

*Jacob's Well***Lesson Title:** Stories from the Savior—The Unforgiving Servant

**Key Concept:** Jesus often spoke in parables, stories with both spiritual insights and practical applications. In the parable of the Unforgiving Servant, Jesus calls us to forgive others not because they deserve it, but because God has forgiven us.

**Scriptures:**

<sup>21</sup>Then Peter came to him and said, “Lord, how many times must I forgive my brother who sins against me? As many as seven times?” <sup>22</sup>Jesus said to him, “Not seven times, I tell you, but seventy-seven times!”

(Matthew 18:21–22 *New Living Translation*)

<sup>32</sup>Then his lord called the first slave and said to him, ‘Evil slave! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me!’ <sup>33</sup>Should you not have shown mercy to your fellow slave, just as I showed it to you?’

(Matthew 18:32–33 *New Living Translation*)

**Context Scriptures:** Matthew 6:12, 14–15, 18:21–35; Luke 6:35–38, 17:3–4; Mark 11:25; Colossians 3:12–15; Ephesians 4:31–32

**Lesson Thoughts:**

A king who was settling his debts came across one of his slaves who owed him 10,000 talents. One talent was 6,000 days’ worth of wages, which meant that this slave owed his master about 150,000 years of work. The slave begged for mercy and promised that he would repay the debt, if only his master would have patience with him. He was entirely undeserving of the patience he requested; how could he ever repay thousands of years’ worth of debt?

Instead of selling the slave and his whole household, the generous king had mercy on him, forgiving the debt entirely. This slave had just been forgiven of an unforgivable debt, and what did he do with his newfound freedom? He went out, found a fellow slave who owed him a few months’ wages, and assaulted

*Jacob's Well*

him, demanding his money immediately! The fellow slave begged for mercy, promising that he would repay him, but his attacker refused to wait. Unlike the king who had just forgiven his debt, this unforgiving slave did not see fit to forgive his debtor. Instead, he threw him into prison until he could repay the debt.

When the king heard of this, he was furious. He called the first slave in, chastising him, "You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt... Shouldn't you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?" For the slave to accept the king's mercy only to turn around and be so cruel to a fellow slave was truly unforgivable. The king threw the slave into prison to be tortured until he could repay his debt (no easy task while being tortured).

Jesus used this story to answer Peter's question about how many times we must forgive those who wrong us. When we face this question, we must remember who we are called to emulate, and how he forgave us. Jesus promised that "if you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you." What a blessing that the faultless God would offer us forgiveness for our faults! But we must be clear: Jesus also said that "if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Matthew 6:14–15). As we strive to live up to this difficult command, we must remember why we are forgiving: not because our debtors deserve our forgiveness, but because Jesus loved and forgave *us* when we did not deserve it.

**Discussion Questions:**

- 1) Is it fair for God to ask us to forgive others? Why or why not?
- 2) Why does God ask us to forgive others, even if they clearly don't deserve it (not sorry, still wronging you, not changing, etc.)?
- 3) Have you ever failed to forgive somebody? How did that work out for you, your relationship with the other person, and your relationship with God?
- 4) Does forgiveness mean that you act like the offense never happened? If you cannot forget, how do you forgive? Discuss.

**Next Lesson:** The Wedding Banquet

*Jacob's Well*

**Notes and Reflections**

- 1) Do you take the forgiveness of God for granted? Do you often think about how God will not forgive you if you do not forgive others? If not, pray over this. Ask God to help you remember his call to forgive others, and to help you forgive those you are struggling to forgive.
- 2) If you know of somebody who you have not forgiven, forgive them. Pray and ask God to help you forgive them as he forgives you. Ask him what forgiveness looks like in this situation.
- 3) Consider all that Jesus has forgiven humanity for, from our disobedience in the Garden of Eden to our continued rebellion and hardheartedness. Compare our offenses against God to our much lesser offenses against each other. Remember that we are called to forgive others, which is a much smaller sacrifice than God has made for us.

*Jacob's Well*

**Notes and Reflections, cont.**