

PLOT TWIST

"THE WHOLE STORY OF FORGIVENESS"

MATTHEW 18:21-35

This Week's Core Competency

Kindness/Goodness – I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

1 Thessalonians 5:15, *Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.*

Core Competencies are not mutually exclusive. Self-Control and Patience are related, as are Love and Kindness/Goodness, more specifically, love expressed in forgiveness and Kindness/Goodness. The one who is kind and good does the right thing, and the right thing for a person who has been forgiven to do is to forgive.

This story of Kindness and Goodness expressed in forgiveness has been told countless times, and yet it deserves to be told once more. "During World War II Corrie ten Boom was confined in the concentration camp at Ravensbruck for her part in sheltering Jews from their Nazi oppressors. Her father died in another camp, and in the dehumanizing conditions of Ravensbruck she was not only humiliated and degraded, but she watched the life of her sister

Bear with each other and forgive one another whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

– Colossians 3:13

Betsy ebb away. Yet God's grace was real in the midst of all the suffering, and after the war she went to Germany to preach God's forgiveness.

"Following one service, a man came forward whom she recognized immediately. One of the worst experiences in camp had been the delousing showers where the women were ogled and taunted by leering guards. This man was one of those S.S. guards, a man who had been one of the cruelest, especially to her sister. Now he stood in front of her, with his hand outstretched. 'Ja fraulein, it is wonderful that Jesus forgives all our sins, just as you say.' Corrie froze as all the memories flooded back, but the man carried on. 'You mentioned Ravensbruck. I was a guard there, but since then I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me, but I would like to hear it from you as well. Fraulein, will you forgive me?'

"Corrie stood there paralyzed. She couldn't forgive. Betsy had died there; she had been humiliated. At the same time, she was ashamed that she could preach about forgiveness but couldn't or wouldn't forgive. 'Lord, forgive me. I can't forgive,' she cried inwardly. As she prayed, she felt not only forgiven but set free. The glacier of hate melted within and her hand unfroze. As she reached out her hand and spoke her forgiveness, she felt another burden of the past fall away" (Gary Inrig, *The Parables*, 77, 78).

day 1

ENCOUNTER – read God’s word to put yourself in touch with him.

Matthew 18:21-35

21 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?"

22 Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

23 "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24 As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. 25 Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

26 "The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' 27 The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

28 "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded.

29 "His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.'

30 "But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. 31 When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.

32 "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. 33 Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?'

34 In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

35 "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."

Companion Passage Colossians 3:12-14

12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. 16 Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. 17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (NIV 2011)

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Circle "my brother" in v. 21.
- * Highlight Jesus' answer to Peter's question in v. 22.
- * Circle "seventy-seven times" in v. 22.
- * Underline "the kingdom of heaven" in v. 23.
- * Box "like" indicating *comparison* in v. 23.
- * Circle "ten thousand talents" in v. 24.
- * Box "since" indicating *reason* in v. 25.
- * Circle "sold" in v. 25.

- * Box "to" indicating *purpose* in v. 25.
- * Box "but" indicating *contrast* in vv. 28, 30.
- * Circle "a hundred denarii" in v. 28.
- * Box "instead" indicating *contrast* in v. 30.
- * Circle "wicked" in v. 32.
- * Box "just as" indicating *comparison* in v. 33.
- * Highlight "this is how" in v. 35.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. What prompted Peter's question in verse 21?
2. Put what Jesus meant by his answer in your own words.
3. Describe the gist of the *contrast* introduced in verse 28.
4. *Compare* the size of the two servant's debts and explain the point of the *contrast*.
5. *Compare* the master's response and the forgiven servant's response to their two debtors' pleas and explain the point of the *contrast*.
6. What do you infer from verse 31?
7. Put the point of the *rhetorical* question in verse 33 in a simple declarative sentence.
8. Describe how the master treated the unmerciful servant.
9. **Discussion:** Verse 35 says, "This is how . . ." Talk about how the master's treatment of the unmerciful servant is like the heavenly Father's treatment of brothers who don't forgive brothers.

day 3 **EXAMINE** – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

In light of what Jesus said regarding a brother "who sins against you" (vv. 15-17), Peter asked a legitimate question, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me?" and generously proposed, "Up to seven times?"

