

Pastor Kyle Mercer
Forgiven People Forgive People

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Series: Plot Twist
Matthew 18:15-34

BIG IDEA – FORGIVEN PEOPLE FORGIVE PEOPLE

We love Reality Church. We love Carlos Lollett and his family. I told you this last time. He is the most lovable and huggable pastor in America. If you were here a couple of weeks ago, he preached for me in the *One* series, and you can see why God is blessing his church and his ministry.

We love Miami. We all wish we were in Miami right now. This is a great time of year to be in Miami. I was in Miami in April with Carlos, and I had a little bit of time. I was down there for a different event, and he said, "I've got to give you a tour of the city." Miami is huge, as you guys know. Miami has one big idol. Every city has one big idol. The one big idol in Miami is vanity. Everybody is obsessed with how they look. It's all about the external. That's hard, because Christianity is about the internal.

Anyway, he was taking me around the city, and at the time he was meeting in a movie theater. As we were in this key location in the city, he pointed to a building and said, "That building right now has an open spot. We might be able to get that building, but I don't know if we can afford it." I said, "Well, you need to get a phone call with me and Pastor Dave." We got a phone call with them, and we said, "You guys can't afford not to do this."

So, they leveraged everything they had to get into a 24/7 permanent facility, and they're now running two services that are packed, looking for a third service. So we're excited. Here's what we're going to do. They're going to be our main national partner for Hold the Rope. We talked about Hold the Rope last week. Our local partner is... We have many partners, but the partner we talked about last week was the prison ministry. Our main national partner is going to be Reality Church.

If you're new, what we like to do is whenever a church plant gets their first home, their permanent home... We like to be like the great generous parents and say, "Hey, look. Let's help you get into your first home." They leveraged everything they had to get into this building. So, we want to give them a one-time gift at the beginning of January to let them go farther faster in this new building.

So, here's what we're asking from you guys. If you're part of Two Cities... We want 100 percent participation. We want everybody here to give a one-time gift above and beyond normal tithes and offerings by the end of the year, and then we're going to call them in early January and say, "God has blessed us. We want to be a blessing to you, and we believe in what you're doing." So, I hope you'll be a part of that.

By the way, speaking of buildings and their building, we had an incredible two prayer nights Wednesday and Thursday. Who was there at that? Yes, a lot of you. So many of you came Wednesday night I thought, "Is anyone coming Thursday?" We filled up every parking lot. Then Thursday night it was packed again, hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of you praying with families and couples and Community Groups.

Listen, guys. We're still on schedule for December 17. I've used all of these different illustrations and metaphors, but if getting into this building is like launching a rocket into orbit, we turned on the engines at the prayer night. It was awesome. Thank you for being there. We're on schedule for December 17. Pray for us. It's going to be a sprint to the finish line.

I have some pictures for those of you who didn't get to see everything. Look at that with the signs on the... Oh, it looks beautiful. How about the other side? Look at that. We just sprinkled the building with a little bit of orange. Do you see it in the corners? There you go. We used that orange sparingly.

Okay. Let's go inside. Oh yes! Those orange seats are for our VIP members. I'm kidding. I'm kidding. Look at that. Let's go to the next one. That's the VHQ, the volunteer headquarters, for those of you who serve. Oh, it's so beautiful, guys. That's the lobby, 40-foot ceilings being designed. That'll be finished this week. Oh, look at that herringbone pattern. Oh yes!

We're so close. Pray for us. Pray with us. Get ready. Last night was our third-to-last (Lord willing) Saturday night service in this building. We're very, very excited about where God is leading us. Let's take a moment to pray, and then we'll dive into another parable this morning.

Lord, it's an exciting time. As I said at the prayer night, let us never take for granted what is happening to us and what we're getting to experience. The number of pastors, Christians, and churches across church history who wish they had 13 acres in

downtown... Lord, it's with fear and trembling and eager expectation and hope that we move toward this building.

I just pray that each of us would be praying this prayer as we get ready: "Lord, get me ready for what you're about to do." Lord, I thank you for the people here who have given, who have served, who have prayed, who have invited. We are entering into an entire new season, dare I even say new era, of our church as we head into this building. We pray to get in there before the end of this year for your glory and our good. And all God's people said, "Amen."

All right. You've probably heard of C.S. Lewis. He wrote *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *Mere Christianity* and a book called *The Screwtape Letters*. He wrote a lot of books. He has a famous quote. He said, "Everyone thinks forgiveness is a lovely idea until [they have] something to forgive." Today I'm going to talk about forgiveness, and whenever I talk about forgiveness, everyone says, "Yes! Other people should forgive other people."

