

The Unmerciful Servant

Bible Passage: Matthew 18:21-35

Main Point: God shows mercy to us so that we will show mercy to others.

Key Passage: Mark 6:34

Big Picture Question: Why did Jesus tell parables? Jesus told parables to teach people about God and His kingdom.

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SAY • Jesus told this parable to answer Peter's question, "How many times should I forgive someone who wrongs me?" Peter thought maybe seven times was enough. Is it OK if we only forgive people seven times? (*No.*) Jesus said that Peter should forgive seventy times seven times. Seventy times seven equals 490. But Jesus wasn't saying that once you forgive someone 490 times, then you can stop. He told a parable, or story, to help Peter understand.

In the parable of the unmerciful servant, a king told his servants to pay back what they owed. One servant owed the king fifty million silver coins! In Bible times, if you couldn't pay what you owed someone, you and your whole family would have to work to pay the debt or you would all be sent to prison. The servant did not want that to happen, so he begged the king to give him more time to repay the debt. What did the king do? He forgave the servant completely! He basically said, "I forgive you. You do not have to repay me." This wasn't easy for the king to do. After all, the king wasn't going to get back his fifty million silver coins. But this was very good news for the servant.

Then the servant went out and saw a man who owed him some money—not nearly as much as he owed the king. He ordered the man to pay him, but the man couldn't. The man begged for more time, but the servant said no. He threw the man into jail.

Why do you think the king was upset when he heard this? (*The king had forgiven what the servant could never repay, but the servant did not forgive the small amount.*) The king said that the servant was evil, and he punished him.

• How do you think the servant felt when the king forgave his great debt? Did you know that we all have a great debt?

Jesus said that God is like the king in the story. We are like the servant. When we sin, we break God's law. The punishment for sin is death and eternal separation from God. Nothing we do is enough to pay the debt we owe God and take away God's punishment for our sin. But God sent His Son, Jesus, to die on the cross to pay for our sin and take the punishment we deserve.

When we trust in Jesus, God forgives our sin completely. Because we have been forgiven our great debt, we can forgive others when they wrong us—not just 490 times, but over and over again without keeping count. **God shows mercy to us so that we will show mercy to others.**

Key passage

Lead kids to read together Mark 6:34.

SAY • Jesus and His disciples were busy traveling and teaching. The Bible says that sometimes they didn't even have time to eat.

When I get hungry, I can be kind of grumpy. But Jesus never was. He had compassion on the people. *Compassion* is a concern for the suffering of others.

SAY • Jesus cared about people. He had compassion on them, and He showed mercy to them. In our Bible story, Jesus taught the people that **God shows mercy to us so that we will show mercy to others.**

SAY • *Mercy* means not getting the punishment you deserve, but being shown kindness instead. Today's Bible story is about the mercy God shows to us.

The Gospel: God's Plan for Me

Ask kids if they have ever heard the word *gospel*. Clarify that the word *gospel* means “good news.” It is the message about Christ, the kingdom of God, and salvation. Use the following guide to share the gospel with kids.

God rules. Explain to kids that the Bible tells us God created everything, and He is in charge of everything. Invite a volunteer to read Genesis 1:1 from the Bible. Read Revelation 4:11 or Colossians 1:16-17 aloud and explain what these verses mean.

We sinned. Tell kids that since the time of Adam and Eve, everyone has chosen to disobey God. (Romans 3:23) The Bible calls this sin. Because God is holy, God cannot be around sin. Sin separates us from God and deserves God's punishment of death. (Romans 6:23)

God provided. Choose a child to read John 3:16 aloud. Say that God sent His Son, Jesus, the perfect solution to our sin problem, to rescue us from the punishment we deserve. It's something we, as sinners, could never earn on our own. Jesus alone saves us. Read and explain Ephesians 2:8-9.

Jesus gives. Share with kids that Jesus lived a perfect life, died on the cross for our sins, and rose again. Because Jesus gave up His life for us, we can be welcomed into God's family for eternity. This is the best gift ever! Read Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21; or 1 Peter 3:18.

We respond. Tell kids that they can respond to Jesus. Read Romans 10:9-10,13. Review these aspects of our response: Believe in your heart that Jesus alone saves you through what He's already done on the cross. Repent, turning from self and sin to Jesus. Tell God and others that your faith is in Jesus.

Offer to talk with any child who is interested in responding to Jesus.

Bible story review & Bible skills

Form three teams of kids. On a chalkboard or dry erase board, draw a column for each team and put 10 X's in each column. Explain the rules of the game.

You will ask a question to a player on team 1. If she answers correctly, she may erase two X's from the board. She may take both from another team or split them and take one from two different teams. The goal is to "knock out" other teams by erasing all of their X's. The player will also shoot a ball at the basket to earn a chance to erase another X. If a player doesn't know the answer, she may ask her teammates. If her team is correct, she may erase only one X.

Ask additional questions to the teams, one at a time. When you run out of time or questions, debrief. If a team's X's are all erased, allow them to continue to play.