On the question one author writes, "Behind Peter's question, 'Lord how often . . . ?' are two possible concerns, one focusing on the offended party and the other on the offender. Experience suggests that there must be limits to patience with misbehavior. Peter may be asking, 'If my fellow Christian insults me repeatedly, must I go on suffering this indignity just because he always says 'Sorry, old boy!''? Or he may be proposing, 'Is it in the best interests of my brother for me to go on tolerating uncivil behavior when it is clear that his repentance is superficial and he has no intention of changing?' These are legitimate concerns, but Jesus' answer addresses neither of them. Both have been dealt with in the previous paragraph, which encourages confrontation for offenses that threaten Christian fellowship" (Douglas A. Hare, *Matthew*, Interpretation, 216).

Jesus no doubt stunned Peter with his answer. Rather than commend him for his forgiving spirit—Peter proposed forgiving more than twice as often as the Jews required—Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times." Or in other words, countless times. Peter was speechless as Jesus went on to explain by telling the now familiar parable of the unmerciful servant. Following centuries of domestication and familiarity, the story has unfortunately lost much of its force. It would have been shocking and radical when first spoken. The point of the story is impossible to miss. Before he told it, Jesus said we are to forgive each other without keeping track of the number of times we do. Then near the end, the rhetorical question makes it clear that we are to have mercy on each other just as God has had mercy on us (v. 33). And finally, in the last verse, Jesus said, "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart." Evidently we're supposed to forgive one another as often as we're asked to—and mean it.

The details of the story drive the point home. In the first scene, a king conducts an audit of his

ministers of state or provincial governors and discovers that one of them owes him an immense sum—thousands of talents or billions of dollars, take your pick—a sum impossible to repay. Perhaps Jesus has the practice of tax farming in mind, in which case the man had bid a large sum for taxing rights and had not been able to produce the money. "Jesus is speaking of a vast sum; the man [in the parable] must have been a high official on special service to have been entrusted with such an amount (or perhaps the tax farmer over an especially rich province; Josephus speaks of the taxes from Palestine as amounting to 8,000 talents, *Ant.* 12.175; he also says that Antipas received 200 talents as taxes from Perea and Galilee and that Archelaus got 600 talents from his area, *Ant.* 17.318-20)" (Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 473). In any case, it's a parable, and you get the picture.

With a view to recouping a portion of what he was owed, the king orders that the man be sold, along with his wife, children, and all his belongings, suggesting that the story is about Gentiles. Jewish law did not countenance the sale of a wife for her husband's debts. But when the servant begs him to be patient and give him extended terms, the king does more than grant his request. He cancels his debt entirely and lets him go!

In the second scene, the former debtor becomes a creditor. A fellow servant owes him a small fraction of what he had owed the king, but when that fellow servant pleads for patience and extended terms just like he had, "the pardoned embezzler stands on his rights and tolerates no breach of the original contract. He takes legal action to have the delinquent thrown into debtor's prison" (216). Other servants who know he had been forgiven, but then refused to forgive, report what he had done—or better yet refused to do—to the king who doesn't think much of it.

In the final scene, the master calls his servant on the carpet. Listen to his words, for they reveal the point of the parable. "You wicked servant," he says, "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?" The king then turns the man over to jailers to be imprisoned

and tortured until he has paid in full all he owes. Since the man has no way of earning money in jail, not to mention the fact that he owes a fortune, the king's orders amount to a life sentence.

