

CoreGroup Guide | Debunked - Part 2

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Welcome

In her book *Travelling Mercies: Some Thoughts on Faith*, author Anne Lamott suggests that, “Not forgiving is like drinking rat poison and then waiting for the rat to die” (pg 120). In other words, when we hold on to our resentment and bitterness, we often end up poisoning ourselves. This week we continue our sermon series *Debunked: Unpacking Christian Cliches* as we discuss the well known adage, “Forgive and Forget.” Although this phrase is not found in the Bible, it seems like there could be some wisdom in there somewhere. But is it really that easy?

Opening Prayer

Good and gracious God, thank you for bringing us together again today. Thank you for helping us to set aside this time to connect with each other, to reflect on our faith, to learn, to grow, and to be challenged. Some of us come here today weary and wounded from the world, burdened by past hurts. This is a hard topic today, God. Please help us to stay present with each other, grounded in grace, and open to the nudging of your spirit. It’s in your name we pray, Amen.

Ice Breaker

What is a silly grudge you held onto as a child? Maybe with a sibling, a classmate, a neighbor, or a teacher. What eventually helped you move on?

The Head

These days the concept of forgiveness is pretty common, but can be difficult to practice. This was not always the case, though. In fact, ancient Rome in the 1st century was a pretty vengeful and violent place with no moral or relational duty to forgive anybody. This is the setting of Jesus’ life and ministry here on Earth. Our scripture reading for today is sometimes called the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant, as told by Jesus during a powerful conversation with his disciples.

Matthew 18:21-33

²¹ Then Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, how many times should I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Should I forgive as many as seven times?”

²² Jesus said, “Not just seven times, but rather as many as seventy-seven times.

²³ Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ When he began to settle accounts, they brought to him a servant who owed him ten thousand bags of gold. ²⁵ Because the servant didn’t have enough to pay it back, the master ordered that he should be sold, along with his wife and children and everything he had, and that the proceeds should be used as payment. ²⁶ But the servant fell down, kneeled before him, and said, ‘Please, be patient with me, and I’ll pay you back.’ ²⁷ The master had compassion on that servant, released him, and forgave the loan.

²⁸ *“When that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him one hundred coins. He grabbed him around the throat and said, ‘Pay me back what you owe me.’*

²⁹ *“Then his fellow servant fell down and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I’ll pay you back.’”* ³⁰ *But he refused. Instead, he threw him into prison until he paid back his debt.*

³¹ *“When his fellow servants saw what happened, they were deeply offended. They came and told their master all that happened.”* ³² *His master called the first servant and said, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you appealed to me.’”* ³³ *Shouldn’t you also have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?’*

- Together as a group, summarize this story in your own words. Who are the main characters, what are the central events, and what are the key takeaways?
- Why do you think Jesus shared this parable in response to Peter’s question?
- What does it mean to have mercy on someone, especially in the context of forgiveness?

The Heart

True forgiveness is difficult enough as it is. But even if we do manage to forgive someone, the pain and hurt can linger for a very long time, sometimes made worse by a long history and a complicated web of emotions. Jesus commands us to never stop forgiving, but there must be more to it than that. What happens after forgiveness?

- The advice to simply “forgive and forget” is popular for a reason.
 - What parts, if any, of this phrase are helpful?
 - What parts, if any, can be harmful?
- What happens in your mind, body, and spirit when you hold onto a resentment?
- What does it look like to extend grace to another person, and to yourself?
- How is forgiveness different from making excuses, justifying a behavior, allowing something harmful to continue, or pretending the wrong never happened?

The Hands

The story of Joseph in the Old Testament book of Genesis gives us a different perspective on forgiveness. Joseph came from a large family and was known to be the favorite son. However, his brothers grew to resent him, fueled by their jealousy and hatred. As a teenager Joseph was tricked by his brothers, sold into slavery, and falsely imprisoned. Joseph eventually forgave his brothers, but he did not forget what they had done. Years later, after rising to power in Egypt and reconnecting with his brothers, Joseph remembers the harm they caused him, names the wrongdoing, honors God, and softens the grip his anguish once had over him.

- Share about a time when someone forgave you, or when you were the one who offered to forgive. What was that experience like for you? What happened *after* all was forgiven?
- What is one relational boundary you might think about putting in place in order to release the power the past has over you?
- “Forgive & Forget” is such a common phrase, but as a group, how might you reframe, rephrase, or rewrite this statement in a way that is more Biblically accurate?

Closing Prayer

a blessing for when your family disappoints you

God, the very people who are supposed to
love me and know me best have let me down

I don't know if I'll be able to find a way forward

I'm losing my sense of home
and the reality of it fills me with a kind of fear
However big, however small,
this pain feels unforgivable

I know they're only human (really, I know),
but their mistakes feel like they echo through me

They strike a painful chord that rings on and on,
and I feel convinced, all at once, that I am not loved
Not known
Not safe
I feel small all over again

So bless me, God,
when tears prick at my eyes and I feel lost to myself
Bring me home

Remind me of the places you've brought me,
the person I've become,
when I can feel your light and peace

Forgive them for me when I can't
And send some grace for this moment
to keep my heart from breaking,
or my temper from rising,
or any sentence starting with "YOU ALWAYS..."

You remember me when I am a stranger to myself
and an outsider at my own address
God, bring me home

by Kate Bowler and Jessica Richie, from *The Lives We Actually Have* (2023)

From Pastor Charity

Throughout this series we will be revisiting the *Much Given. Much Expected* initiative introduced in September 2025. You can learn more about this two-year effort to fund the mission and vision of The Gathering by checking out the [Much Given page](#) on our website. If you've not yet had an opportunity to make a commitment and feel led to do so, you can do that by using this [MUCH Commitment Form](#). Thank you for your generosity!