

## MARK OF A DISCIPLE

Disciples of Christ offer forgiveness and mercy to others (Ephesians 4:32).

## SCRIPTURE

MATTHEW 18:21–35

## BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

Peter's question would have seemed quite merciful on the surface. Suggesting that the disciples should forgive seven times was very generous, considering it was more than double what the rabbis of his day traditionally taught: you should forgive someone only three times.<sup>1</sup> Jesus' response of 77 times (or 70 times 7, depending on the translation) wasn't meant to put a precise number on the amount of forgiveness we should offer. Jesus' answer and the following parable teach us that our forgiveness should be limitless, just as God's is.

Check out the *Teacher Prep Video* for this lesson: <https://vimeo.com/1065899501>



## OPENING

### WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

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### GAME or ICE BREAKER

Based on your group's size, choose a **Game** from **Deep Discipleship Games** OR use the **Ice Breaker** prompt.

- **Game**—We recommend **Knock Out** or choose another screen game from **Deep Discipleship Games**
- **Ice Breaker**—Describe a time when you experienced something that truly surprised you.

### WORSHIP

Craft a time of worship with a live band or sing along to a playlist.

- Check out our curated Spotify list. We understand that every church has a different theological view of worship. These songs are suggestions, please pick what works best for your church.
- <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/2xmeIKGUjkEE7bJYSCbRwe?si=d254ec715a4749e5>

#### MEDIA AS STUDENTS ARRIVE

1. Play background music (optional)
2. Display **SERIES TITLE Slide** and announcement slides in a loop or customize the provided **PowerPoint**.
3. Play a 5-minute Countdown Timer 5:00 minutes before you start.

#### DEEP DISCIPLESHIP GAMES

Find free games in **Deep Discipleship Games**. It's already included with your Deep Discipleship subscription. View the game in advance in case you need supplies or slides.

#### SLIDES (optional)

Use **SERIES Background & Blank Slides** or **PowerPoint** to create lyric slides.

## TRANSITION TO MESSAGE

Include a brief element that transitions students from worship to teaching time, like a prayer or video. This will keep students focused and prepared for the message while the band leaves the stage.

### VIDEO (optional)

Show **SERIES Promo Video** or **LESSON Intro Video** after the last worship song.

## MESSAGE

*Use the following teaching points and suggested illustrations as a starting point to build your message.*

### POINT 1: God’s mercy knows no bounds

Read or have someone in your group read Matthew 18:21–27

In this story, we have a master who initially seems harsh. The servant owes him an incredible amount of money, and the master plans on selling him to receive some payment on his debts. During this time in history, this is what would be expected from a master. The listeners of this parable would have seen the master’s choice as justice, but Jesus shows that his mercy is beyond what we can imagine. Allowing the servant to stay free and pay off the debt would have been merciful, but the master doesn’t even make the servant pay off the exorbitant amount of money he owes. The debt is forgiven, cancelled. The master’s mercy is boundless.

*ILLUSTRATION:* Tell a **personal story** about a time when someone generously paid something for you. It could be as small as a dinner or as big as college tuition.

Being forgiven of a debt of any amount brings a feeling of freedom. But God setting us free from our debt of sin is completely life-changing and life-giving.

### SLIDES (optional)

Use the **SERIES PowerPoint** OR the **Background & Blank Slides** to create these slides to support your message:

- Matthew 18:21–27
- Point 1

### POINT 2: Unforgiveness hurts our witness

Read or have someone in your group read Matthew 18:28–31

The servant’s response in this story is ridiculous. It’s almost hard to imagine anyone being that unforgiving. He has been forgiven a fortune, and he immediately attacks a fellow servant violently over a tiny amount of money. Notice how the other servants react. They are shocked by his behavior. They know that a great injustice has been done and immediately tell the master. As disciples of Christ, we are called to always forgive others since we have been forgiven so much. This is one way to show the world how much we’ve been forgiven.

