eat** with such a person. Why? Because you'll be guilty by association and you'll give Christianity a bad name. Listen, yes...we're to go and try to lead people to Jesus, but you better be careful about how you go about that.

Young people, be careful who you hang it with... School is starting and you need to select your friends wisely. Never forget, “Bad company corrupts good character” 1 Corinthians 15:33. Young people, think about whom you associate with...even on social media, because when you re-tweet someone who uses foul language...you are condoning that language. Proverbs 13:20 says it this way:

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### **Proverbs 13:20**

Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.

Listen, my point in returning back to the unrepentant “false Christian” of 1 Corinthians 5 was to point out the fact, that you don't have to keep forgiving this guy...because the truth is...you're not to even be around this fake anymore. You are to leave him to his own devices, so that in his isolation like the Prodigal Son, he may repent and come to his senses. We saw this clearly last week... Jesus taught us, there is a time and place where we dis-fellowship ourselves from someone like this man, so that he might truly repent and be saved. Remember verse 5...

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### **1 Corinthians 5:5**

<sup>5</sup> you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

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No, we're not doormats...but, the principle Jesus is teaching is here in Matthew 18 is that we're not to be “stingy forgivers.” We're not to keep a ledger. It's not 490...it's unlimited for the repentant person. I like how Paul described the way we're to treat difficult people in **Romans 12**.

### **Romans 12:17-18**

<sup>17</sup> Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. <sup>18</sup> If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

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But, that's hard isn't it? When someone wrongs us, in our FLESH we want to get them back! We want them to pay! But, here's the issue with that. We're only hurting ourselves!

You see unforgiveness is like a boomerang. It's like you drinking poison and hoping the other person dies. It's only going to hurt you. In fact, Jesus has already taught about this very subject in the Sermon on the Mount.

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When Jesus was teaching the "Model Prayer," or what we often call: "The Lord's Prayer," He said that we are to ask God to forgive us our trespasses as we also forgive those who trespass against us, right? Of course trespasses are what? Sins. We're to forgive those who sin against us. But, it goes much further than that..

#### **Matthew 6:14-15**

**14** For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, **15** but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

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Church family when it comes to forgiveness, if we choose not to forgive, we will NOT be in fellowship with God. We'll not be in lockstep with His will for our lives. We'll be the wandering sheep then. We'll be in dis-fellowship with God.

Now listen...don't misunderstand what Jesus is saying. Jesus isn't saying that we lose our relationship with God, if you don't forgive...no...because we're sealed by the Holy Spirit at the moment of our salvation...NO...what's at stake here is our fellowship...our intimacy with our heavenly Father.

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Listen, do you think I can be in good fellowship with my son Andrew if he's treating Clara like a dog? Do you think I can watch Andrew be unkind and unforgiving toward Clara and me be okay with that and just blow it off. Of course not! And the same is true with our Heavenly Father.

Jesus said in the Beatitudes: "**Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive WHAT?**" MERCY. If you want mercy, you've got to give it.

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Perhaps the key passage in all of the teaching Epistles in the NT on forgiveness is found in Ephesians 4. Paul tells the Ephesians believers to stop grieving the Holy Spirit...watch...

#### **Ephesians 4:30-32**

<sup>30</sup> And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. <sup>31</sup> Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. <sup>32</sup> Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

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Do you understand? We have been forgiven so much...how could we possibly choose not to forgive? (In fact, this will be the theme of the entire message next week as Jesus tells the parable of the man who had been forgiven so much, but refused to forgive.)

So, let me ask the question again: Are you a forgiving person or a resentful, bitter person? Are you continuing to drink the bitter poison of unforgiveness?

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Listen, church...I'm afraid some of you are very bitter and continue to upset with people in your life and some of you are even still holding a grudge with someone who's dead. It's true! Some people I've met are still holding a grudge at people who've been dead for years and it's eating them up. It's like battery acid on their skin...it's eating down to the bone of the soul and it's bitter and it's

robbing the joy from the Christian's life.

So you might ask, "How do I know if this is me?" Well, you're the one who says, "I'll forgive, but I never going to forget." Friend, when you say, "I'll forgive but I won't forget," **you haven't forgiven anyone**. You want to know why...because of your attitude... It's counter to how God forgives.

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### **1 John 1:9**

<sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

He cleanses us. Do you know what that means? It means He wipes it away...He removes it as far as the east is from the west. It means He doesn't hold it against us anymore! When you say, "I'll forgive but won't forget"...you're still holding it against them...and that's counter to Jesus' teaching.

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Are you being controlled today by someone who is dead, or someone who's living three states away? I had a lady tell me one time she wasn't going to send her dad a Birthday Day card because of how mean he was to her when she was little. I said, "That's your choice, but he probably wasn't expecting one anyway!"

