



The Unforgiving Servant

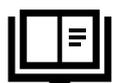
Matthew 18:21-35

Welcome to 'Together Apart', free intergenerational resources to help us be church together while we are apart.

All the sections explore the same Bible passage in a range of creative ways. Choose whichever parts work best for you, and remember that 'All Age' does not mean 'only for the kiddies'!

You can find lots more free resources like this at www.reflectionary.org

Here is what you will find in each resource pack:



A Word in Your Ear

A Bible passage that we can all learn from together, whatever our age.



Food for Thought

Aimed at adults and teens, some thoughts and questions on the passage. Occasionally there might even be some Greek or Hebrew!



Inner Space

A blank space for you to record what's in your head, whether that is worries, dreams or a shopping list.



Looking Closer

A creative and interactive look at the Bible passage. Great for older children and anyone who likes a creative approach.



I Wonder...

An imaginative style of Bible study, perfect for younger children and those who like to immerse themselves in the Bible world. Based on Lectio Divina and Godly Play wondering.



Take a Break

A chill-out zone, with meditative colouring for adults and children, and links to audio recordings of the passage so that you can listen while resting your eyes.



Creation Station

A craft for children (or young-at-heart adults!) to help us think about the passage. Glue sticks at the ready!



High 5

Some creative prayer ideas for helping us to spend time with God. Five minutes, or as long as you want.



A Word in Your Ear

Take your time reading this extract from our Bible passage. Ask God to help you hear. You can decorate the space around the words if you like.

The Unforgiving Servant

from Matthew 18:21–35

A king wanted to settle accounts with his servants.

One owed him ten thousand bags of gold.

The king ordered that everything he had, including his family, be sold to repay the debt.

The servant fell to his knees. "Be patient with me," he begged, "and I will pay back everything." The king took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go.

But then the servant found one of his fellow servants who owed him just a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him by the neck and yelled, "Pay back what you owe me!"

The fellow servant fell to his knees and begged, "Be patient with me, and I will pay it back."

But he refused and had him thrown in prison.

The king called the servant back in. "You wicked servant!" he said, "I cancelled all your debt because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?"



Food for Thought

Numbers can be funny things. We hear of millions and billions of this or that and most people's eyes glaze over. So the numbers in Jesus' parable might lose some of their meaning for us. Let's put them in today's terms.

Jesus talks about a servant who owes his king ten thousand *talents* (a large coin, nothing to do with Britain's Got). Most of Jesus' audience worked in agriculture, and the standard day's wage was a denarius (the silver coin of the second part). A talent, by contrast, was about twenty years' wages. The equivalent today would be something over £350,000. And this guy owed ten thousand of them! That's over three-and-a-half *billion* pounds!

To give you an idea, three-and-a-half billion is the number of minutes since the invention of the wheel (or thereabouts).

Just think about that. You owe someone £3,500,000,000. The debt is due. They'll take your car. They'll take your house. They'll take all your friends' houses. They'll sell you into slavery with your spouse and your children, and probably their children too. This a debt you can never, in all the world, ever pay. Your only hope is to drop to your knees and beg for mercy.

Q: How can we get beyond the familiarity of these Bible stories and recapture the shocking immediacy of Jesus' parables? How would it feel to owe so much?

Forgiven a debt that would buy 400 16-bedroomed Scottish castles, the servant meets a colleague who owes him a second-hand car's worth. Yelling, he grabs the guy by the throat, rejects his pleas for mercy and throws him in debtor's prison.

Q: What would you think of such behaviour if you were the king? What would you do?

But what about that final verse? None of us are perfect in forgiving others, so is Jesus saying that when we fail God will throw us unto prison (Hell? Purgatory?) to be tortured? Will God withdraw his forgiveness and make us pay off our sins ourselves? No, not at all. That does not fit with his teaching in other parts of the Bible. We must be careful not to read parables (one main point) as allegory (each detail representing something). Jesus' dramatic story-telling device is designed to grab his listeners by the lug-holes and give them a good shake.

