

INTRODUCTION.

A. Scripture text: **Matthew 18:21-35**.

Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" **22** Jesus said[^] to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. **23** "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a certain king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. **24** "And when he had begun to settle *them*, there was brought to him one who owed him ten thousand talents. **25** "But since he did not have *the means* to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. **26** "The slave therefore falling down, prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will repay you everything.' **27** "And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. **28** "But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and *began* to choke *him*, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.' **29** "So his fellow slave fell down and *began* to entreat him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.' **30** "He was unwilling however, but went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. **31** "So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. **32** "Then summoning him, his lord said[^] to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me. **33** 'Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?' **34** "And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. **35** "So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."

B. This is the third in a series on being a servant.

C. Story of a young man looking for a ministry, and then forgiving those who attacked him (Swindoll, IYS, p. 54-57).

Forgiveness is not an elective in the curriculum of servanthood. It is a required course, and the exams are always tough to pass. Several years ago, I traveled to Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in search of a pastoral intern. In the process of interviewing a number of men, I met a seminarian I will never forget. As it turned out, I did not select him to come for the summer, but I was extremely impressed with his sensitivity to God. Although young and inexperienced, his spirit was tender, and he spoke with gentleness. It was obvious that the Lord was deeply at work in his life. The marks of a servant's heart were clearly visible, so much so I probed to discover why. Among other things he related an incredible, true story that illustrated how God was molding him and shaping him through one of those tough "forgiveness exams." As best as I can remember, here's his story. I'll call him Aaron, not his real name.

Late one spring he was praying about having a significant ministry the following summer. He asked God for a position to open up on some church staff or Christian organization. Nothing happened. Summer arrived, still nothing. Days turned into weeks, and Aaron finally faced reality-he needed any job he could find. He checked the want ads and the only thing that seemed a possibility was driving a bus on the south-side of Chicago... nothing to brag about, but it would help with tuition in the fall. After learning the route, he was on his own-a rookie driver in a dangerous section of the city. It wasn't long before Aaron realized just how dangerous his job really was.

A small gang of tough kids spotted the young driver and began to take advantage of him. For several mornings in a row they got on, walked right past him without paying, ignored his warnings, and rode until they decided to get off... all the while making smart remarks to him and others on the bus. Finally, he decided that it had gone on long enough.

The next morning, after the gang got on as usual, Aaron saw a police man on the next corner, so he pulled over and reported the offense. The officer told them to pay or get off. They paid... but, unfortunately, the police man got off. And they stayed on. When the bus turned another corner or two, the gang assaulted the young driver.

When he came to, blood was all over his shirt, two teeth were missing, both eyes were swollen, his money was gone, and the bus was empty. After returning to the terminal and being given the weekend off, our friend went to his little apartment, sank onto his bed and stared at the ceiling in disbelief. Resentful thoughts swarmed his mind. Confusion, anger, and disillusionment added fuel to the fire of his physical pain. He spent a fitful night wrestling with his Lord.

How can this be? Where's God in all of this? I genuinely want to serve Him. I prayed for a ministry. I was willing to serve Him anywhere, doing anything...; and this is the thanks I get!

On Monday morning Aaron decided to press charges. With the help of the officer who had encountered the gang and several who were willing to testify as witnesses against the thugs, most of them were rounded up and taken to the local county jail. Within a few days there was a hearing before the judge.

In walked Aaron and his attorney plus the angry gang members who glared across the room in his direction. Suddenly he was seized with a whole new series of thoughts. Not bitter ones, but compassionate ones! His heart went out

to the guys who had attacked him. Under the Spirit's control he no longer hated them-he pitied them. They needed help, not more hate. What could he do? Or say?

Suddenly, after there had been a guilty plea, Aaron (to the surprise of his attorney and everybody else in the courtroom) stood to his feet and requested permission to speak.

Your honor, I would like you to total up all the days of punishment against these men--all the time sentenced against them, and I request that you allow me to go to jail in their place.

The judge didn't know whether to spit or wind his watch. Both attorneys were stunned. As Aaron looked over at the gang members (whose mouths and eyes looked like saucers), he smiled and said quietly, "It's because I forgive you."

The dumbfounded judge, when he reached a level of composure, said rather firmly: "Young man, you're out of order. This sort of thing has never been done before!" To which the young man replied with genius insight:

Oh, yes, it has, your honor... yes, it has. It happened over nineteen centuries ago when a man from Galilee paid the penalty that all mankind deserved.

