

9. Because the servant failed to reciprocate his master's mercy, he was handed over to the "torturers" (v. 34). What could some of those tormentors be in our lives if we have an unforgiving spirit?

10. How does a failure to forgive affect our capacity to experience God's love and grace? (v. 35; Ephesians 4:29-32)

**Last Word:** My intention is not to load you down with guilt or insert additional blame into a situation that's already charged with hurt and emotion. But if we want to be free – free from our tormentors, free to enjoy God's forgiveness – then we first have to acknowledge the depths that unforgiveness has reached in our lives. We have to recognize the damage it's caused and can cause. And we have to deal with the fact that our unforgiveness is a sin, just as the original offense committed against us was. No worse of a sin, but certainly no less of one.

As I've tried to bring God's word to bear on the subject of forgiveness, my desire was not to add to your burden but to spare you more pain. I long for you to enjoy the blessing, the freedom, and the transformational power of walking in the light of God's gracious forgiveness. I pray the Lord's blessings be upon you as you forgive one another as God in Christ forgave you.

**Prayer:** Thank God for forgiving your enormous debt of sin. Ask Him to root out any bitter unforgiving spirit in your heart.

## Lesson 8

# *The Danger of an Unforgiving Spirit*

## Matthew 18:21-35

Our society is riddled with rancor and bitterness. We almost consider it a normal response to life. Unfortunately, this has bled into the life of believers to the point that an unforgiving spirit is an all too common attitude among Christians.

The Hebrew writer warns us to, "*See to it... that 'no root of bitterness' springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled*" (12:15). The author is alluding to Deuteronomy 29:18, which describes one who defiles themselves by turning away from the one true God to pursue false gods. From our point of view, the one who allows bitterness and an unforgiving spirit to take root in their hearts has turned from God to worship at the altars of the false gods of hurt feelings, resentment, and anger. The longer we serve these self-made idols, the more difficult it becomes for us to break free. We must recognize, that in this state we stand under God's judgment. His curses will be upon us and "*the LORD will blot our [our] name from under heaven*" (Deuteronomy 29:20). But you can be free, let's learn how together. *Read Matthew 18:21-35.*

1. What is your typical response when you are asked to forgive someone for the same offense several times over? Explain why you have this attitude

2. Looking at v. 21, do you think Peter had a special reason for asking Jesus how often he was required to forgive the person who sins against him? Explain your answer.

3. What does Jesus' answer tell you about how forgiveness operates in His kingdom? (v. 22)

4. To further illustrate His teaching, Jesus tells the *Parable of the Unforgiving Servant*. The parable opens with a king "who wished to settle accounts with his servants" (v. 23). Describe the predicament one servant found himself in. (vv. 24-26)

5. Out of pity, the king graciously forgives his servant's enormous debt. Then what unconscionable act does the servant commit upon leaving the king's presence? (vv. 28-30)

For easy comparison, let's put the two debts in the simple terms of dollars and cents. In that case, the first servant owed his master something on the lines of \$62.6 Million while he was owed a mere \$100. Boiled down, the first servant was forgiven \$626,000 and then choked his fellow slave for one measly dollar.

6. The king, upon hearing a report about the first servant's actions (v. 31) promptly summons him. What is the point of his indictment in vv. 32-33?

7. This parable is obviously not about how to treat people who owe you money. What do the two debts represent in our lives?

What contrast does Jesus want us to draw?

8. It can be difficult to detect bitterness in our hearts. From your experience, what are some of the telltale evidences that hurt has morphed into an unforgiving spirit?