How many times did Peter think he should forgive someone? (*seven times, Matt. 18:21*)

How many times did Jesus say to forgive someone? (*seventy times seven times, Matt. 18:22*)

In the parable, how many silver coins did the servant owe the king? (*fifty million, or 10,000 talents; Matt. 18:24*)

What did the servant ask the king to do? (*give him more time, Matt. 18:26*)

What did the king do for the servant? (*The king forgave him, Matt. 18:27*)

How many silver coins did the man owe the servant? (*one hundred, or 100 denarii; Matt. 18:28*)

What did the man ask the servant to do? (*give him more time, Matt. 18:29*)

What did the servant do to the man who owed him money? (*put him into jail, Matt. 18:30*)

Why was the king angry? (*The king forgave the servant what he could never repay, and the servant did not forgive the small amount; Matt. 18:32-33*)

Who paid the debt for our sin? (*Jesus, Rom. 4:25*)

Why can we forgive others? (*God has greatly forgiven us, Eph. 4:32*)

In what Gospel can we find this parable? (*the Gospel of Matthew, Matt. 18:21-35*)

Say • How did you feel when another team erased your team's X's? [*Prompt kids to discuss.*] Can you forgive the other teams for erasing your X's? How many times should you forgive others who wrong you? (*We should forgive without counting.*) Why is it hard to forgive? How many times has God forgiven you?

Activity choice

Option 1: Practice forgiveness

Say • Forgiving someone who wronged you isn't easy. Sometimes the other person doesn't realize how much he hurt you, or he isn't even sorry!

Distribute slips of paper and pencils. Prompt kids to write about a time they were wronged. What happened? How did that make them feel? Allow a few minutes for kids to write.

Say • We learned today that **God shows mercy to us so that we will show mercy to others**. You can pray and ask God to help you forgive someone else. Thank Him for forgiving your sins.

Invite kids to line up a few feet away from a trash can. Challenge kids to crumple or tear up their papers and toss them into the trash can as a way to show they have chosen to forgive someone who wronged them.

Option 2: Draw the line

Explain that one side of the room represents "That's so easy!" and the other represents "That's too hard!" The middle of the room represents "I'm not sure." You may choose to lay a piece of masking tape or painter's tape across the floor to help kids visualize the spectrum.

Tell kids that you will read a statement. Kids should think about how easy or hard it would be for them to show forgiveness or mercy in that situation. Allow kids to move along the line after each statement.

Your classmate didn't invite you to a party.

Your friend spilled chocolate milk all over your shirt.

Your brother borrowed and lost your favorite game.

Your sister ripped your new jeans.

Your dad missed your soccer game.

Your grandpa broke his promise to take you to the movies.

Say •Believers should not “draw the line” on how many times we will forgive someone who wrongs us. Through Jesus, God has forgiven all of our sin—past, present, and future. **God shows mercy to us so that we will show mercy to others.**

Option 3: The forgiver

Instruct kids to form a single-file line. Choose one kid to be the forgiver. She will sit in a chair at the front of the room. Kids should take turns approaching the forgiver one at a time. Each kid should issue an apology. For example: “I’m sorry I ate your candy bar.” The forgiver should keep a straight face and reply, “I forgive you.”

Encourage kids to give silly or outlandish apologies to make the forgiver laugh. If a player’s apology causes the forgiver to smile or laugh, he becomes the forgiver.

Say •These were silly, made-up offenses to make each other laugh. Each time you apologized, [*name of the forgiver*] forgave you. How many times should someone forgive others? Three times? Five times? One hundred times? That’s a question we will answer when we hear today’s Bible story.

Option 4: Money challenge

Announce that you will give kids a challenge. Any kid who completes the challenge will earn \$1 of play money. Challenge kids to do 25 jumping jacks. Then distribute play money to each kid who completes the task.

Explain that any kids who want to earn another dollar of play money can do 25 more jumping jacks. Allow kids to do the challenge. Give play money for each set of 25 jumping jacks a kid completes.

Say •How many sets of jumping jacks would you need to do to earn \$100? (*100 sets*) How many sets would you need to do to earn \$10,000? (*10,000 sets*)

That is a lot of jumping jacks! I’m not sure we could do it. Today we are going to hear a Bible story about a servant who owed his master so much money that he could not repay it. To repay the debt, the man would have to work for 20,000 years! Let’s find out what happened.

Journal and prayer (5 minutes)

Prompt kids to write down how many times Jesus wants us to forgive others and why. Suggest that they list names of people they need to forgive and encourage them to do so joyfully.

Say •**God shows mercy to us so that we will show mercy to others**—not just three times or seven times, but many, many times—not keeping count. We have been forgiven a great debt, so we can forgive others when they sin against us.

Lead kids in prayer. Pray that kids would be slow to get angry at others who wrong them, remembering that God does not hold their sin against them. Pray that by showing mercy to others, kids would be a witness of God’s love to those who may not know Him.