

## Lesson Five: The Story of the Unforgiving Servant

**Main idea:** As citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven, we forgive others their debt against us since Jesus forgave our debt against him.

### Teacher preparation:

- Read Scripture references, James 2:13, Luke 17:3-4, Ephesians 4:32, Matthew 6:14-15
- Gather: Bible; dry erase markers or chart paper and markers; various balls for the game; print the handout; crayons, markers, and colored pencils; scissors
- Take time to meditate on this week's Scripture and think about your own life. Do you keep in mind the great debt you have been forgiven and allow that to encourage you to forgive others?
- Optional print the coloring page

### Scripture references:

- Matthew 18:21-35
- 1 Corinthians 13:5
- Mark 12:31
- Colossians 2:13-14

### Game: How Many Times?

Ask the children how many times they can do various tasks. "How many pushups can you do? How many times can you bounce a ping pong ball on a paddle? How many times can you bounce a hacky sack off your knee? How many free throws can you score in a row?" Have the children attempt these tasks. Ask if anyone can complete these tasks 490 times in a row without messing up. Let them try. The point of the game is to show that it is nearly impossible to do something 490 times. This idea ties in with today's lesson. The exact activities you do don't matter, as long as they get the wiggles out of the kids and show them how hard it is to do something 490 times.

### Message:

Open in prayer, then say, This is our fifth week learning all about the parables. As you remember, parables are stories Jesus told to teach us important lessons about the Kingdom of Heaven. From them, we learn what Heaven is like, what God is like, and what we should do as citizens of Heaven. We learned in the Story of the Soils that the message of the Kingdom of Heaven will be received differently by different people. In the story of the Wheat and Weeds and the story of the Fishing Net, we learned that when Jesus returns, he will separate those who believe in him from those who don't, so it's our job to tell everyone about his love. We learned that even the little things we do make a big difference in the Kingdom of Heaven in the Story of the Mustard Seed and the Story of the Yeast. In the Stories of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl, we learned that the Kingdom of Heaven is worth more than anything in this world. The parables remind us that we represent the Kingdom of Heaven, we represent Jesus, everywhere we go in the world. In today's parable, we will study one characteristic of citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. We will learn one way that we are supposed to behave as Christians. Follow along with me as I read from Matthew 18:21-35.

<sup>21</sup> “Then Peter came to him and asked, “Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?”

<sup>22</sup> “No, not seven times,” Jesus replied, “but seventy times seven!”

<sup>23</sup> “Therefore, the Kingdom of Heaven can be compared to a king who decided to bring his accounts up to date with servants who had borrowed money from him. <sup>24</sup> In the process, one of his debtors was brought in who owed him millions of dollars. <sup>25</sup> He couldn't pay, so his master ordered that he be sold—along with his wife, his children, and everything he owned—to pay the debt.

<sup>26</sup> “But the man fell down before his master and begged him, ‘Please, be patient with me, and I will pay it all.’ <sup>27</sup> Then his master was filled with pity for him, and he released him and forgave his debt.

<sup>28</sup> “But when the man left the king, he went to a fellow servant who owed him a few thousand dollars. He grabbed him by the throat and demanded instant payment.

<sup>29</sup> “His fellow servant fell down before him and begged for a little more time. ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it,’ he pleaded. <sup>30</sup> But his creditor wouldn't

wait. He had the man arrested and put in prison until the debt could be paid in full.

<sup>31</sup> “When some of the other servants saw this, they were very upset. They went to the king and told him everything that had happened. <sup>32</sup> Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, ‘You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. <sup>33</sup> Shouldn’t you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?’ <sup>34</sup> Then the angry king sent the man to prison to be tortured until he had paid his entire debt.

<sup>35</sup> “That’s what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart.”

