

**Sunday, September 17, 2023 – Easter Hill United Methodist Church**  
**Bible Study**  
**“How Many Times?”**  
**Matthew 18:21-35**

Open with a word of prayer

**Gathering Time** (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, ask participants, “What comes to mind when you hear the word ‘forgiveness’?”

**Matthew 18:21-35. Context.** In last week’s reading, Matthew’s Jesus outlines a measured process of church discipline when one member sins against another or against the community. This week’s reading is something of a counter-balance, where Jesus insists that there be no limit to our forgiveness of those who do us injustice, no matter the response of the one giving offense. Jesus illustrates this point with a parable: a king’s servant has mismanaged the king’s assets and run up an unimaginable debt – 10,000 talents would have been more than the annual tax revenue of the entire Near East, an amount the servant could never conceivably repay, even though he says he will. On the other hand, the same servant shows no forgiveness to his fellow slave who owes him 3 months’ wages. For this he pays dearly. A negative example of what we pray, “forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors”!

**Read Matthew 18:15-20**

What touches your heart, what do you hear in the scripture, what questions do you have, or what doesn’t make sense to you in the text?

**Read Matthew 18:15-20 again -**

Write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.

How many times did Jesus say we need to forgive those who sinned against us? (Matthew 18:22) *What do you think it means?* “Seventy-seven times, or seventy times seven. Which is it? Doesn’t matter; it wasn’t math; it was and is grace. No, he was trying to talk in terms of infinite grace”. How do you feel when you hear that we need to forgive so many times?

**Note:** In my culture, it was considered *good and honorable* not to forgive. Sometimes forgiveness was seen as a sign of weakness. History tells me that some

families told one generation to another that they would never forgive certain families. I know someone who has not forgiven a friend who did something fifty years ago. It was refreshing for me to know that Christ taught us to forgive because God forgave us first. Even in his last breath, Jesus asked God to forgive us (Luke 23:34). What an amazing grace! After I became a Christian and pastor, I encouraged other Christians in my culture to forgive; however, I have seen some people struggle with this idea because it conflicts with their cultural understanding of forgiveness.

- How did you learn forgiveness (or how did you not learn forgiveness)? Who taught you to forgive when you were growing up?

In the parable, what do you think the king symbolizes? What do you think the parable means? The slave who was forgiven a great debt refused to forgive a fellow slave a much smaller debt. Why do you think he reacted this way? Does it reflect the human tendency to withhold forgiveness? How might we learn from it?

A similar message is in the Lord's prayer; "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matthew 6:12). As many of us say the Lord's prayer often, how might we live a life of forgiveness? How might unforgiveness affect our own well-being and relationships? What area of your life might need help from God to forgive?

#### **Optional Activities:**

- Reflect on what God has done to forgive and provide grace in your life.
- Pray for God's guidance to forgive someone who did something to you.
- Work on letting go of bitterness and resentment.
- If possible, try to seek reconciliation.
- Although it may be challenging, try to practice forgiveness all the time as a Christian practice.

#### **Closing Reflection Question**

How is this scripture calling you to change, to see, to be or what might it be calling you to do?

**Prayer** (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

**Sending Forth** (2 minutes). After all, have shared, end by praying the following or a similar prayer:

Gracious and Loving God, thank you for forgiving us endlessly. Grant us the strength to forgive others, releasing any bitterness or resentment. May the transformative power of forgiveness bring healing and reconciliation in our relationships. **Amen.**

And now we pray The Lord's Prayer....

Our Father who art in Heaven  
hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in Heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power  
and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.