

AT THE MASTER'S FEET:
A study of Jesus' Sermons in the Gospel of Matthew
AMEN Bible Study 2012-2013

The Master's Family: The Reconciled Life

Helping Your Brother – Forgiveness

Matthew 18:21-35

March 21, 2013

- 18:21-22 I. God's ways are not our ways
Isa. 55:8-9
- A. Our standards for living seem commendable to us.
Prov. 16:25; Matt. 7:13-14
- B. God's standard of kingdom living seems impossible to us.
Lk. 18:27

The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

- 18:23 II. One day, Jesus Christ will hold everyone accountable.
Matt. 12:36; 25:14-46; Rom. 14:10-12; Heb. 4:13; 1 Pet. 4:5-6
- :24 A. Our debt, our sin is huge! We can never repay it.
- :25-26 B. A huge debt requires a severe penalty.
Rom. 5:6-11; Heb. 9:11-28
- :27 C. Out of mysterious compassion and unfathomable love, God forgave us and paid our huge debt.
John 3:16; 15:13; Rom. 5:8
- :28-29 D. The debts and wounds that others inflict on us can appear horrible to us but pale in comparison to all that God has forgiven us.
- :30 E. Refusing to forgive others indicates we do not value God's grace or, even worse, that we do not know Him at all.
Matt. 7:21; Jn. 14:15
- :31-35 F. The penalty for refusing to forgive others is severe.
Matt. 6:12,14-15; Mk. 11:25; Lk. 6:37; 11:4; Col. 3:13

On the Road to Forgiveness¹

¹ The following statements are taken verbatim or summarized from Lewis B. Smedes' book, *The Art of Forgiving: When You Need to Forgive and Don't Know How*, New York: Ballantine Books, © 1996.

*Hate is the most self-righteous of all emotions. We feel deliriously righteous when we hate the evil creature who viciously assaulted us. . . We love our hate, coddle it, feed it, stroke it, and above all justify it. But let it settle in for a while, take over the best room in our souls, and it becomes a disagreeable guest who will not leave when our party is over.*²

Because of the kind of pain that hate is, we must heal that pain before we can do anyone else any good. Forgiving begins to heal the pain of a wounded past.

God is the original, master forgiver. Each time we grope our reluctant way through the minor miracle of forgiving, we are imitating his style.³

Minor offenses can be overlooked and forgotten. Forgiving is for the wounds that stab at our souls, for wrongs that we cannot put up with, ever, from anyone. Forgiving is about healing wounds.

Smedes writes that we pass through 3 stages of forgiving.

1. We rediscover the humanity of the person who hurt us.
2. We surrender our right to get even.
3. We revise our feelings toward the person we forgive.

Many people who say that they cannot forgive a person who wronged them are handicapped by a misunderstanding of what forgiveness is.

- Forgiving does not mean that we tolerate the wrong done to us.
- Forgiving does not mean that we want to or have to forget what happened.
- Forgiving does not mean that we excuse the person who did it nor that we surrender our right to justice.
- Forgiving does not mean that we invite someone who hurt us once to hurt us again.

Forgiving is not always about reunion.

- For reunion to be possible, the person wounded forgives the offender, and the offender must show true repentance and, if need be, make restitution.
- It takes one person to forgive. It takes two to be reunited.
- Forgiving happens inside the wounded person. Reunion happens in a relationship between

² Ibid. p. 73.

³ Ibid. p. 21.

people.

- A person can truly forgive and refuse to be reunited.
- We can forgive even if we do not trust the person who wronged us not to wrong us again.
- Reunion is sometimes impossible, but forgiveness is always possible.

Forgiving does not always mean restoration.

Sometimes—perhaps many times—we need an inner push to forgive. We need for God to give us the desire to forgive, especially if we do not want to forgive nor know how to start forgiving.

Our motivation to forgive may be God-centered (He commands it) or self-centered (I want to be freed from a painful past). We cannot do any good for the person who wounded us until we have done good for ourselves--by forgiving. Obeying God's command to forgive is not only in the best interest of our brother but also in our best interest.

Should we forgive people who do not ask for our forgiveness?

- Forgiving is something good we do for ourselves; we should not have to wait for permission from the person who did something bad to us. The person who hurt us should not control whether or when we recover from the pain he brought us.

Forgiving is seldom done once and for all. It almost always needs repeating.

Forgiving serious wounds takes time and prayer. But be careful not to take too long or rage and bitterness will take root in the soul.

When we forgive, we set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner is us.

When we forgive we walk in stride with our forgiving God.