

Open Bible Stories — The Story of the Unmerciful Servant

Introduction

Key Idea

The story of the unmerciful servant teaches us that we should forgive others as God has forgiven us.

Core Belief Verse

"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." Ephesians 4:32

God's Big Story

The eternal God created all things in six days.

He made a good and perfect world.

He made humans in his image to fill the earth and rule over creation.

But humans rebelled against God and ruined God's creation.

God set to restore his world through his promise.

God made a covenant with Abraham. He promised to bless all nations through Abraham.

God kept his promises across the generations.

God provided Abraham with a promised child, Isaac.

God gave Isaac a wife and she bore twins, Jacob and Esau.

God blessed Jacob and his sons, and the blessing continued to the next generation.

God rescued Joseph, one of Jacob's sons, and used him to rescue his family.

God caused his people, the Israelites, to multiply in the land of Egypt; eventually, they became slaves.

But, God raised up a deliverer, Moses, to deliver his people from their slavery.

God judged the Egyptians with harsh plagues; in the final judgment, he passed over his people who covered their doorposts with the blood of a sacrificed lamb.

Then, God delivered the Israelites by bringing them out of Egypt and crossing the Red Sea on dry land.

God made a covenant with the Israelites and made them his people.

God tested Israel in a series of wilderness wanderings and eventually brought his people into the promised land of Canaan.

God raised up deliverers to lead Israel and rescue them from their enemies.

God formed Israel into a kingdom. He made a covenant with King David and promised to send a king that would rule his people forever. Many of Israel's kings were evil and the kingdom of Israel divided into two kingdoms.

God sent prophets to warn his people of God's judgment and call them to repent.

When Israel did not repent, God sent his people into exile. After many years, he brought them back to the land.

Throughout the Old Testament, God promised to send his Messiah to deliver his people from their sin.

After many years, the prophet John was born. He would prepare people for the coming Messiah.

At the perfect time, God sent his Son, Jesus, to be born of a virgin Mary.

When John and Jesus grew up, John baptized Jesus as a sign that Jesus was God's beloved Son.

Jesus endured all manner of temptation without ever sinning.

When he was thirty years old, he launched a public ministry of preaching, teaching, and healing.

He taught his disciples about the life of compassion, sacrifice, and forgiveness.

The Story: The Story of the Unmerciful Servant

29-01



One day, Peter asked Jesus, "Master, how many times should I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus said, "Not seven times, but 70 times seven!" By this, Jesus meant that we should always forgive. Then Jesus told this story.

29-02



Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. One of his servants owed a huge debt worth 200,000 years' wages."

29-03



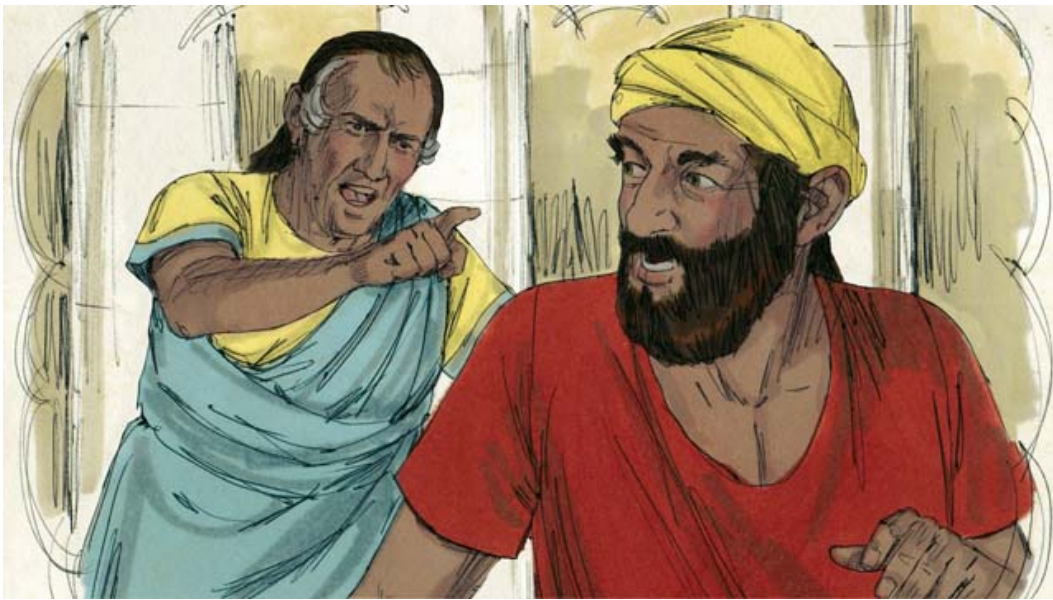
"But the servant could not pay his debt, so the king said, 'Sell this man and his family as slaves to pay his debt.'"

