

## **Jesus Provides STRENGTH for Forgiveness** **Matthew 18:21-35**

**Questions:** Today I want to ask you some difficult, yet hopefully probing and thought-provoking questions...(Please answer these questions privately...cover your answer.)

### Forgiveness Scale

- (1) The most painful experience in my life was \_\_\_\_\_.  
Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ In Process \_\_\_
  
- (2) The most recent painful experience in my life has been \_\_\_\_\_.  
Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ In Process \_\_\_
  
- (3) The one person who has hurt me the deepest is \_\_\_\_\_.  
Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ In Process \_\_\_

Now take a close look at how you have answered these questions...Because if you have taken this seriously and answered these questions honestly they may very well serve as a “Spiritual Barometer” for you today, to tell you where you are and how you are doing spiritually.

You see, one of the most subtle enemies to your spiritual well-being is a “spirit of unforgiveness.” If there is anyone or anything in your life that has offended you, and you have been either unwilling or unable to forgive that person or that group of persons, then you are “STUCK” spiritually today.

**NOTE:** A lot of people know they are stuck spiritually. But they don’t know why. For many their reason is because somewhere in their lives they were hurt or offended by someone and they have refused to deal with that hurt and forgive the person or persons who perpetrated the offense. They have been stuck spiritually ever since.

**Question:** You’re asking....“Can unforgiveness in my life, have a negative impact on my entire church family?” And the answer is a resounding, haunting “YES.” **Heb. 12:15** says a “bitter root” will “trouble you and defile many.”

Unforgiveness in our life will grieve the Holy Spirit and quench the Holy Spirit. And our goal today is to use the word of God and get “UNSTUCK.”

There are a number of people today who have been hurt or offended in their life. And the truth is, you are not really over it yet today.

Many have responded to the hurt or offense in the typical way our selfish human flesh urges us to respond...Some of those typical responses might be:

- (1) To just try to ignore the offense and go on doing the best you can.
- (2) To actively seek revenge or in some way try to return the hurt upon the person who inflicted it upon you.
- (3) Stay angry at the person who hurt you and cut off fellowship with them.
- (4) Refuse to forgive them unconditionally because they have not asked for forgiveness nor do they really deserve your forgiveness.

Jesus told a very pointed parable that deals with the issue of forgiveness and let's read that parable as a starting point today. Before we do, let's take time to pray and ask the Holy Spirit to show us any unforgiveness that may be in our lives.

### **Text Matthew 18:21-35**

21 Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?”

22 Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

23 “Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants.

24 As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him.

25 Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

26 “The servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’

27 The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

28 “But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded.

29 “His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.’

30 “But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.

31 When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.

32 “Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to.

33 Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’

34 In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

35 “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.”

I believe one of the greatest illustrations of unconditional forgiveness I have ever heard about was following the trial of Raymond Johnson in Denver, CO. He was the young man who was convicted of killing young 3-year old Casson Evans in a drive-by shooting incident. Raymond Johnson was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole for little Casson’s murder.

The most astounding thing in this whole trial was the statement made by Sharletta Evans, Casson’s mother. She is a very committed Christian. Let me read to you her statement at the sentencing:

***DENVER POST*** - NEWS ARTICLE, Sat., August 17, 1996—p. 1A)  
Casson's mother, Sharletta Evans, said the one thing that hurt just as much as losing her son was the toll the murder took on her family.

"My son has been deprived of a brother, a playmate, a friend, and the love and responsibility that comes with being a big brother. I took pride in teaching them to honor and respect one another as brothers," she said.

"I asked the Lord what in the world could he possibly give me to replace the loss of my son, and he told me nothing in this world. But he could give me himself because he is the only thing bigger and better than life," Evans said.

"I pray that Raymond Johnson will find the Lord because that way he will find the value of life. Our lives is God's gift to us, and everyone's life is valuable, even yours, Raymond.

This woman has discovered the secret to true freedom. It would be very easy to live with unrelenting bitterness and unforgiveness for the rest of her life.

I don't know of anything more severe or painful than to have one of your children murdered pointlessly in a random act of violence.

Had Sharletta Evans chosen to stay bitter and angry at Raymond Johnson, she would be in a prison just as real and confining as the prison cell in which Raymond Johnson will spend the rest of his life. It would be a self-imposed prison of unforgiveness, hatred and bitterness.

