Open Bible Stories

The Story of the Unmerciful Servant

## 0 Introduction

### 0.1 Key Idea

The story of the unmerciful servant teaches us that we should forgive others as God has forgiven us.

### 0.2 Creedal Verse

“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” Ephesians 4:32

### 0.3 Metanarrative Summary

The eternal God created all things in six days. He made a good and perfect world. He made humans in his image to fill the earth and rule over creation. But humans rebelled against God and ruined God’s creation. God set to restore his world through his promise. God made a covenant with Abraham. He promised to bless all nations through Abraham. God kept his promises across the generations. God provided Abraham with a promised child, Isaac. God gave Isaac a wife and she bore twins, Jacob and Esau. God blessed Jacob and his sons, and the blessing continued to the next generation. God rescued Joseph, one of Jacob’s sons, and used him to rescue his family. God caused his people, the Israelites, to multiply in the land of Egypt; eventually, they became slaves. But, God raised up a deliverer, Moses, to deliver his people from their slavery. God judged the Egyptians with harsh plagues; in the final judgment, he passed over his people who covered their doorposts with the blood of a sacrificed lamb. Then, God delivered the Israelites by bringing them out of Egypt and crossing the Red Sea on dry land. God made a covenant with the Israelites and made them his people. God tested Israel in a series of wilderness wanderings and eventually brought his people into the promised land of Canaan. God raised up deliverers to lead Israel and rescue them from their enemies. God formed Israel into a kingdom. He made a covenant with King David and promised to send a king that would rule his people forever. Many of Israel’s kings were evil and the kingdom of Israel divided into two kingdoms. God sent prophets to warn his people of God’s judgment and call them to repent. When Israel did not repent, God sent his people into exile. After many years, he brought them back to the land. Throughout the Old Testament, God promised to send his Messiah to deliver his people form their sin. After many years, the prophet John was born. He would prepare people for the coming Messiah. At the perfect time, God sent his Son, Jesus, to be born of a virgin Mary. When John and Jesus grew up, John baptized Jesus as a sign that Jesus was God’s beloved Son. Jesus endured all manner of temptation without ever sinning. When he was thirty years old, he launched a public ministry of preaching, teaching, and healing. He taught his disciples about the life of compassion, sacrifice, and forgiveness.

## 1 Biblical Interpretation: Observing the Details of the Story

After reading the crafted biblical story, answer the following questions to familiarize yourself with the details of the story.

### 1.1 Observation Questions

#### 29-01

What question did Peter ask Jesus?  
Peter asked Jesus, “How many times should I forgive my brother when he sins against me?”  
How many times did Peter suggest that he should forgive his brother?

How many times did Jesus say he should forgive his brother?

What did Jesus mean when he said, 70 times seven?

#### 29-02

What story did Jesus tell?

What would this story explain?

In the story, how much did one of the king’s servants owe him?

#### 29-03

Was the servant able to pay his huge debt to the king?

How did the king decide to punish the servant with the huge debt?

#### 29-04

What did the servant do?

What did the king do when the servant begged him to be patient?

#### 29-05

After this, what did the king’s servant do to a fellow servant?

How much was the debt of the fellow servant?

What did the servant then do to a fellow servant who owed him a small debt?

#### 29-06

What did this servant do?

What did the servant do when his fellow servant fell on his knees and asked him to be patient?

#### 29-07

How did the other servants react when he threw his fellow servant in prison?

#### 29-08

What did the king say to his servant?

How did the king punish the servant who did not forgive his fellow servant?

#### 29-09

What did Jesus say this story taught about God?

### 1.2 Translation Questions

Use the following translation questions to understand specific details of the passage. Discuss how you might translate these specific elements of the story.

#### 29-01

**how many times should I forgive** To forgive means to pardon or cancel a debt that is owed. Someone forgives another person when they no longer hold that person as guilty or culpable for the wrong they have done/committed. How would you express **how many times should I forgive** to mean how often should I pardon others for things they have done against me?

  

**my brother** This term sometimes included people who were not actually siblings, but who shared another very strong connection such as religion, ethnic background, etc. How would you express **my brother** to mean a sibling or fellow member of one’s family but can also include someone viewed as brotherly because of common beliefs or shared group identity?

  

**sins against me** When people disobey God’s commands, they often do wrong against other people. How would you express **sins against me** to mean does something wrong against me?

  

**Not seven times, but 70 times seven!** Jesus was not talking about an exact number. He was saying that we should forgive people every time they sin against us. How would you express **Not seven times, but 70 times seven!** to mean you should not forgive only seven times, rather you should forgive 70 times seven times?

  

#### 29-02

**The kingdom of God is like** God rules over people as King. Jesus used a story of a king and his servants to show how God rules over people and what it is like to be under God’s rule. How would you express **The kingdom of God is like** to mean the way God rules people can be compared to?

  

**to settle accounts with his servants** In this story, one servant owed the king a large debt. The king wanted to collect the debts his servants owed him. How would you express **to settle accounts with his servants** to mean to have the servant repay the king the money he borrowed from the king?

  

**huge debt** The servant owed the king a very large sum of money. This debt was so large that it was near impossible for the servant to repay the king the full amount. How would you express **huge debt** to mean an enormous amount of money owed to someone else?

  

#### 29-03

**Sell this man and his family as slaves** The king commanded that the man and his family be made slaves and sold for money so that he could repay his debt to the king. How would you express **Sell this man and his family as slaves** as a command hand over the man and his family to become slavery (forced servitude) in exchange for money?