We love forgiveness. If you watch a movie on forgiveness and somebody forgives somebody or you hear a story of forgiveness, if it's a serious enough thing that's forgiven, you'll get emotional, and you'll get the quiver in your liver. You'll be like, "Oh, that's amazing." But the hard thing about forgiveness (we'll dive into this a little bit)... Forgiveness and justice are often in tension.

A lot of people are like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah. I like the idea of forgiveness, but I also like revenge, I also like justice, and I also like people getting what they deserve." We have to talk about this today. Here's the thing about forgiveness. Forgiveness is something our culture today doesn't understand. Whenever our culture doesn't understand anything, because we've lost the Judeo-Christian worldview, we always replace it with two extremes.

So, instead of forgiveness, here are the two extremes of culture (then we'll get to forgiveness). The first is the new fake tolerance. Do you know what I'm talking about? That's "We approve and celebrate and act like everything is normal." What is that saying? "There's nothing that needs to be forgiven." It's like, "Okay. Christians can't say that." We're maybe the last people on earth who have to say, "That was wrong. That was sinful. Christ needed to die for it, and you need to repent of it."

So, the new tolerance is one way we ignore forgiveness. We just act like there isn't sin anymore. Well, there is. The other extreme you see on the left and the right, the Republicans and the Democrats, is cancel culture, which is basically, "I don't know what to do with you when you offend me. I don't know what to do with you when you've hurt me, so here's what I'll do: I'll act like you're dead. I'll have nothing to do with you, and I'll cancel you and define you by the worst thing you've ever done."

Guys, we have to talk about forgiveness. Why do I have to talk about forgiveness? Well, first, it's a big theme in Scripture. That's one reason we'll talk about it. It comes up today. Secondly, it's a big issue. You need to get to know, if you don't know him, our pastor of care Jordan Taylor. He's a great guy. I said to him last night after the sermon... We were talking outside.

I said, "Jordan, in all of your experiences counseling people, in how many of the counseling sessions... Like, give me a percentage. In how many of the counseling sessions does it eventually get down to an issue of forgiveness?" He said, "A hundred percent." They may not come in there for that. They have marriage issues. They have kid issues. They have addiction issues. Somewhere along the line, there's a need to forgive someone.

So, we have to talk about it because the Bible talks about it. We have to talk about it because some of you... Just a warning. I'm going to give you a chance to forgive this morning. Don't worry. I'm not going to make you stand up. I'm not going to make you raise your hand. I'm not going to embarrass you, but I'm going to give you a chance. Just so you can prepare yourself, in about 40 minutes, I'm going to give you a chance to forgive. We have to get through the whole sermon first.

The third reason we have to talk about forgiveness is it's the center of our faith. I mean, I don't know. I was down here singing with you guys just a few minutes ago. If you haven't noticed, all of the songs we sing are all about forgiveness. That's going to be the whole idea of the parable we're going to see today. It's like, "How can I sing about and celebrate God's forgiveness to me and not share that with other people?"

Here's the big idea for the message and for the passage and parable we're going to look at today. It's very simple. It's four words. *Forgiven people forgive people*. Or to say it in a little bit longer way... When you have experienced and embraced God's forgiveness of you vertically, you will extend it horizontally.

It's interesting. I don't want to get too deep into this. Some people would say... The softer version would be this: you can't be a healthy Christian and be dealing with a root of bitterness and unforgiveness. That would be the nice way to say it. There are some who say, from the teachings of Scripture, it appears that if you have an unforgiving heart, you might have an unforgiven heart.

The person who is unable to forgive... And we'll get into it. I know things happen to you. The person who is unable to forgive... It may be the sign that they're really not a Christian, because when you experience the grace and mercy of God, it's so profound it's going to affect how you deal with every person.

Listen. Forgiveness should make you a better person. You being forgiven should make you a better person, a better husband, a better wife, a better mother, a better father, a better friend. But I'm getting ahead of myself. Let me show you the background here.

01 WE DEAL WITH FORGIVENESS LIKE A FAMILY

Matthew 18:15. We always do the circumstances around the parable first. ***"If your brother..."*** He's talking to the Christian community. ***"...sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother."***

Here's the first thing we need to know about forgiveness: we deal with forgiveness like a family. He's like, "Okay. Your brother..." Listen. You know this, but when you become a Christian, the most basic thing you learn is "God is my Father; the church is my family."