In the parable we just read, Jesus told of a wicked servant who refused to forgive a minor infraction or debt that was owed to him, regardless of the fact that he himself had just been forgiven of an immeasurable debt against him. And the punishment that he received for refusing to forgive the debt was that he was "IMPRISONMENT" and "TORTURE."

Please understand, there is no prison or no torture more confining or more painful than the self-imposed prison and torture of bitterness and unforgiveness.

There are scores and scores of people who are truly living in a self-imposed prison of unforgiveness and bitterness.

They are stuck in that self-imposed prison today, locked in tight to:

- Anger
- Hurt
- Painful memories
- Bitterness
- Depression
- Secret desires for revenge

And the only way you are going to get out of that emotional prison today is to forgive the person or persons who have hurt you.

**UNCONDITIONAL FORGIVENESS IS YOUR ONLY KEY TO  
TRUE FREEDOM!!**

### BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES RELATED TO FORGIVENESS

#### 1. DEFINITION OF FORGIVENESS:

"Forgiveness is the willful act of CANCELING a DEBT that is owed to you as the result of a personal INJURY."

You see, forgiveness involves 3 elements:

- (1) The element of personal INJURY.
- (2) The element of DEBT resulting from that personal injury.
- (3) The element of CANCELING the debt that is owed to you.

**BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATION:** Is that not exactly what Jesus is explaining in this parable we just read? He tells of a just and merciful king who canceled an enormous debt to a man who had no possible means of repaying that debt. This man had embezzled the king's money and the debt was owed but canceled.

Then Jesus tells how this same man who has just been forgiven of an immeasurable debt turns right around and refuses to extend the same spirit of grace he had just received. He refuses to cancel another man of an extremely small, insignificant, trivial debt that was owed him.

**NOTE:** When we refuse to forgive...It is kind of like taking a person hostage.

**HOSTAGE ILLUSTRATION:** When a person is taken as a hostage on the international scene, the abductors usually want something...The message they send, in essence is, "If you give us what we want, we will give you back what we have taken." There is always some type of condition, a ransom of some sort.

When individuals refuse to forgive others for a wrong done to them, they are saying the same thing. But instead of holding people hostage until they get their demands, they withhold love, acceptance, respect, service, kindness, patience, or whatever the others value. The message they send is this: "until I feel you have repaid me for the wrong done to me, you will not have my acceptance.".....the element missing from this scenario is *cancellation of the debt*. Persons who refuse to forgive refuse to cancel the debt." (*The Gift Of Forgiveness*, Charles Stanley—p.16-17)

2. The burden of forgiveness always falls on ME because I have been FORGIVEN.
  - a. What is the whole point of this parable?...It is simply this, "I have been forgiven of an enormous debt that I could never possible repay. And because God has freely canceled the huge sin debt I have against him..."

I am always obligated to forgive everyone who owes me any debt. No debt owed to me could possibly compare to the enormous debt that I had to God.”

### **EXPLANATION OF PARABLE:**

- This parable tells of a servant who had embezzled an enormous amount of a king’s money.
- The amount he embezzled is described as “10,000 talents.”
- Historical documents from that day reveal the annual revenue collected by the Roman government from Idumea, Judea, Samaria, and Galilee was about 900 talents. Based on the figures, 10,000 talents represents 11 years of taxation from 4 provinces.
- The word for “ten thousand” comes from the Greek word *MURIAS*. While it does mean literally “ten thousand” it also was used figuratively to represent a vast, unaccountable number. In that sense it has the same connotation as the English word that is derived from it...*MYRIAD*. It means an “Incalculable and unpayable debt.” (*Matthew*, John MacArthur—p. 148)
- In the economy of the day a talent was equal to 6,000 denarii. The average laborer earned 6 denarii a week. It would take the average laborer 1,000 weeks to earn even 1 talent.
- To pay a debt of 10,000 talents would take the average person something over 1 million years to pay off if he paid the king every cent he made during that time.
- The obvious point is this debt was an impossible debt to pay off.
- The king simply canceled this astronomical debt.
- Then this same fellow turned around and refused to cancel a debt of 100 denarii that was owed to him....Remember 100 denarii is 1/600,000 (one six hundred thousandth) of the debt that had just been forgiven him.
- The point is that while this servant may have had a LEGAL right to hold this creditor to his debt of 100 denarii....He had no MORAL right to hold him to that debt because of the gargantuan debt that had just been forgiven him.
- The point is God has canceled our sin debt against Him. We had a debt against him so enormous there is not a one of us that could possibly repay it. In fact if every human being on this planet consolidated all their “Righteous Resources” together, we would not have enough to pay the sin ransom for even one person. And yet God has freely forgiven us...Therefore, we have a moral and spiritual obligation to always forgive everyone who ever owes any kind of sin debt to us...There is no debt anyone can possibly owe us that compares to the debt we owed against God.

