

*Mondovi: Our Savior's, Gilmanton & Montana: Salem United Methodist Churches  
9.13.2026, 16th Sunday after Pentecost, Rev. Hyuntae Kim, Ph.D.*

## The Grace of Forgiveness

Matthew 18:21–35

Let us pray: Father God, because we have been forgiven by your grace, help us also to forgive others. We open our hearts to receive your Word that pours out the power of forgiveness and love. We pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, rose again, and sent the Holy Spirit. Amen.

A pastor once asked the congregation during a sermon, “If there is anyone here who has never disliked or been upset with someone, please raise your hand.” Of course, no one raised a hand. So the pastor asked again, “Really, no one?” Then the oldest man in the congregation raised his hand. Surprised, the pastor said, “You mean there isn’t a single person you have ever hated or disliked?” The old man replied, “I used to have many, but they all passed away, so now there’s no one left.”

Today, just as we did last week, we listen to the Lord teaching us about forgiveness.

Our passage begins with the words “at that time.” What time was that? It was when the Lord had just taught that the one who becomes like a little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, that the Father’s will is to seek the one lost sheep, and that we should pray even for a brother who seems like a pagan or a tax collector. At that time, Peter came and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?”

When I read this verse, I found myself wondering how many sins I have committed in my lifetime. Romans 14:23 says, “Everything that does not come from faith is sin.” When I think about all the things I have done out of human reasoning, the things I did carelessly without faith, and even the sins committed in my thoughts, I cannot count them. No one can ever be completely free from sin.

Forgiveness means giving up the full rights of a creditor. Salvation is the complete cancellation of our debt of sin, the act of being forgiven. So if we have been saved, forgiveness is not optional. It is essential.

In the days of Jesus, the rabbis taught that a person should forgive up to three times. But Peter came and suggested seven times, the Hebrew number of completeness. Since his answer more than doubled the accepted standard, he probably expected to be praised. He probably felt proud of himself when he thought he was being generous in forgiveness. Yet because Peter had the courage to ask, we are able to learn from this passage today. Peter still did not understand the true nature of forgiveness. Once you start counting, forgiveness is no longer forgiveness. None of you take out a notebook every time your child does something wrong and say, “This is number 490.” Counting means you have no intention of forgiving. It only means you are postponing revenge.

Jesus speaks of forgiving seventy times seven, 490 times, but that does not mean you may retaliate on the 491st. No one can actually count that far. So the Lord is saying, “Let it go. Forget it.” But that is exactly what we find so difficult, and it becomes an obstacle for those of us who want to walk the path of discipleship. This is a doorway every disciple must pass through.

The first step we must take is to acknowledge and confess that forgiveness is not a natural trait within us. You may think you have forgotten something, but it was only sitting quietly at the bottom of your heart.

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When something stirs it up again, the memory and the feeling rise to the surface just as they were. We have all experienced this. Forgiveness is impossible by our own strength. That is why God first allows us to experience his limitless forgiveness. When we remember, through the grace of the cross, that we are sinners who have been forgiven, then we are able to forgive others.

There was a young man who carried deep bitterness because of the violence he had suffered at home and at school since childhood. He grew up without a father, under a strict single mother, and he felt a painful absence of a father in his life. Because of that, he could not call God "Father." He felt no connection at all. Realizing how desperately he needed healing in his inner life, he followed the teaching of a Christian counselor and began writing in a notebook all the abuse and deprivation he had experienced. He decided to bring those things before God and face them honestly. Painful wounds do not disappear simply because we pretend they are not there.

In a prayer room, he read through the notebook and prayed to God. As he prayed, he poured out all his pain just as David did, without hiding anything. The wounds hurt deeply. But as time passed, he found that when he read the same events again, they no longer affected him. He had forgiven, and he was set free. It was because he had fixed his eyes on the Lord.

To help Peter and the disciples understand, the Lord tells a parable. The parable begins with the words "the kingdom of heaven is like." This means that forgiveness is the way of life for the people of the kingdom. "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants." One servant owed him ten thousand talents. This amount was the equivalent of the wages earned by sixty million people working for one day. If one person worked three hundred days a year, he would need two hundred thousand years to repay that debt. So ten thousand talents was a debt impossible for any human being to repay.

When the master demanded repayment, the servant said, "Be patient with me, and I will pay back everything." It was an empty promise made out of desperation. Yet the master, moved with compassion, forgave the servant's enormous debt.

When this man met a fellow servant who owed him a hundred denarii, he grabbed him by the collar and demanded repayment. A hundred denarii was the wage for one hundred days of labor, so it was a debt that could realistically be repaid. His fellow servant's plea, "Be patient with me, and I will pay it back," was sincere. It was not an empty promise like the one he himself had made. But he showed no mercy and threw his fellow servant into prison. To repay the debt, the man would need to work, yet he was not even given the chance to do that.

How could he act this way after receiving such great compassion? Perhaps he was simply relieved to escape punishment and never truly felt gratitude. If he had genuinely been thankful, he would have passed on the grace he had received to his fellow servant.