29-04



"The servant fell on his knees before the king and said, 'Please be patient with me, and I will pay the full amount that I owe you.' The king felt pity for the servant, so he canceled all of his debt and let him go."

29-05



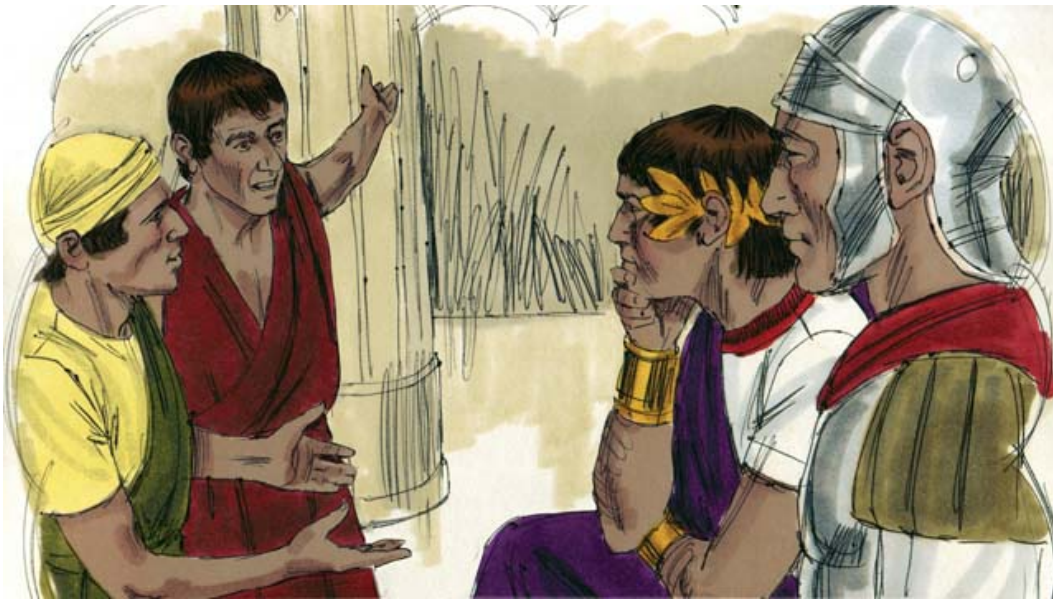
"But when the servant went out from the king, he found a fellow servant who owed him a debt worth four months' wages. The servant grabbed his fellow servant and said, 'Pay me the money that you owe me!'"

29-06



"The fellow servant fell on his knees and said, 'Please be patient with me, and I will pay the full amount that I owe you.' But instead, the servant threw his fellow servant into prison until he could pay the debt."

29-07



"Some other servants saw what had happened and were greatly disturbed. They went to the king and told him everything."

29-08



"The king called the servant and said, 'You wicked servant! I forgave your debt because you begged me. You should have done the same.' The king was so angry that he threw the wicked servant into prison until he could pay back all of his debt."



Then Jesus said, "This is what my heavenly Father will do to every one of you if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

A Bible story from: Matthew 18:21-35

Community Study: Loving as Jesus Loved— Showing Genuine Care for One Another

- **Key Idea:** showing love to one another
- **Key Passage:** John 15:12-17
- **Main Session:** OBS 29 (The Story of the Unmerciful Servant)

Recite the Creedal Verse (3-5 minutes)

The verse below summarizes the teaching of the current passage. Read the verse out loud as a community. Read it again several times as a group until the whole community can recite it from memory.

32 Be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you. Ephesians 4:32

OR

14 For if you forgive people their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. Matthew 6:14-15

Sing a Song (3-5 minutes)

Choose a song to sing to praise God and encourage one another.

Read the Passage (3-5 minutes)

Commitment to God involves our commitment to other believers. As a community, read the following Bible passage together to understand what it means to be committed to Jesus and his work.

12 This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 No one has greater love than this—that he lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are my friends if you do the things that I command you. 15 No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, for everything that I heard from my Father, I have made known to you. 16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain.

This is so that whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. 17 These things I command you, so that you love one another. John 15:12-17

Explore the Passage (10-15 minutes)

Christians can only love one another by first receiving God's love for them. As a community, use the following questions to discuss the teaching of the biblical passage.

1. How does Jesus command his followers to relate to other believers?
2. What makes these instructions difficult? Why is it important for Christians to follow these instructions?
3. How does God's love for us make it possible for us to love others?
4. How can your community obey Jesus' teaching in this passage?

Share Your Thoughts (5 minutes)

Think about how you can personally apply this passage to your life. Use the following sentence to help you clarify your thinking. Share your ideas with the rest of the community. Because God has love me, I can love others in this way...

Pray to God (5 minutes)

Pray that God would help your community be committed to God by being committed to one another. Ask God to protect your community from disunity and division in your relationships.