I think the 'this' of '*this is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you ...*' is more to do with being hauled up before God to explain our actions than being thrown into prison.

As a word-picture it certainly sticks in the mind and makes us realise the seriousness of our situation. This is no cheap grace, no easy forgiveness, no "I can do what I like 'cos God will forgive me." Should the servant, debt forgiven, run up another debt to be forgiven again?

No, that kind of 'sorry', like a grumpy teen forced to apologise, is not sorry at all. Repentance, on the other hand, means to turn around, to face the other way, to walk a different path so that, having been washed clean from the last muddy puddle I stumbled into, I don't fall into the same mud again. Redemption requires a response.

Q: Which parts of this parable are story-telling devices, and which are teaching about the kingdom? What is your response to God's forgiveness?



Inner Space

What's going round your head? Here is a space for you to put your thoughts on paper. You can write, draw ... whatever you like. What will you put here?



Looking Closer

Woo hoo! Maths in the Bible! Peter asked Jesus about forgiving people, but the question is: *How many times?*

I mean, it's no problem if someone bumps into you in the corridor and says "Sorry". But what if they keep bumping into you? How often do you say, "That's OK", before you think that they're doing it on purpose and they're not really sorry at all?

Peter's brother, James, was another of the disciples and I wonder if they were having a brotherly scrap that day. Perhaps James had been 'accidentally' shoving Peter, and Peter was getting fed up with saying "That's OK." When would he be allowed to shove James back?

What do you think? How do you deal with people who are not really sorry? Write or draw it here.

A large, empty rounded rectangular box with a double-line border, intended for a student to write or draw their response to the question above.A large, empty rounded rectangular box with a double-line border, intended for a student to write or draw their response to the question above.

Peter probably thought he was being generous by suggesting that he would forgive James seven times before he got fed up and took a swipe at him. But Jesus had other ideas.

Seven? That's nothing. Try seventy-seven times, or seventy times seven. (That's 490 times!) Whichever Jesus said, 77 or 70x7, it's still a bazillion load of forgiveness.

Do you think Jesus meant us to count the times we forgive someone, and then on the 491st (or 78th) time we are allowed to hit back?

Jesus told a story to show us why we should keep on forgiving others. Some parts of this story tell us about God and us, and other parts are to make the story more exciting.

For example, we *don't* owe God bags of gold, so that is just part of the story. But God does forgive us when we have done nothing to deserve it, so that part tells us about God and us. God does not get fed up with forgiving us, even after 490 times or more!

Which bits of the story tell us about God and us, and which bits are dramatic story-telling?

A large, empty rounded rectangular box with a double-line border, intended for a student to write or draw their response to the question above.



I Wonder...

Read or listen to the passage a few times and let it sit in your mind.

Which words, phrases or ideas do you notice? Does anything stand out for you? Hold that in your heart and listen to what God might be saying.

I wonder what you like and don't like in the story.

I wonder what happened after the story finished.

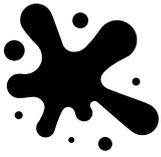


Take a Break

Put on some music, or listen to the passage being read out while you simply sit and be. You can colour the picture below, or fill it with zentangles, or you can just spend the time breathing.

Matthew 18 on Bible Gateway audio [ESV](#) – [Message](#) – [NIV \(Dramatised\)](#) – [NIV \(Suchet\)](#)





Creation Station – Funny Faces!

