



Catch the meaning of Matthew 18:21-35

See Fish the Bible ! Understand Scripture and Apply It to Life, Stephen H. Wheeler, © 2012 www.fishthebible.org

Tools for effective listening Whether we're listening to our friends, our families, our employers, or our Bibles, the following tools will help us:	The passage—Matthew 18:21-35 Forgiving from the heart
1. Immediate Context: <i>Stop interrupting me! Hear my whole thought!</i> 1a. Get the big picture. ----- 1b. Find the important details. ----- 1c. Unmask our assumptions.	Jesus tells His disciples to forgive from their hearts or face serious consequences. ----- <div>  The important details are related to the main point: (1) Comparison to financial debt. (2) The forgiven one refuses to forgive. (3) Result: condemned to prison. (4) God will treat you like that servant. </div> ----- Earthly prison or eternal punishment?
2. Translations: <i>Could you say that again using different words?</i>	10,000 talents = 10,000 bags of gold 100 denarii = 100 silver coins
3. Footnotes and commentaries: <i>Mary, help me understand what John just said.</i>	100 denarii = 100 days of wages
4. Book context: <i>Oops! Sorry. I forgot what you told me this morning.</i>	Language: hell, fire of hell, eternal fire, eternal punishment, weeping and gnashing of teeth....
5. Whole Bible context: <i>If only I had paid attention to what you said last week.</i>	Related passages on forgiveness. (For examples, see optional sheet of sermon notes.)
6. Setting: <i>I understand you so much better, now that I know the setting of your life.</i> 7. Figurative language: <i>The way you talk enriches my life.</i> Examples: metaphor, irony, symbolism... 8. Genres: <i>The "color" in your language helps me understand you better.</i> Examples: humor, proverbs, prophecy, <u>parables</u> , Hebrew poetry, word pictures... 9. Word study: <i>You just used a word I thought I understood, but...</i> 10. Application: <i>Finally, I know what to do.</i> (action, attitude, belief, etc.)	<div>  Optional: See sheet of sermon notes. (available after the service) </div> Pick up the application sheet, after the service.

10. Application : Matthew 18:21–35

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Some possible manifestations of unforgiveness

This list was inspired by the notebook for

Overturning Strongholds, © Richard Houle, p 23.

- Thoughts of revenge
- Tendency to gossip or slander
- Distrust or distance in relationships
- Always being on guard
- Feelings of anger and hurt every time I remember some past event
- An exaggerated emotional reaction to some small sin against us. We may wonder why certain *little things* upset us so much.
- Spiritual dryness
- Broken fellowship with God
- Difficulty in prayer and Bible reading
- Some of us isolate ourselves by living in a fantasy world.

Process for forgiving prompted by the details of Matthew 18:21–35

1. Ask God who you need to forgive.
2. Make a list of what you lost and the consequences. Tell God all about it, even though He already knows. (optional: Attach a symbolic dollar amount.)
material and emotional losses (ex. results of aggression, emotional trauma, irrational fears, insecurity, bitterness, isolation, destructive habits)
lies you started believing (ex. *I'm ugly. Sharing my thoughts with others is always dangerous. God doesn't love me.*)
3. Meditate on the hugeness of God's forgiveness and the high price He paid.
4. Cancel the debt. Turn it over to God. Let go of it. (Romans 12:19)
Don't confuse forgiveness (done in one's own heart) with reconciliation (Two people must agree) Don't confuse forgiveness with trust. Jesus died to forgive us, but He never put his trust in us. (ex. See John 2:24)
5. Confess unforgiveness and other sins.
6. Renounce each lie that resulted from your trauma, and replace it with truth from Scripture.
7. Pray for God's help in continuing to leave behind your claim to recover that debt.

Coaching Questions

See *Fish the Bible!* © 2012, Stephen Wheeler, p 68.

1. What truths should I start believing?

(Example: I am fearfully and wonderfully made, as it says in Ps 139.)

2. What lies have I been believing that I should stop believing? (and what manifestations of these lies should I target?) Many of us are unknowingly imprisoned by lies concerning ourselves, others, or God. What are **my** lies? (Example: The lie that I am inferior and the manifestation of being distracted from work by daydreams of heroism.)

3. What does this tell me about my world and the people around me?

(Example: There is a prison of unforgiveness in the here and now. Am I in that prison?)

4. What promises are here to help me? (Example: Forgiving that bully from my heart will free me from prison.)

5. What principles are here to guide me? (Ex: I can and should forgive, even if the other person admits no wrong.)

6. What commandments are here to respect? (I must forgive that bully from my heart.)

Sermon notes for *Forgiving from the Heart*, © Stephen Wheeler 2018

This is my attempt to be transparent, to let you in on some of the research behind the sermon.

See also: *Fish the Bible! Understand Scripture and Apply It to Life.*, © Stephen Wheeler 2012. www.fishthebible.org.