And then, for the next three or four minutes, without interruption, he explained how Jesus Christ died on our behalf, thereby proving God's love and forgiveness.

He was not granted his request, but the young man visited the gang members in jail, led most of them to faith in Christ, and began a significant ministry to many others on the south-side of Chicago.

He passed a tough exam. And, as a result, a large door of ministry--the very thing he'd prayed for--opened up before him. Through the pain of abuse and assault, Aaron began to get a handle on serving others.

- D. Learning to forgive and forget will improve your serve.
- E. Can we be like this young man and turn in our throne for a towel?

I. FORGIVENESS IS NOT AN ELECTIVE.

- A. Forgiveness is a "required course" for those who would practice servitude (Psa. 103:10-12; Eph. 4:31-32).

(Psa. 103:10-12) He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.

11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, So great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him.

12 As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.

(Eph 4:31-32) Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. **32** And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

- B. There are only TWO POSSIBILITIES when showing forgiveness:

- 1. You are the offender (Mt. 5:23-24).

"If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, **24** leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.

- a. STOP... "Leave your offering there"
- b. GO... "go your way"
- c. RECONCILE... "first be reconciled"
- d. RETURN ... "then come and present your offering"

- 2. You are the offended (**Mt. 18:21-35**).

Notice both the vertical and horizontal forgiveness!

- a. Refusing to forgive **is hypocritical.**
- b. Refusing to forgive **inflicts inner torment upon us.**

- C. How to make it happen in your life:

- 1. Focus fully on God's forgiveness of you.
- 2. Deal directly and honestly with all the resentment you hold.

II. REMEMBERING TO FORGET.

- A. Are you bowing to the monument (idol) of spite?

"It isn't simply enough to say, 'Well, okay--you are forgiven, but don't expect me to forget it!' This means we have erected a monument of spite in our mind, and that isn't really forgiveness at all.

Servants must be BIG people. Big enough to GO ON, remembering the right and forgetting the wrong.”

B. Forgetting means three things:

1. **Refuse to keep score** (1Cor. 13:4-5).

Love is patient, love is kind, *and* is not jealous; love does not brag *and* is not arrogant, **5** does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong *suffered*,

2. **Being bigger than any offense** (Psa. 119:165).

Those who love Thy law have great peace, And nothing causes them to stumble.

3. **Harboring no judgmental attitudes** (Mt. 7:1-5).

“Do not judge lest you be judged. **2** “For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. **3** “And why do you look at the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? **4** “Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ and behold, the log is in your own eye? **5** “You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.

C. WHAT to remember and HOW to forget.

1. **Be vulnerable** (Phil. 3:12-13).

Not that I have already obtained *it*, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. **13** Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet; but one thing *I do*: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead,

It means being willing to express personal needs, admitting one’s limitations or failures, having a teachable spirit, and especially being reluctant to appear the expert, the answer man, the final voice of authority.

2. **Be humble** (2Cor. 11:24-27; Gen. 41:51).

(2Cor. 11:24-27) Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine *lashes*. **25** Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. **26** *I have been* on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from *my* countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; **27** *I have been* in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.

Think of all the people Paul could have had on his “hate list.” But he had no such list. With humility he forgot what was behind Him. He intentionally disregarded all those wrongs against him.

(Gen 41:51) And Joseph named the first-born Manasseh, “For,” *he said*, “God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father’s household.”

If anybody ever had a reason to nurse his wounds and despise his past it was Joseph. But he refused to remember the offenses. In fact, he named his first child, Manasseh which means, “forget.”

3. **Be determined** (Phil. 3:14; 2Tim. 4:7).

(Phil 3:14) *I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

Servants who refuse to get bogged down and anchored to the past are those who can pursue the objectives of the future. They are too involved in getting the job done to be occupied with yesterday’s hurts and concerns.

(2Tim. 4:7) *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith;*

Each new dawn delivers a fresh, new package called “today.” How are you going to use it?

Hanging on to the past, or pressing on to the future?

D. Servants must learn, to the best of their ability, to forget the past if they ever want to reach their potential.

CONCLUSION AND INVITATION.

A. Two very important questions:

1. Is there someone I have refused to forgive which keeps me from being happy and productive?
2. Is there something I have refused to forget which keeps me from showing love in X?

- B. Forgiving and forgetting solves these dilemmas.
- C. Those who want to take the towel of servanthood may come.
- D. Plan of salvation for non-Xians, erring Xians.