

## **Jesus on Forgiveness**

Matthew 18:21-35

Series: *Jesus On \_\_\_\_\_: The Only Perspective that Matters*

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When we were planning this series out (as we do with every series), we try to be as strategic as possible in making the decision on what messages we plan to preach each weekend. Once we know the series and how long it's going to be we lay out the calendar and begin to look at the major dates and church events that will come up during the series.

We know that in the Spring we have senior graduation day (that's next week), we know we have Memorial Day, we know we have Mother's Day along with Parent Child commitment today.

And as we were planning out this series, we had the different subjects that we knew we were going to deal with and the question became which one do we tackle on Mother's Day?

I immediately vetoed Jesus on Judgment...wasn't going to do that on Mother's Day, and Jesus on Money wouldn't be a good fit. Could definitely have done Jesus on Anxiety – a lot of anxiety that comes with being a mom, but out of all the topics we are going to address in this series there was one that we looked at and said, “This may be the best one for Mother's Day.”

The subject is the title: **Jesus on Forgiveness**

I thought about forgiveness on Mother's Day because of an article I read years ago preparing for another Mother's Day message I was preaching.

I had never heard of this before, but it's a real thing and even now if you put the words “mom guilt” in the google search engine you will get pointed to literally thousands of research articles, blogs, medical clinics all trying to help mothers cope with “mom guilt”.

**Illus. Mom Guilt** - “Mom guilt” is the name given to the feelings of guilt and shame that come with being a mom and feeling like what you are doing isn't enough.

Whether it's your own expectations or you're trying to live up to someone else's expectations (social media is a big deal – people look like the perfect mom or family, and we can get into a comparison game and it steals joy and makes you think you're not doing enough).

BTW - Can we just admit here that social media is everyone's highlight reel? Like I only put the good stuff on social, I'm not highlighting the losses or the bickering going on!

Today when you get to social media and you see all the nice family pictures especially of young families (I've been there!) just know there is so much yelling going on, threatening within an inch of their life to smile and stop bothering their siblings!

Social media can increase the “mom guilt” and it’s just this emotion...this feeling...of not being enough...not doing enough...and it can drive moms into depression, severe anxiety, and/or unhealthy behaviors and patterns of thought.

So, it just made sense today to talk about forgiveness on Mother’s Day because some need to learn to forgive themselves better AND I’m also aware that there are many (both men and women) that perhaps do not have a good relationship with their own mom.

I don’t pretend to know backstories or everything that has gone into the relationship with your mom that has created the tension, anger, frustration, or discouragement. I do know that the quicker we can deal with it and learn to forgive for whatever the offense, the better it will be for us and those closest to us.

So, let’s jump in today and see all that Jesus said concerning forgiveness.

### **1. Jesus taught forgiveness**

In the very first message he ever preached, *The Sermon on the Mount*, he taught his disciples how to pray. And do you remember the section that is right in the middle of the Lord’s prayer? **Matt. 6:12 – “and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”**

On a separate occasion, Jesus teaching the same prayer in Luke’s gospel, he teaches the exact same way to pray...doesn’t change a thing!

**Luke 11:2-4 – “And he said to them, “When you pray, say: “Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us...”**

Notice, Jesus isn’t just teaching us to forgive, but the wording of this prayer gives the insinuation that forgiveness has already taken place when the prayer is being prayed!

We are to ask forgiveness from God for our sin and we are to grant forgiveness to those that have sinned against us. This is SO important to Jesus that in the Lord’s Prayer from Matt. 6, the ONLY commentary Jesus adds – this is significant – the ONLY commentary Jesus adds to this teaching on prayer is the section on forgiveness.

**Matt. 6:14-15 – “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”**

So, let’s just underscore right out the gate today how important forgiveness is. Jesus says our forgiveness from God is contingent on our willingness to forgive others.

If you EVER needed a reason to forgive, this is it right here! You want God’s forgiveness, then you must forgive those who have hurt you...betrayed you...abused you...sinned against you! This is a tough pill to swallow. I’m with:

**Erwin Lutzer – “Forgiveness sounds like a marvelous idea until you are the one that has to do it.”**

So, let’s talk about this. What exactly is forgiveness? Well, let’s begin by talking about what it’s NOT!