Let’s start with the conversation that takes place just before this parable. Peter asks Jesus how many times he is supposed to forgive someone who sins against him, who does something wrong to him. Peter guesses that seven times should be enough. It seems like a strange number to pick out, doesn’t it? It also seems like a lot of times to forgive someone when they keep sinning against you. Imagine you are playing soccer with a group, and your best friend keeps stealing the ball from you. You hardly get to play because they are being such ball hogs! But every time your best friend steals the ball, he at least says he’s sorry. I don’t know about you, but by about the third or fourth time that happens, I don’t think I would want to play soccer anymore. What do you think? (Give students a moment to share. They will surely come up with their own experiences of slights and grudges that they should keep in mind for the rest of the lesson. Remind them not to share names or specifics, as that would be gossip and would hurt another’s feelings.) Peter probably thought he was being very generous by saying he could forgive someone seven times. A lot of Rabbis, who were the Jewish religious teachers at the time, said that it was plenty to forgive someone three times. Most people in Jesus’ time thought that if you forgave someone three times and they still wronged you, that you would not have to forgive them. So with that in mind, Peter’s guess that forgiving someone seven times seems awfully kind. But Jesus has a different idea of what forgiveness looks like. How does Jesus respond to Peter in verse 22 of Matthew 18? (Allow a student to respond.) Jesus says we must forgive them seventy times seven times! Let’s do a little math to figure out exactly how many times that is. (Work out this multiplication problem briefly on the board, or have the older students figure it out.) Seventy times seven is 490! Now that is a lot of times to forgive someone. Think of our story of playing soccer with our friend, or a time in your own life where someone kept

sinning against you and hurting your feelings. Can you imagine forgiving them 490 times? In our game, it was nearly impossible to do any task 490 times in a row. It's not likely we could forgive someone 490 times and still be kind to them and not be bitter or angry with them.

But do you think that is really what Jesus means? Do you think he really wants us to forgive people exactly 490 times, and then we stop forgiving them? I don't think so. For one thing, that would be really hard to keep track of. I would have to keep a little notebook with people's names in it, and little tally marks for every time I forgive them. (Demonstrate tally marks on the board.) Jesus does NOT want us to do this. The Bible tells us in 1 Corinthians 13:5 that love keeps no record of wrongs. As Christians, we love everyone. Jesus told us in Mark 12:31 that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. So if we love everyone, and keep no record of wrongs, then we shouldn't be keeping tally marks of the number of times we forgive someone, should we? That is literally keeping a record of the wrong things they do against us.

So if Jesus does not want us to literally forgive 490 times, what do you think he means? (Allow a student to answer.) Jesus gives this really big number for two reasons. One is to tell us that we should forgive endlessly. We can't keep record of wrongs, we can't tally up the number of times we must forgive. We cannot keep track of the number of times we forgive. We must keep forgiving and forgiving and forgiving, no matter what, even if it means forgiving more than 490 times! The other reason he gives us such a big number is to tell us that we cannot forgive endlessly on our own. We need Jesus to help us forgive. So Jesus sets up this parable, the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant, by telling us that we must forgive endlessly.

Now let's look at the parable itself. There are three main characters. Who can tell me who they are? (Allow students to answer.) That's right, we have the king, the servant who owed the king a big debt, and the servant who owed the first servant a small debt. (Write these characters on the board.) The king decided he wanted to settle his accounts. This means that he wanted everyone who owed him money to pay him back. So he calls in this one servant who owes him A LOT of money. the original language says this servant owed the king ten thousand talents. This was a type of currency used at the time. One talent was equal to about 6,000 denarii. A denarii is what a worker got paid for one day of work. So I did the math on this one and to pay off his debt to the king, this servant would have to work every day for 164, 383 years. So obviously, this man owes the king a debt that cannot be paid. Does

that sound familiar? Let's think of this parable in spiritual terms. Who does the king represent? (Allow a student to answer.) That's right, the king is God. (On the board next to "king," write "God." And who is the servant who owes the king a big debt? (Allow a student to answer.) Yes, we are the servants who owe the king a big debt. (On the board, write "us" next to "servant who owes the king a big debt.")

