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Grounders:

Have you had the opportunity to forgive someone who has wronged you? Jesus likened withholding forgiveness to a prison. The irony is that the person who will not forgive is the one locked inside the four walls. *Forgive* means “to let go.” In order to forgive someone who has wounded us, we must *let go* of four prison walls that incarcerate us in the prison of un-forgiveness. In Jesus’ parable of the unforgiving debtor, He described three scenes illustrating the three applications of the story (Matthew 18:21-35).

Scene one portrays the largest debt ever incurred (150,000 years’ wages) being forgiven, or *let go*, vertically from the king to his servant (Matt. 18:21-27). In Christ, God has let go of the largest debt ever incurred—our sin against Him. This week, remember your personal story of that big debt being let go by God in Christ. Write down the date, time, and place where you appropriated God’s forgiveness to your own life.

Scene two paints a similar scenario; however, the debt incurred horizontally between the forgiven servant and his fellow servant is comparatively quite small (100 days’ wages) (Matt. 18:28-31). The servant who had been forgiven the largest debt ever incurred will not *let go* of the small horizontal debt with his fellow servant. He wants to *hold on*.

Are you holding on to a horizontal debt? If so, write it down on that same sheet of paper where you recorded the date, time, and place where you surrendered your vertical debt to Christ. Something about the reality of ink on paper will allow you to connect with the point of scene two in Jesus’ parable. The vertical debt you were let go in Christ is infinitely larger than the horizontal debt that you are holding against the offender.

Scene three casts a dark reality: withholding forgiveness horizontally results in imprisonment (Matt. 18:32-35). Word of the forgiven servant’s behavior reaches the king who responds by throwing the unforgiving servant into prison. Jesus concluded the parable with quite possibly the most sobering words in Scripture, “*This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart*” (Matt. 18:35).

As we see in Jesus’ concluding statement, forgiveness flows from the heart (will, emotions, mind, and spirit). The Bible teaches us that two heart conditions exist: *proud* or *humble*. A proud heart is hard and unforgiving. A humble heart is soft and forgiving. A proud heart holds on. A humble heart lets go. When someone harms us, we either *hold on* or we *let go*. When we hold on, we remove the vertical from the horizontal, taking matters into our own hands. Consequently, we break up the cross into four pieces—each piece representing a prison wall. Ironically, the one incarcerated is not the offender, but the withholder.

Forgiveness does not occur horizontally in relationships without first occurring vertically with God in Christ. So, we are not the one forgiving, or letting go. Christ in us lets go. In order to forgive others, we must first be forgiven by God. Freedom in Christ from the penalty, power, and one day the presence of sin leads to freedom in relationships with others (Matt. 6:12, 14-15). Forgiveness frees us for reconciliation. Forgiveness



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always precedes reconciliation, but reconciliation does not always follow forgiveness because reconciliation takes two.

Forgiveness welds together two ideas: justice and mercy. Both are found in Christ and are displayed in their ultimate clarity at the cross. The key that unlocks the prison of withholding forgiveness is crossed-shaped (humility toward God and others).

This week, try the instant forgiveness experiment. Every time that you are wronged, instantly let go of the offense and the offender. Do this by remembering that the biggest debt ever incurred was let go of you in Christ. While the offense against you horizontally might hurt, it pales in comparison to the weight of your sin against God. You will not be the one letting go; rather, it will be Christ in you. He will set you free. Forgiven and forgiving,
Mitch