




Theme: Summer Stories with Jesus


“The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant”

Weekly Memory Verse:

³³ ***“Shouldn’t you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?”*** –
Matthew 18:33

Monday, August 15 – Read Exodus 33:18-34:8. This story was a high point in the Hebrew scriptures, as God revealed his nature to Moses. The fact that Numbers 14:18; Nehemiah 9:17; Psalm 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2, and Nahum 1:3 quoted this list of God’s qualities, and many other places echoed it, shows its value. As Dr. Maxie Dunnam said, “It was left for Jesus to become the Incarnation of these words that persons might forever believe that what God said He was, He was.”

 Moses asked God, “Please show me your glorious presence,” which reads “your glory” in most versions. In answer, God did not dazzle Moses with a Hubble-type image of a huge cosmic light show as galaxies collided. God said the essence of divine glory was that God “is compassionate and merciful, very patient, full of great loyalty and faithfulness ... forgiving every kind of sin and rebellion.” Moses bowed and worshipped that God. How is worshipping that same God shaping who you are today?

 The imagery of God telling Moses, “You will see my back, but my face won’t be visible” reminds us that, as humans, we can’t know everything about God. But, through the Bible and especially through Jesus, we can know what we most need to know. As you’re reminded that God is God and you’re not, how do God’s qualities of mercy, patience, compassion, and forgiveness move you to trust God in the areas that lie beyond your full understanding?

Prayer: *Lord God, thank you that your glory consists mainly, not in force or power, but in compassion, mercy, patience, loyalty, and faithfulness. Shape my identity to be more and more like you. Amen.*

Tuesday, August 16 – Read Matthew 18:15-21. In these verses, Jesus looked ahead to when his followers would live and worship in assemblies (or “churches”). He said they needed to deal with

hurts and failures through forgiveness and reconciliation. Even if people didn't want to reconcile, Jesus did not prescribe "shunning," for he himself often reached out to, "Gentiles and tax collectors," after all. His approach was so different that Peter asked how many times it had to be followed.



Pastor and scholar N. T. Wright noted, "Forgiveness doesn't mean saying 'it didn't really happen' or 'it didn't really matter'. In either of those cases, you don't need forgiveness; you just need to clear up a misunderstanding. Forgiveness is when it did happen, and it did matter, and you're going to deal with it and end up loving and accepting one another again anyway." What makes evasion or dishonesty about conflict so often feel "easier" to us? When have you experienced the joy of honest, hard-won reconciliation?



Is there a sense in which you think Peter was raising a legitimate concern? How can you tell the difference between a person who is abusing a relationship, who seems to have no intention of allowing "forgiveness" to change what's hurtful, and one who is honestly seeking forgiveness, even for a repeat offense?

Prayer: *Lord, thank you for being realistic and honest about the fact that we will all mess up, and need forgiveness from you and one another. Keep me forgiving as well as forgiven. Amen.*

Wednesday, August 17 – Read Matthew 18:21-27. Some rabbis taught that any given sin could only be forgiven three times, so Peter may have thought that stretching that to seven times was generous. But Jesus had something much bigger in mind. His parable made the servant's debt a whopper, an amount equivalent to 60 million days' wages! (That's about 170,000 years of work.) In his story, the king (he pretty clearly meant God) showed mercy even to a person who owed that kind of debt.



So, we don't think all we need is a tally sheet that goes up to 77 or 490, commentator Craig Keener noted, "Seventy times seven (some interpreters read seventy-seven) does not really mean exactly 490 here; it is a typically graphic Jewish way of saying 'Never hold grudges.'" How hard do you find it to let go of wrongs done to you? What change process do you need to enter with God to reorient your human tendency to hold grudges?



In Jesus' parable, the servant owed a debt so absurdly large that in human dealings no one could possibly owe that much. Do you think Jesus intended that the parable make us aware of the gap between our purity and God's, and make us aware of our need for a Savior to bridge the gap? Is that a good image, or are we not actually all that bad?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, as this story reminds me how much you've done to give me eternal life, I offer you praise from the depths of my heart! Thank you for your love and forgiveness. Amen.*

Thursday, August 18 – Read Matthew 18:28-35. With his enormous debt forgiven, Jesus said, the servant breathed a huge sigh of relief, and then spotted someone who owed him about 100 days' wages. He demanded payment on the spot, and when that debtor pleaded for mercy, he refused and had the man imprisoned. His attitude and his actions made it clear that he didn't understand, or truly value, the mercy the king had showed to him.



Have you ever been in a situation where you or another person received mercy and forgiveness, yet found it hard to extend that to another person? What inner factors too often make that characteristic of us as humans? How can taking in God's forgiveness over time transform us so that we can forgive others as we have been forgiven?



Sometimes it bothers us that Jesus seemed to say God will not forgive us unless we forgive others. Pastor Myron Augsberger noted in his book *Caring Enough to Forgive, Caring Enough NOT to Forgive*, “This is not a legalism, but states the expectation of responsible persons whose moral sense of responsibility will call them to express the forgiveness towards others that they have experienced from God.” In what ways does God’s generosity in forgiving and restoring you change how you see yourself, and prompt you to be generous toward others who have wronged you?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, you gave up so much to reach me with your forgiveness. Help me to accept and value that gift, and to be more forgiving toward myself and others in my life. Amen.*

Friday, August 19 – Read Luke 23:20-37. Enduring betrayal by his friends and his nation, Jesus suffered the agony of crucifixion and a sense of separation from God. Through it all, he lived what he taught in the Lord’s Prayer, that we, “forgive those who trespass (sin) against us.” On the cross, Jesus did what might seem impossible, as he prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they’re doing” (Luke 23:34).



Think of a time when someone wronged you in a major way. Remember how the situation came to be, what feelings it triggered in you, and what you did about them. Have you been able to forgive and let go of the hurt, or has this wrong continued to haunt you? What would it take (and what kind of help might you need, divine or human) for you to set yourself free from the past by forgiving?



As Jesus was dying on the cross, he taught us that God is willing to forgive even the worst possible sin. Do you need to ask God to forgive you for things you’ve done? If so, do that now, and trust that God will indeed forgive you. Do you need help forgiving yourself? Ask God to guide you in that process and consider speaking confidentially with a Stephen Minister, Christian counselor, or pastor to help you work through the issue.

Prayer: *Compassionate God, you suffered so much, yet prayed, “Father, forgive them ...” As you forge a new identity in me, may I see myself and others through your eyes, and forgive as you forgave. Amen.*

Saturday, August 20 – Read Colossians 3:5-14. The apostle Paul pictured a set of attitudes and behaviors that are woven together into a distinctive way of life. Forgiveness cannot and does not exist by itself—it requires a willingness to live beyond malice, and to bring large amounts of honesty, compassion, humility and above all love to bear on our conflicts and hurts.



Scholar N. T. Wright wrote: “Supposing there was a town in which everybody behaved in the way described in verses 5–9. And supposing, a few miles down the road, there was a town where everybody behaved in the way described in verses 12–17. Which town would you rather live in?” Jesus offers all of us the opportunity, beginning here and now, to live forever a life characterized by compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, and love. As you live more and more into the kingdom life God has called you to, in what ways are you experiencing freedom to be like Christ as you “put on the new nature”?

Prayer: *Lord God, I choose the qualities you offer to grow in me to be the template, the pattern, of how I live. But I’m a work in progress. As I relate to others who are also “works in progress,” help me to extend the love and forgiveness you give me to them. Amen.*