

Story 7: The Unmerciful Servant

This Bible study focuses on a passage in the Gospel of Matthew in the New Testament.
Stories that Make You Think:

Matthew 18:21-35

Objective:

To understand the principle that God treats us according to the way we treat others. If we forgive others the wrongs they have done us, our Father in heaven will also forgive us.

Introductory Questions:

Jesus talked a lot about forgiving other people for the wrongs they do to us. He exemplified forgiveness when he died on a Roman cross, praying "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." What does the word forgiveness mean?

1. Do you have a similar word in your language?
2. Is forgiveness highly valued in your culture?

Introduction:

When Jesus taught his followers how to pray, his model prayer for our relationships with other people went like this:

"Forgive us the wrongs we have done, as we forgive the wrongs that others have done to us."

He reemphasized this point to his followers after teaching them how to pray by saying:

"If you forgive others the wrongs they have done to you, your Father in heaven will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive the wrongs you have done."

Jesus made the same point at another time in a memorable story about a servant who did not know how to practice forgiveness.

Reading the Passage:

Have the group read the passage has a role play. Assign the following parts:

- Peter
- Jesus
- Servant
- Second Servant
- King

Have the group read the passage silently to find out their lines. Then have the group read the passage aloud.

Questions:

Matthew 18:21-22 - The Question

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Like so many other times, Jesus told a story in response to a question. In this instance, the question came from Jesus' follower, Peter. Teachers in Jesus' time said that you should forgive your brother up to three or four times. Peter asked if he should forgive his brother seven times.

1. What answer do you think Peter was expecting when he asked Jesus if he should forgive his brother up to seven times?
2. Peter's question shows that he had already learned something about forgiveness. What does his question imply that he already knew?

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3. How many times did Jesus say we should forgive?
4. What do you think his answer means?

Matthew 18:22-35 - The Story

1. Jesus says this story represents what God's kingdom is like. Who do you think the king represents in the story?
2. Who do the servants represent?
3. Whom do you think Jesus wants us to identify with in the story?

4. What is your reaction to the king?
5. What kind of person is he and how would you characterize him? Do you like him? Why or why not?
6. How did you react to the servant who showed no mercy?
7. Do you think the king's judgment on him was just?

Thought Questions:

1. Why do you think Jesus told this story to Peter?
2. What did he want to happen in Peter's life?
3. If this story represents God's kingdom, it implies that Jesus believed people owe a great debt to God that he is willing to forgive. What debt would people owe to God that would need forgiveness?
4. Based on what you learned from this story, would you say God's forgiveness of us is limited or unlimited? Conditional or unconditional?
5. How about our forgiveness of others?
6. Why do you think Jesus wants us to forgive others for the wrongs they have done for us?
7. What are the alternatives practiced by people who do not forgive?
8. What effects does not practicing forgiveness have on our lives?
9. Describe the type of person you think needs to hear this story the most.
10. What are some practical examples of situations in modern life where we can put forgiveness into practice?

Closing:

Ask for any thoughts or questions on what Jesus said about forgiveness. Close with a prayer asking for help in forgiving other people as he forgives us.