

### Leader's Corner

Forgiven People Forgive

Matthew 18:21-35

**Big Idea:** Because God has forgiven an immeasurable debt through Christ, followers of Jesus are called to extend forgiveness to others. Forgiveness does not minimize hurt or eliminate wisdom and boundaries, but it releases revenge, entrusts judgment to God, and opens the door to healing and freedom.

**Main Idea:** The gospel reminds us that we are people who have been forgiven an impossible debt. When we truly grasp the mercy we've received from God, forgiveness becomes not merely a command but a response to grace.

**Main Passage:** Matthew 18:21–35

**Main Practice:** Identify one debt Jesus has canceled in your life and one debt you may still be holding against someone else. Ask God to help you take one faithful step toward release this week.

**Leader Reminder:** Forgiveness is deeply personal. Some group members may be carrying significant wounds, betrayals, abuse, divorce, family conflict, or grief. Create a safe environment. Encourage honesty without forcing disclosure. Remind the group that forgiveness and reconciliation are not the same thing, and healthy boundaries may still be necessary.

### Prayer and Praise

#### Opening Prayer:

*Father,*

*Thank You for the mercy You have shown us through Jesus Christ. We confess that we often forget the depth of our own forgiveness while holding tightly to the offenses of others. Open our eyes to the greatness of Your grace. Give us courage to bring our hurts honestly before You and wisdom to know what faithful forgiveness looks like in our circumstances.*

*Where there is bitterness, bring freedom.*

*Where there is pain, bring healing.*

*Where there is brokenness, bring hope.*

*Teach us to forgive as we have been forgiven.*

*Through Christ our Lord,*

*Amen.*

#### Worship Suggestions:

- Living Hope
- His Mercy Is More
- Lord I Need You

# Group Discussion

## Forgiveness Flows From the Gospel

Jesus tells a story about two debts. One debt is impossibly large and completely canceled. The other is real but comparatively small. The tragedy of the parable is not the size of the second debt—it is the servant's failure to remember the mercy he received.

The heart of the gospel is this: God has forgiven us far more than we could ever repay. When that reality grips our hearts, it reshapes how we respond to those who have hurt us.

Forgiveness is not pretending something didn't happen. It is choosing to release our right to revenge and entrusting justice to God.

### **Main Discussion:**

1. When you hear the word "forgiveness," what thoughts or emotions immediately come to mind?
2. Read Matthew 18:21–22. Why do you think Peter thought forgiving seven times was generous? What does Jesus reveal about the nature of forgiveness through His response?
3. Read Matthew 18:23–27. What stands out to you about the king's response to the servant's impossible debt? What does this teach us about God's mercy toward us?
4. The sermon stated, "The cross shows us both the depth of our debt and the depth of God's mercy." How does reflecting on Jesus' forgiveness change the way we view our own offenses and failures?
5. Read Matthew 18:28–30. Why do you think the servant struggled to extend the same mercy he had received? Where do you see similar tendencies in our culture—or in yourself?
6. The sermon noted that our culture often teaches us to keep score, cancel people, retaliate, or demand repayment. What are some subtle ways we "keep score" in relationships?
7. Read Matthew 18:32–35. How can unforgiveness become a prison for the person who refuses to release it? Have you ever experienced that personally?
8. The sermon distinguished forgiveness from reconciliation. Why is that distinction important? What might healthy boundaries look like while still pursuing forgiveness?
9. Read Colossians 3:13 and Ephesians 1:7. What practical habits help us remember how much we have been forgiven by Christ?
10. As you reflect on this week's message:
  - What debt has Jesus canceled in your life?
  - What debt are you still holding against someone else?
  - What might be your next faithful step toward release?

# Practice

## As a Group:

Spend time praying through these three statements:

1. Thank Jesus for a debt He has canceled in your life.
2. Ask God to reveal any bitterness or unforgiveness you may be carrying.
3. Pray for courage, wisdom, and healing as you take steps toward forgiveness.

If appropriate, invite group members to share one area where they desire freedom and pray for one another.

## Individually This Week:

### Remember

Spend five minutes each day thanking God for specific ways He has forgiven and shown mercy to you.

### Release

Write down the name of a person or situation where you are struggling to forgive. Bring that hurt honestly before God in prayer.

### Reach Out

Consider one next faithful step:

- A prayer of release
- A conversation
- Seeking wise counsel
- Meeting with a pastor, mentor, or counselor
- Establishing a healthy boundary while choosing forgiveness

### Receive Help

If the wound is deep, invite trusted Christian community into the process. Forgiveness is often a journey, not a moment.

# Further Study

## Supporting Passages:

- Matthew 5:38–48 — Loving enemies and releasing retaliation
- Luke 23:34 — Jesus forgives from the cross
- Colossians 3:13 — Forgive as the Lord forgave you
- Ephesians 4:31–32 — Put away bitterness and extend kindness
- Romans 12:17–21 — Leave room for God’s justice
- 1 John 1:9 — Bringing sin and pain honestly before God
- James 5:16 — Confession, prayer, and healing
- Matthew 18:15–20 — Wise restoration within community

## Theological Reflection:

“To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you.”

— Lewis B. Smedes

“Forgiveness does not excuse anything. Forgiveness simply says, ‘I am no longer going to make you pay for what you did to me.’”

— Tim Keller

## Final Reflection:

*The gospel never asks us to minimize our wounds. It asks us to bring them to the One who bore wounds for us. The cross reminds us that justice matters, mercy is costly, and forgiveness is possible. As forgiven people, we become people who forgive.*