  

**to pay his debt** The reason the man would be sold was so that the money received from selling him could pay part of what he owed to they king. How would you express **to pay his debt** to mean to pay back the money he owed to the king?

  

#### 29-04

**fell on his knees** The servant rapidly came down on his knees before the king. It does not mean he fell down accidentally. This was a way to show his humility and his desire for the king to help him. How would you express **fell on his knees** to mean quickly knelt down on the ground?

  

**felt pity** The king felt compassion on the servant. The king knew that the servant and his family would suffer greatly if they were sold into slavery. How would you express **felt pity** to mean felt sorry for hardship, pain, or misfortune someone would suffer?

  

**canceled all of his debt** The king said that the servant did not need to pay back any of the money that he owed the king. Because the servant no longer owed the king money, the servant was free to go and would not be sold into slavery. How would you express **canceled all of his debt** to mean the king abolished/eliminated the servants debt and did not make him repay the money he owed the king?

  

#### 29-05

**a fellow servant** The king had more than one servant. In fact, he had many servants. Both servants in this part of the story were of similar rank before the king. How would you express **a fellow servant** to mean another man who was also a servant of the king?

  

**Pay me the money that you owe me!** The servant commanded his fellow servant to repay the money that he borrowed from him. How would you express **Pay me the money that you owe me!** to mean repay his debt by giving back to the servant the four month’s wage he had borrowed?

  

#### 29-06

**Please be patient with me** The fellow servant asked for the servant to give him some time so he could pay back the debt in full. That is, How would you express **Please be patient with me** as a polite and humble plea to not punish him but allow him time pay back the full amount of money he owed the other servant?

  

**threw his fellow servant into prison** The servant had his fellow servant put in prison because of his debt. The servant forcefully put his fellow servant in prison. How would you express **threw his fellow servant into prison** to mean forcefully had the man put into prison.

#### 29-07

**what had happened** The servant had refused to cancel the other servant’s debt and had put him into prison. How would you express **what had happened** to mean the thing the servant did by not canceling his debt and throwing him into prison?

  

**greatly disturbed** Other servants observed what the one servant did to his fellow servant. This caused the other servants to be deeply saddened and upset over what happened. How would you express **greatly disturbed** to mean deeply grieved or very distressed?

  

**everything** The other servants reported to the king how the one servant refused to cancel the debt of his fellow servant and put him in prison. How would you express **everything** to mean they told the king what the servant had done to his fellow servant?

  

#### 29-08

**called the servant** The king had authority to command people to do things. They king ordered his guards to bring the servant to him. How would you express **called the servant** to mean commanded the servant to come to him?

  

**You wicked servant!** The king called the servant evil. He made a strong statement to emphasize how unrighteous the servant was. How would you express **You wicked servant!** as a strong statement that emphasizes that the servant is very evil and morally bad?

  

**begged me** The one servant pleaded with the king to show him pity and compassion. How would you express **begged me** to mean urgently asked me to be merciful?

  

**You should have done the same** The king told the servant that the right thing to do was to forgive his fellow servant of his smaller debt because the king had forgiven his much larger debt. How would you express **You should have done the same** to mean you should have forgiven the man who owed you, just as I forgave you?

  

#### 29-09

**This is what my heavenly Father will do to every one of you** Jesus said that God would punish people who did not forgive others of sins done against them. How would you express **This is what my heavenly Father will do to every one of you** to mean God would punish people in the same way the king punished the unforgiving servant if they did not forgive others of wrongs done against them?

  

**forgive your brother from your heart** Here the heart represents a person’s inner being. Jesus taught that his servants needed to genuinely and honestly forgive others of the debts/wrongs they have done. If they did not forgive others in this way, God would punish them in a similar way to how the king punished the unforgiving servant. How would you express **forgive your brother from your heart** to mean sincerely pardon fellow persons of the wrong they have committed against you?

  

## 2 Theological Dialogue: Discussing the Meaning of the Story

Take time to explore the meaning of this story together as a community. Use the following discussions as a way to grasp what truth the story teaches.

### 2.1 Discourse Questions

##### How does Jesus use the idea of debt to explain sin? (29-01, 29-02, 29-03, 29-05)

##### What does Jesus teach his disciples about offering forgiveness to others who sin against us? (29-01, 29-08, 29-09)

##### What does Jesus teach about how one receives forgiveness? (29-03, 29-04)

##### How does Jesus warn his disciples about not forgiving others when God has forgiven them? (29-05 ,29-02, 29-03, 29-06, 29-07, 29-08, 29-09)

### 2.2 Theological Questions

Answer the following theology questions as a community. Discuss what truths this story teaches.

1. How is sin like a debt before God and others? How does this story compare sin to a debt?
2. What does real forgiveness look like? In this story, what picture does Jesus give of real forgiveness?
3. What is the connection between receiving forgiveness from God and offering forgiveness to others? How does this story highlight this relationship?

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## 3 Personal Reflection: Following the Teaching of the Story

Take a moment to allow this story to evaluate your own life and to consider how God would have you respond. After this reflection, use the quality checking questions to check your translation draft among the translation team.

### 3.1 Journal Reflection

Prayerfully think about the following personal reflection questions. Write/Record your answers and/or discuss them as a group.

1. Reflect on how massive your sin is before God? How is your own sin before God like a debt impossible to pay back?
2. To what extent have you experienced God’s forgiveness of your sin?
3. In what ways is God calling you to offer forgiveness to others who have sinned against you?
4. What makes forgiveness hard for you?

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