So, now he uses familial language to talk about forgiveness. The first thing he says is, ***"If your brother sins against you..."*** We know it's not going to be *if*. When is it going to be? *When*. Here's what I want to tell you. You need to have the expectations for your life that you're going to sin against other people and they're going to sin against you.

Look at your neighbor who you came with and say, "You're going to sin against me." It's a little awkward, but just tell them. They're going to do it. It's okay. All right. Now come back together. This is what's going to happen. You're going to sin against them, and they're going to sin against you.

In fact, here's how this works. The longer you live, the more people you're going to need to forgive. The more people you love and the longer you live, the more people you're going to need to forgive. Christians are like porcupines. We have all of these little spikes, and if we get too close to each other we poke each other.

So, he says, ***"If your brother sins against you..."*** Now, here's the problem. This is very practical, I think, very helpful today, some of these categories I'm going to give you for forgiveness. The first thing you have to ask... Because you put together the intellectual furniture of your mind and heart as you're dealing with anger toward people and potential unforgiveness.

The first thing you have to ask is, "Is this sin that this person did against me or is it strangeness? Is it against God's Word or is it just weird? Is it an issue of integrity or is it an idiosyncrasy?" So, the big question is...*Is it sin or is it strangeness?* Now, this is going to surprise most of you. I'm a little strange. Just a little bit. Here's how this

works. I am a little strange. By the way, when you get married, you realize how strange you are.

I remember I was dating Margy, and she said to me, "Kyle, every time you hang up the phone, you never say 'Goodbye.'" I don't know what I was doing. Instead of "Goodbye" or "Talk to you later," I would just say, "All right," and I'd hang up. Then I realized that's what my whole family does. Okay. Is it a sin to hang up the phone without saying "Goodbye"? No! Is it strange? Yes. Maybe.

I have a very loud voice, which hopefully God is using in preaching and teaching. I talk loudly, and I talk loudly everywhere I go, especially when I shouldn't be talking loudly. My wife will have to say to me, "What would be the nicest way to tell you that you are screaming right now?" Is it a sin to yell? No! But is it strange? Potentially.

So, you have to ask, "Is it sin or is it strangeness?" And you will fight about this in your marriage all the time. By the way, sometimes if it's strangeness, you just need to realize that you are shallow, a little petty, a little oversensitive, and way too easily offended.

Then you have to ask, "Is it sin or is it weakness?" That's different than strangeness. "Is this a character issue or is this a competency issue?" A lot of women think their husbands are not very good listeners. My wife has never told me that, or if she did, I wasn't listening.

Now, can not listening be a sin? It can, because I can be like, "I don't care about you. I don't care what you say. I'm busy. You're not important to me." So, somebody could be a bad listener and it could be a sin, and somebody could be a bad listener and it could seriously just be a weakness.

It's like, "You need to learn how to actively listen. How about making some listening noises? How about repeating back to the person what they said in a simplified form so that they agree?" That's the heart of communication. Okay. So, you have to ask, "Is it a sin or is it strangeness? Is it a sin or is it weakness?" That's the first thing.

Once you deal with that, as you think about your past as you deal with forgiveness, there are three main categories people have to deal with in my pastoral experience. Sometimes people need to forgive something massive that happened to them. I mean massive. And you'll know this, because it's an event, and it still haunts you. You're still, in some ways, trapped.

This could be something very serious. Your dad left. Sexual assault. Somebody abused you. You were betrayed. What's hard to forgive is the massive nature of the offense. We're going to talk about that. That is common, but less common than what most

people need to forgive, which are the many things someone did to them. Death by a million paper cuts.

Why do marriages end? Not because people fall out of love but because they fall out of forgiveness. The only way to sustain any long-term, close, meaningful relationship is through forgiveness. So, sometimes it's one thing they did, and it's a big deal. Sometimes it's the many things. Like, "I always told him" or "She knows I hate that" or "Not again."

Here's the third category. And sometimes they're all mingled together, but I'm just giving us some categories. The third category... It's not massive or many but it's the man (or woman) who did it. Sometimes you'll struggle to forgive not because of what was done but because of who did it. If your boss did it, it wouldn't be a big deal, but your dad did it. Right?

This is a lot of exes. Do you have any exes? You don't need to raise your hand. An ex-boyfriend, an ex-fiancé, an ex-husband, an ex-wife, a terrible relationship with your mom or dad or grandma or grandpa or aunt or uncle or brother or sister. Part of what makes it so painful is you're like, "That was my sister. My friend can do that, but not my sister."

