

Forgiveness: A Matter of the Heart**Parable People**

Matthew 18:21-35

Jesus' parables are not simply stories with easy answers; they make us think beyond just what the story says. They are yet another creative way God pursues us, inviting us into the communal practice of becoming disciples by asking: What does it say? What does it mean? What am I supposed to do with it? Peter approaches Jesus with a question many of us can relate to: "I know I'm supposed to forgive, but do I really need to forgive that much?" Jesus' answer, "not seven times, but seventy-seven times," completely inverts Peter's view of forgiveness.

*** Why do you think Jesus often uses teachings that make people uncomfortable rather than simply giving straightforward answers?**

*** Where do you find yourself looking for limits, exceptions, or justifications when it comes to forgiveness?**

Jesus says this parable is what the kingdom of heaven is like. For his original Jewish audience, the idea that heaven could break into earth in the present would have been revolutionary. Yet this is exactly what we pray every time we say, "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." The king in this parable represents God and the servant represents us. The servant owes an unpayable debt of ten thousand talents, yet the king responds with compassion and releases him. Forgiveness is one of the primary ways God's kingdom is brought to earth because it reflects what God longs for and values.

*** How does seeing forgiveness as "kingdom of heaven business" change the way you think about forgiving others?**

*** What stands out to you about the king's response to the servant's impossible debt?**

The tragedy of the parable is that the servant who received unimaginable mercy refuses to extend mercy to someone who owes him a much smaller debt. Jesus' point is clear: forgiveness received obligates forgiveness given. We represent the first servant. We could never deserve the grace God has shown us, yet we are invited to extend that same grace to others. Only when we begin to see others as created in God's image and loved does forgiveness become possible and a regular way of life.

*** How might your relationships change if forgiveness became one of the primary ways you were oriented toward the world?**

*** Who is difficult for you to see as a beloved image-bearer of God, and how does that affect your ability to forgive?**