



## TIME OF GRACE®

# *Forgiveness Is Offensive: When Forgiving Feels Impossible*

## Study Notes

### *Summary*

How do you forgive someone who sins against you? While Christians may agree that they should forgive, finding the power to forgive day after day can feel impossible. This message unpacks Jesus' teaching on forgiveness, proving that the most important thing to do is to begin with the forgiveness you have first received from heaven.

- **Luke 11:4:** Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.
- **Matthew 18:23,24:** <sup>23</sup> Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. <sup>24</sup> As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him.
- **Matthew 18:27:** The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.
- The Big Idea: God let your ( \_\_\_\_\_ )  
\_\_\_\_\_ alone!
- "Are you not amazed that, poor and needy as you are, the Lord thinks of you? But let not [your sin] discourage you. For if God casts out none that come to him, why should you fear? Our sins are many, but his mercies are more."—John Newton

### *Points to Ponder*

1. Which emotionally bothers you more: The sin(s) that others have committed against you? Or the sin(s) that you have committed against God? Be honest. Then explain your answer.
2. Study Ephesians 4:32 and Colossians 3:13. What connections do you see between these passages and today's message?

3. **Challenge:** Pray the Lord's Prayer each day this week. Pause after each line that mentions forgiveness in order to confess your sins personally to the Father and to release the sins personally committed against you.

### *Homework for Next Week*

Read 1 Peter 3:8-12.

Time of Grace Ministry  
**Forgiveness is Offensive: When Forgiving Feels Impossible**  
Luke 11:3-4, Luke 7:47, Matthew 18  
March 14, 2021

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That when forgiveness isn't just a concept in church, when it's not something on a piece of paper, a fill in the blank in the church bulletin, when it's a choice that you actually have to make when the hurt is real and the emotions are high, forgiveness is one of the hardest things in the world to do.

If you would read the Bible cover to cover, you'd find out that in the 128 separate verses, the word "forgive" comes up and today, I want to share with you what I think are the most important verses of them all. I want to share with you a prayer that Jesus taught us to pray and then a story that Jesus told to his friends. And in those two things, you will find the fuel for forgiveness and the healing that your heart needs when it's hard to forgive. But I want to warn you right up front, what I'm about to share with you just might be the most offensive thing that Jesus ever said. And so, my heart craves and needs but when I say it, some of you are going to wish I didn't. But I'm still going to say it because Jesus said it and he loves us.

So if you're ready to dive into the deep end of the pool of forgiveness, let me start by telling you about the prayer that Jesus taught and here's what Jesus said in Luke 11. He said, "We also forgive everyone who sins against us." Not just, Father, we forgive people. But Jesus, who knew exactly what would happen in your life, the Jesus who knew the name of the person who would hurt you the most. As the Son of God, he could already divinely see what was coming in your future, how hard it would be, how many tears you would shed. He'd drop the word "everyone" in his famous prayer. Like, the person who threw the little stone or this stone or the worst stone in your past, he wanted you to pray day after day, week after week, year after year, God, we forgive everyone. No exceptions. It might hurt so badly but, God, we're not going to pick and choose. Like you, we're just going to forgive. And I think that's why Jesus didn't start his line of forgiveness there. Anyone know what comes right before this line? I'll show you. "First, Father, forgive us our sins." And it's like Jesus knows. Before we get to the hard, emotional ground of thinking about that person who did that thing, before you look out at them, he wants you to look up at him because he knows that is the only fuel that will work to allow the human heart to really forgive everyone.