1. Immediate Context—Mt 18:21–35

Big Picture

- Previous context—v15-20 reconciliation and church discipline
- Subsequent context—v19:1-12 Jesus moves on to Galilee and is questioned about divorce and remarriage.
- Present occasion: One of Jesus' followers (Peter) asks how many times he must forgive a brother.
- Main speaker: Jesus.
- Audience: Jesus is addressing his disciples throughout chapter 18 (see v1). In some cases, He speaks to a broader audience through his disciples (ex. v7). In v15-20, He narrows His focus to the church, using words like "brother" and "church" and speaking about His presence when believers pray. In v21-35, He continues his focus on believers, using words like "brother" and "every one of you."
- Summary statement: Jesus tells his followers to forgive from their hearts or face serious consequences (something resembling a prison).

Important Details

- Jesus compares forgiveness to cancellation of a financial debt.
- Having already been forgiven of a huge debt, the servant refused to forgive much smaller debt.
- In turn, the master did to the servant what he had done to his fellow servant.
- In verse 35, Jesus says to his disciples that God will do the same to them if they don't forgive from the heart.

Possible assumptions about unspoken or unwritten details. (They may or may not be true and must be tested.)

- The words, prison and jailers refer to eternal punishment.
- The words, prison and jailers refer to some kind of punishment here on earth.

2. Translations (ESV, NIV, NLT)

v24—ten thousand talents. (ESV)	10,000 bags of gold. (NIV)	millions of dollars. (NLT)
v28—100 denarii. (ESV)	100 silver coins. (NIV)	several thousand dollars. (NLT)

3. Footnotes and Commentaries

The ESVSB, NIVZSB, NLTsb, HCSBSB, and other study Bibles have notes on verse 18 pointing out that a denarius was equivalent to a day's wages. HCSBSB on Mt 18:32-35—"The word jailers literally means torturers. The debtor's torture would continue until the debt was paid in full. Since the debt could not possibly be repaid, the torture symbolizes eternal punishment."

BEC, NT Vol 1, p67—"It is important to note that this parable is not about salvation, for salvation is wholly of grace and is unconditionally given....The world's worst prison is the prison of an unforgiving heart. If we refuse to forgive others, then we are only imprisoning ourselves and causing our own torment."

NIVZSB on Mat 18:35—"See note on 6:12."—> Mat 6:12: "**forgive us our debts**. Means not that we lose our salvation every time we sin but that our fellowship with God is hindered when we fail to repent of our misdeeds."

4. Book Context

Matthew says much about eternal punishment in his Gospel. You can find the following language by skimming through Matthew. Then you can do word searching to find what you missed. The following language is found throughout the book of Matthew **but is completely absent in Mt 18:21-35**:

- hell 5:29, 30, 10:28, 23:33
- fire of hell, 5:22, 18:9
- eternal fire 18:8, 25:41
- eternal punishment 25:46
- thrown into outer darkness 8:12, 25:30
- weeping and gnashing of teeth 8:12, 13:42, 50, 22:13, 24:51, 25:30
- Hades 11:23, 16:18

In Matthew 18:15, Jesus speaks of gaining or winning your brother over. For this to happen, people must get together. However, our passage speaks of forgiveness **from the heart**, which can be done by an individual. Even if we can't yet be reconciled, we can always forgive from the heart.

5. Whole-Bible Context

Selected verses from a word search for "forgiv*" using OLB with NIV ("*" is the wildcard character, which enables us to search for words such as forgive, forgives, forgiving, forgiven, and forgiveness.)

When we received Christ as Lord and Savior, God forgave us, for all eternity of all our sins, past, present, and future. In the here-and-now, God forgives us as we forgive others. Bitterness and unforgiveness hinder our fellowship with Christ and with each other and cause innumerable problems in the Church and in our personal lives. The following verses speak (at least in part) to the here-and-now forgiveness of God and/or the constant need of believers to reject bitterness and forgive yet again.

Mt 6:12 **Forgive** us our debts, as we also have **forgiven** our debtors.

Mt 6:14-15 For if you **forgive** men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also **forgive** you. 15 But if you do not **forgive** men their sins, your Father will not **forgive** your sins.

Mr 11:25 And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, **forgive** him, so that your Father in heaven may **forgive** you your sins."

Lu 11:4 **Forgive** us our sins, for we also **forgive** everyone who sins against us...

Eph 4:32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, **forgiving** each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Col 3:13 Bear with each other and **forgive** whatever grievances you may have against one another. **Forgive** as the Lord forgave you.

Jas 5:15 And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be **forgiven**.

1Jo 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will **forgive** us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Examples of prisons in the here-and-now

1Co 11:28-30 A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. 29 For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. 30 That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.

Ps 32:2-5 Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit. 3 When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. 4 For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Selah 5

Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"—and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

Ps 51 (This psalm was written after David's sin with Bathsheba.)