What Jesus said at the end is hard. Clearly God expects us to forgive one another and mean it. We don't have to forgive others in order to be saved, but once we are saved, our Heavenly

Father expects us to forgive just like we have been forgiven. But what if we don't? Will he revoke our forgiveness and punish us eternally? No, that takes the details of the story too far. God expects us to forgive one another, and if we don't, our fellowship with him will be hindered and we will face being disciplined for unforgiven everyday sins. If we don't forgive other believers, God will not forgive us.

The Message of the Passage

God has forgiven us, so he expects us to forgive each other if we want to be forgiven for our everyday sins.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22. Reflect on 3 *living questions* to apply what you have learned this week.

• **Journal your answers to the following *living questions*:**

–How is God making himself known to you?

–How does God want to change you?

–How is God calling you to change your world?

notes **N** STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 21 **brother** Peter's question links vv. 21-35 to the preceding verses (esp. vv. 15-17). "As with the principles in vv. 15-16, Jesus' advice may work well with unbelievers too, but his primary focus remains on believers" (Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC, 282).

v. 21 **seven times** "The teaching within Judaism (based on Amos 1:3; 2:6; Job 33:29, 30) is that three times was enough to show a forgiving spirit. Rabbinic Judaism recognized that repeat offenders may not really be repenting at all: 'If a man commits a transgression, the first, second and third time he is forgiven, the fourth time he is not' (*b. Yoma* 86b, 87a). The Mishnah is even less forgiving: 'If a man said, "I will sin and repent, and sin again and repent," he will be given no chance to repent . . . for transgressions that are between a man and his fellow the Day of Atonement effects atonement only if he has appeased his fellow' (*m. Yoma* 8.9)" (Michael J. Wilkins, *The NIV Application Commentary: Matthew*, 622).

v. 22 **seventy-seven times** Or "seventy times seven" (cf. NKJV, NASB, NLT). "'Seventy-seven times' is probably an allusion to Gen. 4:24, where Lamech proudly boasts to his wives that he will avenge himself seventy-sevenfold on anyone who dares to attack him. Forgiveness is thus presented as the antonym of revenge. Followers of Jesus must renounce the very human intention of getting even with someone who repeatedly injures them. They are called to be Lamech's polar opposite" (Hare, 216). In either case, the number whether "seventy-seven times" or "seventy times seven" is an example of hyperbole. Disciples are to forgive countless times.

v. 23 **a king** Parable is not allegory. Nevertheless, in this common form of rabbinic story involving a king with servants or sons, "the king almost always stands for God; the servants, for God's people. Often obedient and disobedient servants provide a contrast between righteous and wicked behavior. Settling accounts is a natural metaphor for judgment" (Blomberg, 282-83).

v. 24 **ten thousand talents** "The 'talent' was the highest known denomination of currency in the ancient Greek language, and ten thousand was the highest number for which the Greek language had a particular word (*myrias*; cf. our *myriad*)" (283). "The exact monetary value is difficult to determine, because the 'talent' was not a coin but a unit of monetary reckoning. A silver talent was about seventy-five pounds, valued at six thousand denarii. Since a denarius was the equivalent of a day's wage for a common laborer and if we use the year 2001's minimum wage of \$5.15 an hour in the United States, a common laborer could expect \$41.20 a day. A talent, therefore, would be worth approximately \$247,200 (cf. 25:15). Altogether, therefore, the man owes at least two and a half billion dollars. As extreme as those figures are, comparisons are difficult to appreciate since such a sum in first century Palestine would be far more disproportionate to the same sum in modern times. Some estimate that the amount is the equivalent of hundreds of billions of dollars. In any case, the hyperbole of the parable is dramatic" (Wilkins, 623). An increase in the minimum wage to \$7.25 an hour would make the talent worth \$348,000 and would boost the man's debt to three and a half billion dollars.

v. 25 **sold** "Selling people into slavery to pay their debts was extremely common in the ancient world. The man begs for mercy and makes a promise he almost certainly will not be able to keep. To the astonishment of Jesus' original audience, the king pities the man and cancels his debt. Not only will he not sell him into slavery, but he will not require repayment of any kind. Sheer grace is at work here" (Blomberg, 283). "Debtor's slavery was often designed more as punishment than repayment, for as in this case, it was impossible to repay the amount owed" (Wilkins, 623).