That's what I learned from a Broadway musical. If you ever want to see me come this close to ugly crying. Buy me really, really good seats to see the Broadway musical Les Misérables. Ever heard of it before? Based off of a famous French novel by Victor Hugo? The story in part is about this convict named Jean Valjean who has been deeply hurt by the legal system of his day. He steals a loaf of bread, they throw him in prison and make him a slave for years. And when he gets out, he is clutching onto that sin and he can't let it go. He's homeless, no one will give him work because of his legal record, and he's so bitter he's about to explode until - until - this hospitable priest opens the doors of a church to Jean Valjean. He invites him inside, he serves

him a meal, he gives him a place to stay free of charge. He loves him even though he owes nothing to him. But maybe you've heard that sometimes hurt people - hurt people - and though Jean can't let go of the stone and, in fact, he throws it at the priest; he steals some silver from the church cabinets and he runs off into the night sinning against the very man who had just helped him. But the police catch him. They catch Jean Valjean, silver candlesticks in his hands. They drag him back to the church and they're waiting for the priest just to say the word and they can throw him back in prison. And do you know what the priest says? "Officers, no! That was my gift to him. Jean Valjean, you forgot to take the rest!" And stunned, the officers walk away. And even more stunned, Jean Valjean looks at the priest and the priest leans in close and he speaks these words: "Jean Valjean, my brother, you no longer belong to evil but to good. I withdraw your soul from black thoughts and I give it to God."

And I won't ruin the story for you; you can hear the whole thing when you take me to the show. But I can tell, Jean Valjean finally lets it go and he forgives and he loves and he serves and his life changes. Not because the sins committed against him in the past had changed but he now realized the forgiveness he had first received.

And that's exactly how it is with Jesus. When we come to church and pray the Lord's Prayer, when we sit down at the end of a hard day, before we get to those people, we just start with us and God. And when we realize that Jesus is just like that priest, he was so good to us and still, we sinned against him and yet, he's still so good to us. Even the times we knew better and we've taken from him, he says, "No, no, no, I withdraw your soul from punishment, from prison, from hell, and give it to God. I bless you in ways that you don't deserve. I will not treat you as your sins deserve to be treated. Instead, I will love and give and listen and be there for you." And when that thought sinks deep into your heart that God - God - would do that for a person like me, then I'm ready to look at him and to forgive. Then I'm ready to glance at the biggest stones of my past and let it alone. How could I throw that at him if God didn't throw the stone at me?

That was Jesus' simple, beautiful teaching. But that teaching actually hangs on a massive question and I'll ask you the question directly. How many stones have you thrown at God? Like when you look at a cross in a church, how many of your stones are piled up at the base of it? When you think about those people and their character and you as a person and your character, what do you think? In Luke 7, Jesus said that, "The one who thinks they've been forgiven very little will love little. But the one who knows they've been forgiven much, well, they will love much." And that's why Jesus just didn't teach us to pray some prayer; he also told the story. I think in the gospels, it's the most offensive story he ever tells. Which is why before I get to that story, I want to tell you the G-rated version of the story that Jesus almost told.

It goes like this: Once upon a time, there was a man who owed his king 100 silver coins but he couldn't pay. The king wanted to settle the accounts; the man didn't have the money. He begged for the king's mercy. "Give me more time." And the king looked at the man and his debt, he smiled, and said, "I forgive you all 100 silver coins. I cancel the debt right now. You don't owe me. Go in peace," and the man did. He left the palace of the king ecstatic. He was completely debt free, absolutely forgiven. And he was so happy until he ran into one of his neighbors that also owed him 100 silver coins. And he said to the neighbor, "Where's my money?" The neighbor didn't have it. He said, "Just give me more time. I'll pay you." But the man wouldn't

wait. He demanded payment in the moment. He had the man thrown into debtor's prison and wouldn't let him out until he paid back every single coin. And when the king heard that story, that this man could not forgive the exact same amount that he had just been forgiven that very day, well, the king? He was royally ticked. The end.