The other servants saw what happened and reported everything to the king. When we live without forgiveness, people around us notice. Such a life cannot bring good influence. It carries not the fragrance of heaven but the stench of hell. When the king heard what had happened, he was deeply offended. He

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summoned the servant and said, "Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?" Then he handed him over to be imprisoned.

The Lord adds the heart of the parable at the end. "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart." Jesus says that our heavenly Father will place us in a prison. What is this prison? If we are saved Christians, this prison is not hell. It is the dark space within our own souls where we lock ourselves in. It is a prison of the heart. When we leave unforgiveness and hatred unattended in the room of our hearts, we become trapped there. It is a place that grieves the Holy Spirit and a place where the devil dances. Even though we belong to the kingdom of heaven, we end up living as if we were in hell.

Look at 1 John 2:11. "Anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them." When we hate a brother or sister, our spiritual discernment becomes clouded. We cannot hear God's voice clearly. Even when we pray, we struggle to receive his guidance. It is like a computer infected with a virus.

This servant gave the devil an opportunity because he received grace but did not give thanks. The devil clings to a soul that refuses gratitude. This is why we must cultivate the habit of expressing thanks to the Lord from the moment we open our eyes in the morning until we lie down at night, remembering the grace of the cross. It is how we guard our own hearts.

According to research by counseling psychologists, the more we dwell on a wound, the harder it becomes to forgive. The devil tries to make us meditate on the hurt itself over and over. But if we simply ignore it and cover it up, it eventually festers and bursts. The pain continues. This is why, as I mentioned earlier, we must bring our wounds to Jesus, just as that young man did. When we stand in the room of our hearts where hatred resides and look directly at the person inside that room, forgiveness feels impossible. But when we think of Jesus first and then look at that person briefly, we find that forgiveness becomes possible. Healing happens when we acknowledge the wound and bring it before Jesus.

A memory we refuse to forgive is like drinking a drop of poison every day. Because God loves us, he has given us the astonishing prescription of forgiveness. When the heart becomes sick, the body also suffers. Not every illness comes from unforgiveness, but whenever I am sick, I ask the Lord whether there is something I have not repented of or someone I have not forgiven. If something comes to mind, I always pray to repent and forgive.

Forgiveness sets our souls free. 1 John 2:10 says, "Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble." To have nothing that causes stumbling means there is no foothold for the devil, no opening for him to attack.

We often confuse forgiveness with reconciliation, but they are not the same. God has forgiven the world, yet not everyone has reconciled with him. The grace of the cross has the power to forgive every person, but not everyone acknowledges their sin or receives that grace. When the forgiveness that has been offered is received and met with repentance, reconciliation takes place.

Forgiveness is the first step, and reconciliation is the second. By the power of the blood of the cross, we step out of the prison of hatred, and we release the other person as well. We stop condemning and choose to forgive first. The rest, the reconciliation, is placed in God's hands.

Colossians 3:13 says, "Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you." We carry a selfish memory. We easily forget the hurt we have caused others, yet we remember vividly the hurt we have received. We are people who are wounded, but we also wound others without realizing it. This is why, the closer we draw to the Lord spiritually, the more we find ourselves praying prayers of repentance. The stronger the light becomes, the more clearly we see how much within us needs to be washed away and how much poison needs to be removed.

Matthew 18 is about the church, the body of Christ. The church is the gathering of people who must forgive seventy times seven, and who must also be forgiven seventy times seven. Forgiveness becomes possible not by focusing on the other person, but by seeing our own sin.

There is a story from a Christian family in Korea. The husband had fallen into adultery, gambling, and drug addiction, and the entire family suffered for many years. His wife struggled with severe depression and panic disorder. In the midst of this, she was led to a church community that shared Scripture meditation together. As she received the nurture of the Word in that community, she began to interpret her suffering through Scripture, and the deep wounds within her were healed. Her symptoms disappeared as well. Above all, she realized that although she said with her mouth that she loved God, in reality she had worshiped money as an idol. She repented of that sin. Once she came to know deeply the forgiveness and love of her heavenly Father, she was finally able to forgive her husband not only seven times, but seventy times seven, just as Jesus taught. She also came to believe that God would stop her husband's addictions.

Later, her husband joined the same community and, as he listened to the Word, he was set free from his addictions. Today he runs a rehabilitation center for people struggling with drug addiction. As he nurtures them with Scripture every morning, not only are these people coming to salvation, but also their families.

Now, we will pray a prayer of forgiveness. This is an example and a practice. Today, as each of us remembers how God has forgiven us, who is the person we must have compassion on and forgive? As I read the prayer, please insert the names of the people you need to forgive and pray aloud with your lips. The devil hears the declaration of your lips, and it becomes the power that breaks his chains. Remove the influence of the devil from your life. Relying on the blood of Jesus on the cross and the power of his grace, let us pray together.

Father, I forgive those people for hurting me. Separate this sin from them and put it on the cross, never to be held against them again. Father, bless them.

I ask your forgiveness for the anger, bitterness, and unforgiveness in my heart against them. I receive your forgiveness. Thank you, Father. In Jesus' name. Amen.