- b. This is why the Bible repeatedly tells us that the burden of forgiveness always falls upon us...Because we have been forgiven of so much.

**Col. 2:13** says “God forgave us all our sins, (14) having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us’ he took it away, nailing it to the cross.”

**Eph 4:32**

32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

**Col 3:13**

13 Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

- c. You see, as a forgiven child of God you never have any right not to forgive others.
- d. We have no right to maintain a grudge, to harbor bitterness or unforgiveness.

3. Genuine forgiveness is always UNCONDITIONAL.

- a. It makes no difference who is right and who is wrong...You see in our forgiveness, God was right and we were wrong, yet He forgave us.
- b. It makes no difference who is the OFFENDER and who is the OFFENDED...You see in our forgiveness, we were the offender and God was the offended yet He forgave us.
- c. It makes no difference whether the person who is indebted to us **DESERVES** to be forgiven or not...You see in our forgiveness, we did not deserve to be forgiven, yet God forgave us.
- d. It makes no difference how **GREAT THE INJUSTICE OR INJURY**...You see, there is no injustice or injury that could possibly be perpetrated against us that comes close to comparing to the injustice and injury we have inflicted on Holy God....Yet He forgave us.

- e. It makes no difference HOW OFTEN the individual repeats the offensive action against us...For you see, no one could possibly offend us as often as we have offended Holy God, and yet He forgave us.

**NOTE:** That is exactly what Jesus is trying to teach Peter in **Mt. 18:21-22**.

**Matt 18:21-22**

21 Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?”

22 Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

- f. It makes no difference whether the OFFENDER ASKS FOR FORGIVENESS or not...You see, God nailed our sins to the cross of his Son, Jesus Christ, before we had ever asked for His mercy or forgiveness.
  - g. Our forgiveness is always unconditional you see because...The forgiveness we have received from Holy God is an unconditional forgiveness.
4. Jesus both MODELED forgiveness and He MINISTERS forgiveness.
- a. Did Jesus not model forgiveness for us and to us in His earthly ministry?
    - He taught us to forgive.
    - Jesus taught us to pray,

**Matt 6:12**

12 Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

**Mark 11:25**

25 And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”

Jesus demonstrated and modeled this kind of unconditional forgiveness on the cross. Remember what He prayed?

**Luke 23:34**

34 Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

- b. Jesus practiced and modeled forgiveness during his entire earthly ministry...And now Jesus wants to continue to practice the ministry of forgiveness through us.
- c. Jesus will minister forgiveness through us continually, as He reproduces His life in us and through us.

**2 Cor 5:14-19**

14 For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.

15 And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

16 So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:

19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

- d. When you refuse to unconditionally forgive a person for an offense...You are living and acting in open rebellion and resistance to the person of Christ who lives in you.
- e. Christ continues in you the life He has always lived...It is a life of unconditional forgiveness.
- f. When someone hurts or offends you...the Holy Spirit is prompting you to immediately forgive that person...Because this is the response of Christ Himself.
- g. There is no offense so great against you that Jesus cannot forgive through you. You may not be able to forgive it in your own strength....But Jesus helps you forgive.
- h. You know what...It's been my experience that the Holy Spirit will absolutely not let me go on angry and unforgiving toward someone. I mean as soon as someone hurts my feelings, immediately something inside of me

begins to whisper...“You have to forgive that person because Jesus Christ has forgiven you, and what they have done to you is not nearly as horrible as what you did to Christ.”