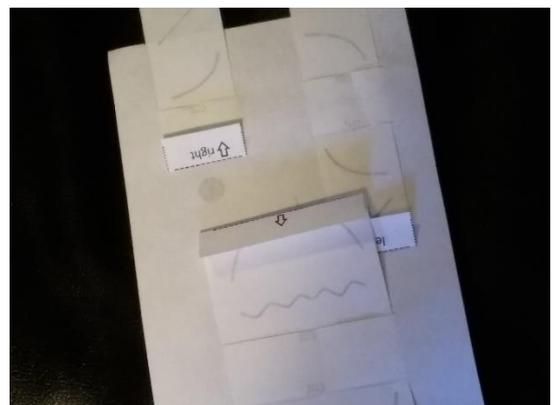
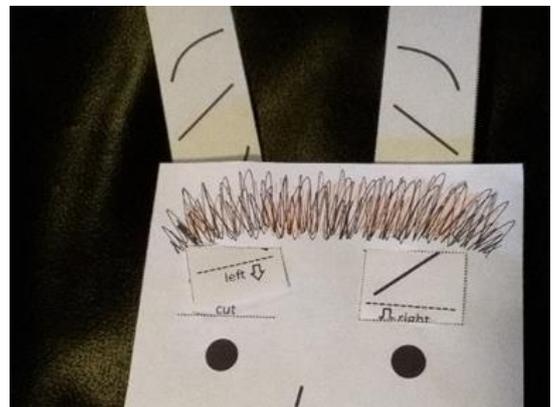
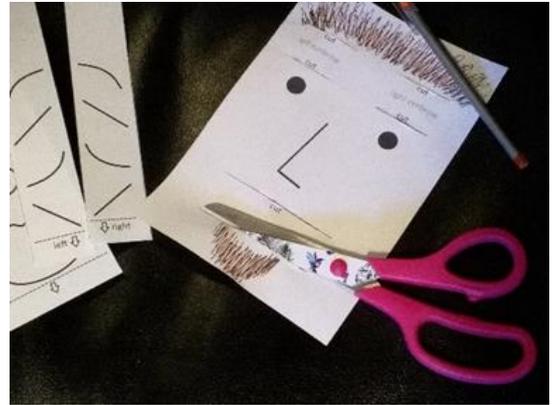
Make this crazy funny face and tell the story of the unforgiving servant or any other story you like. Slide the tabs to change the eyebrows and mouth. What kind of funny faces can you make?

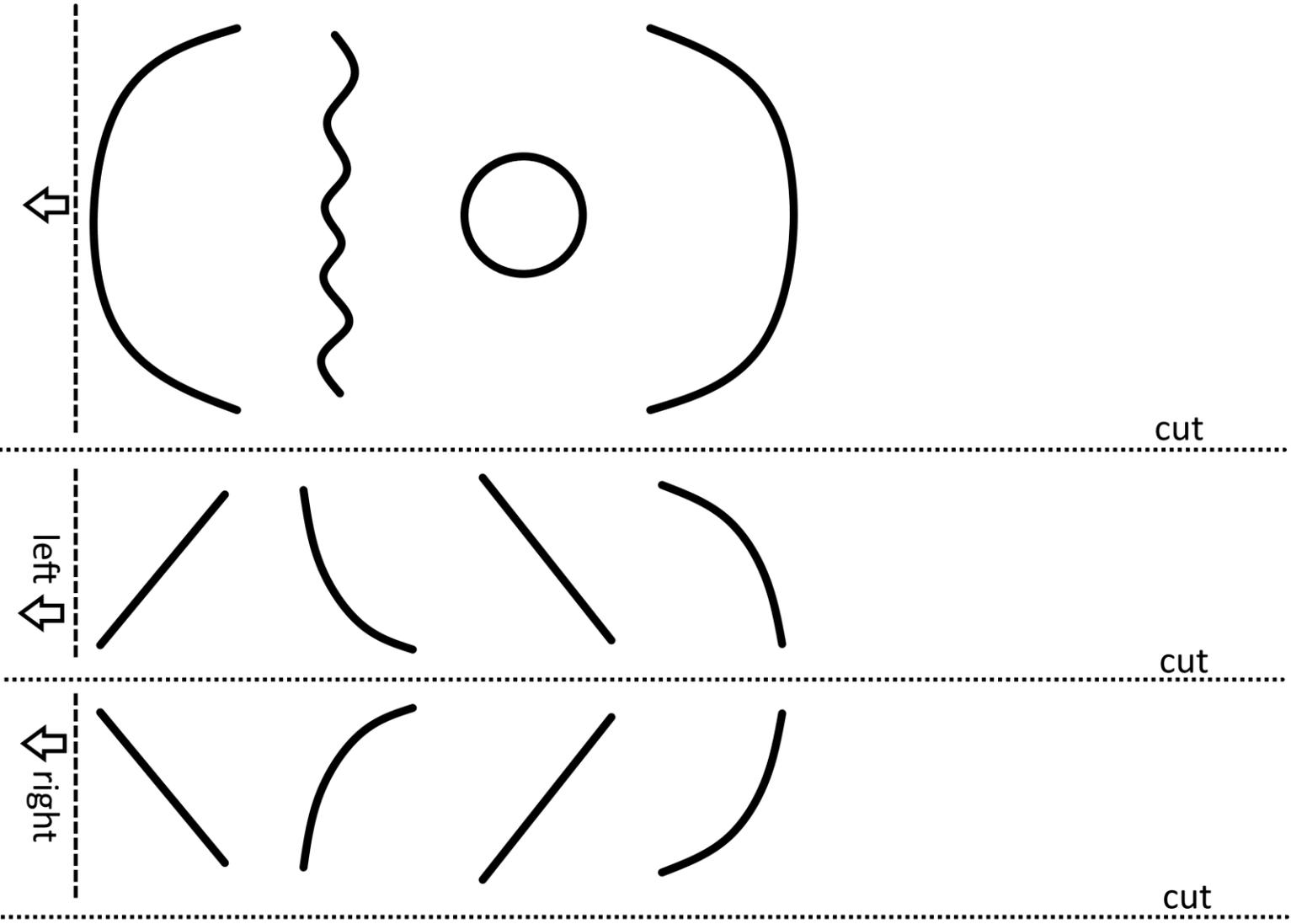
You will need:

