

Family Bible Study

9/13/2026

How could he have lost that much money? What would his options have been to repay that debt? As background, King Herod received each year from all his territories (Judea) a total of only around 900 talents, far less than this servant lost!

10. What two things does the king do to the servant for his debt (v27)?
11. What does the servant then do to his fellow servant for the debt that servant owed (v30)?
12. Upon learning of his servant's actions towards the other servant, what is the king's response (v32-34)?
13. *Note:* This is most assuredly a gentile (non-Jewish) king. For, 1) the king is "worshiped" by the slave (v26), something impossible for a Jew; 2) Jewish law prohibited the wife and family from being sold into slavery; and 3) while Jewish law allowed a man to be imprisoned for debt, it didn't allow him to be tortured (v34).
14. How do you suppose the unforgiving servant was supposed to pay back such a large debt...from prison?
15. What is Jesus' explanation of the point of the story (v35)?
16. How does this connect with Jesus' prayer in Matthew 6:9-14?
17. Is the purpose of this story to "scare the hell out of people" with the threat of punishment for sin? Or is there another purpose? Say, about defining the boundaries of the church (how people are supposed to act in the church)?
18. Does that make Jesus' instructions any easier to follow?



Matthew 18:21-35 *The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant*

²¹ Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" ²² Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.

²³ "Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. ²⁵ And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. ²⁶ So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' ²⁷ And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸ But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.' ²⁹ So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' ³⁰ He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. ³¹ When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. ³² Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' ³⁴ And in anger his master delivered him to the torturers, until he should pay all his debt. ³⁵ So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

Questions to Wonder with Kids

- Today Jesus continues his teaching on what to do when another Christian sins against you. Last week he taught that we are to go talk to the person when they've hurt us, with the hope of reconciling with them. Here Peter asks a follow-up question about forgiveness: how far, or how many times, should we forgive someone when they've hurt us? What do you think—how many times should you forgive someone if they've hurt you?
- How many times does Peter suggest? How many times does Jesus say?
- What are some reasons why you wouldn't want to forgive someone who's done you wrong?
- What are some reasons why you should?
- To get his point across, Jesus tells a story, a parable. What is the story about?
- What happens with the servant who owes the king a great debt (10,000 bags of gold)? Does he have to pay it back?
- I wonder how the servant felt after the king forgave him...
- What happened to the other servant, the one who owed money to the first servant? I wonder why the "big debtor" couldn't forgive the "little debtor," even though he had his debt forgiven...
- What happens when the king finds out about the servant whom he forgave?
- I wonder if the servant learned his lesson...What was that lesson?
- What does this story have to do with us? Whom do we owe?
- In one version of the Lord's Prayer, Jesus directs us to pray: "forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." What does this "debt" have to do with sins? And what is the connection between our forgiving those who've wronged us and the wrongs we've done to God?

Questions for Adults

1. This passage is a continuation of Jesus' teaching (from last week) on sin and forgiveness in the church. In the previous verses, Jesus taught his disciples to confront a Christian brother or sister when they wrong them. Here, Jesus tells them what to do when the sin has been exposed. Peter, apparently speaking for the rest of Jesus' followers, asks Jesus a follow-up question about forgiveness (v21). How would you characterize Peter's question—is he being miserly, bitter, resentful or generous and big hearted? (Forgiving someone seven times is more than most of us would be comfortable doing, if we're being honest.)
2. Does Peter's question assume that the one who in the wrong was repentant and asked for forgiveness? Does it matter? Does forgiveness dependent on repentance? Can it ever lead to repentance?
3. The word used here for forgiveness means "to remove," as in to remove a block or barrier between people. How does this inform the question of whether we can or should forgive an unrepentant sinner? That is, once the block has been removed, does that mean the two people are automatically reconciled?
4. What is Jesus' response to Peter's question (v22)?
5. "Seventy-seven times" shows up once before in Genesis 4:24. What connection might there be between the two references?
6. Does the delineation of "seventy-seven times" suggest that we are free to retaliate upon the *seventy-eighth* offense? What does 1 Corinthians 13:5 have to say about that?
7. Jesus follows up his reply with an illustration, in the form of a parable (v22-34). What is the parable ("story with a point") about?
8. Who are the characters in the parable? What is their relationship? What is the (initial) crisis or problem that presents itself for the characters (v24)?
9. A "talent" is a measure of gold or silver that is equivalent to around 6000 denarii, with a denarius being a day's living wage. So, about how many days of labor did the servant owe (v24)?