- i. If you can go on in a constant state of anger and unforgiveness toward someone and it does not bother you...You have good reason to question whether or not you are really saved.
- j. Listen, this is what it means to “Have the mind of Christ.” (1 Cor.2:16) We have been learning for weeks now that as a believer you already possess the mind of Christ. To have the mind of Christ means you:
  - Think as Christ thinks.
  - View every situation as Christ views it.
  - You have the same attitude as Christ.
  - You take the same perspective as Christ.

Now let me ask you something....Does Jesus Christ ever hold a grudge?? Does He not always, instantly forgive. This is the Christ we know. And Christ will minister this same attitude in you when you allow Him to do so....Getting self out of the way.

5. Unconditional forgiveness is your only protection against developing a heart of BITTERNESS.
  - a. There is not a one of us here who does not have the potential of becoming a bitter person.
  - b. This is why the Bible gives us such a clear and stern warning about guarding our hearts against the development of a “root of bitterness.”

### **Heb 12:14-15**

14 Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.

15 See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.

- c. Let’s look at the root of bitterness:

- (1) A root of bitterness lies beneath the surface where it is unseen.  
(suppressed anger)
- (2) A root of bitterness never remains dormant.  
(left unmolested it grows and spreads)
- (3) A root of bitterness “troubles you” and it “defiles many people around you.”
- (4) A root of bitterness grows larger and becomes more deeply imbedded the longer it is allowed to grow.

**Ex.** Small sprouts that spring up along my fence are easily removed and leave little damage behind. But a full grown tree is a major thing to remove and leaves a huge hole behind.

- (5) A root of bitterness will eventually produce a surface plant that bears no resemblance to the root itself:
  - anger
  - hostility
  - shyness
  - coldness
  - cynicism
  - extroversion
  - introversion
  - depression
  - spiritual stagnation
  - indifference

It may produce the physical fruit of:

- ulcers
- high blood pressure
- heart disease
- hypertension
- chronic fatigue
- colitis
- headaches

The only way to stop the growth is to extract the root through unconditional forgiveness. (Quit excusing yourself for being mad and harboring unforgiveness.)

- d. Listen, unresolved anger, bitterness is the most dangerous, deadly emotion you possess. **Heb. 12:15** says it will “trouble you and defile many.”

**Ex.** Dr. Adrian Rogers tells of “An ancient Roman story....The soldiers of Caesar became dissatisfied with their regimen and rations. They could not complain to Caesar, so they became angry with the gods. So, many of them shot their arrows toward the heavens, hoping to hit the gods. Several of the soldiers were wounded or killed as their own arrows, with high velocity, fell back upon their heads. What an apt illustration of what bitterness does to a person.”

- e. If you do not want your own arrows of bitterness to fall back on your head, then you must forgive all who have ever offended you...No matter what the offense may be.
  - f. And by the way, if you want your heart to be protected from ever becoming bitter...You must learn to forgive offenses INSTANTLY or IMMEDIATELY. The longer you let the anger simmer...the harder it is to extract it from your mind and heart.
6. Forgiveness can become a WAY OF LIFE when it is practiced regularly and consistently.
- a. I think all of us understand how anger and unforgiveness can quickly become a habit, a pattern of life, a way of living. All of us have met angry people.
    - Anger is all they have known all their lives.
    - The only way they know how to respond to offenses and interruptions is to get angry or explode.
    - Their anger is a stronghold....It is a way of life.
  - b. I believe that forgiveness can also become a pattern of living, a life-habit when it is practiced regularly and consistently.
  - c. When you start learning how to forgive people who offend you, and you discipline yourself to depend upon the Holy Spirit to practice immediate forgiveness whenever you are hurt or threatened....It won't be long until this becomes a way of life.

**2 Cor. 5:17**, says “If any man be in Christ he is a new creation. Old things are passed away behold all things are become brand new.”