First, let’s make the point that: **Forgiveness is not forgetting**

Listen, there are some things that have happened to us in life that there is NO forgetting. I wish erasing memories was as easy as erasing a contact in our phone, but it’s not!

Wouldn’t that be great? If someone slandered us or spoke maliciously against us...or if there was a situation that caused hurt and pain and bitterness, if we could just hit the “delete” button in our mind and we never think about it again – it would be awesome, right?

The problem is, forgiveness doesn’t work this way. It’s impossible to forget the hurt and pain that some have caused us, be it the action or offense against us was intentional or perhaps maybe the person that was causing it was unaware of what they were doing and the pain they were causing – either way, forgiveness is NOT forgetting the sin that was leveled against you.

Second: **Forgiveness is not a feeling**

There are some that are waiting to forgive until you feel like it! And that to me like waiting until you feel like going to the dentist! No offense to the dentists in the room! If I waited to feel like it, I’d never go!

Forgiveness is commanded in scripture. It’s not a feeling, but a choice we make...a deliberate decision to as we will see in a moment “let go” of an offense against you. And it’s NOT just a one-time decision but probably one you are going to have to make over and over and over again.

Thirdly: **Forgiveness is not fake**

What I mean by this is, forgiveness is NOT pretending like something didn’t happen to you...it’s not living like you weren’t hurt or simply overlooking what someone did to you.

There are some of us – and I use “us” purposefully, because I’m one of you that are really good at compartmentalizing. If you’re a certain personality type that is more of a peacemaker, it’s easier for us to overlook offense and call it forgiveness, but the reality is sometimes we haven’t unpacked and properly dealt with what happened because we don’t want to have to try and cope with the negative emotions or influences that may come along with it.

These are ALL things that forgiveness is NOT! It’s not forgetting, it’s not a feeling and it’s not fake. What is forgiveness, then? Jesus teaches us we should forgive, what does the word mean?

Well, in our New Testament, the word Jesus uses for “forgive” or forgiveness carries with it this idea to dismiss...to let go...to release from obligation...to abandon.

The word picture is that of separating and leaving something or someone behind...literally sending away! It has connotations that go back to the Day of Atonement and the scapegoat being “sent away” into the wilderness.

If I had time to show use the numerous times it’s used in scripture, it’s also translated in our English versions as the word “left”. After Jesus completed his 40 day fast in the wilderness and defeated Satan, the word that is used in Matt. 4:11 is the “devil left him.” – went away...this is literally what the word means.

It’s leaving...separating from...sending away the offense and the punishment of the wrongdoing. One of my Bible dictionaries combines the meanings and summarizes it this way:

**“Forgiveness means giving up resentment or claim of requital on account of an offense.”**

It’s letting it go! Who knew the Elsa way to live from Frozen was the Jesus way to live! “Let it go! Let it go!”

This is what forgiveness is! It’s letting go of the offense and leaving any sort of payback, resentment, and bitterness behind – you send that stuff away! You let it go...you leave it behind!

THIS is forgiveness...and any normal person is thinking right now,

1. “that’s really hard to do” – and you would be right.
2. “how often do I have to forgive?” What if the person doesn’t repent, acknowledge they did anything wrong OR sins against me again? Do I still have to forgive them?!

Well, I’m glad you asked because Jesus shares a parable with us that answers ALL of these questions.

**Illus. Men in the Loop** – I told them this week one of the many things I love about preaching is simply reading God’s Word (explain) – I love talking about this because this is Jesus’s perspective on forgiveness. If you have an issue with it, take it up with him!

**Matt. 18:21** – “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?”

It was taught in some circles of Judaism that you only were required to forgive someone up to three times...after that you didn’t have to forgive them anymore – Peter thought he was being extremely gracious here – do I forgive them 7x – which 7 is a number of completion in the Bible. Look at how Jesus answers!

**Matt. 18:22** – “Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.”

Some translations read 70x7 – Peter wanted to know if forgiveness had limits and Jesus clearly answers that it does not!

This number (70x7) is meant to represent infinity! Unlimited forgiveness! And then Jesus shares with them a parable...a story teaching and explaining forgiveness.

