

3. Forgiveness versus Reconciliation

Romans 12:19 NLT - 19 Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, "I will take revenge; I will pay them back," says the LORD.

This is not an easy teaching, and it causes us to wrestle with the implications in cases of abuse, and suffering. But as we choose to trust God and follow His will, we may be able to forgive, even when reconciliation isn't possible.

There is a difference between forgiveness and reconciliation. When we forgive, we let go of the past sins, don't harbor grudges or plot revenge. We move on in our life. Reconciliation requires a proper response from both parties. It means a genuine repentance and change in behavior. When that happens, the relationship can be restored to a healthy state.

Have you seen or been a part of a successful reconciliation? If so, share that with your group. If not, has there been a time you were able to forgive someone even if you were unable to reconcile with them? Is there anyone God is prompting you to reach out to for reconciliation now?

WRAP-UP

The ungrateful servant was forgiven a debt he could never repay, but instead of reflecting that mercy towards others, he was bitter and vengeful. If we have opened our heart to Jesus as Lord, we must allow Him to live in us and through us. That will include changing our hearts so that we can truly forgive those who sin against us.

MEMORY VERSE

31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. 32 Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you. - Ephesians 4:31-32 NLT

PRAYER (20 MIN)

Ask your group to pray for you regarding one area where you can apply this study in your life.

Challenge – There may be individuals in your life who you need to forgive, but who are no longer alive, or refuse to make contact with you. Even if you can't tell them in person, spend time with God expressing your forgiveness and asking Him to change your heart towards that person.

Parable of the Ungrateful Servant- Grace and Responsibility

Storyteller #2

INTRODUCTION

What do you think of when you hear the term "the gift of grace"? Perhaps you've heard it defined as God's unmerited favor. In the parable of the Ungrateful Servant, we see someone who received the gift of forgiveness of his debt, but it doesn't seem like it had any effect on him. In fact, he demonstrates the opposite response to someone who was indebted to him. Maybe you know what happened; he was tossed into prison and tortured. What's wrong with this picture? How could someone be unaffected by such boundless grace? And if the king threw him in prison does that mean God expects something from us in response to His gift of Grace? The answer may surprise you.

Ice Breaker

What do you do when someone gives you a Christmas gift, but you don't have a gift for them?

Key Passage

Matthew 18:27-28, 33-35 NLT - 27 Then his master was filled with pity for him, and he released him and forgave his debt. 28 "But when the man left the king, he went to a fellow servant who owed him a few thousand dollars. He grabbed him by the throat and demanded instant payment. ... 33 Shouldn't you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?' 34 Then the angry king sent the man to prison to be tortured until he had paid his entire debt. 35 "That's what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart."

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. The Gift of Grace

In the parable of the ungrateful servant, the king has pity and forgives the man's astronomical debt. The servant was not forgiven because he was worthy of being forgiven nor did the king expect that the huge sum could be repaid by him. And yet in the culture of that day, gifts did not come with no strings attached. Gifts were seen as a something that created a bond of

obligation and required reciprocity. So, the king likely had some expectation about the response of the servant to his generous gift.

Let's see if we can find some parallels between the parable of the ungrateful servant and Paul's description of God's grace from Ephesians 2.

Ephesians 2:8-10 NLT - 8 God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. 9 Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. 10 For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

How does this passage show that we are like the servant who had not done anything to earn forgiveness?

It seems that the king expected forgiveness to be demonstrated by the servant who had been forgiven his debt. What does Eph 2:10 indicate that God expects of us as a result of our being created anew in Jesus?

Matthew 6:12 NIV - 12 And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

When Jesus taught his disciples to pray in Matthew 6, he addressed the expectation of someone who was forgiven a debt. Do you think when we forgive others that obligates God to forgive us? Then what is the motivation for us in forgiving others?

Matthew 18:21-22 NKJV - 21 Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" 22 Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.

This parable was told by Jesus to his disciples in response to Peter's question about forgiving someone who sins against you. Peter wanted to know if 7 times was enough to forgive someone. Jesus replied that 70 times that amount of forgiveness was required and then tells the parable of the ungrateful servant.

When we consider the context in which the parable was given and consider Jesus' concluding statement "That's what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart.", how is forgiving someone "up to 7 times" an indication you haven't forgiven them from your heart? What does this reveal about the true condition of our hearts and our relationship with God?

2. Why is Forgiveness So Difficult?

There are many factors that can influence our willingness to forgive. If we don't recognize our own need for forgiveness, then we are less likely to offer forgiveness to others. This means we must first admit that we are sinners, and that sin is serious.

Romans 6:23 NLT - 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.

What are some reasons people are unwilling to admit that they are sinners in need of a savior? How does Romans 6:23 show the true magnitude of our sin? How does this impact our perspective on the debt we owe and God's mercy in forgiving us?

Ephesians 4:31-32 NLT - 31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. 32 Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

How might hanging on to the behaviors listed in Eph 4:31 effect our willingness to forgive?

If you have suffered pain at the hands of another you know how difficult it can be to give that pain over to God. This is especially true for something you've experienced over the course of a lifetime. Verse 32 gives you two tools to help you to forgive- first it tells you what behavior should replace the evil practices that result in unforgiveness. Second it should remind you of what motivates you to forgive.

Galatians 2:20 NLT - 20 My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

The truth is, we live between two kingdoms, the earthly kingdom right now and the heavenly kingdom that has not yet been fully revealed. In this earthly kingdom forgiving someone doesn't make sense. But in the Kingdom of God, His mercy flows freely. Gal 2:20 holds the key to being able to forgive. Paul says his old nature (old self) is dead, and Christ lives in him.

If we have given our lives to Jesus, then we are being shaped into the image of Christ. Every day we make choices to pursue the old desires and behaviors or the put them to death and allow the will of God to direct our steps. How do we forgive? By allowing Jesus to live in and through us.

Pause to pray and ask God to reveal any areas of bitterness you need to let go of. Is there someone you've been unwilling to forgive? Ask God to give you His eyes and His heart toward that person so you can truly forgive.