



THE COMPASS

RED HILL LUTHERAN CHURCH

The Compass:
Encounter-Examine-Explore-Embrace God's Word
On
Your Discipleship Path

Sermon Series: "Surrender: Serving the Savior"
(Pentecost, 2026)
"Forgiveness." Text(s): *Matthew 18.21-35; Luke 15.25-32.*

□ **Day #1—Monday, September 14th. Read: Matthew 18.21-22. —Encounter: God's Word and your life—What do you Hear and/or See?**

Forgiveness makes human relationships possible. If it were not for forgiveness, our relationships with God and each other would be in serious jeopardy. This text from Matthew reveals to us that the struggle to forgive was just as real during the time of Jesus as it is now. As followers of Jesus, humility and honesty are necessary character traits; they really are fruits of a growing faith. Humility and honesty are the consequences of being forgiven by God. Humility and honesty are also necessary for interpersonal relationships to be restored and strengthened. We see this clearly in Peter's question to Jesus. Peter recognized that forgiving is risky, so he asks Jesus how he should handle forgiving others, particularly his "brothers" in the future. Where there is Christian love, our lives are shaped by a different ethic and outlook—we see what real life looks like in light of the freedom of the Gospel! (*Ephesians 3.17-19*).

What is hardest for you when it comes to forgiving? 1). Forgiving again and again? 2). Not punishing those who hurt me? 3). Forgiving from my heart— "I can say the words but I don't feel them?" 4). Wondering how I can forgive without encouraging irresponsibility?

Peter's offer to Jesus to forgive up to "seven times" must have been to Peter a magnanimous gesture! Jesus' answer, "70 times 7;" would literally be 490 times. So does this mean we forgive someone 490 times only? Jesus' point was that no limits should be set on forgiveness. Peter's initial question to Jesus is a question that we ourselves likely still ask today: "Lord, how much is enough?"

The context here is on how disciples should respond to a fellow-disciple's wrongdoing when they themselves are personally affected. It is assumed that the answer lies in forgiveness; again, the only question is whether there is any limit. One commentator believes that we should hear in the figures, "seven," and "seventy-seven," a deliberate echo of the Lamech story in Genesis. In other words, our willingness to forgive should be as limitless as the extravagant vengeance of which Lamech once boasted (*Genesis 4.24ff*).

Jesus' reply, "70 times 7" (again, 490 times) must have shocked Peter! How can we possibly keep count for that many sins and debts? Of course, that was exactly the point Jesus was making: Love "keeps no record of wrongs" (*1 Corinthians 13.5*). By the time we have forgiven someone that many times (which in intimate relationships we surely do!), we could say that we have a "habit" of forgiving.

Let us be clear: Jesus was not advising thoughtless or shallow forgiveness; forgiveness starts with an acknowledgement that a wrong has been committed, a debt incurred. It must be remembered constantly that forgiveness of this kind is a supernatural ability...it comes through the power of the Holy Spirit working in our hearts. This repeated forgiving of the brother or sister works on behalf of the offender as well. If someone is guilty of a repeated sin, no doubt he or she would find strength and the power to conquer that sin through the encouragement of his/her loving and forgiving brother or sister (you ☺). If we are willing to forgive in this manner, God uses us to transform the character of the other.

Consider/Reflect: Do you have someone in your life you feel you have forgiven *too many times*? What is the hardest part about forgiving for you? If you are struggling to forgive someone (maybe yourself), pray about this person today and ask God to give you the power to forgive.

□ **Day #2—Tuesday, September 15th. Read: Matthew 18:23-25. —Examine: The Text and its Message.**

To provide an example of this type of forgiving spirit discussed yesterday, Jesus told a parable. It is important to note that this parable is not about salvation, for salvation is wholly by God's grace and received through faith. To make God's forgiveness an earned achievement, is to violate the very truth of Scripture (*Romans 5.8; Ephesians 2.8–9; Titus 3.3–7*). In the parable, God is like the king in that God has forgiven us a debt that we are unable to pay. The parable is a comment upon the fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer: Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those that trespass against us. Forgiven sinners forgive sinners. The main character in this parable went through a couple of "stages" in his experience of forgiveness. We will look at one of those stages today:

He was a truly a debtor (vs. 23–27). The servant of the king owed a large amount, 10,000 talents. In terms of today's buying power, this was probably equivalent to over \$10 million dollars as a talent was a measure of gold or other precious metal, between 58 and 80 pounds. This large amount of money could indicate that the debtor had been stealing resources from the king. Consequently, when the accounting was done, his crime was discovered. The total tax levy in Palestine at that time was about 800 talents a year, so you can see how dishonest this man was. If this man created this debt through illegal means, this implies that the servant was both guilty of sinning against his king and/or he owed a debt he would never repay!

