

SERMON STUDY GUIDE

HIDDEN PLAIN SIGHT UNCOVERING THE KINGDOM

"Parable of the Vineyard Workers"

March 30, 2025

Scripture Passages: Matthew 18:21-35

INTRO

Have you ever held onto something so tightly that it began to weigh you down? Unforgiveness is exactly that—an invisible weight that can quietly grow heavier over time, affecting how we live, love, and relate to God. Jesus tells a powerful parable in response to a very practical question:

"Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?"

Jesus' reply: "Not seven times, but seventy-seven times."

Peter wanted a limit. Jesus offered a lifestyle.

STUDY AND REFLECTION

The Unmerciful Servant (Matthew 18:21–35)

Jesus tells of a king who begins settling accounts. One servant owes an impossible debt—**ten thousand bags of gold**—a number meant to represent something unpayable. The servant begs for mercy, and **the king forgives the entire debt**.

But that same servant turns around and violently demands repayment from a fellow servant who owes him just a few silver coins. When the king finds out, he is furious.

"Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?" (v. 33)

The parable ends with a sobering warning: forgiveness withheld is forgiveness forfeited.

KEY THEMES

1. *The Weight of the Debt*

"They changed the standard—from grace to earning."

The first servant's debt is enormous—millions in today's money. Jesus is making a point:

What we've been forgiven by God is beyond what we can imagine.

To forgive others, we must start with remembering what God has forgiven in us.

Forgiveness begins where gratitude lives.

2. *The Smallness of the Offense*

Compared to the king's forgiveness, the second servant's debt was tiny.

When we withhold forgiveness, we magnify the offense and minimize God's mercy.

- Have you ever made someone pay for something far smaller than what you've been forgiven?



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3. *The Trap of Unforgiveness*

"Bitterness is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die."

When we refuse to forgive, we chain ourselves to the offense.

The parable ends not with reconciliation, but imprisonment.

Unforgiveness locks the door—and throws away the key.

APPLICATION

Jesus calls us to be like the king—not the unmerciful servant.

- Who do you need to forgive?
- What offense are you still replaying in your mind?
- How does remembering God's mercy help you extend grace to others?

Forgiveness is not about forgetting—it's about releasing.

We let go, not because they deserve it, but because we didn't either.

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Which group of workers do you identify with right now—and why?
2. How do you tend to respond when someone receives grace you don't think they deserve?
3. How can our community reflect the landowner's radical generosity?

REFLECTION AND PRAYER

Ask God to:

- Show you where you are holding onto offense or bitterness.
- Help you forgive from the heart—not just with words.
- Renew your understanding of the mercy you've received.

"Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors..." (Matthew 6:12)

LIVE THE PARABLE

- Write down the name of someone you need to forgive. Pray over it every day this week.
- Take a bold step toward peace—whether it's a conversation, a letter, or a prayer.
- Celebrate the mercy of God by showing mercy to others.

Forgiven people forgive people. Set someone free—and discover it was you.