**Matt. 18:23-27 - “Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. <sup>24</sup> When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. (Now, this is an unreal number to the people listening that day...this is tens of millions of dollars...and the point Jesus is making is that this servant could NEVER repay the king!) 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. (I’ll just mention this here and we’ll talk about it more in just a moment, but that is justice...this servant owed and he could not repay!) So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ <sup>27</sup> And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt.”**

Here we see the flipside of justice and that is mercy. The King sees the servant, KNOWS the servant could NEVER repay him and instead of taking his wife, children and everything else the servant had, the King instead has mercy on him and totally forgives the debt!

BTW – this is a picture of the gospel! You know this, right? We’re the servants who have racked up a sin-debt we could never pay, but Jesus, the King...in his mercy, pays the debt for us! Keeps justice intact (justice cost him his life!), while at the same time freely bestows on us his mercy and releases us totally and completely from the penalty that was solely ours to pay!

We should be the most grateful, forgiving people on the planet because of the forgiveness King Jesus has shown us!

We’ve been released from SO much just like the man in this story. But Jesus isn’t done with this story and sadly if we read this text accurately while at the same time allow the Holy Spirit to read us, this may feel closer to home for a lot of us than we’d like to admit.

**Matt. 18:28-30 - “But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii (Now, remember he has just been totally forgiven and released from a debt that was worth tens of millions – a hundred denarii – that’s a few days worth of wages! It’s nothing...to put it in perspective just pretend being forgiven for 150 million dollars you owed to someone but refusing to forgive someone who owes you \$100 dollars! It’s crazy, right? Look at the text...it continues), and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’ <sup>29</sup> So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ (said the same exact thing the servant had just said to the king!) <sup>30</sup> He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt.”**

Notice this...in this story, there wasn’t a break in the day! One episode follows the next. In other words, what a short memory this servant has...it makes you wonder, what is he thinking! He just left being forgiven for a HUGE debt and now is holding this SMALL debt over this person?

**Matt. 18:31-35 - “Then 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. <sup>32</sup> Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. <sup>33</sup> And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ <sup>34</sup> And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. <sup>35</sup> So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”**

What’s the lesson Jesus is teaching? If you’ve experienced the forgiveness of God for your offenses against him, you better be ready to forgive people when they have offenses against you.

You neglect God’s great mercy in your life by NOT showing his mercy to others and as in this story, you will get his judgment!

**F.F. Bruce – “Should some persist in an unforgiving attitude toward others, could they even so enjoy the assurance of God’s forgiveness? If Jesus’s teaching means what it says, they could not.”**

In other words, if you are withholding forgiveness, are you sure you’ve been forgiven by God? Forgiven people, forgive. We look at the cross and see our sin. And if Jesus can forgive our sin, we can forgive those who have sinned against us.

**C.S. Lewis – “To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you.”**

We are to forgive because Jesus taught forgiveness. We are also to forgive because:

## **2. Jesus modeled forgiveness**

This is important to understand. Jesus did not overlook our sin and forgive us. He didn’t just show us mercy at the expense of justice. Instead, his justice is what enabled his mercy.

See, the Jewish people knew they were supposed to forgive. They had grown up knowing the Old Testament law and the law repeatedly spoke of justice and mercy. This was a part of God’s character...intricate to who he is...and justice and mercy was to be exhibited in and through his people.

Israel in the Old Testament and believers in Jesus today should be living in a way that we properly reflect WHO he is – a God that is just AND merciful.

And true forgiveness is able to take place BECAUSE Jesus dealt with sin on the cross. Justice was meted out through the sacrificial death of Christ and therefore, mercy can flow, and forgiveness can follow.

When Jesus said from the cross as he was being beaten, mocked and put to death - in the tense of the New Testament this was something that he said repeatedly:

**Luke 23:34a – “And Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do...”**

Jesus was not overlooking sin...he could ask the Father to forgive because in that moment his death was the very act upholding God's justice that in return enabled mercy to flow and forgiveness to follow.

Think about how Jesus models forgiveness:

### **1. Jesus forgives quickly**

**1 John 1:9 – “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”**

There is judicial forgiveness that occurs at salvation (explain). There is also what is called “parental” or sometimes “familial” forgiveness. When we are in a right relationship with God and we sin against him, our fellowship with God is broken. What are we to do? We confess that sin, repent of that sin, and Jesus forgives us.