02 KEEP THE CIRCLE AS SMALL AS POSSIBLE FOR AS LONG AS POSSIBLE

Okay. What is it? Is it the person? Is it the thing? Is it the many things? Is it sin? Is it strangeness? Then you can do what Jesus tells us to do here. Here's what he says. I'm going to go back to verse 15 but also read verse 16. ***"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone."*** He's actually going to give us a pattern and paradigm, a multi-stepped approach to deal with this.

"If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses." If we would do this, it would solve so many problems in our marriages, in our families, in our communities, and in our churches.

Here's the second big thing: we are to keep the circle as small as possible for as long as possible when we're dealing with sin. Here's a really simple way to say it. This is so simple. This is something you would teach your kid. If somebody sins against you, you go to them. Here's another way to say it: talk *to* people instead of *about* people.

How many people, when they're sinned against... Have you ever seen this? Have you ever seen the cringe-worthy social media post about somebody somebody else doesn't like? It's like a bad Yelp review. "My uncle..." It's like, "What is going on

here?" People go to the modern-day confessional booth, Facebook, to tell the world how they've been wronged.

Some people are a little bit more passive-aggressive in how they approach it, and they might just gossip about that person now...reputation destruction. Gossip is when you confess somebody else's sins without their approval. Some of you are a little bit more religious. I know how you do things. If you're angry at somebody, you just make it a prayer request. "Pray for Timmy. He's so rude."

We need to keep the circle as small as possible for as long as possible. The first thing he says is "Talk to the person." So, if somebody offends you at this church, we would say, don't come to a staff member. Don't come to your Community Group leader (unless that's the person who offended you). Go to that person first.

Now, this is important to understand. Why do we keep the circle as small as possible for as long as possible? Because sin is meant to be covered. I mean, this is Genesis, chapter 3. Remember Adam and Eve? They were naked. Our physical nakedness and our spiritual or moral nakedness is not meant to be shown to everybody. God was like, "Let's get some loincloths and cover this immediately."

Here's the truth, and you know this. You can't handle knowing everybody else's sin. It would wear us all out. And nobody can handle knowing all of *your* sin. It's very, very hard on people. What will happen sometimes... You know, I'm trying. I'm just like you guys. Yes, I'm a pastor. Yes, I'm trying to be a godly Christian and all that.

But if someone comes to me and tells me something about their husband, just some horrible thing, or some horrible thing about their wife, it's hard for me to look at that person the same. Is it hard for you? It's like, "I'm trying, but thank you. Thank you for telling me that horrible secret in their life that I now know and try to put to the back of my mind every time I'm interacting with them, but it kind of pops up."

So, here's how it works. Here's the principle. The only people who should know about a sin are the people who can see that same person restored. Usually, in the best circumstances, it's a few people, and everybody else in the church has no idea what's going on. Yeah, there are three ladies working with her.

She has a problem with alcohol, but nobody needs to know that, and the three people who knew how bad the problem was get to rejoice with her at how great she's doing now. See, what happens is every once in a while... It could be the wife. It could be the husband. They're in a Community Group... This happens with a certain personality and temperament.

They're overly emotional, and they think being vulnerable and authentic means to proverbially throw up on people and tell them everything at once. They don't even mean to, but they throw their husband under the bus or they throw their wife under the bus. Here's what happens in churches. Then everybody just remembers the worst thing about that person.

"You know what she did, right?" It's like, "Yeah, but what you don't know is that she repented of that six months ago and has been walking in a measure of freedom. She's actually the godliest version of herself and more like Christ, and God has used it to redeem a bunch of other areas in her life, and now she's helping other people with the same struggle." But you don't know that. You just know the thing she did.

So, you have to keep the circle as small as possible for as long as possible. Look at what happens here. Remember, he says, "Take one, then take two more." ***"If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector."***

I don't have time to get into this, but this is really church discipline. This isn't a sermon on church discipline. Here's what I'll tell you, just so you know about our church. Ninety-nine percent of sin in this church is dealt with either by one person talking or two or three people talking to someone.

Every once in a while, the person doesn't repent, and it makes it up to the leadership of the church. It almost never goes well, unfortunately, just so you guys know. Think about it. If someone confronted you... If you are spiritually alive as a Christian and someone confronts you, the first thing you should say is, "Oh my goodness! I am so sorry. Thank you."

But if your heart is hard, if two or three more people came and said, "Dude, I agree with him," you would say, "Oh my. Three of you?" I'm just telling you, by the time it gets to the church, the person's heart is normally so hard that we normally have to say, "Listen. We no longer can treat you as a Christian, because we don't believe a Christian can live in this open, unrepentant sin that has been confronted.