Now, that was the story that Jesus almost told. Do you any of you longtime Bible experts in the room know what was wrong about my story? Let me show you what the actually said. Matthew 18: "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with the servants. As he began to settle them, a man who owed him 10,000 bags of gold was brought to him." He didn't owe the king a little bit of silver; he owed him gold. He didn't owe him silver coins; he owed him bags of gold. And it wasn't 100 silver coins; it was 10,000 bags of gold. Now if you're figuring out how much 10,000 bags of gold is worth is tricky business. Some scholars say it was millions of dollars or hundreds of millions of dollars. One Bible professor that I found said this was equivalent to about \$7 billion. Seven billion - with a B. And 100 silver coins would have been worth about \$12,000. In other words, Jesus is saying that what the guy owed the king compared to what he was owed was not like one percent of the debt or 10 percent or .1 percent or .01 percent or .001 percent. No, what his neighbor owed him was .00017 percent of what the king had just forgiven. That his debt was about a million times greater to the king. And that should offend you.

What is Jesus trying to say in his story? He's saying, you know that person that hurt you? You know that stone that's so hard to let alone? What do you think? Are you as bad as them? Well, Jesus says no. You? You're a million times worse. A million. And when you say to someone, how could you? How could you? I would never do something. Well, you did. Often. A lot. Why would you make our lives so messy? Why would you do this to our family? You should know exactly why because it's what you've done 7 billion times to God. See, Jesus knows we get so infatuated with these stones that we forget something. We focus on every edge, every detail of what they did to us, that we lose sight of how often we have done the exact same thing to God.

So let me help you visualize it today. Katie, could you help me visualize this with our friends? And Jonathan, could you help me visualize this? And Nate in the back, could you help me? And Jordan, could you help me? And Latisha, could you help me? And Chad, could you help me? We need to remember that there's not just one or two stones; there's not just a sin back a few years ago that we've committed against God. That whatever we think that someone has done to us, there is not one or 10 or 100; there are countless stones that God sees when he looks at us day after day after day after day. And we cannot hold on so tightly to the things that have been done to us that we forget day after day what's happening. And Alex, if you can help me, we can't forget one more thing. We can't forget that to God, there is no small stone. Every sin is not small and annoying to him. In fact, this isn't even the right size. To God, every sin should look like this.

And friends, we can't forget that. If you turn your back on every sin that you've committed and just think about what your ex did, what your dad did, what your boyfriend did, what your boss did, it is the craziest hypocrisy in the world. And the craziest part is that every sin that you have ever committed is against God. God! He is so - he's God. He's holy and good and he's been so kind to you every day of your life and yet, every time - every time you worry, every time you

lash out, every time you want to get your way, every time you forget his rules - you throw a stone at God. And you can't forget that. Excuse your past and your sin and that person who sinned against you will be the villain and you will feel so superior and you will spend your days judging them and wanting consequences and pointing your finger at them because of the consequences. But you don't want God to do that to you. So friends, you can't; we can't. And Jesus tells a story that's offensive. And honestly, I wouldn't tell it unless Jesus did. As I look out at some of you, I know; I know what has happened. Some of us have wept together, some of you have sent me late night emails, what you have been through is not small. But the other day, I was having a conversation with a woman from our church who's been hurt very deeply and you know what she said? She said, "Pastor Mike, it's the same Jesus." The Jesus who taught this story, it's the same Jesus. The one who we believe is good and compassionate and forgiving and kind. This isn't someone who took the pen alongside Jesus' teaching. This is what Jesus taught because he knows we need it. We will never know what it means, "God, forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us," until we remember what God did.

But once that truth hits your heart, there's something I don't want you to miss. It's back in Matthew 18; let me show you one little verse. "The servant's master, the king, took pity on him, cancelled the debt, and let him go." When you think of God, when you think of this, you need to know the truth of the gospel; that God, the King of Kings, the Holy One of heaven, he cancels the whole thing. He's not the God of second chances; he's the God who leaves seven billion stones alone. He's the God for whom your past, your addiction, your drinking, your problem with anger, it's not too much for him. No, you might sin a lot but this king has so much compassion, unlimited compassion, and so much mercy and so much love that there is nothing you've done, nothing you could ever do, that this king of love is not willing to forgive. I love the story! At first it offends me and I say, "God, I'm not that bad," but then I read it again and say, "God, you are so good!" Ten thousand bags of gold, seven billion sins, yet you forgive just like that. And this is what Jesus did.