Similarly, every sin we commit is a debt to God and not like a debt to an equal (as in a servant to a king in the parable). In our sin debt to God, we are unable to repay. Like the servant in the parable, we have dishonored our relationship with God by breaking His law. The penalty is death (*Romans 6:23*). If God should deal with us in strict justice, we would be condemned. God is a just God. Justice demands satisfaction. This is why Jesus dies in our place and thus satisfies God's wrath because of our sin. The theological term for this is *Vicarious Atonement*; Jesus takes our place and assumes our debt...death! Jesus' resurrection affirms that the penalty was paid in full, which achieves our justification (we are declared "not guilty" and our relationship with God is restored) and new life is given! The reality is that we are forgiven a debt that we could not pay. The question now becomes, "How will I handle the debts and sins committed against me? We forgive because God has forgiven us, and no offence against us can remotely compare with the incalculable amount we ourselves have been forgiven by God (our King).

Consider/Reflect: Imagine that when you pay your next month's mortgage or rent, you are told that it has been paid in full—forever! How would you respond? Would you be more likely to forgive someone who owed you \$50.00? Why do you think Jesus used money to illustrate forgiveness?

□ **Day #3—Wednesday, September 16th. Read: Matthew 18:26-27. —Explore: The background to this text(s).**

The debtor thought he might be able to receive mercy from the king. He told the king that, given enough time, he could pay his debt back. We detect two sins here: Pride and a lack of sincere repentance. Again, if he stole the money, he clearly was not ashamed; he was ashamed because he was caught! Again, in the economy of that day his indebtedness was likely impossible to repay. In other words, his case was hopeless except for one thing: The king seemingly was a man of compassion. Moreover, he was! The king *assumed the loss* and forgave the servant. This meant that the man was free and that he and his family would not be thrown into a debtor's prison. The servant did not deserve this forgiveness; it was purely an act of love and mercy on the part of the king.

As mentioned yesterday, in this part of the parable, we can see the personal truth that when it comes to the debt we owe God due to our sin, God (the king) gives us unimaginable forgiveness of the debt we owe (our sin). The truth is that our sin is so great, and the consequences of that sin (death) so final, we realize our absolute inability pay our debt or reverse the consequences. Our sacrifices and offerings will not bring forgiveness. Likewise, our good works are but God's work in us, so we are unable to make satisfaction for our debts to God. Hence, we need someone who loves us so much that He provides a way out—forgiveness. Or, more properly, we need a Someone who loves us more than the debt we owe. This Someone is our Savior Jesus Christ, who paid our sin debt.

Now, as we live in the freedom of forgiveness given by from God, *we must forgive others*. We must believe and thus experience God's forgiveness in our hearts so that it humbles us and makes us gentle and forgiving toward others. The servant in the parable did not have a deep experience of forgiveness and humility. He was simply glad to be "off the hook." He had

never really repented. Scripture tells us to: “...*be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you*” (*Ephesians 4:32*).

Consider/Reflect: Consider how much God loves you. All of your sin—past present, and future, has been forgiven through Jesus’ death and resurrection. You matter to God that much!

☐ **Day #4--Thursday, September 17th. Read: Matthew 18:28-31. —Explore: The background to this text(s).**

The servant left the presence of the king, went, and found a fellow servant who owed him 100 denarii. The average day’s wage for a worker was a denarius. Consequently, this debt was insignificant compared to what the servant had owed the king. Instead of sharing with his friend the joy of his own release from the debt he owed the king, the servant mistreated his friend and demanded that he pay the debt. Ironically, the fellow servant used the same approach as the king’s “unjust servant:” “Give me time! I will pay you all of it!” However, the unjust servant was unwilling to give to others what he had been given—release from a debt (forgiveness).

Perhaps he had the legal right to throw the man in prison, but he did not have the moral right. The unjust servant had been forgiven a debt so large that he was essentially given his life back. How much more should he have forgiven his fellow servant the very SMALL amount owed? In addition, again, because of the king’s mercy, the unjust servant and his family had been spared the shame and suffering of prison. However, he would not do the same for his fellow servant.

The lesson of the parable is obvious: if the king could forgive the servant’s debt of *millions* of dollars, certainly the servant could forgive his friend’s debt of *few* dollars! We forgive others because Christ has forgiven us (*Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13*). Again, I remind you: This parable is not about salvation; it is a matter of “family forgiveness” between brothers and sisters in Christ, not between God and the sinner. This is important because we do not do not need to read eternal judgment into *vs. 34-35* (See tomorrow).

One of the evidences that a person is truly saved is his or her love for their brothers and sisters (*1 John 3:10-17*). Christians, completely forgiven by God, should never fail to forgive (*Luke 17:3-4*). Compassion lies at the root of forgiveness. The Lord’s compassionate desire to feed (*Matthew 14:14; 15:32*) and to heal (*Matthew 20:34*) was a manifestation of his even deeper compassionate desire to forgive (*Matthew 18:27*).

Consider/Reflect: Have you experienced (or are you experiencing now) the “prison” of unforgiveness? How does this text speak to your present circumstances? In refusing to be merciful to others, what do we deny ourselves?

