

Don't Take the Bait
The Bait of Unforgiveness
Jeff Lindholm

TALK IT OVER

Key Scripture:

Matthew 18:23-35 (NLT)

23 "Therefore, the Kingdom of Heaven can be compared to a king who decided to bring his accounts up to date with servants who had borrowed money from him. 24 In the process, one of his debtors was brought in who owed him millions of dollars. 25 He couldn't pay, so his master ordered that he be sold-along with his wife, his children, and everything he owned-to pay the debt. 26 "But the man fell down before his master and begged him, 'Please, be patient with me, and I will pay it all.' 27 Then his master was filled with pity for him, and he released him and forgave his debt. 28 "But when the man left the king, he went to a fellow servant who owed him a few thousand dollars. He grabbed him by the throat and demanded instant payment.

29 "His fellow servant fell down before him and begged for a little more time. 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it,' he pleaded. 30 But his creditor wouldn't wait. He had the man arrested and put in prison until the debt could be paid in full.

31 "When some of the other servants saw this, they were very upset. They went to the king and told him everything that had happened. 32 Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, 'You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. 33 Shouldn't you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?' 34 Then the angry king sent the man to prison to be tortured until he had paid his entire debt.

35 "That's what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart."

Genesis 27:40 (NLT)

40 You will live by your sword, and you will serve your brother. But when you decide to break free, you will shake his yoke from your neck."

Matthew 5:21-22 (NLT)

21 "You have heard that our ancestors were told, 'You must not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment.' 22 But I say, if you are even angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the court. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell.

1 Corinthians 1:28-30a

1 Corinthians 2:1-3

1 Corinthians 2:13a

Start **talking**. Find a conversation starter for your group.

- During the sermon, Jeff mentioned his struggle while preparing this topic, and that Jesus of course knew this and led Jeff to just the right verses to speak to him. Have you ever experienced something similar in your quiet time, bible reading, or prayer?

Start **thinking**. Ask a question to get your group thinking.

- **Read Matthew 18:23-35.** In this parable, what is Jesus trying to teach to his disciples about the consequences of unforgiveness?
- **Read Genesis 27:40.** What does Isaac's prophesy toward Esau tell us about bondage and freedom regarding forgiveness?
- **Read Matthew 5:21-22.** How does this passage help us with our understanding of forgiveness?

Start **sharing**. Choose a question to create openness.

- How do you define forgiveness? What does it look like in various circumstances?
- Jesus says in Matthew 5:44 *But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you!* How are you doing in this area of loving your enemies and praying for those who persecute you?
- What are some practical ways we can recognize how much we have been forgiven?
- What are the roles of humility and gratitude in our ability to forgive?
- Can you share a story about forgiving someone who truly wronged you? Was that forgiveness dependent on the offender's apology or repentance?
- What does forgiveness look like when trust has been broken?

Start **doing**. Commit to a step and live it out this week.

- Identify someone who has hurt you and forgive that person.

Start **praying**. Be bold and pray with power.

- Father, thank you for forgiving us and for freeing us through Jesus Christ. We recognize that through you, everything is possible. So father, please help us to forgive those who have wronged us and please pour blessings over those who have persecuted us and those who continue to do so. In Jesus' mighty name. -Amen

Start **digging**. For further study.

- Read the 2nd page and discuss it.

Question: "What does the Bible say about unforgiveness?"

Answer: The Bible has quite a bit to say about forgiveness and unforgiveness. Perhaps the most well-known teaching on unforgiveness is Jesus' parable of the unmerciful servant, recorded in Matthew 18:21-35. In the parable, a king forgives an enormously large debt (basically one that could never be repaid) of one of his servants. Later, however, that same servant refuses to forgive the small debt of another man. The king hears about this and rescinds his prior forgiveness. Jesus concludes by saying, "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart" (Matthew 18:35). Other passages tell us that we will be forgiven as we forgive (see Matthew 6:14; 7:2; and Luke 6:37, for example).

Do not be confused here; God's forgiveness is not based on our works. Forgiveness and salvation are founded completely in the person of God and by Jesus' redeeming work on the cross. However, our actions demonstrate our faith and the extent to which we understand God's grace (see James 2:14-26 and Luke 7:47). We are completely unworthy, yet Jesus chose to pay the price for our sins and to give us forgiveness (Romans 5:8). When we truly grasp the greatness of God's gift to us, we will pass the gift along. We have been given grace and should give grace to others in return. In the parable, we are appalled at the servant who would not forgive a minor debt after having been forgiven his unpayable debt. Yet, when we are unforgiving, we act just as the servant in the parable.

Unforgiveness also robs us of the full life God intends for us. Rather than promote justice, our unforgiveness festers into bitterness. Hebrews 12:14-15 warns, "Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root rises up to cause trouble and defile many." Similarly, 2 Corinthians 2:5-11 warns that unforgiveness can be an opening for Satan to derail us.

We also know that those who have sinned against us – whom we may not want to forgive – are held accountable by God (see Romans 12:19 and Hebrews 10:30). It is important to recognize that to forgive is not to downplay a wrongdoing or necessarily to reconcile. When we choose to forgive, we release a person from his indebtedness to us. We relinquish the right to seek personal revenge. We choose to say we will not hold his wrongdoing against him. However, we do not necessarily allow that person back into our trust or even fully release that person from the consequences of his sin. We are told that "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). While God's forgiveness relieves us from eternal death, it does not always release us from the death-like consequences of sin (such as a broken relationship or the penalty provided by the justice system). Forgiveness does not mean we act as if no wrong has been done; it does mean we recognize that grace abundant has been given to us and that we have no right to hold someone else's wrongdoing over his head.

Time and again, Scripture calls us to forgive one another. Ephesians 4:32, for example, says, "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." We have been given much in the way of forgiveness, and much is expected from us in response (see Luke 12:48). Though forgiveness is often difficult, to be unforgiving is to disobey God and to depreciate the greatness of His gift.