So, we're going to love you, but we're going to love you in a new way and a different way. We're not going to love you as a brother or sister in Christ, but we're going to love you as an unbeliever. Our relationship with you is no longer a discipling relationship; it's an evangelizing relationship." This may sound intense to some of you who aren't familiar with this stuff, but this is to protect the church so that sin doesn't spread and so that people know God takes sin seriously.

Okay. Here's what happens. ***"Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."***

This is rabbinical teaching. ***"Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."***

It's a little bit of a confusing passage, but basically, Jesus says that what he gives to the church is the ability, according to God's Word, to extend forgiveness to people in Jesus' name. It's really powerful. By the way, this is why I had a friend tell me that when he grew up, his parents always told him, "If someone sins against you and asks for forgiveness, you don't say, 'It's okay'; you say, 'I forgive you.'" It's powerful.

Look at what happens here. Look at verse 21. ***"Then Peter..."*** Of course Peter. ***"...came up and said to him, 'Lord, how often will my brother sin against me..."*** It's like, "Okay. You're not really worried about you sinning against your brother, Peter, but that's okay." ***"...and I forgive him? As many as seven times?"***

Peter says, "Give me a number." This is the same thing we talked about last week with the priest and the Levite. He wants to limit grace, and he wants to measure forgiveness, which is the temptation for all of us. "How many times should my wife sin against me or my husband sin against me and I forgive them? Give me a number."

Peter thought he was being generous, because the rabbinical tradition of that day said three times. He says seven times. Look at what Jesus says. Here's how Jesus responds. ***"Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.'"*** Now, some of your translations say, "Seven times seventy" or some of your translations say, "Seventy-seven times seven."

It's like, "What's up with these Bible translators? Can't they get this right?" It's because Jesus made up a word. He made up a number. Here's how we would say it today. "How many times should I forgive?" "A bazillion." "To infinity and beyond." That's what we're saying. So, he's like, "You never give up on forgiving people."

03 WHEN YOU FORGIVE, YOU CANCEL A DEBT

Now, like Jesus often does, he tells us a statement, then gives us a story. He gives us a principle that we're like, "What?" and then he gives us a picture. So, now look at the parable with our time left. Here's what he says. ***"Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants."***

This would often happen. We don't understand this because we don't live under this kind of monarchy. The king would come and say, "Whoever owes me, if I need something, I could call upon this person and ask them to immediately pay." That's the whole idea. So they get this. This makes sense.

Verse 24: **"When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents."** Now, the disciples are listening, and they're like, "Okay. This is obviously a made-up story, because no one could owe 10,000 talents." A talent was the largest monetary unit of measurement in that day. One talent was 20 years' wages. So, just by doing basic math, you know that 10,000 talents would be 200,000 years of wages.

Okay. If it's not immediately obvious (you probably know this story), God is the king and we are the servant in this story. What God is saying is we owe a debt to God that we cannot calculate, cannot count, cannot comprehend, and certainly cannot pay back. For all of the sins of omission and commission, for breaking God's law, for all of the good deeds left undone, for being ungrateful and unthankful, for all of our idolatry and false worship... I mean, you add it all up and it's incalculable.

We have to get that first. That's key. So, here's what happens. **"And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made."** This is what sin does. Sin makes you guilty, then it makes you dirty, and then it makes you enslaved. Those are the three things sin will do to you long term.

It makes you guilty. You'll wake up at 3:00 in the morning and your conscience will condemn you. It'll make you dirty. You'll feel like, "Ugh." Then it will make you enslaved. The modern word for that is *addicted*. He's giving us this picture. He's guilty. He's indebted. He's going to be enslaved now.

04 WHAT FORGIVENESS IS & IS NOT

Here's what happens. **"So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.'"** He's trying to pay it back. He can't, though. **"And out of pity..."** Here's the first plot twist. **"...the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt."**

This has been a sermon on forgiveness, and I haven't even defined forgiveness yet, but I wanted to wait until we got to this point. Biblically, forgiveness is I cancel the debt you owe me because of Christ. Or another way to say it... How do you know you've forgiven someone?

I don't make you pay with my passive-aggressive temperament toward you, with the silent treatment, with the cold shoulder, with bringing it up at strategic moments a couple of times a year to still make you feel guilty about it. I don't understand...

Maybe there's another talk by somebody else who tells Americans how they can forgive.

I don't know how someone can forgive deeply the horrible things that happen to them unless they're a Christian and have the Christian worldview, because here's what we believe. Why do I say you cancel the debt because of Christ? Because here's what you can say if somebody has sinned against you: "I'm going to trust God with this, because either Christ died for it..."

