

Get Ready!

How Many Times?

By: Myra Montgomery

Text

Matthew 18:21-35

Key Quest Verse

“Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:32).

Bible Background

Jesus uses this illustration to explain the concept of forgiveness. Jesus isn't teaching that we should keep track of the number of times someone does something to hurt us and then stop forgiving him when he has done it more than 490 times. He meant that we should always be willing to forgive, no matter how many times he does something to us. In Matthew 18, Christ uses the parable of the unmerciful servant to explain forgiveness in light of Peter's question. *Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?"* (Matt. 18:21). By this time in Christ's ministry, Peter has heard much of Christ's teachings. He had heard the Sermon on the Mount where the Lord taught that if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins (Matt. 6:14-15). Christ had also taught the disciples that "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him." (Luke 17:3-4) This may explain why Peter asked if giving forgiveness for seven offenses was sufficient. He wanted to know the limit that we should reach for offering forgiveness to our brothers. Christ uses the parable of the unmerciful servant to illustrate that there should be no limit on our forgiveness for others.

Get Ready!**Lesson Quest**

What I want my students to:

Know: To learn that to be forgiven we must forgive

Feel: To develop an attitude of forgiveness

Do: To express forgiveness or to make a promise to forgive

Leader's Devotion

"How many times should I forgive my brother?" asked Peter. "Seven times?"

"No," said Jesus. "Not seven times, but seventy times seven."

That's a tall order. Real forgiveness is a gift from God and it doesn't come easy. Insults and injuries and offences damage pride, and only those who are able to face the pain of wounded pride are really able to forgive. And only those who dare to begin to approach those dark, hidden corners of their inner being, are able to face the pain of wounded pride.

It's a difficult business, forgiveness. It's much easier to totally blame somebody else for all problems than it is to accept that I myself might bear some responsibility. And taking that first step of approaching the other party, whether I'm the offender or offended against, is very difficult indeed.

Sometimes people are precipitated into forgiveness, but that usually takes a major, earth-shattering event, like a sudden death or a life-threatening illness. That sort of event changes priorities, and wounded pride is suddenly seen for what it really is.

Yet forgiveness is at the heart of the Christian faith, and without it Christianity is just a hollow sham. "Forgive us our sins," we say to God, "as we forgive those who sin against us." Forgive us Lord, in the same measure that we forgive other people.

Get Set!



Option A

Materials: Money or play money

Procedure: Put the money out on the table and discuss: **Have you ever owed anyone money? A little or a lot? How did it feel to be in debt to that person? Were you able to pay them back? How did that feel? Or have you ever had someone owe you money? How did it feel? Did the person pay you back? Jesus told a story about someone who both owed money and was owed money. In Jesus' story the debts stand for something even more important.**

GO TO THE BIBLE STORY

Option B

Materials: Chalkboard or marker board, chalk or markers

Procedure: Write the word FORGIVE on the board. **What does it mean to forgive?** Jot students' ideas on the board (to stop being angry, not hold it against the person). **Why is forgiving difficult?** Perhaps you can tell the students about a time when you were forgiven or forgave another. Ask the students to assign words that start with the same letters in Forgive. For example F -Forget about the offense of the person that is asking forgiveness, O-offer your friendship to the person you are forgiving, R-receive their apology, G-Give in and don't hold a grudge, I- "I forgive you" should be said to the person offering the apology, V-value the other person's feelings, E-Earnestly pray for God's power to help you forgive. If your class has some difficulty with filling in the blanks, do the Bible story first and return when they have learned about forgiveness. **Jesus told a story to show the importance of forgiveness.** Lets turn to this story and see what the Great Teacher will show us to day.

GO TO THE BIBLE STORY

Get Set!**Bible Story**

Teacher Tip: Provide markers for students to highlight portions of the story in their Bibles

Optional Object Lesson: You may want to put the items listed below on a table and say that these are some things that relate to our story. As we read the parable, we will see if we can match the objects to the events or people in our story.

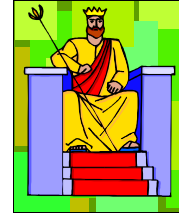
Materials: Play money, a crown to represent the king, 2 objects to represent servants (apron, dishcloth or tools), a chain to represent prison, heart to represent forgiving each other from the heart

Once Peter asked Jesus, “Lord, how often should I forgive somebody who sins against me? Up to seven times?” Jesus answered, “No, seventy times seven.” Then Jesus told a parable to explain forgiveness. What is a parable? (A comparison, where things in the story represent or stand for other things.) For example, the king in this parable represents someone else.

One day a king called his servants to come before him and pay their debts, and one servant was brought who owed the king 10 million dollars. (Put a large stack of play money on the table.) But the servant didn’t have the money to pay the king back, so the king commanded that he be sold into slavery, along with his wife and children and everything he owned, so the money could be paid back to the king. Then the servant fell on his knees before the king and begged, “Please be patient with me and I will pay it all back!” So the king felt pity for him and canceled all the debt and let him go.