### SLIDES (optional)

- Matthew 18:28–31
- Point 2

### POINT 3: We can forgive with God’s help

Read or have someone in your group read Matthew 18:32–35

The final verse in this passage shows us that forgiveness is something that happens “from your heart” (v. 35). Depending on what and whom we

### SLIDES (optional)

- Matthew 18:32–35
- Point 3



are forgiving, we may still need distance from people who hurt us, but we must always forgive them from our hearts. Jesus warns here that a lack of genuine forgiveness can lead to us not being forgiven. God’s forgiveness is a gift that we receive. We never have to earn it. Part of receiving it, however, is asking for the Holy Spirit to work in our lives to help us forgive others. God will always help soften our hearts when we ask for his help.

*ILLUSTRATION:* Tell a **personal story** about a time when you were able to forgive someone or when someone forgave you with God’s help. While it may be hard to share these stories, forgiveness is so counter-cultural that it can be powerful to hear.

Forgiveness can be hard to give, but it changes lives—those who receive it as well as those who offer it.

## CLOSING

### MARK OF A DISCIPLE

Disciples of Christ offer forgiveness and mercy to others (Ephesians 4:32).

#### SLIDES (optional)

- Mark of a Disciple

#### FACILITATOR NOTE: DO YOU HAVE SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION RIGHT AWAY?

- If YES, then **STOP HERE**, divide into groups, and provide Small Group Leaders with the **Small Group Breakout Questions** on the next page.
- If NO, then end your gathering with the **Reflect & Respond** questions and **Prayer** prompt below.

### REFLECT & RESPOND

Give the students time to silently think through what they have heard and contemplate these questions:

- How does it feel to know that God will forgive even your biggest debts/sins?
- Where do you need to extend forgiveness to someone else in your life?

#### SLIDES (optional)

Use the **SERIES PowerPoint OR the Background & Blank Slides** to display the **Reflect & Respond** questions.

**FACILITATOR NOTE:** Remind students that forgiveness begins in the heart. Sometimes, students may need to talk with a trusted pastor or adult to learn how best to extend forgiveness.

### PRAYER

Take time to pray that each of us will be able to receive and extend God’s forgiveness.



**SMALL GROUP BREAKOUT (OPTIONAL)**

*Pick a few questions from each section to discuss. Close with prayer.*

**BREAKOUT QUESTIONS**

**Build Meaningful Relationships**

- **How would it feel to be forgiven such a large debt?**  
It would be life-changing. The man in this parable was facing slavery, but he was set free and given a new start in life.
- **What is the most significant debt that we are facing?**  
All of us are born with sin and continue to sin in our lives. We can never earn enough to pay off that debt, but through Jesus, our debt has been paid.

**Share Personal Stories & Ask Intentional Questions**

- **Why does Jesus say to forgive “seventy-seven times” (v. 21)?**  
Jesus doesn’t mean that on the seventy-eighth time, we can stop forgiving. Instead, seventy-seven is a large number that implies that we should always forgive.
- **In what ways are we like the wicked servant?**  
Sometimes, we hold grudges against others over little things when God has forgiven us an enormous debt.
- **Why do you think this story includes the other servants?**  
It shows how ridiculous the wicked servant is and how our unforgiveness hurts our witness as Christ’s disciples.
- **What do you think the other servants thought about the master and the ungrateful servant?**  
Answers will vary, but probably incredibly impressed by the master’s act of mercy and extraordinarily shocked and disappointed by the servant’s unwillingness to follow his master’s example.

**Make Life Application & Hold Students Accountable**

- **Why does forgiveness matter so much to God?**  
Refusing to forgive has its roots in pride and ungratefulness. When we refuse to forgive, we often pridefully believe that we are better than others. It’s foolish to expect forgiveness and understanding from God and others while simultaneously refusing to give it to others.
- **How can we ensure we aren’t like the wicked servant in the passage?**  
Answers will vary. We can actively seek to forgive others, realize we have been and will be in need of forgiveness ourselves, and we can ask for God’s help because we can never do this alone.

**PRAYER**

Take time to pray that each of us will be able to receive and extend God’s forgiveness.  
*Use this space to keep track of any prayer requests.*

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<sup>1</sup> Barbieri, L. A., Jr. (1985). *Matthew*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 2:62.

