

Command #17: Forgive People "Seventy times Seven" (Don't Refuse to Forgive Them)

Matthew 18:21-35 // Jim Bennett

Matthew 18:21-23

²¹ Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?"

²² Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

²³ "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. ²⁵ Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

²⁶ "At this the servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' ²⁷ The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

²⁸ "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. ²⁹ He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded.

²⁹ "His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.'

³⁰ "But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. ³¹ When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

³² "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. ³³ Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' ³⁴ In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

³⁵ "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

Condensed Version

Read Matthew 18:21-35 and discuss these questions with your disciple(s):

1. Why would Jesus make such an extreme point about forgiveness?
2. How does this passage change the way you might look at yourself compared to others?
3. Meditate on Ephesians 1:3-7. What do you admire about Jesus from this passage?
4. In what ways does unforgiveness affect the way you think about and relate to others? (family members, church members, neighbors, coworkers, etc.?)

Study: (answers follow below)

1. Read and meditate on Matthew 18:21-35. What strikes you? Write down a few observations you have about the text.
2. Read Matthew 18:15-20 and write down how Jesus' teaching could have led Peter to ask the question he did.
3. Why would Jesus give such an extreme example of forgiveness?

Answers:

1. Many possible answers.
2. Jesus had been teaching about correcting a fellow believer. Peter, possibly trying to appear mature, may have been thinking, "I could do that more than once, even 7 times!" Jesus makes a point that there is no limit to how often we should forgive others when we understand the depth of our own sin against God.
3. Remember that Jesus is making a point that there is no limit to how often we should forgive others when we understand the depth of our own sin against God. The example only seems extreme to us. But really, our sin adds up to an unpayable debt. We need God's mercy which should lead us to forgive others without limit.

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Worship:

1. What do you learn in Matthew 18:21-35 that leads you to appreciate something about God?
2. Meditate on Ephesians 1:3-7. What do you admire about God from this passage?
3. Write out a prayer of worship directed to Jesus, praising him for his forgiveness and how he took our sin penalty on Himself.

Answers:

1. God's forgiveness is so vast and free when we consider our sin debt is beyond anything we could ever think of paying on our own.
2. God's love and Jesus' power to make us holy. Also God's plan from before time began to make us part of his family, and to forgive our sin; this shows His kindness.
3. (Your prayer focused on thankfulness for what God offers to you.)

Obey:

1. Ephesians 4:32 instructs us to forgive as Christ forgave us. What other things does this verse make clear? How does humility as a mindset affect these things?
2. In what ways does unforgiveness (and pride) affect the way you think about and relate to others? (family members, church members, neighbors, coworkers, etc.?)

Train:

How to help disciple others:

1. Study Matthew 18:21-35 yourself, ask your disciple(s) to study it, then discuss it and pray about it together.
2. Consider memorizing and meditating on Ephesians 4:32 with your disciple(s).
3. Forgiveness, like so many other virtues, is more caught than taught. Yield to Christ to live through you so you can model forgiveness for those you are trying to influence for God.