Then that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him only 10 dollars. (Count out \$10 of the money on the table.) He grabbed him by the throat and began to choke him, shouting, “Pay back what you owe me!” His fellow servant fell to the ground and begged, “Please be patient with me and I will pay it back!” But he refused. Instead he threw his fellow servant in prison until he could pay back the \$10.

When the other servants saw what happened, they were very upset and went and told the king everything. Then the king called the servant before him. “You wicked servant,” he said, “I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?” In anger the king turned him over to the jailers until he could pay back all he owed. Jesus said, “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive each other from your heart.”

Go!**The Unmerciful Servant****DRAMA**

Materials: Worksheet with script, props (optional): chair “throne,” crown and robe for king, sword for guard

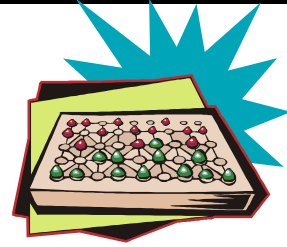
Quest Connection

We will act out the story Jesus told to see how it feels to be in it.

Procedure: Have the students take parts and read the play out loud, and maybe also have them perform it with simple props.

Close

It’s hard to avoid the message of this story, isn’t it? God has forgiven each of us such a huge debt that the least we can do is forgive our fellow “servants.”

Go!

Forgiving Game**GAME**

Materials: Monopoly, Life or a similar game that uses money; paper and pens

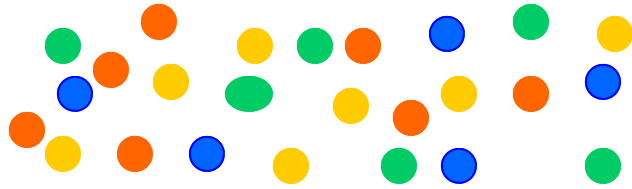
Quest Connection

We're going to play a game to practice "forgiving" debt so we can be forgiven.

Procedure: Play Monopoly or Life with a twist. Players start with no money. When they need to pay the bank (i.e. to purchase property or pay a fine in Monopoly) they must write an IOU to the bank with the amount. When another player owes them money (e.g. rent in Monopoly when someone lands on your property) they forgive the debt and can then cancel all that they owe the bank.

Close

How did you like that game with a twist? Just as in the game, in life we must forgive in order to be forgiven.

Go!**Count The Dots****ARTS AND CRAFTS**

Materials: Holes cut out with a hole punch from paper of several different colors; white paper, glue or glue stick

Quest Connection

Jesus told us to forgive each other seventy times seven times. How many is that? (490).

Procedure: Instruct the students to first count out exactly 490 “dots” each and then glue them to their papers to form a design (fish, bird, their name, etc.) As they struggle with counting out 490 dots, ask them if they are losing count. **Why do you think Jesus said to forgive seventy times seven times? Could you keep track of how many times you’ve forgiven someone or would you lose count just as you are with these dots? So how many times was Jesus really saying we should forgive?** (an unlimited number)

Close

Just as you couldn’t keep track of these 490 dots, you can’t keep track of how many times you’ve forgiven someone, so don’t even try. Just keep on forgiving.

Go!

Probing The Parable**CREATIVE THINKING**

Materials: Worksheet, pens

Quest Connection

Remember that I told you that a parable is a comparison in story form, where each thing in the story represents something else. We'll see what each item stands for.

Procedure: Have students complete the worksheet either individually or together.

Close

Now that we know the meaning of the story, we can apply it to our lives. We must forgive in order to be forgiven.

Go!

Crossword**GAME**

Materials: Worksheet, pens

Quest Connection

Many verses in the Bible make the same point as the parable: that to be forgiven we must forgive.

Procedure: Complete the crossword by looking up the verses.

Close

Let's remember to be kind to one another, forgiving each other, because God has forgiven us, as Ephesians 4:32 says.

Go!**Dear,**

Please Forgive!**CREATIVE WRITING****Materials:** Worksheet, pens

Quest Connection

Has somebody come to mind who you need to forgive? Or maybe you need to ask somebody's forgiveness. Take a few moments to think.

Procedure: Students write a letter of forgiveness, either forgiving someone or asking to be forgiven. They don't necessarily have to give the letter to the person if they are writing to forgive (if it wouldn't be helpful, bringing up old sins).

Close

Let's continue to forgive each other from the heart. What are some areas that we need to ask for forgiveness?

The Unmerciful Servant

Characters: king

servant

fellow servant

servant girl

guard

King: I think I'll settle my accounts today. Guard, bring me that servant who owes me millions of dollars.

Guard brings servant before king.