☐ **Day #5— Friday, September 18th. Read: Matthew 18:32-35. —Explore: The background to this text(s).**

What was wrong with the unforgiving, unjust debtor? The same thing that is wrong with those who have been forgiven by their God and King, but they have not really experienced that forgiveness deep in their souls: They do not LIVE forgiven. The result is that forgiveness is not shared with others. If we live unforgiving lives, always seeking to get even or get back at someone, we put ourselves into a spiritual “prison.” Conversely, if we live according to forgiveness, sharing with others what God has shared with us, then we will experience freedom and joy. In reality, Peter asked for a means of spiritual bookkeeping. “Jesus, just tell me how to properly account for the wrongs committed against me.” Jesus told him to practice forgiveness and forget the bookkeeping!

The description of the “prison” of unforgiveness is vivid. The jailers, or “tormentors,” are the ones who were allowed to scourge and torture 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.

We reveal the true condition of our hearts by the way we treat others. The king literally delivered the servant from prison; but the servant put himself back in. The world’s worst prison is the prison of an unforgiving heart. If we refuse to forgive others, then we are only imprisoning ourselves and causing our own torment. What about *vs. 34-35*? “Pastor, I thought you told me this wasn’t about earning forgiveness—it sure seems like it here!” In this passage, what we have is Jesus’ honest description of the human heart. When our hearts are humble and repentant, we will seek to forgive those who have sinned against us. However, where there is pride and a desire for revenge, there can be no true repentance. Think about it this way: If I am in a true relationship with God, so much so that I grieve my sin against my Father, consequently when I seek His forgiveness, and I am granted His forgiveness, I desire to thank and please God for His incredible gift of mercy! What is it that pleases God and how does God desire we thank Him for His mercy? *Micah 6:8*:

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Let us remind ourselves of the main theme of this parable: Jesus tells us that forgiveness is the heart and soul of the Christian life! We are forgiven by God and we are to forgive others. The first (unjust) servant had been forgiven all, and he in turn should have forgiven all. You and I as God's children have had all our sins forgiven through Jesus' death and resurrection. Therefore, when someone sins against us, we ought to be willing to forgive . . . even repeatedly!

Consider/Reflect: God does not forgive us because we forgive; God forgives us and through His forgiveness and the power of the Holy Spirit, we possess a forgiving attitude!

□ **Day #6-Saturday, September 19th. Read: Luke 15:25-32. —Embrace: God and His guiding you through His Word.**

In Jesus' well-known parable of the Prodigal Son, the central focus is on the mercy and love of the father (God) taking back his rebellious son (us). The parable of the Prodigal Son also has a second "act" to it, which is the relationship between the older, dutiful brother and his younger, rebellious, but forgiven, brother. The attitude of the older brother (who symbolized the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law in *Luke 15.1-2*), was one of judgment and disgust. Hearing the noise of the party, the older brother became angry (just as the Pharisees and teachers of the Law were angry with the message Jesus was proclaiming). Like the older son who refused to go to the feast, the Pharisees refused to enter the kingdom Jesus offered to the nation.

Interestingly, the father went out and pleaded with the older brother to go to the feast, just as he went out to greet the younger son (Jesus ate with Pharisees as well as sinners. He did not want to exclude the Pharisees and teachers of the Law from the kingdom). The older brother was just as disrespectful to his father as his brother had been—they were just different means of disrespect. Both brothers used the father for what they could get; they did not love the father for the father's sake. The older brother's, "Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders..." betrayed the fact that the older brother thought he had a relationship with his father because of his good work. In other words, he served his father not out of love but out of a desire for reward; the same as his younger brother. It is interesting to consider the father's description of his younger son's experience: He was dead, and was now alive; he was lost, and now was found. This is the spiritual experience of every lost sinner who comes to the Father through faith in Jesus Christ (*John 5:24; Ephesians 2:1-10*). Note the parallels between the younger son's coming to the father and our coming to the Father through Christ (*John 14:6*)...

<i>The Younger Son</i>	<i>Jesus Christ</i>
He was lost (<i>v.24</i>)	"I am the way"
He was ignorant (<i>v.17</i>)	"I am the truth"
He was dead (<i>v.24</i>)	"I am the life"

Because the elder brother refused to go in, he missed the joy of forgiving his brother and restoring the broken relationship. He also missed the joy of pleasing his father and uniting the family again. This proves the spiritual theme of this week: If we are out of fellowship with God, we cannot be in fellowship with our brothers and sisters and, conversely, if we harbor an unforgiving attitude toward others, we cannot be in communion with God (*see also Matthew 5:21-26; 1 John 4:18-21*).

Consider/Reflect/Pray: God has forgiven us "70 times 7"...and more! "Lord, you have forgiven me. Please help me to forgive _____. Please change my mind and change my heart so that I may please you in all I do. Lead the way Jesus. I am your son/daughter. In Jesus' name, Amen."

Pray and Prepare for Worship Tomorrow...
Sermon Series: "Surrender. Serving the Savior."

Scripture Texts:

Isaiah 55.6-9

Philippians 1.12-14, 19-30

Matthew 20.1-16