Movement 1: Understand the Story

Read each question aloud. Give the group time to answer before sharing the answer.

Observation Questions

29-01

What question did Peter ask Jesus?

Peter asked Jesus, "How many times should I forgive my brother when he sins against me?"

How many times did Peter suggest that he should forgive his brother?

He suggested that he should forgive him seven times.

How many times did Jesus say he should forgive his brother?

Jesus said he must forgive him 70 times seven.

What did Jesus mean when he said, 70 times seven?

Jesus meant that we should always forgive.

29-02

What story did Jesus tell?

Jesus told a story about a king who wants to settle accounts with his servants.

What would this story explain?

This story would tell what the kingdom of God was like.

In the story, how much did one of the king's servants owe him?

One of the king's servants owed him a huge debt worth 200,000 years' wage.

29-03

Was the servant able to pay his huge debt to the king?

No, he was not.

How did the king decide to punish the servant with the huge debt?

The king ordered that the man and his family be sold as slaves.

29-04

What did the servant do?

The king's servant fell on his knees and begged the king to be patient with him.

What did the king do when the servant begged him to be patient?

The king felt pity on the servant and canceled his debt.

29-05

After this, what did the king's servant do to a fellow servant?

The king's servant found a fellow servant who owed him a debt.

How much was the debt of the fellow servant?

The fellow servant owed the other servant four months' wages.

What did the servant then do to a fellow servant who owed him a small debt?

He grabbed the servant and demanded that he pay the money that he owed him.

29-06

What did this servant do?

This servant fell on his knees and begged his fellow servant to be patient with him.

What did the servant do when his fellow servant fell on his knees and asked him to be patient?

He threw his fellow servant into prison.

29-07

How did the other servants react when he threw his fellow servant in prison?

They were greatly disturbed and told the king about it.

29-08

What did the king say to his servant?

He called him a wicked servant, reminded the servant that the king forgave his debt, and told him he should have also forgiven the debt of his fellow servant.

How did the king punish the servant who did not forgive his fellow servant?

The king was so angry that he threw him into prison until he could pay back all his debt.

29-09

What did Jesus say this story taught about God?

Jesus explained that God would do as the king did to the servant to all who did not forgive their brother.

Movement 2: Theological Questions

What Does This Story Teach Us?

1. How is sin like a debt before God and others? How does this story compare sin to a debt?
2. What does real forgiveness look like? In this story, what picture does Jesus give of real forgiveness?
3. What is the connection between receiving forgiveness from God and offering forgiveness to others? How does this story highlight this relationship?

Movement 3: Live It Out

Personal Implications & Applications From The Story

Guide the group to discuss practical obedience from this story and name concrete next steps.

1. Reflect on how massive your sin is before God? How is your own sin before God like a debt impossible to pay back?
2. To what extent have you experienced God's forgiveness of your sin?
3. In what ways is God calling you to offer forgiveness to others who have sinned against you?
4. Think about this week. Where does "The Story of the Unmerciful Servant" challenge you to obey God in a practical way?
5. How does this key idea shape one decision you need to make right now: The story of the unmerciful servant teaches us that we should forgive others as God has forgiven us.

Movement 4: Retell the Story

Invite the group to retell the story several times until they can tell it clearly and faithfully.

1. Can someone retell "The Story of the Unmerciful Servant" from beginning to end in their own words?
2. Retell this story again, but focus on what God did at each key moment.
3. Retell the story in three parts: beginning, middle, and ending. What changed in each part?
4. If you were teaching this story to your family tonight, how would you tell it simply and clearly?

Church Ministry

Reflect on how this story can edify and mature the Christian community. Design a way to minister this story to your church community.

Ministry Preparation: Take time to consider how you could minister this story to others. Record some ministry ideas below.

Ministry Implementation: Minister this story to a group of believers as you had planned. Use the information in this study to help develop a teaching/lesson or lead a discussion of this story with other believers. Record your ministry plan below.

Ministry Reflection: Think about what you learned from ministering this story to other believers. Reflect on your experience below.

Movement 5: Share It

Help each person plan how they will share this story with others before the next gathering.

Report-back next meeting: Who did you share with, and what happened?

1. Who is one specific person you will share "The Story of the Unmerciful Servant" with this week?
2. When and where will you share this story with them?
3. What is the one main truth from this story you want them to remember?

Mission Engagement

Consider how you will witness this story to unbelievers. Design a way to share this story and engage them in what it teaches about Christianity and the gospel.

Witness Preparation: Take time to consider how you will witness this narrative to unbelievers. Record some ideas below.

Witness Implementation: Share this story with an unbeliever. Use the information in this study to help develop a teaching/lesson or lead a discussion of this story with others. Record your witness plan below.

Witness Reflection: Think about what you learned from sharing this story with unbelievers. Reflect on your experience below.