Now of course we haven't borrowed money from God. The debt we owe is not financial, it is not material. The debt we owe God is spiritual. Let's have a sword drill to see what the Bible has to say about our debt to God. Take your fingers and bookmarks out of your Bibles and hold them over your head. When I say go, look up Colossians 2:13-14. Go! (Read, or have a student read Colossians 2:13-14.) <sup>13</sup> You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins. <sup>14</sup> He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross." These verses tell us that we have a record of charges, or a list of things we owe God. We owe him because we sinned against him. Our sin has separated us from God, and we need to be made right with him. The problem is, we can never pay back our debt to God. Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of sin is death." Thankfully, Jesus died in our place and paid our debt to God. So Romans 6:23 goes on to say, "but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord." Since Jesus has paid the debt that we owe God, we can have eternal life. We are free from the costs of sin, from the debt that we can't ever pay! How should this make us feel? (Allow students to answer.) We should be grateful, and very, very happy! How do you think the great debtor in our story should have felt? He should be grateful and very, very happy too! Is that what the story says, though? Nope.

What does the debtor who owed the king more than he could ever pay do after being forgiven his huge debt? (Allow a student to answer.) Our parable says he went out to a fellow servant who owed him a much smaller amount and violently demanded that he pay the debt. This fellow servant owed 100 denarii, which is 100 day's worth of work. When compared to the 164, 383 years worth of work the first servant owed the king, a few month's worth is practically nothing. Who, spiritually speaking, is the servant who owed the small debt? (Allow a student to answer.) He's anyone who owes us anything. (Next to "the servant who owed the small debt" on the board, write "others.") Of course I don't just mean people who owe us money. The fellow servant is the person who did something wrong or hurtful to us, and they owe us an apology.

Is it easy to forgive people who do wrong to us? Of course it isn't. That is why we need Jesus to help us forgive.

The end of this parable is a tough warning. What happened to the servant who owed the king an unpayable debt, after the king discovered he was unwilling to forgive his fellow servant? Matthew 18:34 tells us, "the angry king sent the man to prison to be tortured until he had paid his entire debt." As we said, this man can never pay this debt. That means he will spend the rest of his life being tortured, all because he would not forgive as he had been forgiven. Jesus goes on to say in verse 35, "That's what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart." If we don't forgive people, it means we deserve the punishment of hell. Now let's be clear here. We are still sinners. Sometimes we will mess up and not forgive people. This DOES NOT mean we will go to hell. If we believe in Jesus and do our best to follow him, then we will go to Heaven. Forgiving others is not a way to earn a place in the Kingdom of Heaven, it is evidence that we have a place in the Kingdom of Heaven. As citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven, we forgive others their debt against us since Jesus forgave our debt against him.

End in prayer.

### **Craft:** Mini Book

Every week, students will make a mini book that retells the parable in very basic terms. This fifth mini book in their library reminds the kids how to forgive like citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. To begin, demonstrate how to fold the book. Fold along the solid lines. Start by folding the long side to the long side. Crease well. Keep it folded, then fold in half, crease well, and fold in half again, creasing well. Now unfold it all the way and fold it in half short side to short side, so the dotted line in the center is folded in half. Cut along this dotted line. Do not overcut! Now unfold the paper and fold it in half again, this time long side to long side. Now for the tricky part. Pinch both short ends of the paper, with the crease facing up. Bring your hands together, causing the cut in the middle of the paper to open up. You should have a plus sign now. The last step is to press all the pages down so the cover is on top. Mush the pages down and crease all the folds. You may need to use a marker or pencil for these creases, as they are all now stacked up on each other. Now that you have a little book, have the kids write their name on the cover. Read each page and have the children illustrate it accordingly.



The servant who was forgiven the unpayable debt is not grateful to the king. Instead of going out and forgiving the little debt a fellow servant owes him, the servant who was forgiven the great debt by the king demands that his fellow servant pay the little debt.

Because he was not willing to forgive the debt of his fellow servant, the king took the man he had forgiven and had him thrown into prison where he was tortured for the rest of his life. If we do not forgive others, God won't forgive us. When we forgive, it does not earn us a place in the Kingdom of Heaven, it is evidence that we already have a place in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus then tells a story where a king forgives a servant who owes him an unpayable debt. This reminds us of how God forgives the unpayable debt of our sin when we believe in and follow Jesus.