- The template on the next page – print 1 or 2 copies onto white or coloured paper
- Scissors
- (optional) colouring pens

What to Do

1. Cut the sheet along the three dotted lines. The big piece is your funny face, and the three strips are for the eyebrows and the mouth.
2. (optional) Add some details to the face, perhaps a beard or hair. If you like you can have two funny faces, one for the unforgiving servant and one for the king.
3. Cut the marked slits on the face. If you find it tricky to cut in the middle of the paper, you can cut in from the edge of the paper and use sticky tape to repair the sides.
4. Thread the right eyebrow strip through its two slits. Thread the end with the arrow first, going from the top of the face downwards. The strip should start under the paper, then over the section where it says 'right eyebrow' then back down. Make sure that the eyebrow markings show at the front.
5. Fold the end of the strip along the dashed line to stop the strip coming out.
6. Repeat for the left eyebrow and for the mouth (thread the mouth strip from the bottom of the face going upwards).
7. Now slide the strips up and down to make a cross face, a pleading face, a surprised face, and a happy face. What other faces can you make?





cut

cut

cut

.....
cut.....

left eyebrow

.....
cut.....

.....
cut.....

right eyebrow

.....
cut.....



.....
cut.....

.....
cut.....



High 5

Spend five minutes talking and listening with God. Here is one way:

Merciful King, Hear us as we pray.

One person says the prayer in each section then leaves a pause while everyone talks to God by themselves. After a minute, the leader says the first part of the call and response (*Merciful King*), and everyone replies with the second part (*hear us as we pray*). You can have a different leader for each section if you like.

Dear God of justice and truth,

We are like the servant who owes much and cannot repay. We do wrong things, we say wrong things, we think wrong things. We are sorry, please forgive us.

[pause]

*Merciful King,
hear us as we pray.*

Dear God of mercy and grace,

You are like the king who generously forgives. Thank you that you rescue us from our muddy pits, clean us up, and set us on the right path. Help us to live in ways that please you.

[pause]

*Merciful King,
hear us as we pray.*

Dear God of love and compassion,

We live among people who need forgiving, just like us. Please help us to show your love to everyone we meet, and to reflect your goodness in the world.

[pause]

*Merciful King,
hear us as we pray.*