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Keep your heart
out of the
trap of bitterness
by forgiving others!

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WHAT'S IN THIS Study?



DAY 1: Me? Bitter?

DAY 2: The Real Problem

DAY 3: What Bitterness Does

DAY 4: The Cure for Bitterness

DAY 5: Once Upon a Time



DAY 6: The Story Under Attack

DAY 7: Jesus, the True Hero

DAY 8: Happily Ever After

DAY 9: Naomi: When God Seems Mean

DAY 10: Joseph: When Life Isn't Fair (Part 1)

DAY 11: Joseph: When Life Isn't Fair (Part 2)

DAY 12: Esau: When People Hurt Me

DAY 13: Jonah: When Forgiveness Isn't Deserved

DAY 14: When Forgiveness Isn't Fair

DAY 15: When We Don't Forgive

DAY 16: When Forgiveness Overwhelms Us

DAY 17: When I'm Bitter at God

DAY 18: When I'm Bitter at Others

DAY 19: When I'm Bitter at Myself

DAY 20: Letting Go

Pre - K Level

Ages 2 - 4

God offers us all forgiveness—
there are no strings attached—
forgiveness is free when we come to Him
and immediately given when we ask!

But when we bitterly refuse to forgive
the ones who have done wrong to us,
God says that this is not right—
we should be quick to offer forgiveness!



KEY TRUTH:

We should be
quick to forgive
because we have
been forgiven.

 JAMES 2:13



There are
no strings
attached to



Trace the words. Draw a line through the strings to show that there are no strings attached to God's forgiveness.

Primary Level

Ages 5 - 7

When We Don't Forgive

Today, we're going to look at another parable Jesus told to continue explaining forgiveness!

Read **Matthew 18:23–27**. What did the king do to his servant who owed him a debt?

A powerful king needed to settle a debt with a servant who owed him ten thousand talents—about 800,000 pounds of silver. It would have taken the servant several lifetimes to pay that! But he asked the king for patience, and the king completely forgave the debt.

But in Matthew 18:28–30, we see that this servant didn't forgive like he had been forgiven. Instead, this servant went and found another servant who owed him money—about three months of work. He demanded the servant pay it immediately and then threw him into prison when he wasn't able to do so.

Read **Matthew 18:31–35**. What did the king do when he found out?

The king was so angry! He had just forgiven the servant of a huge debt, and then that servant refused to forgive a much smaller debt. The king sentenced the first servant to prison.

So what's the point of this story? Jesus was showing us that when we refuse to forgive others, we are trapped in the prison of our own bitterness!

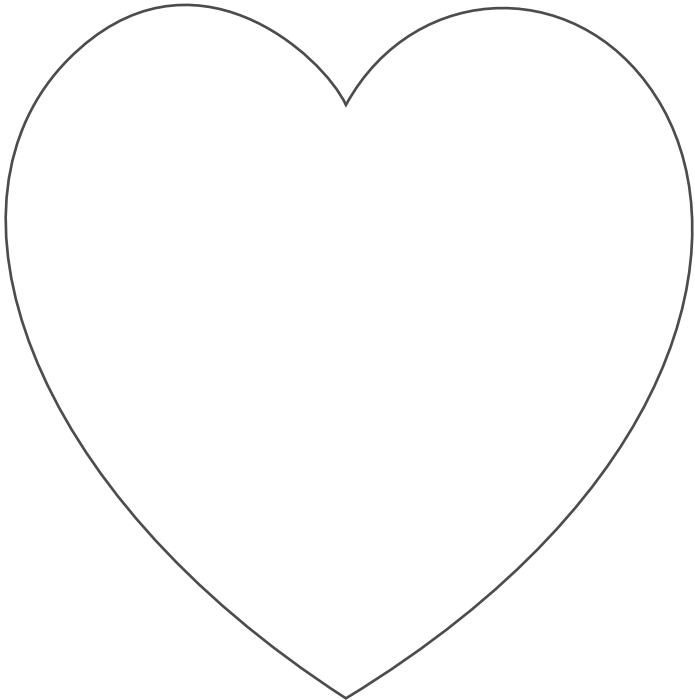
Read KEY VERSE **James 2:13**. What does this verse teach about showing mercy to others?

Those who refuse to forgive and show mercy will be judged. In His compassion, God offers us undeserved forgiveness! That's why He is so displeased when we refuse to show forgiveness to others.

**We should be quick to forgive
because we have been forgiven.**



Draw a cage around the heart to show what bitterness does to us when we refuse to forgive.



Pray and thank God for His undeserved forgiveness. Ask Him to help you forgive others.

Junior Level

Ages 8 - 12

Today we're going to look at another parable Jesus told to continue explaining forgiveness.

Read **Matthew 18:23–27**. What happened to the servant's debt?



A powerful king needed to settle a debt with a servant who owed him ten thousand talents—about 800,000 pounds of silver. It would have taken the servant several lifetimes to pay that! But he asked the king for patience, and the king completely erased the debt from the record.

But in Matthew 18:28–30, we see that this servant didn't forgive like he had been forgiven. Instead, this servant went and found another servant who owed him money—about three months of work. He demanded the servant pay it immediately and then threw him into prison when he wasn't able to do so.

Read **Matthew 18:31–35**. What did the king do to the forgiven servant?

The king was FURIOUS! He had just forgiven the servant of an unimaginable debt, and then that servant refused to forgive a much smaller debt. The king sentenced the first servant to prison—the same punishment that servant gave to the one he wouldn't forgive.

So what's the point of this story? To understand it, we have to know who each character is portraying. The king represents God, the first servant represents us, and the second servant represents those who hurt us.

