

Matthew 18:21-35
“Once Upon a Time”
Sermon date 10/5/2025

Ice breaker

- 1) What's something small someone did recently that made a big positive impact on your day?

Unpack It

What stood out to you from Sunday's sermon and why? What was a takeaway or something that left you wondering about?

Looking Back

This passage falls within a broader section of Matthew's Gospel where Jesus teaches His disciples about community life, humility, accountability, and forgiveness. Matthew 18 is often referred to as the “Discourse on the Church” because Jesus outlines how believers should interact within the body of Christ. The specific context of this parable begins with Peter's question about forgiveness, which likely reflects both his earnestness and the rabbinic teaching of the day that forgiveness should be extended three times. Peter, thinking he is being generous, offers seven times—but Jesus responds with a radical expansion: seventy-seven times, symbolizing boundless forgiveness.

The parable Jesus tells is a response to Peter's question and is unique to Matthew's Gospel. It illustrates the kingdom of heaven using familiar societal roles: a king and his servants. The debt described in the story is astronomical—ten thousand talents would have been an unpayable sum, likely the equivalent of billions today, signifying the immeasurable mercy of God. The contrast with the fellow servant's debt, a hundred denarii (a few months' wages), shows how trivial human offenses are compared to what God has forgiven. The parable ends with a sobering reminder: those who have received mercy are expected to extend it.

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Diving In

Read together: Matthew 18:21-35

Diving Deeper

- 1) What do you think the original audience would have thought about the amount the servant owed (ten thousand talents)? Why did Jesus choose such an extreme number?
- 2) What emotions or motives might have driven the unforgiving servant's actions toward his fellow servant?
- 3) The word "mercy" plays a big role here. How would you define mercy in your own words based on this story?
- 4) What does this passage teach you about the nature of God's kingdom and what it means to live as one of its citizens?
- 5) Is there anyone in your life you are struggling to forgive right now? What's holding you back?
- 6) What would it look like this week to extend grace to someone in your life the way God has extended grace to you?

Closing It Out

Thank God for His extravagant mercy

- Praise God for the immeasurable debt He has forgiven us through Jesus. Ask for a heart softened toward those who have wronged us
- Pray for the ability to forgive, even when it feels difficult or undeserved . Confess any bitterness or unforgiveness
- Ask God to reveal any lingering grudges or unresolved conflicts and for the grace to release them. Pray for reconciliation in relationships
- Lift up broken or strained relationships, asking God to bring healing and restored trust. Pray for wisdom in navigating forgiveness
- Ask for discernment in setting healthy boundaries while still embracing a spirit of grace.

Take It Home

If you would like to press in a bit more this week, here is a prayer and reading guide for the week:

Day 1: The Debt We've Been Forgiven

Scripture: Psalm 103:8–14

Focus: Reflect on God's compassion and how He removes our sins far from us.

Prompt: What does this psalm teach you about God's attitude toward your failures?

Day 2: A Forgiving Heart

Scripture: Colossians 3:12–14

Focus: Paul urges believers to forgive as the Lord forgave them.

Prompt: What would it look like for you to "put on" forgiveness today?

Day 3: When Forgiveness Feels Impossible

Scripture: Luke 23:32–34

Focus: Jesus forgives His executioners on the cross.

Prompt: How does Jesus' example stretch your understanding of forgiveness?

Day 4: Forgiveness and Reconciliation

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:17–21

Focus: Believers are called to be ambassadors of reconciliation.

Prompt: Where might God be calling you to bring reconciliation in your world?

Day 5: Mercy Triumphs Over Judgment

Scripture: James 2:8–13

Focus: The call to live out the “royal law” of love and mercy.

Prompt: How can you live a mercy-first life in your relationships and community?