James 5:14-16 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. Forgiveness doesn't necessarily mean that we trust the other person. Note that Jesus forgave people, but in John 2:24, we learn that he didn't trust them: *But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all people.*

6. Setting

10,000 (Greek myrios ("myriad")) was the largest number in the Greek language. A talent was worth about 20 years wages and was the largest unit of currency in the Greco-Roman world. (ex. NIVZSB on v24).

ESVSB on Mat 18:25: **"sold, with his wife and children.** A practice common in the ancient world, often as punishment for those whose debts could not possibly be repaid."

7. Figurative Language

v22—The plain sense of forgiving 77 times is that you always forgive without counting the number of times. v24—Since Jesus chose the largest number and the largest unit of currency, it makes sense that He was using figurative language to verbalize the hugeness of God's forgiveness.

v23—The NIVSB, for example, includes a note on v23 (in turn pointing to note on Mt 3:2) and stating that the "Kingdom of Heaven" is used 33 times by Matthew and never by other Gospel authors (who use "Kingdom of God"). The Holman dictionary entry on Kingdom of God says that this expression refers to the all-encompassing reign/realm of God. We misread v23 if we read it as "Heaven is like." or "the afterlife is like."

8. Genre

This is a parable. The main point or central theme of the parable is addressed in verse 35 and could be stated as: *Having been forgiven of so much, we must forgive others or face serious consequences (akin to a prison).* Knowing the main point makes it easier to separate the important details from the others.

Important details of the parable (those that relate to the central theme)

1. Jesus compares forgiveness to cancellation of a financial debt.
2. Having already been forgiven of a huge debt, the servant refused to forgive a much smaller debt.
3. In turn, the master did to the servant what he had done to his fellow servant.

Unimportant details (not tied to the central theme. Jesus probably used them to make the parable true to life.

1. The exact amounts of the debts
2. The master's unawareness of the unforgiveness of the servant prior to being informed by other servants.
3. The words, "until he should pay"—The identical wording of v30 and v34 underscores the similarity between what the unforgiving servant dished out and what he received. However, using this detail to interpret v35 as pointing *only* to hellfire goes beyond what one can normally extract from the details of a parable. It may be akin to deducing details of what can be done in the afterlife by using details from the parable of Luke 16:19-31. Furthermore, it distracts readers from the serious consequences of unforgiveness in the here-and-now. Sadly, bitterness and unforgiveness are prevalent in the lives of all people, including genuine believers, and our passage addresses this issue. That being said, I stop short of saying that Mat 18:35 can *never* refer to the afterlife.

9. Word Study

Looked at definitions and occurrences and of Strong's numbers 3781, 3782, 3783, and 3784 (debt/sin and related).

Ten thousand in Mt 18:24 comes from Greek murioi (Strong's 3463) and can simply mean innumerable or countless. It is also used in 1Co 4:15 & 14:19.

10. Application

Application refers to what we do with a passage in our particular situation. Most (not all) passages have only one basic meaning. However, there are usually many applications. For example, "Love your neighbor as yourself" has basically one meaning, yet each person will apply it differently, depending on their particular situation.

We do not need to be afraid to be transparent with God about our complaints or accusations against Him. As with the psalmists, our complaints may turn to praise. I found the following verses simply by flipping through Psalms and reading the first two or three verses. Then, if I saw a complaint, I'd read the ending. These are the complaints I found which turned into praise: Psalms 6:3, 10:1, 13:1, 22:1-2, 43:2, 64:1, 69:1-4, 74:1-11, 142:2.

Please see the **application sheet** for more details.

Abbreviations:

ESV: *English Standard Version*. ESVSB: *ESV Study Bible*, © 2008 by Crossway Bibles.

HCSB: *Holman Christian Standard Bible*. HCSBSB: *HCSB Study Bible*, © 2010 by Holman Bible Publishers.

NIV *New International Version*. NIVSB: *NIV Study Bible*, © 2011 by Zondervan.

NIVZSB: *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*. General Editor: DA Carson, © 2015 by Zondervan.

NLT: *New Living Translation*. NLTSB: *NLT Study Bible*, © 2008 by Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

BEC *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, Warren Wiersbe, NT, Vol 1, p67.

Biblegateway: www.biblegateway.com. Access Bible translations, Greek and Hebrew lexicons, commentaries, Bible dictionaries, and other references.

BlueLetter: <http://www.blueletterbible.org>. Access Bible translations, Greek and Hebrew lexicons, cross-references, Bible dictionaries, and more.

Holman: *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, © 2003 by Holman Bible Publishers.

OLB: <http://onlinebible.net>. *The Online Bible*. Free downloadable app. You do not need to be connected to the Internet to use it.

Olivetree: <http://www.olivetree.com>. *Olive Tree Bible Software*. Bibles and Bible resources for iPad, iPhone, Mac, Windows, Android, and others.