It's going to be paid for one of two places. Christ either died for it or it'll be paid for in the lake of fire. This is why theology is very important. It's like, "Okay. Jesus died for it and paid for it. I don't need to also try to make them pay for it." If they're not a believer and are completely rebellious, it's like, "They're going to pay for this one day. I don't need to try to add to it here."

So, forgiveness is canceling the debt because of Christ. It's making someone not pay for it. It's absorbing the cost. I mean, think about this king. He now has to figure out how to get 10,000 talents or he just absorbs it. Every once in a while, my kids will break something in the house.

Maybe they were being foolish or sinful in doing it, and they break something. I'm making something up. Say it costs \$20. Well, they have \$4 in their account. So they ask for forgiveness, and I forgive them, but guess who has to pay for it? Me. That's what happens. God is going to forgive, but God himself is going to have to pay for it.

So, that's what forgiveness is, but I want to talk about what forgiveness is not, because it brings up a lot of confusion with people. Forgiveness is not waiting for an apology. There are some people who are never going to apologize to you. They don't even know they did anything wrong. They think you got over it. You're letting certain people live rent free in your mind.

There are some people who are never going to apologize for a very profound reason: they're dead. I have met people who are haunted by their dad who died 10 years ago. It's like, "Listen. Obviously, he's never going to apologize, so you're going to have to not wait for the apology."

Secondly, forgiveness is not a feeling. I just want to tell you this. You're not going to wake up one day and decide, "Today is the day. I feel like forgiving. I have my muffin; it's time to forgive my mother-in-law." No. You haven't forgiven your mother-in-law for seven years. You're not going to wake up and feel it. It's a decision of faith. Sometimes God is gracious and feelings follow.

Forgiveness is not forgetting what they've done or trusting them again. You could forgive your boyfriend, and he could be your ex-boyfriend. You could break up with him. You could forgive your coworker and not work with your coworker anymore. You could forgive your business partner and not go into business with them anymore. You could forgive your abuser and still tell the police about him.

I mean, we're not saying there are no consequences in this life for what people have done. We're saying that what you need to do is to forgive, but it's not the same as forgetting or trusting. Forgiveness is not approving what they've done. In fact, in a profound way, forgiveness is actually saying, "This is such a big deal that I have to actually take it to God. It's an actual sin against me, and I need to forgive." Finally, forgiveness is not something you do once.

I heard a story about a lady and her son. You can imagine how horrible this is. Her son was killed by a drunk driver. She tells the story of the moment... You know, the line you cross when you go, "Okay. I forgive him." But she said she still has to forgive the drunk driver on the anniversary of her son's death and on his birthday every year.

So, sometimes there's going to be something that happens, and you're going to have to remind yourself. "Self, I have forgiven them. I'm actually going to take another moment right now and cancel the debt. I'm not going to make them pay, and I'm going to move forward."

05 WE SHOULD FORGIVE BECAUSE WE HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN

Let me show you what happens here. This is another surprise. ***"But when that same servant..."*** That would be the one who had 10,000 talents canceled. ***"...went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.'"*** Which is exactly what the unforgiving spirit says.

Notice a couple of things. First, he was looking for somebody who owed him. How many of you are still keeping score? That will not be good for your marriage or your family. I've met people, and their whole calendar is about what other people have done wrong to them.

"Well, it's November. You remember last November. Remember three years ago on my anniversary when you didn't... Oh, it's my birthday again. Remember 10 years ago..." It's like, "Oh! Your whole calendar is about keeping score with what other people have done."

Now, here's what I love about the honesty of this parable. The 10,000 talents is this massive, incalculable, incomprehensible debt that never could be paid back, and that's what we owe God, but 100 denarii is... A denarius is a day's wage. So, by basic math you know it's a third of your salary. How would you feel if somebody owed you a third of your salary? Percentage-wise, for all of us, that's going to be a lot.

Here's what I love. God is saying what other people have done to you is actually a big deal, but it's not as big of a deal as your sin against God. You have to realize that your sin against God is greater. So, if you cheat on your taxes, yes, you're sinning against the government, but God is more angry. If you lie to your spouse and she finds out, she'll be angry; God is more angry.

So, when you have this idea that "My sin against God is greater..." I remember I was at Duke. These Duke students... You know how they are. This one Duke student thought he was really smart, so he came up to me and said, "How can a sin committed in a finite period of time (our life) deserve an infinite punishment?"