By throwing him in prison, the first servant kept his debtor from ever paying the debt. He cared more about punishing the debtor than getting the money back. When we're bitter, we don't really care about the debt being paid. We just want to cause pain in return.



Jesus was showing us that when we refuse to forgive others, we are trapped in the prison of our own bitterness until resentment consumes and destroys us.

Read ^{KEY VERSE}  James 2:13.

What does this verse teach about showing mercy to others?

In His compassion, God offers us undeserved forgiveness! That's why He is so displeased when we refuse to show forgiveness to others.

The first servant's debt greatly outweighed the second servant's. This reminds us that even though the pain others cause us is severe, it doesn't compare to the debt we owe God! Because God completely forgives our enormous debt to Him, we can forgive others of their smaller debt to us.

We should be quick to forgive
because we have been forgiven.

What do you need to remember when you're tempted to hold on to bitterness?

Pray and thank God for His unfathomable forgiveness. Ask Him to help you forgive others.

Youth Level
Ages 13 and up

When We Don't Forgive

Do you remember on Day 4 when Jesus talked with Peter about extreme forgiveness? Right after that interaction, Jesus told a parable to elaborate on and emphasize His point.

Read *Matthew 18:23-27*. Paraphrase this story.

A powerful king needed to settle a debt with a servant who owed him ten thousand talents—about 800,000 pounds of silver. It would have taken the servant several lifetimes to pay that! But he asked the king for patience, and the king completely erased the debt from the record.

Read *Matthew 18:28-30*. In your own words, describe what happens next in the story.

Being forgiven for a debt that large is amazing! This servant **SHOULD** have responded with love and gratitude, but he didn't. He found another servant who owed him money—about three months of work—and demanded for that servant to pay his debt back immediately. Then he threw the other servant into prison for not being able to pay.

Read *Matthew 18:31-35*. What did the king do to the forgiven servant?

The king was **FURIOUS**! He had just forgiven the servant of an unimaginable debt, and then that servant refused to forgive a manageable debt. The king sentenced the first servant to prison—the same punishment that servant gave to the one he wouldn't forgive.

So what's the point of this story? To understand it, we have to know who each character is portraying. The king represents God, the first servant represents us, and the second servant represents those who hurt us.

Did the first servant help his debtor pay the debt by putting him in prison? Why or why not?

Parent Guide

When We Don't Forgive

Do you remember on Day 4 when Jesus talked with Peter about extreme forgiveness? Right after that interaction, Jesus told a parable to elaborate on and emphasize His point.

Read *Matthew 18:23 - 27*. Paraphrase this story.

It would have taken the servant several lifetimes to pay the king back! But he asked the king for patience, and the king completely erased the debt from the record.

Read *Matthew 18:28 - 30*. In your own words, describe what happens next in the story.

Being forgiven for a debt that large is amazing! This servant SHOULD have responded with love and gratitude, but he didn't. He found another servant who owed him a much smaller amount of money—about three months of work—and demanded for that servant to pay his debt back immediately. Then he threw the other servant into prison for not being able to pay.

Read *Matthew 18:31 - 35*. What did the king do to the forgiven servant?



The king was FURIOUS! He had just forgiven the servant of an unimaginable debt, and then that servant refused to forgive a manageable debt. The king sentenced the first servant to prison—the same punishment that servant gave to the one he wouldn't forgive.

So what's the point of this story? To understand it, we have to know who each character is portraying. The king represents God, the first servant represents us, and the second servant represents those who hurt us.

Did the first servant help his debtor pay the debt by putting him in prison? Why or why not?

By throwing him in prison, the first servant kept his debtor from ever paying the debt. When we're bitter, we don't really care about the debt being paid. We just want to cause pain in return.

What do you think Jesus was symbolizing when the king put the first servant into prison?

Jesus was showing us that when we refuse to forgive others, we are trapped in the prison of our own bitterness until resentment consumes and destroys us.

Read ^{KEYVERSE} *James 2:13*. What does this verse teach about showing mercy to others?

In His compassion, God offers us undeserved forgiveness! That's why He is so displeased when we refuse to show forgiveness to others.

Based on this story, how does the debt we owe God compare to the debt others owe us?

This is a pivotal question for understanding the point of this lesson. Bring it up in your family discussion to see if your kids really understand.

The first servant's debt greatly outweighed the second servant's. This reminds us that the pain others cause us is severe, but it doesn't compare to the debt we owe God! Because God completely forgives our enormous debt to Him, we can forgive others of their smaller debt to us.

**We should be quick to forgive
because we have been forgiven.**

What do you need to remind yourself of when you're tempted to hold on to bitterness?

Pray and thank God for His unfathomable forgiveness. Ask Him to help you forgive others.

Scripture: James 2:13

Key Truth: We should be quick to forgive because we have been forgiven.

Discussion: Are you quick to forgive? Give an example of how you can be quick to forgive. How does that compare to the way God forgives?





INCLUDES:



MAKING LEMONADE:

Trusting God through life's struggles



FEAR NOT:

Quieting fear and anxiety with God's truth



DON'T BLOW UP:

Seeking God's way instead of anger



LETTING GO:

Choosing forgiveness over bitterness



ABOUNDING IN HOPE:

How to resist despair and hopelessness

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LETTING GO

Like a root that grows deep in the soil where no one can see, bitterness is a sin that slowly and silently works its way deep into our hearts. Though it's easy to excuse it, bitterness causes incredible hurt, not only to ourselves and others but also to our relationship with God!

Letting Go is a study about the sin of bitterness and its cure. No matter what we experience in this life, God's forgiveness gives us the example and ability to forgive those who hurt us! By learning more about God's character, we will grow in our ability to trust His good plan and choose forgiveness every day.



LG-J