In fact, I did the math. According to Jesus, it would be almost impossible for you, if you tried, to out-sin the mercy of God. Let me tell you the math. If you take seven billion and you divide it by the average lifespan in America, about 79 years, you come up with 88,607,594 sins a year, which is 242,760 sins a day, which equates to 10,115 sins an hour, or 168 sins per minute, or about three sins every second. You think you could sin three sins a second? Go for it. You couldn't do it, which is Jesus' amazing way of saying if you think you're bad, if you feel like the worst, if you look back and just like every second, things were going wrong morally for you, if someone hurt you and you were so bitter or so vengeful and you get to the end and you just say, "God, I know," Jesus says let me tell you a story about a king and a man with a massive debt and he just had compassion and he forgave the whole thing.

Friends, this is what Jesus did for us. Two thousand years ago, there was a rocky hill outside of Jerusalem called Calvary and there the cross of Jesus was planted. And I'm not sure what it looked like but I don't think the Romans let Jesus hold onto anything. His hands nailed to that cross were open because it was God's beautiful way of teaching us this. I'd love for you to write down this big idea for today: That God let your seven billion stones alone. Every sin. All the shame, all the guilt, it's gone because of Jesus.

And that's why we love the song. You know, there's a song we sing here at our church that we adore. It's called "His Mercy is More." And if you've sung it, I wonder if you've ever noticed the lyrics? I love what it says; that God is omniscient and all-knowing but he counts not the sum of our sin. At the opening of this song, "What love could remember, no wrongs we had done." How could God, who knows everything, how could this happen and he would treat us like it doesn't even exist. Not a single stone. How could he smile upon you and be great? What kind of love, what kind of God, is this? And I love the line, "We stood beneath a debt we could never afford." God, how could I pay you back? When I was hurting so bad and I lashed out and it was hard for me to forgive - sometimes I didn't even want to - you just forgive me still. You are so good to me, God, like a flood of love. Who are you? Who am I? But you did.

You know, that amazing song was written back in 2016 by two contemporary Christian artists but they got their inspiration from a notorious sinner from the 1700s. Way back then, there was a man named John Newton who was the captain of a slave ship. You might know that God opened his eyes to see the wretched things that he had done, how many stones he had thrown at black African families, and when he realized what a wretched sinner he was, there was only one place he could go. Not to his own goodness, not to pay God back, but just to cling to Jesus and say, "Forgive me," and he did. John Newton became a pastor and he spoke to people just like you. People who wondered, "Is God still listening? Would God forgive me after all of my struggles to forgive?" And I want to show you what John Newton said to his church. He said, "Are you not amazed that as poor and needy as you are, the Lord thinks of you?" Like God is thinking of you right now! "But let not your sin discourage you for if God casts out none that come to him, not even you, why should you fear? Our sins are many but his mercies are more."

Friends, do not forget how much you've been forgiven. Do your best to forgive, to leave the stones alone, and if that is a battle and a struggle today that leaves you with another stone on the pile, remember this: However big the struggle, your God is bigger. Your sins might be so many but God's mercy? It's always more. Let's pray.

God, none of us want to be humbled. It's so much easier to think that we're the good people and they're the bad people but, God, sometimes it takes us being sinned against to realize how bad sin is; ours included. I'm so grateful, God, that you're not the kind of God who makes us make it up to you. There's not a good work that we have to do to make up for every stone. Instead, there's just a king who smiles and he says it's finished. Father, forgive them. They didn't know; they didn't know.

Lord, when we walk out of here today, there are going to be some deep hurts for us to deal with and the devil loves working in the hearts of hurt people. So lead us not into that temptation, deliver us not from that evil. Heavenly Father, let your will be done and let us forgive everyone - everyone - just as you have first forgiven us. I thank you, God, for your bottomless love and I thank you for mercy that is truly amazing. I thank you, God, for being you. We're going to need your help this week so help us. You said you would and we know that you hear us. We thank you for all these things in the name of Jesus our Savior, in his name we pray, Amen.