

EXTENDING GRACE

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost — Lectionary Readings Deep Dive

St. Peter Lutheran Church • Rev. José R. Argueta • Sunday, September 13, 2026

STUDY FOCUS: BREAKING THE MENTAL LEDGER

By default, human nature relies on a strictly kept scorecard of debts, offenses, and missed apologies. In this study, we explore how God's Word across Genesis, Romans, and Matthew calls us to throw away the ledger—surrendering judgment to God, recognizing our own vast forgiveness, and extending radical grace to others.

PART 1: THE OLD TESTAMENT — GENESIS 50:15–21

Context: Jacob has just died, and Joseph's brothers fear that Joseph will finally avenge the evil they committed against him years earlier when they sold him into slavery.

¹⁵ When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him." ¹⁶ So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this command before he died: ¹⁷ 'Say to Joseph, "Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you." And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.'" Joseph wept when they spoke to him. ¹⁸ His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." ¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? ²⁰ As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. ²¹ So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

DISCUSSION & REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Understanding Guilt & Fear:** Why do you think the brothers assumed Joseph would retaliate after their father's death? How does guilt distort our expectation of how others (and God) will treat us?
- Stepping Down from Judgment:** In verse 19, Joseph asks, "Am I in the place of God?" How does trying to hold a grudge or seek personal revenge place us on God's throne?
- Sovereignty & Providence:** Joseph states in verse 20 that while they meant evil, God turned it to good. How can trusting in God's ultimate providence help you release past wounds caused by others?
- Active Grace:** Joseph did not just verbally forgive them; he promised to provide for them and their little ones (v. 21). What does active, tangible grace look like in our modern relationships?

PART 2: THE EPISTLE — ROMANS 14:1–12

Context: Paul addresses divisions within the early Roman church regarding non-essential religious practices, such as dietary restrictions and special days, urging believers not to judge one another.

¹ As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. ² One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. ³ Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. ⁴ Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls... ⁷ For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. ⁸ For if we live, we live to the

Lord... ¹⁰ Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God... ¹² So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

DISCUSSION & REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. **Opinions vs. Essentials:** Paul warns against quarreling over secondary opinions (v. 1). What are some modern "disputed matters" in the church or community that cause unnecessary friction and judgment?
2. **The Trap of Despising and Judging:** Notice the two traps: the strong tend to *despise* the weak, while the weak tend to *judge* the strong (v. 3). Which tendency do you lean toward when you disagree with a fellow Christian?
3. **Accountability to Christ:** Verses 10–12 remind us that we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. How does keeping our own future accountability in mind curb our desire to police others?

PART 3: THE GOSPEL — MATTHEW 18:21–35

Context: Peter asks Jesus about the limits of forgiveness. Jesus responds with the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant to show the boundless nature of heavenly mercy.

²¹ Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?"
²² Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times. ²³ "Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants... ²⁴ one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents... ²⁷ And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸ But when that same servant 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.'... ³² 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' ... ³⁵ "So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

DISCUSSION & REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. **The Scale of the Debt:** Ten thousand talents was an astronomical, unpayable debt (millions of days' wages), whereas one hundred denarii was a small amount. What is Jesus illustrating about our debt to God versus others' debts to us?
2. **The Shortness of Memory:** How could the servant go straight from being forgiven an ocean of debt to choking a peer over pocket change? In what ways do we do the exact same thing in our daily lives?
3. **Heart Forgiveness vs. Checklist:** Jesus calls us to forgive "*from your heart*" (v. 35). What is the difference between mechanical, rule-following forgiveness and true, heart-level forgiveness?

CONNECTING THE READINGS & PERSONAL APPLICATION

When we connect these three scriptures, a powerful cohesive message emerges:

- **Genesis 50** shows us that forgiveness requires trusting God's sovereignty and stepping down as judge.
- **Romans 14** shows us that grace means allowing room for differences and remembering our shared master.
- **Matthew 18** shows us that grace must flow outward because God has already poured an ocean of mercy into our lives.

LIVING IT OUT THIS WEEK

1. **Identify Your Ledger:** Is there a person or situation where you are holding onto a mental scorecard or waiting for an apology before you extend grace?
2. **Practical Grace in Action:** Select one practical area to focus on this week:
 - *At Home:* Refraining from bringing up a past mistake during a disagreement.
 - *At Work/School:* Praying for someone who spoke ill of you or took credit for your work.
 - *In Family/Friends:* Reaching out to initiate reconciliation with someone who drifted away.

CLOSING PRAYER

"Heavenly Father, You have forgiven us an unpayable debt on the cross through Your Son, Jesus Christ. Forgive us for the times we hold grudges, keep scorecards, and act as judges over others. Fill our hearts with Your Holy Spirit so that Your grace may flow through us freely—into our homes, workplaces, and relationships. Help us to close the book on resentment and live in the freedom of Your mercy. In Jesus' name, Amen."