7. Your flesh will always RESIST you when it comes to exercising forgiveness.
  - a. Can I tell you that there has never been a time when I forgave someone because down deep inside I really wanted to.
  - b. Every time I have ever forgiven someone its not been because I WANTED to....Its been because I NEEDED to.
  - c. I don't know about you, but my flesh never cooperates with me in doing what I know to be the right, godly and spiritual thing to do.
  - d. Therefore, whenever I have had to forgive someone in my heart. It has always had to be a sheer act of faith, carried out by my will. My emotions seldom cooperate.
  - e. You see, my flesh and my emotions tell me, “I am perfectly justified in feeling so angry and hurt. I have a right to be angry. If I forgive the person who has offended me it will “let them off the hook” too easily, it will let them off before they have been made to pay adequate compensation and restitution to me for what they have done to me.”
  - f. But my Bible says, I never have the right to hold a grudge and go on angry and unforgiving toward anyone....No matter what they have done to me.
  - g. So who am I going to believe and obey...I don't know about you, but I have learned I can't trust my own flesh and my emotions, therefore, I have decided I am going to trust the Word of God by faith.
  - h. I know many of you are being dealt with by the Spirit of God today to let go of a grudge you have been nursing for a long, long time...But everything inside of you is resisting letting go of that grudge, or that deep hurt.
    - Your pride won't let you forgive.
    - Your emotions won't let you forgive.
    - Your reasoning processes won't let you forgive.

- i. You see, to forgive someone who has truly injured you, someone who maybe has not asked your forgiveness or who does not deserve your forgiveness...To do such a thing is contrary to every natural tendency within us.
  - j. That is why you have to understand that genuine forgiveness is always a supernatural thing. It does not come naturally. You cannot do it apart from Christ...But with Christ in you, you must do it.
  - k. Just know if you are not forgiving someone today....No matter what you may be telling yourself...The real reason you are not forgiving is because “self” and your “flesh” is getting in the way.
8. You can know you have truly forgiven someone unconditionally when:
- (1) The original offense is no longer a constant mental IRRITATION.
    - You can know you have forgiven someone when the thing they did or said to you is no longer gnawing at you mentally.
    - When you no longer think about it constantly and it no longer bothers you. (This does not mean you will necessarily FORGET the infraction that was perpetrated against you...I think God has the capacity to forget our sins against Him)...But you will no longer dwell on it day and night, and when you do think about it you no longer feel hatred or anger.)
    - You can know you have forgiven the person who offended you when you stop secretly fantasizing about:
      - Letting the air out of their tires
      - Scratching their eyes out
      - Writing them anonymous hate letters
      - Burning their house down
  - (2) Fellowship with the offender is completely RESTORED.
    - You can know you have truly forgiven the person who offended you when you can see that person, and no longer feel spite or contempt for them.

- When you desire to have friendship and fellowship together once again.

**NOTE:** There will be some rare and extreme exceptions to this principle. For instance if you have been the subject of someone's physical or sexual abuse, it may be wise to never expose yourself to the possibility of their violence or abuse again. You may never be able to risk a normal relationship with them because of their abusive behavior.

But in your mind you have still forgiven them and you no longer think of them in terms of revenge or fear. You have released them.

- But I want to say that under most normal circumstances and certainly in the blood-bought church of Jesus Christ, fellowship must be restored to full measure. There is never an acceptable excuse for a breach in fellowship within the Body of Christ.
- I believe this...If you cannot enjoy fellowship with someone, then the forgiveness is not complete.

**ILLUSTRATED IN PAUL AND MARK...**I think there is a beautiful illustration of fellowship being restored between two estranged brothers in the lives of Paul and John Mark. Paul and Barnabas had taken young Mark with them on their first missionary journey. And for some unknown reason Mark abandoned them midway through the missionary journey. This evidently offended Paul, and he lost all confidence in Mark.

When Paul and Barnabas began to plan their second missionary journey, Barnabas wanted to take his nephew Mark. Paul was adamantly opposed to it. The contention became so great between them, they broke up their missionary team and went their separate ways. Barnabas took Mark with him, and Paul got a new partner named Silas. **(Acts 15:36-41)**

But the story does not end there. Somewhere, somehow Paul and John Mark are restored to full fellowship. When Paul is nearing the end of his life he specifically requests Mark to come visit him.

In **2 Tim. 4:11** Paul writes to Timothy and says, "Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry."

- Fellowship can and should be restored when at all possible!!