He doesn't hold it over our head...he doesn't hold out on us...he doesn't make us jump through hoops for his forgiveness or pay some kind of spiritual fine. Now, we may have to pay the consequences...he doesn't just eliminate the consequences of sin upon confession, but he does immediately restore the fellowship.

This is why we should keep short accounts with the Lord. And in modeling the forgiveness of Jesus, we should not hold out on forgiving others.

Now, this doesn't mean that we don't set up healthy boundaries! It doesn't mean that there are not consequences because of the sin against you – the relationship could be so toxic and damage so high that there are consequences that prevent that relationship from ever moving forward and being what it could have been.

However, it shouldn't stop us from forgiving and letting go of offense. No matter the pain, to model Jesus we can't withhold forgiveness.

### **2. Jesus forgives completely**

**Micah 7:19b – “You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.”**

**Psalms 103:12** (speaking of the love of God and let's remember in this, Jesus is God! What is said of God, Jesus made known) -

**“as far as east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.”**

Separation from sin is only possible because of the cross! There is not a sin too grave for God not to forgive. His blood covers ALL sin fully and completely.

**Illus. Grace Greater Than Our Sin** (written by Julia Harriette Johnston in 1910)

**Marvelous grace of our loving Lord,  
Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt!  
Yonder on Calvary's mount out-poured—  
There where the blood of the Lamb was spilt.**

**Grace, grace, God's grace,  
Grace that will pardon and cleanse within;  
Grace, grace, God's grace,  
Grace that is greater than all our sin!**

### **3. Jesus forgives repeatedly**

We read about this in our Matt. 18 passage. He teaches elsewhere this same thing.

**Luke 17:3-4 – “Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, <sup>4</sup>and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive him.”**

### **4. Jesus forgives freely**

What I mean by this, is that with Jesus there are no strings attached. You ask for forgiveness and mean it, you get it. You don't have to bargain, try to repay, you simply confess and receive the forgiveness Jesus gives.

Look at this list...(ALL ON ONE SCREEN)

- 1. Jesus forgives quickly**
- 2. Jesus forgives completely**
- 3. Jesus forgives repeatedly**
- 4. Jesus forgives freely**

Question for you: Are you forgiving like Jesus? According to his teaching...this is Jesus's perspective...from what we have learned today, as his followers, we ought to be able to remove his name from that list and put our name there. And in doing so, we show others who Jesus is?

You say, Pastor, I'm not Jesus...no, none of us are. But look at this last point on forgiveness.

1. Jesus teaches forgiveness
2. Jesus models forgiveness
- 3. Jesus empowers forgiveness**

You're right...you in and of yourself can't forgive like Jesus. BUT, it is a truth of scripture that once he lives in you, you can do anything. The Helper, the Holy Spirit lives in you and he is the one that empowers and enables you to do what you never thought possible.



**Illus. My story** (thank God for his Holy Spirit and my mom) Forgiveness didn't happen overnight! It was a process. And here's what I learned personally about forgiveness...it's this lesson: **Forgiveness leads to freedom.**

**Lewis Smedes** (former professor of Theology at Fuller Seminary) – **“The first and often only person to be healed by forgiveness is the person who does the forgiving. When we genuinely forgive, we set a person free and then discover the prisoner we set free was us.”**

On this Mother's Day...the greatest gift you could give yourselves mom...the greatest gift we could give our mom...our wife, is a person in a right standing with the Lord both positionally (judicially) and practically (parentally).

I'm reminded of this quote and we'll close out the message today.

**Adrian Rogers** – **“The most miserable man on Earth is not an unsaved man, but a saved man out of fellowship with God.”**

If you are living with a spirit of unforgiveness...you're out of fellowship with God and it's not the offense that was done against you making you miserable, it's that you are withholding forgiveness and therefore whether you realize it or not out of fellowship with God!

It's been said that withholding forgiveness is like drinking rat poison and waiting for the rat to die. The rat's not dying, you are!

And you will never be free...you'll never be healed...you'll never be whole until you have received forgiveness from God and granted that forgiveness to whomever it is in your life that needs it (whether they have requested it or not!)

Jesus on forgiveness. May we experience it today.

Let's pray.

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