Now, you've never thought of that question because nobody thinks of that question, but he thought of that question. In other words, "How can God punish me forever for something I did in time?" It's like, "All right. Well, man, you're not the first person to ask that question. The answer is who it's against. It's against an infinite God, so the punishment for it is infinite."

So, as soon as you realize... I know as soon as I say, "Our sin against God is bigger than anyone's sin against us," everybody makes the Christian listening noises. "Mm-hmm." But you actually have to get to the point where it's like, "No, no. Actually, that is true. I have offended and sinned against God more than anyone would ever offend or sin against me." That's going to be the power and the motivation.

So, what he has is gospel amnesia. It's so ridiculous, but this is what we do. You're like, "Wait. Dude, hold on. How can you forget?" In fact, as the story goes on... Look here. Verse 29 you could copy and paste. This is exactly what the first servant said to the king. *Exactly*. And it's exactly what he did.

"So his fellow servant fell down..." He should have been thinking, "You know what? I remember I just fell down." ***"...and pleaded with him..."*** "I remember I pleaded." He puts the same words in this servant's mouth. ***"Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt."***

I want to talk for a few minutes on why people don't forgive. Now, again, it's hard to forgive. I've already said that. But we're complex. Why don't people forgive? Because there is a power we can have over another person if we don't forgive them, especially

if we're still in relationship, and especially if they have a sensitive conscience, especially if they feel bad about it.

We can play the moral superiority card. "Well, I've never done that, but I know *you* have. And every time I get a little angry at you (when I'm angry, I'll just remember about all of the bad things you do), I'll remind you of this." I've seen this happen with spouses. One of the spouses did something, and they got caught or confessed.

It has been years, and usually, honestly (men have their own struggles)... Usually (I've seen it in many situations), the wife keeps reminding him. Sometimes you can see it on a guy. He walks into our church. I'm like, "Oh no. Oh no. He's a shadow and shell of whoever he used to be, and his wife keeps him on a very short leash. This man is a prisoner in his own home." People don't forgive because it's powerful. It's powerful to be morally superior and to constantly remind other people of their sin.

The second reason people don't forgive is it kind of feels good. Right? I mean, you hate it and you love it, because it's a mixture of emotions. You know, if you forgive, you can't be resentful anymore. If you forgive, you can't be angry anymore. If you forgive, you can't play the victim card anymore. If you forgive, you can't be jealous anymore. Half of you loves that. It kind of gives you an energy in life. Right?

There's another reason, and this is particularly for men, usually. Unforgiveness gives people an excuse to be bad. A lot of men get addicted and, specifically, drink too much because of something undealt with in their past. Half of them is glad to have an excuse to be bad. You need to know this about yourself. You're always looking for an excuse to do something you know you shouldn't do.

It's like, if you'd forgive your dad, then you wouldn't have an excuse for drinking so much. If you'd forgive your wife, you wouldn't have an excuse for your fantasy life and all of the things you're looking at. If you'd forgive your husband, you wouldn't have an excuse for lashing out on him and being bitter toward him.

I want to show you what happens. Verse 31: "***When his fellow servants... Those are the people watching. "...saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place."***

Here's what I want you to know: when you're dealing with unforgiveness, everybody around you can see it. A lot of parents (usually dads) have some type of unforgiveness, and it has a negative effect on the entire home. All the kids ever hear about is how horrible Grandpa was. It's like, "Dad or Mom, your unforgiving spirit is so obvious to everybody else."

06 WHEN WE DON'T FORGIVE, WE BECOME A PRISONER

Here's how it ends. ***"Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant!'"*** Here's the "Forgiven people forgive people." ***"I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?"*** People who receive mercy should extend mercy. ***"And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt."***

If you do not forgive, you will not like the person you will become, and you will be, metaphorically speaking, a prisoner. Corrie ten Boom, who was in the concentration camps, and her sister died in the concentration camps... I would put Corrie ten Boom on the top of my list of people who would need to learn how to forgive. That would be top of my list...somebody who was in the concentration camps whose sister died in the concentration camps.

She basically said, "When I finally forgave, I realized I had released a prisoner, and the prisoner was me." Let me tell you this. This is the existential test of forgiveness: freedom. The test of forgiveness is...*Do you have freedom?* "I no longer am angry at this person. I no longer am bitter toward this person." Maybe God would bless you so much that you could... I mean, this is what Jesus wants. Could you wish your enemy well? Could you pray for their salvation? Could you ask for their repentance?