- (3) When you once again have a PASSION to minister and serve.
- When you fail to forgive someone...It seems that one of the first things that happens in your life is you lose your joy and passion in ministry and service.
  - You lose your desire to serve and minister.
  - I don't know exactly why this is other than the fact that a grudge is very emotionally and spiritually draining to maintain. Maybe all your joy and energy is being sapped by the unforgiveness in your heart.
  - When the forgiveness process is complete, joy will be restored to your life again and you will find a new, fresh enthusiasm for serving God and ministering to other people.
  - As long as you are nursing a grudge...You can't possibly be a giver, only a taker.
- (4) When you feel yourself GROWING SPIRITUALLY once again.
- I said to you up front, that when you fail to forgive someone who has offended you....You get "STUCK" spiritually. Your spiritual growth comes to a screeching halt.
  - You may be reading the Bible and having a quiet time, and doing all the things you used to do...but:
  - You are not growing
  - You are not hearing God speak.
  - You are not learning new spiritual truth.
  - You are not feeling the Spirit's presence.
  - You are not enjoying worship...You only go through the mechanics.
  - You are not hungering and thirsting for righteousness.
  - You are not sensing the Spirit's direction in your life.
  - You are not having your prayers answered.

If this describes your spiritual life today...The very first thing I would do is to do an "honest heart check." See if there is anyone in your life toward whom you still harbor bitter feelings.

You will stay stuck until you release that person from the grips of your grudge and totally, unconditionally forgive them.

When the forgiveness is complete...The spiritual growth will start once again.

**NOTE:** Knowing this, I have had to remind myself on occasions that there is no one or no offense worth sacrificing the joy of a growing relationship with Jesus Christ. Man listen—no grudge is worth sacrificing your spiritual growth.

9. To practice forgiveness does not mean taking a casual attitude about SIN.
  - a. Please don't confuse anything I have said today to think I am suggesting we become casual or complacent about sin in other people's lives.
  - b. To forgive someone does not mean we just "wink" at the legitimate sin issues in their lives and ignore the sin.

**REMEMBER:** In our text of **Matt. 18**, just before Jesus gave us the parable of the "Unforgiving Servant" He gave us the procedures for dealing with sin in a brother or sister's life.

**Matt 18:15-17**

15 "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.

16 But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.'

17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

- c. Jesus, the most forgiving man who ever lived was never light on sin. He told the woman taken in adultery, "Neither do I condemn thee (forgiveness), Go and sin no more." (take sin seriously)
- d. And most churches today would be far more healthy if we took sin seriously and practiced biblical church discipline.

**IN CONCLUSION... STEPS TOWARD UNCONDITIONAL FORGIVENESS:**

- (1) Intentionally RELEASE the person from the debt they owe.
  - This will be an intentional, deliberate act of the will.

- Mentally, intentional declare that person to be totally and unconditionally forgiven.
- (2) Actively seek RECONCILIATION and RESTORED fellowship.
- You need to put feet to your decision, and actively, creatively begin to rebuild the fellowship and that has been lost.
  - You will become a “minister of reconciliation.”
  - You will have to be the initiator and bear the burden for the reconciliation.
- (3) Regularly REMIND yourself that the debt has been canceled.
- You will have to rehearse your intentional, deliberate act of forgiveness over and over again
  - You see, you can say to yourself you forgive someone, and even really mean, but then the next time you see that person and they slip up in some way, chances are you are going to forget that you have forgiven them.... You will have to keep reminding yourself that the debt has been canceled.
  - The Bible calls this “RECKONING.” It simply means you take a stand of faith and then you count it to be so.
- (4) Continually RELY upon the power of the Holy Spirit each day.
- None of us have the capacity to forgive someone who has really hurt us in our own strength.
  - We must do it in the supernatural strength of the Lord.
  - Every day ask God to take the bitterness out of your heart and to give you the power to forgive those who have hurt and wounded you.
- (5) Daily REPEAT the above four steps..
- There is hardly a day that goes by but that God does not test my heart and spirit, and give me an opportunity to practice unconditional forgiveness
  - Every day something happens that can cause irritation and pain, and if I do not stay alert and in a posture to forgive every offense instantly, it

doesn't take long until I begin to be a bitter and angry person. My spiritual life begins to suffer.

- You will have opportunity nearly every day of your life to practice unconditional forgiveness.
- Just think of the wonderful difference it is going to begin to make in your life when you begin to practice unconditional forgiveness!