You see, church, we get locked into our little worlds. We think people are sitting around and thinking bad about us. No they're probably not...most likely they're not even thinking about us. You see it takes a whole lot of mental and emotional energy not to forgive. It will wear you out! So many people waste so much time and energy by being angry at people who aren't even thinking about them! Don't let that be you! Forgive!

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One of my favorite accounts of forgiveness in all of the Bible is the one about Joseph of the Old Testament.

Joseph, the son of Jacob, was 17 years of age when his jealous brothers faked his death and sold him into slavery to band of gypsies heading to Egypt. When he arrived, he was sold again...this time to a man named Potiphar. This man would eventually have Joseph thrown into prison because of lies told by his jilted wife. Joseph would be in prison, at no fault of his own for almost 13 years, until he was 30 years of age.

Eventually, the Pharaoh (the King of Egypt) would have dreams that no one could interpret. However, Joseph, known for having the ability to understand dreams, was brought from prison to the Pharaoh and Joseph interpreted the dreams.

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**"Prepare for famine."** That was the interpretation. Sure enough famine came and Pharaoh placed Joseph in charge of all of the grain of Egypt and there was none be found except in Egypt. Guess who ended up in Egypt begging Joseph for food? His BROTHERS. See the artist's depiction...





The thing is...it's been 13 years...and he's not a boy...he's a man and he's dressed like an Egyptian. They don't recognize him!

**Aha!!! Now's his chance**...it's been 13 long years...most of it in the agony of slavery and prison...now they're going to pay. They deserve to pay!

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So what happens? Moses tells us in Genesis 45. Get this in your mind: Joseph finally has the ability and the opportunity to crush his brothers who are on their knees in front of him... So, what ill he do?

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#### **Genesis 45:1-8**

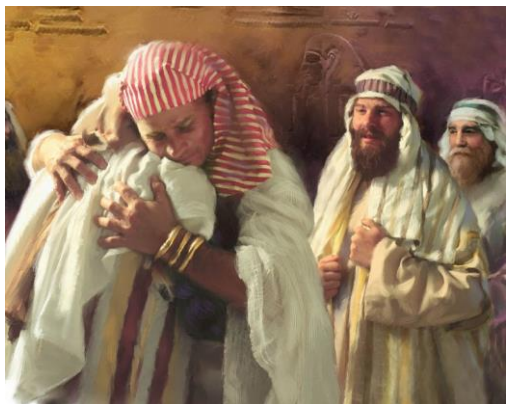
<sup>1</sup>Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him. He cried, "Make everyone go out from me." So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. <sup>2</sup>And he wept aloud, so that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. <sup>3</sup>And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence. <sup>4</sup>So Joseph said to his brothers, "Come near to me, please." And they came near. And he said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. <sup>5</sup>And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. <sup>6</sup>For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. <sup>7</sup>And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. <sup>8</sup>So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.

#### **Genesis 45:14-15**

<sup>14</sup>Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept upon his neck. <sup>15</sup>And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them. After that his brothers talked with him.

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Wow!!! "After that his brothers talked with him." That's beautiful! Church family, here's a picture of forgiveness...



Joseph hugging and weeping with his brothers...

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But, you say, “His brothers didn’t even ask to be forgiven! They need to be sorry! They need to feel some pain!” Oh really? Folks, Romans 5:8 says: “**While we were still sinners Christ died for us!**”

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How did Joseph forgive his brothers? I’ll tell you how...because Joseph saw his life was in the hands of God. When his father returned from Israel to him, Joseph would say to the whole family...

#### **Genesis 50:20-21**

<sup>20</sup> As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. <sup>21</sup> So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.” Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

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That’s forgiveness! Are some of you thinking: “But, I can’t do this!” I know. Neither can I. You see, this is an act of God within us! The only way this happens is if we allow the Holy Spirit...empowered by God’s grace to do this...to do what we can’t do! It’s God’s grace that empowers the believer. Truly, forgiveness is an act of the Holy Spirit in the life of a surrendered saint.

Listen as we close, in God’s economy, as His children, forgiveness is not an option, it’s a way of life. If we are not growing in forgiveness, we’re not growing in Christ. Indeed...forgiveness is foreign to our fleshly nature, that’s why it’s shocking to consider the fact that Jesus Christ died on the cross...with people spitting on Him...ramming a crown of thorns into His head...hammering spikes through His limbs...stripping him naked beating his back with shrapnel...until His entire body was covered with a cloak of blood and flies...and yet, He looked down from the cross and said, “Father **what**? Forgive them...forgive them... forgive them.”

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