

## STEP 8 – RELEASING OTHERS

### MATTHEW 18:21-35

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?”

Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

“Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

“At this the servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

“But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded.

“His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.’

“But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

“Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

### THINKING IT THROUGH

Jesus’ parable of the unforgiving servant is shocking—intentionally so. It forces us to confront the size of our own forgiven debt and the seriousness of withholding forgiveness from others.

**STEP 8 IN RE:GENERATION:** *We forgive those who have harmed us and become willing to make amends to those we have harmed.*

Peter asks Jesus for a number. How many times is enough? Jesus answers with a posture. Forgiveness in the Kingdom isn’t math—it’s mercy.

In Jesus’ story, a servant is forgiven a debt so massive he could never repay it. He walks out free, and he immediately demands payment on a comparatively small debt from someone else. He grabs, he chokes, and he insists on justice after receiving mercy.

That’s the danger Step 8 exposes in us: we can be fully aware of what others owe us and forget what we’ve been forgiven. Forgiveness begins with remembering my own forgiven debt.

The turning point in the parable is not the servant’s promise to repay, but the master’s compassion. The debt is canceled. That’s mercy and grace.

Step 8 isn’t about pretending what happened didn’t happen. It’s about realizing truth:

- ▶ I am more sinful than I want to admit.
- ▶ I am more loved than I ever dared to hope.
- ▶ I have been forgiven a debt I could never repay.
- ▶ That memory softens the clenched fist.

*“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.”*

—Ephesians 4:32–5:1

To forgive is *not* to say, “It didn’t matter.” It *is* to say, “I won’t be your judge, jury, and debt collector.” Some debts can’t be repaid: lost innocence, betrayal, abandonment, abuse, years stolen by someone else’s sin. Forgiveness is releasing my demand that the past be rewritten.

This is the heart-move of Step 8: I release them into God’s hands. Not because they deserve it, but because God has held me that way.

Unforgiveness keeps me chained to what hurt me. In the parable, the unforgiving servant ends up imprisoned. That’s not accidental. When I refuse mercy, I don’t punish them as much as I imprison myself. Unforgiveness becomes a way of staying connected to the wound.

### **Step 8 invites a different future: I don’t have to carry them in my chest anymore.**

Forgiveness and boundaries belong together. Forgiving someone does not mean trusting them, reconciling immediately, removing consequences, or staying in an unsafe relationship. Forgiveness is something I can do in my heart before God. Rebuilding trust must be earned over time. Sometimes the most faithful release includes a boundary.

“From your heart” is a process, not a switch. Jesus ends with those words, reminding us that this is deeper than the sentences we say. Step 8 often looks like repeated surrender: “Lord, I choose to forgive; help my heart catch up.”

We forgive those who have harmed us and become willing to make amends to those we have harmed.

A simple Step 8 prayer you can whisper this week: “Jesus, you canceled my debt. Help me release theirs.”

### **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

1. When you remember how much God has forgiven you, what changes in your heart? How might His mercy reshape the way you view others?
2. What is hardest to release right now—the wound, the desire for justice, or the hope that the past could be different?
3. Since forgiveness is a process, not a switch to flip, what is one small step of surrender you can take this week? What would it look like to pray, “Lord, I choose to forgive—help my heart catch up”?
4. In your situation, how does forgiveness differ from trust? What healthy boundary might help you release someone without putting yourself at risk?

### **CLOSING PRAYER**

Father, Thank You for the mercy You have shown me. I could never repay my debt, yet through Jesus You canceled it and set me free. Help me never forget how deeply I am forgiven and loved. You know the wounds I carry and the people connected to them. Today, I choose to release them into Your hands. Not because it didn’t matter, but because You have shown me mercy. I give up my right to hold on, to collect, and to carry this any longer. Soften my heart where it is still tight. Be patient with me where forgiveness feels hard. Help my heart catch up with what I choose to surrender. Give me wisdom to set healthy boundaries, courage to make amends where needed, and freedom from bitterness. Jesus, You canceled my debt. Help me release theirs.

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