Guys, I want you to know that unforgiveness... The reason I'm talking about it with so many different things is I want you to know it's a serious sin. There are certain sins I mention and you go, "Oh, that's serious, Kyle. I mean, ooh! You know, stealing money or adultery or murder...those are serious." I'm trying to tell you unforgiveness is a serious sin. It's so serious it's one of the only sins that's called *demonic*.

There's actually this verse in Ephesians where it says, "Do not let there be a root of bitterness lest Satan get a foothold." Why would the demonic be especially interested in unforgiveness? Well, demons aren't forgiven, and they never forgive. So, if you need to get out the root of bitterness, you're going to need to use the shovel of forgiveness.

So, as we close, who do you need to forgive? Is it somebody in your past? Is it that event? Is it the many things? Is it your mom? Is it your dad? Is it your brother? Is it your sister? Is it your ex-whatever? Is it somebody in the present? You know it because every time you see them, you feel it. You can't speak well of them. You have imaginary conversations with them in your head in which you win. It's what we all do.

I want to end with something even more practical, which is...*How do you forgive?* I want to give you four steps, because you're going to need this or somebody you love is going to need these four steps. When you finally realize, "That's it. It's him. It's my dad," or whatever, here's what you have to do. There are four steps.

First, you have to say this. You have to have this realization. "Their sin against me was both rebellion and enslavement." See, whenever you sin, you think it's enslavement. "Oh, I couldn't help it. It was late. I was tired. I fell into sin. I struggle with..." Oh, really? That's how it works for you, but how about when people sin against you? "How could they? They knew what they were doing."

Well, the truth is, yes. Sin is always rebellion and enslavement. I had a biblical counseling professor in seminary, and he had the opportunity to help a victim who was molested by a priest. I know; very intense. That man had grown up and was in his 20s or 30s, and he had to help that man forgive the priest who molested him. He said one of the key turning moments was to tell this person, "It was rebellion, and this man is enslaved to the gross passions of his flesh."

The first thing is you have to understand what happened against you was enslavement and rebellion. The second thing is you need to write down what they did. What did they do? I would encourage you... You can type it out, but I'd encourage you to use pen and paper and write it down.

What did they do to you? Like, "Okay. My dad left." "My wife left me, and now she remarried some other guy, and some other guy is tucking my kids in every night." It gets deep for people. You'll know you're close to dealing with it when you start to get angry and cry. You're like, "Okay. I'm close."

The third one (this is a deep one) is "What do they owe me?" It gets deep for people. Some people are like, "You know what my dad owes me? My entire childhood!" "You know what my ex-husband owes me? Three hundred grand and three years of my life back!" Well, you're never going to get that. You know, "You know what my ex-business partner owes me? Three hundred grand!" It's like, "Okay." So, you just write down what they owe you. That's the whole thing. "What do they owe me?"

The fourth step is the act of faith. You cancel the debt and say, "I'm not going to make them pay." People actually recommend doing something dramatic. Maybe you burn it. Maybe you bury it. Maybe you rip it up. Maybe you throw it away, and you say, "I'm going to actively, by faith, cancel this debt because of Christ."

Guys, this is what the apostle Paul did. At the end of the apostle Paul's life... Read the end of 2 Timothy 4 before you go to bed tonight. The apostle Paul, at the end of his life... He's about to get his head cut off. He writes to the church. He says, "Alexander

the coppersmith..." This was not a Christian. "Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the Lord will repay him." Okay. You're not bitter toward him.

Then he says, "Guys, at my first defense, no Christians came and were with me." So, Paul ends his life. He goes, "You know what? This unbeliever was really mean to me. I'll trust the Lord to repay him." Then he says, "At my first defense, no one came to my side," all the Christians. He goes, "May the Lord not count it against them." Then he ends with, "But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me."

I want you to be set free. I want us to be set free to live at peace and unity with one another and to forgive one another. What I'm going to do is I'm going to pray for us in a minute, and then as we sing, I'm going to ask you to have a time of repentance as you sing, to ask the Holy Spirit to do a work in you, to make the gospel real, a present experience of forgiveness that allows you to extend it to whoever you need to. Let's pray.

Lord, we've talked about a lot, and forgiveness is such a serious issue that the longer we live, the more people we're going to need to forgive, and the deeper our relationships, the more there will need to be forgiveness flowing. Lord, whether it was something deep in our past or that just happened recently, whether it was one big thing or many things, I pray you'd give us the grace to forgive.

I pray that our own sin and the reality of grace would be so real in our lives. I pray that we would have, even as we sing this final song, a deep and personal experience of forgiveness that gives us the power and the motivation and the energy to extend it to others. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.