Matthew 18:21-35

21 "Then Peter came to him and asked, 'Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?' 22 'No, not seven times,' Jesus replied, 'but seventy times seven! 23 "Therefore, the Kingdom of Heaven can be compared to a king who decided to bring his accounts up to date with servants who had borrowed money from him. 24 In the process, one of his debtors was brought in who owed him millions of dollars. 25 He couldn't pay, so his master ordered that he be sold—along with his wife, his children, and everything he owned—to pay the debt. 26 "But the man fell down before his master and begged him, 'Please, be patient with me, and I will pay it all.' 27 Then his master was filled with pity for him, and he released him and forgave his debt. 28 "But when the man left the king, he went to a fellow servant who owed him a few thousand dollars. He grabbed him by the throat and demanded instant payment.

When Peter asks Jesus how many times he should forgive someone who sins against him, Jesus replies "seventy times seven times." This means we are supposed to forgive endlessly, with the help of Jesus.

29 "His fellow servant fell down before him and begged for a little more time. 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it,' he pleaded. 30 But his creditor wouldn't wait. He had the man arrested and put in prison until the debt could be paid in full. 31 "When some of the other servants saw this, they were very upset. They went to the king and told him everything that had happened. 32 Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, 'You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. 33 Shouldn't you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?' 34 Then the angry king sent the man to prison to be tortured until he had paid his entire debt. 35 "That's what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart."

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# Story Time with Jesus

Lesson Five

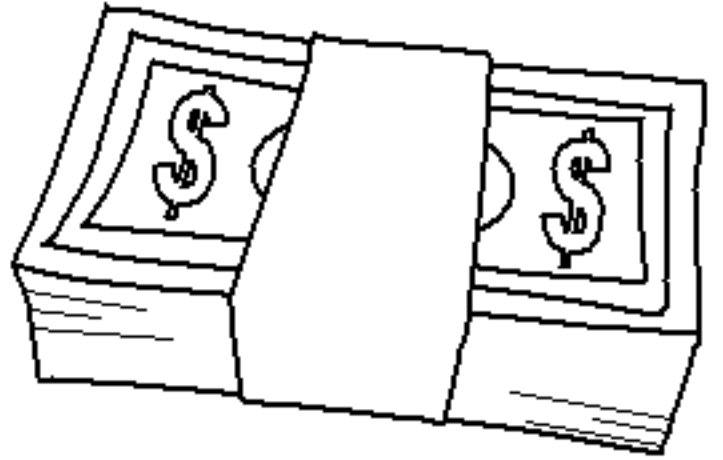
## The Parable of The Unforgiving Servant

Name: \_\_\_\_\_



Unscramble the letters to find the words in our

# Unmerciful Servant Anagram



inoprs \_\_\_\_\_

iillmnos \_\_\_\_\_

aenrstv \_\_\_\_\_

behorrt \_\_\_\_\_

accdeeln \_\_\_\_\_

aeinptt \_\_\_\_\_

cdeikw \_\_\_\_\_

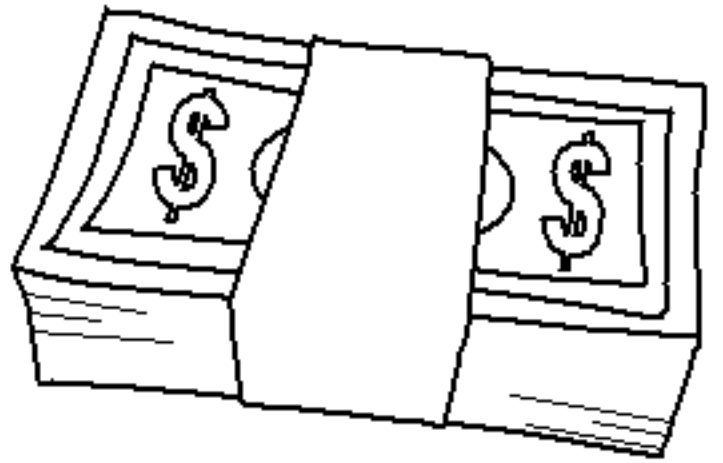
eenstvy \_\_\_\_\_

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Unscramble the letters to find the words in our

# Unmerciful Servant Anagram



inoprs      prison

iillmnos      millions

aenrstv      servant

behorrt      brother

accdeeln      canceled

aeinptt      patient

cdeikw      wicked

eenstvy      seventy

deefrsu      refused

efgiorv      forgive