v. 28 **a hundred denarii** A little more than three month's wages, or approximately \$3800 at the current minimum wage (\$\$7.25)—nothing to sneeze at but nothing in comparison to the billions owed by the first servant.

v. 28 **choke** "Instead of reacting with the same compassion and grace, the first servant delivers physical punishment by choking him and, instead of selling him into slavery, throws him into the debtor's prison, an even more severe punishment than that threatened him by the king, which made repaying the debt impossible (18:29-30)" (624).

v. 32 **wicked** Cf., "evil slave" (the NET Bible; NLT); "you worthless slave" (GNT); "you scoundrel" (NEB). "The adjective *poneros* may indeed have here its general connotation of 'bad' or 'unethical,' but in 6:23 and 20:15, where it modifies 'eye,' it connotes an envious, grudging, or miserly spirit. In the parable, therefore, it may signify 'mean-spirited'" (Hare, 217).

v. 35 **this is how . . .** F. F. Bruce calls this verse "a very hard saying" and then again "a hard saying indeed!" (*The Hard Sayings of Jesus*, 77, 78). Is Jesus saying that forgiven people who refuse to forgive others will have their pardon revoked and subsequently be punished eternally? No; this presses the details beyond the point of the parable (v. 33)—the forgiven servant should have had mercy on his fellow servant just as his master had had on him.

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

Our homes provide rich teaching ground on the subject of forgiveness, especially if they have more than one kid! There will likely be several opportunities this week for family members to pardon offenses. Here are some ways to explain what forgiveness is to your kids. (1) Forgiveness is freely given and not dependent on an apology. (2) Because we have been forgiven by God, it is our responsibility to forgive. (3) Forgiveness is healthy. We may still be hurting from the offense, but bitterness will not take root in our hearts. In addition, here are a few things forgiveness is not. (1) It doesn't keep score. (2) It's not a feeling; it's an action. (3) It may not seem fair but God is always in control. Having boys who are 16 months apart always provided a constant living object lesson in forgiveness in our home. "He took my ball!" "He ruined the game!" "He's wearing my shoes!" "He changed the channel and I was watching my favorite show!" "He ate the last apple!" I could go on but the point is we must live in a spirit of forgiveness. It's easier to do that when we remember the forgiveness we have been shown by the Father. "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Love well and forgive freely this week!

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Mt 18:21-35

1. What happened when the first servant asked his master to be patient with his debt?
2. What happened when the second servant asked the first servant to be patient with his debt?

What Do You Think

1. Why was the master so angry?
2. What does this story teach us about forgiveness?
3. Is there someone you need to forgive?

What R U Going To Do

Our core competency this week is Kindness/Goodness. You can demonstrate that by bringing protein items, like peanut butter or canned meat, to the KidPix store. We are collecting them for 6 Stones as they serve people who need food.

Core Comp

Kindness/Goodness - I treat others better than myself.

Memory Verse

Psalm 119:10 - *I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands.*

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized my verse _____, completed *Scrolls* _____, brought Bible _____, brought a friend _____.

Series Discipleship Challenge located in KidPix Store.

Child's name _____ Grade ____ Parent's signature _____

Earn 1 token by completing the PantegoKids Bible study and another token by reciting the memory verse.

Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians*

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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Wendy Hollabaugh (B.S.W. University of Texas at Arlington) is the Children's Minister at Pantego Bible Church. Wendy has over ten years of experience in Children's Ministry. She has a passion for leading families to connect with God and each other. She enjoys creating compelling environments where kids fall in love with God and His Truth. Wendy and her husband, Greg, are also involved in their own personal youth ministry as they are training their three teenagers, Hannah, Aaron and Noah.



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