



THE NONCONFORMIST

THE **PUZZLING** STORIES
OF JESUS

5



YES, NO + MAYBE

1. I've had to forgive one of the people sitting near me more times that I can count!
2. It is not wise to let people continuously wrong you without circumstances.
3. After a large number of offenses, some people prove that they don't want forgiveness.
4. God is inconsistent in how he disciplines us.
5. God treats you the way that you treat others.

DIG DEEPER

● **READ Matthew 18:21-35** (NLT)

21 Then Peter came to him and asked, "Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?"

22 "No, not seven times," Jesus replied, "but seventy times seven!"

23 "Therefore, the Kingdom of Heaven can be compared to a king who decided to bring his accounts up to date with servants who had borrowed money from him. 24 In the process, one of his debtors was brought in who owed him millions of dollars. 25 He couldn't pay, so his master ordered that he be sold—along with his wife, his children, and everything he owned—to pay the debt.

26 "But the man fell down before his master and begged him, 'Please, be patient with me, and I will pay it all.' 27 Then his master was filled with pity for him, and he released him and forgave his debt.

28 "But when the man left the king, he went to a fellow servant who owed him a few thousand dollars. He grabbed him by the throat and demanded instant payment.

29 "His fellow servant fell down before him and begged for a little more time. 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it,' he pleaded. 30 But his creditor wouldn't wait. He had the man arrested and put in prison until the debt could be paid in full.

31 "When some of the other servants saw this, they were very upset. They went to the king and told him everything that had happened. 32 Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, 'You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. 33 Shouldn't you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?' 34 Then the angry king sent the man to prison to be tortured until he had paid his entire debt.

35 "That's what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart."

✦ **21 Seven times?** - Until seven times? (ἑως ἑπτακίς; [heōs heptakis]) Peter thought that he was generous as the Jewish rule was three times (Amos 1:6). His question goes back to verse 15. There was a rabbinic view: "If a man commits a transgression, the first, second and third time he is forgiven, the fourth time he is not forgiven" (Yoma 86b). Peter more than doubled this quota of forgivenesses. Peter has clearly learned something from Jesus. He understands now that retaliation is not the right path for a disciple; rather, forgiveness is a quality to be prized. But he sees this as something that should be practiced in moderation. Surely forgiving the same person seven times would be enough?

✦ **22 Seventy times seven!** - This may mean seventy-seven times, but the point is that there is no limit to the number of times that forgiveness must be offered to an individual. It is a way of saying that for Jesus' followers forgiveness is to be unlimited. For them forgiveness is a way of life.

● Why is it difficult for us to forgive repeated offenses from the same person?

DIG DEEPER...CONTINUED

+ **24 Millions of dollars** - Literally, ten thousand talents. The “talent” was the highest known denomination of currency in the ancient Roman Empire, and ten thousand was the highest number for which the Greek language had a particular word

+ **26 The man fell down...and begged** - The meaning of the verb “begged” is “approach in dog-like fashion,” descriptive of the manner in which a dog approaches its master on all fours in hopes of escaping punishment. The man is about to lose everything, and so he approaches his king in the most humble way possible. I will pay you everything is, of course, an exaggeration. It is inconceivable that the man could have repaid the enormous amount. For example, **the annual income of King Herod was only nine hundred talents**, and for this man to have repaid ten thousand talents would have been an impossible feat.

● What do you think that Jesus was trying to communicate about our debt to God?

+ **27 His master was filled with pity** - The king was a compassionate man, and Jesus employs a verb that indicates that he was deeply moved in his pity. The king is here called “the lord of that slave,” a title that brings out the fact that he had the right to dispose of the defaulter as he chose. He did more than the man asked. The debtor had requested no more than time to pay, but the king gave him complete freedom. He released the man; prison no longer hung over his head. And he forgave him the debt. The king set no conditions. The man had asked for forbearance and volunteered to repay the debt (even though it was so large that there was no possibility of his ever doing so). But the king ignored all this. He freely forgave. That was all. There were no conditions and no hesitation. It was an act of pure grace.

● What does it say about the nature of God that Jesus would ascribe this type of response?

+ **28 Grabbed him by the throat** - Creditors often dragged their debtors before the judge, as the Roman law allowed them to do, holding them by the throat.

+ **28 Demanded instant payment** - (εἰ τι ὀφείλεις [ei ti opheileis]). Literally, “if thou owest anything,” however little. He did not even know how much it was, only that he owed him something. This debtor owed 100 denarii, which is only 100 day’s wages for a commoner.

● Is it typical for mankind to not treat others with the same grace God has given us?

+ **33 Shouldn’t you have mercy...?** - This verse is in a real sense the key to the entire parable: those persons whose debt of sin God has forgiven are obligated in return to forgive the sins that others commit against them.

● What is the limit to how much mercy we should show to those who have wronged us?

+ **34 Tortured** - The “torturers” are the jailers, who were allowed to scourge and torment the poor debtors in their care in order to get money from them for the creditors, or else to excite the compassion of friends and thereby obtain the amount of the debt from them. Trench states in *Notes on the Parables*: “In early times of Rome there were certain legal tortures, in the shape, at least, of a chain weighing fifteen pounds, and a pittance of food barely sufficient to sustain life, which the creditor was allow to apply to the debtor for the purpose of bringing him to terms; and no doubt they often did not stop there.” Torture was not allowed among the Jews, though it is known to have been used by Herod the Great. The man’s own punishment is described in terms of the punishment which he inflicted on his fellow servant.

● How do we condemn ourselves to torture and a prison by not forgiving others their debts?

+ **35 That’s what my heavenly Father will do** - In a nutshell his teaching is this: God eternally and unconditionally forgives those who repent of so immense a debt against him that it is unconscionable for believers to refuse to grant forgiveness to each other for sins that remain trivial in comparison. God allows you to decide how merciful He should be to you.

● What does this tell you about God’s character?



MY PRAYER...

1. How am I refusing to forgive others?
2. Why is it so difficult to not punish those who have wronged me?
3. What new aspect of God’s character does He want me to know?