Servant: Yes, your majesty?

King: You owe me millions of dollars! I demand that money right this instant!

Servant (trembling with fear): Um, well, I don't exactly have the money, O great king.

King: All right then, you and your family will be sold to pay your debt!

Servant (falling on knees): Please, please be patient with me, O king! I promise you I will repay every penny! Be merciful – I am but a poor servant!

King (after considering for a minute): All right then, you may go. I forgive all of your debt.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

The Unmerciful Servant Continued....

Servant leaves king and sees fellow servant with servant girl.

Servant (choking fellow servant): Where's my ten dollars you owe me? I want my money NOW!

Fellow servant: I'm sorry! Really! I'll pay you back as soon as I can! Please be patient, my friend!

Servant: Patient? Ha! Guard! Take this man to prison until he can pay me back every penny he owes.

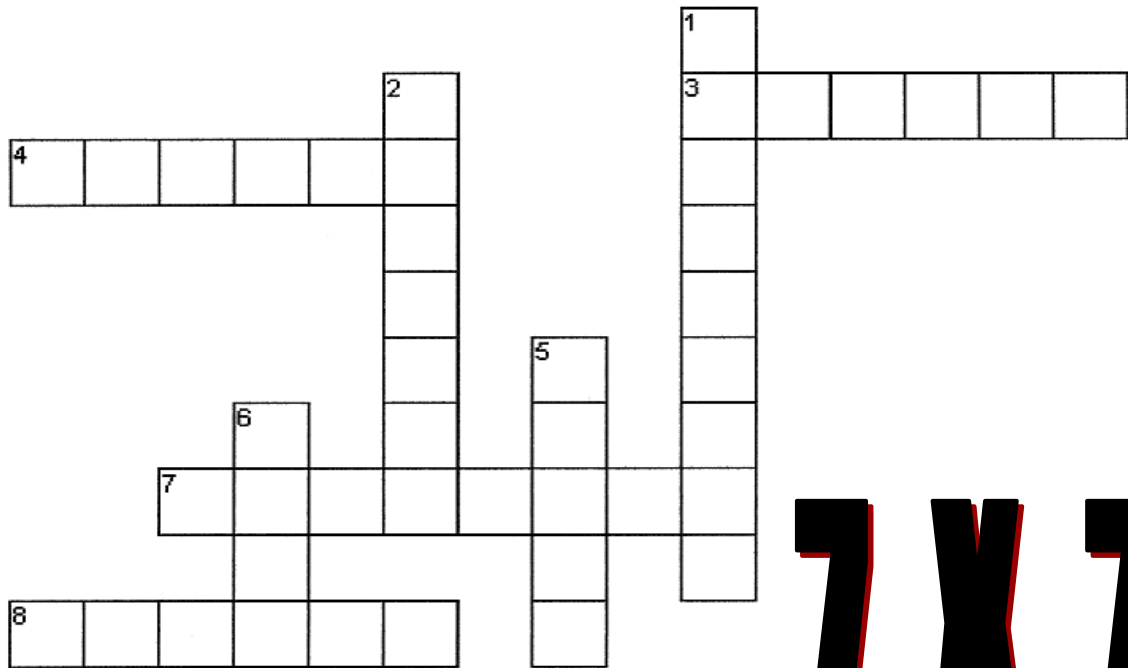
Servant girl: Oh my! (approaches king, flustered). O king, something terrible just happened! I just saw your servant choking his fellow servant over the matter of a few dollars!

King: Guard, bring me that servant! (Guard drags him before king.) You wicked servant! I canceled all your debt because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you? Guard, throw this servant in jail until he can pay back everything he owes me!



*“Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you”
(Ephesians 4:32)*

Dear,



7 X 7

Across

3. "If you forgive ___ for their sins, your heavenly Father will also forgive you" (Matthew 6:14)
4. "If you do not forgive others, then your ___ will not forgive your sins" (Matthew 6:15)
7. The Lord's prayer says, "Forgive us our debts as we also have ___ our debtors."
8. "___ and you will be ___ed" (Luke 6:37b)

Down

1. "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, ___ each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you" (Eph. 4:32)
2. "Whenever you stand ___, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your sins" (Mark 11:25)
5. "If your brother sins against you ___ times a day, and returns to you ___ times, saying 'I repent,' forgive him" (Luke 17:4)
6. "Forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the ___ forgave you, so also should you" (Col. 3:13)

Probing the Parable


What does each item from the story represent? Draw lines to match.

The king 

Us

Servants 

A huge debt, a lot of sin

10 million dollars 

God

10 dollars 



Forgive





Cancel debt 

A small debt, a little sin

Fill in the blanks.

We owed   that we could not possibly

repay.  has mercy on us and 

If someone sins  against us  and we don't , 

 will not  us. But if we do   will also.