

## Study Questions – Matthew 18:21–35 (NKJV)

This parable moves beyond a command to forgive and exposes the **connection between receiving grace and extending it**. It challenges not just behavior, but the condition of the heart.

### Parallel Passages:

- There is no direct parallel parable in Mark or John.
- A closely related teaching on forgiveness appears in **Luke 17:3–4** (forgiving repeatedly) and **Luke 7:40–50** (parable emphasizing forgiven debt and love).
- Also see **Ephesians 4:32** and **Colossians 3:13** for New Testament teaching on forgiveness.

### Study Questions and Responses

#### 1. What does Peter’s question reveal about how people naturally approach forgiveness?

*(Matthew 18:21)*

Peter asks, “Up to seven times?”—suggesting he is trying to define a reasonable limit. This reflects a natural tendency to treat forgiveness as something measurable and conditional. Even when we aim to be generous, we often still set boundaries.

Jesus had just taught about restoring relationships (Matthew 18:15–20), so Peter’s question shows he is thinking practically—but still within human limits.

Everyday Application: We often forgive until we feel “taken advantage of” or emotionally exhausted. This passage challenges us to examine whether our forgiveness is rooted in grace or governed by personal thresholds.

#### 2. How does Jesus’ response (“seventy times seven”) redefine forgiveness at a deeper level?

*(Matthew 18:22)*

Jesus moves forgiveness from a **quantifiable act** to a **continuous posture**. The phrase echoes the reversal of escalating vengeance in **Genesis 4:24**, where Lamech speaks of multiplied revenge—Jesus replaces that with multiplied mercy.

This reflects God’s ongoing forgiveness toward us (Psalm 103:10–12; Micah 7:18–19).

Everyday Application: Forgiveness is not about keeping count but about cultivating a heart that is ready to release offenses. This is especially relevant in long-term relationships where repeated hurts may occur.

#### 3. What does the size of the servant’s debt reveal about the nature of sin and grace? *(Matthew 18:23–24)*

The servant owes **ten thousand talents**, an amount so large it would be impossible to repay—essentially a lifetime (or many lifetimes) of debt. This illustrates the depth of human sin before God (Romans 3:23; Psalm 130:3).

Grace, therefore, is not partial assistance—it is complete forgiveness of an unpayable debt.

Everyday Application: When we minimize our own need for forgiveness, we tend to be less forgiving toward others. A deeper awareness of God’s grace toward us softens our attitude toward those who wrong us.

#### **4. Why is the servant’s plea in verse 26 both sincere and unrealistic?**

The servant asks for patience, promising to repay everything (Matthew 18:26). While his plea sounds humble, it is unrealistic—he cannot actually repay the debt.

This reflects how people sometimes approach God—wanting time to “fix things” rather than recognizing their need for full mercy (Isaiah 64:6; Titus 3:5).

Everyday Application: We can fall into the mindset of trying to earn forgiveness—either from God or others. This passage reminds us that forgiveness is not earned; it is received and then extended.

#### **5. What does the master’s compassion reveal about the nature of God’s forgiveness? (Matthew 18:27)**

The master is “moved with compassion” and **completely forgives the debt**. This reflects God’s heart—He forgives not reluctantly, but compassionately (Psalm 86:5; Ephesians 2:4–5).

The forgiveness is immediate and total, not partial or conditional.

Everyday Application: God does not forgive us halfway. Understanding this helps believers move beyond guilt and also challenges them to forgive others more fully rather than holding onto parts of the offense.

#### **6. What does the servant’s harsh response to his fellow servant reveal about the heart? (Matthew 18:28–30)**

Despite receiving mercy, the servant responds with aggression, demanding repayment for a small debt. This contrast reveals that experiencing forgiveness externally does not always result in internal transformation.

Jesus teaches that what is in the heart eventually shows in behavior (Matthew 15:18–19).

Everyday Application: We may accept God’s forgiveness intellectually but still struggle to reflect it relationally. This passage invites us to ask: Has grace truly changed how I treat others?

#### **7. Why are the other servants “very grieved,” and what does this teach about the impact of unforgiveness? (Matthew 18:31)**

The other servants are deeply troubled because injustice and lack of mercy disrupt the community. Unforgiveness is not just a private issue—it affects relationships and group dynamics (Hebrews 12:15).

It introduces bitterness, tension, and division.

Everyday Application: Unresolved conflict in families, churches, or workplaces often affects more people than we realize. Choosing forgiveness can restore peace and prevent wider relational damage.

**8. What does Jesus mean by forgiving “from the heart,” and why is this essential? (Matthew 18:35)**

Forgiving “from the heart” means more than outward words—it involves a genuine release of resentment and the desire for retaliation (Romans 12:17–19).

This kind of forgiveness reflects God’s work within us and aligns with His character (Colossians 3:13).

Everyday Application: We may say we forgive while still replaying the offense or holding onto bitterness. True forgiveness often takes time and intentional surrender, asking God to reshape our attitudes toward the person who hurt us.