



*Written by
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The Parable of “The Unmerciful Servant”

Scripture: Matthew 18: 21-35

Dramatic Category: “Fractured Parable”

What is a “Fractured Parable”?

A “Fractured Parable” is a contemporary, humorous re-telling of one of the parables of Jesus. The Narrator, who may, or may not be involved in the action, tells the parable. As the parable is told, the mimes portray the action, occasionally using props and suggested costume pieces. The mimes generally wear black slacks, black turtleneck shirts or black and white striped shirts with black suspenders, and white gloves to accent their hand motions. They do not need to wear the traditional “white-face” of the mime genre. These “Fractured Parables” do not require any specific set.

Topic: Forgive as we have been forgiven

Performance Time: 7 minutes

Number of Players: 6 players (*men or women*)

Objective:

To stress the importance of forgiving others, just as God has forgiven us through Christ.

Synopsis:

In the "Parable of the Unmerciful Servant," Jesus tells the story of a righteous King, who forgives a slave who owes him a great deal of money. The forgiven servant, however, does not forgive his fellow slave, who owes him only a small amount of money. When the King hears that the forgiven servant was unmerciful and did not forgive, as he was forgiven, the King has the unmerciful servant thrown into prison until he repays his entire debt. The comparison is obvious and convicting between God, as the "King," who forgives us, His "servants," but who expects us to forgive each other, just as we have been forgiven.

Cast:

Narrator 1: *Reads the script and can speak in a "kingly" tone*
 Narrator 2: *Reads the script and can plead in a pathetic tone*
 Mimes:
 King: *A pompous and powerful ruler*
 Messenger: *A humble emissary of the King*
 Unmerciful Servant: *A self-righteous and harsh servant*
 Fellow Servant: *A pitiful victim*

NOTES:

1. When the script refers to “mimes,” they respond to the Narrator as neutral mimes, not as their assigned characters. When you see character names in the script, the mimes portray those characters; add character props to the standard mime costume, if you desire, such as: hats, neckties, a briefcase, a boa, etc.
2. Change the character names to reflect the gender of the mimes playing the parts.

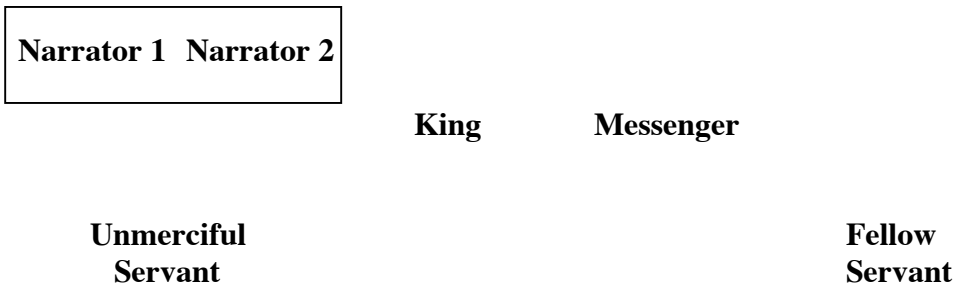
Props:

A crown for the king
 All other props are “pantomimed” (imaginary)

Sound: Wireless mics for the Narrators

Staging Arrangement:

The various characters in this mime line up across the stage in the configuration sketched out below. When they are not “on,” they turn their backs to the audience. Raise the Narrators up on a box or a platform so they look down on the action, but can be clearly seen by the audience.



Lighting: Even light across the stage

NOTE:

This skit is a narrated mime; this technique requires that the action described by the Narrator be acted out in **pantomime** by “mimes” who **perform simultaneously** while the story is being told. The attention of the audience is on both the Narrator and the mime action. Block the action of the mimes so that they illustrate the events being described by the Narrator. Facial expression and interaction between the Narrator and the mimes is suggested to add comedy and energy to the performance. The characters respond to what the Narrator says. The action is almost constant.

The Script:

NOTE: The narrator lines are in bold. The mime directions are in italic.

NOTE:

Before the formal action begins, the mimes perform a "pre-show" routine that mirrors the action of the parable. All the players enter the stage area casually.

Narrator 1: *(To the mimes)* **Okay, it's story-time, folks!**

Narrator 2: **Places, everyone!**

(In the shuffle of taking their places, the mime who plays the King, gets knocked over by the mime who plays the Unmerciful Servant. The King lands flat on his bottom and looks up bewildered. The Unmerciful Servant hurries to pick him up and begs his forgiveness.)

Unmerciful Servant: *(mortified and helping the King up)*
Oh, I am so, so sorry. Please forgive me.

King: *(dusting himself off and getting up gingerly)*
That's okay; I'll be fine.

Unmerciful Servant: *(apologetic)* Thanks.

(As the Unmerciful Servant takes his place, he trips over the Fellow Servant who inadvertently steps in his way. The Unmerciful Servant takes a tumble on stage and scowls at the Fellow Servant, who tries to help him up.)

Fellow Servant: *(apologetic)* Oh, I am so sorry. Are you okay?

Unmerciful Servant: *(indignant)* Why don't you watch where you're going?
You could kill somebody with those big feet.

Fellow Servant: I said I was sorry!

Unmerciful Servant: Yeah, well sorry's not good enough!
I'm gonna' call you "bigfoot" from now on.

Messenger: *(defending the Fellow Servant)* Hey, lighten up, man.
He said he was sorry.

(The two mimes begin arguing with each other; the King and the Messenger step in to settle things, but it backfires and they all start yelling at each other. The Narrators look at each other in bewilderment.)

Narrator 1: *(raising his voice over the "free-for-all" that is taking place on stage.)*
Peter came to Jesus and said,
"How often should I forgive my brother when he sins against me?"

Narrator 2: *(ignored by the mimes, who are now all in each other's faces)*
"Up to seven times?"

Narrator 1: *(shouting)* **I said... "How often should I forgive?"**

(The narrators exchange a knowing look and realize that they will have to take matters into their own hands to save this parable, so they put their scripts down and step into the middle of the scuffle, which has now escalated into a full brawl, with Mimes and gloves flying everywhere! The Narrators break up the fight.)

Narrator 1:
(grabbing the Unmerciful Servant and holding him back as he says these words, right in his face)

"How often should I forgive my brother when he sins against me?"

Unmerciful Servant:
(straining against the Narrator who is holding him back from attacking the Fellow servant)
He stuck his "big foot" in my way!

Fellow Servant:
(straining against the other Narrator who is holding him back from attacking the Unmerciful Servant)

You could watch where you're going!

(The two mimes lunge out at one another again, while the other mimes stand panting from the fight, putting their gloves back on, and watching anxiously.)

Narrator 2: *(to the other narrator)* **What did you say this parable was about?**

Narrator 1: *(answering him)* **Forgiveness.**

Narrator 2: **That's right!** *(to the warring Mimes)*
Forgiving others as you have been forgiven.

King: *(stepping up to the Unmerciful Servant and trying to be helpful)*
He's right there. I did forgive you.

Messenger: You did the same thing when...

(The two servants lunge at each other again; this time the Narrators really clamp down, and the Mimes look uncomfortable.)

Narrator 1: *(To the other Narrator)*
How often should I forgive my brother when he sins against me?
Up to seven times?

Narrator 2: *(answering the other narrator)* **No, up to seven times seventy!**

Narrator 1: *(to the Unmerciful Servant)*
That's four hundred and eighty-nine more times!

Unmerciful Servant: *(to his Fellow Servant)* I forgive you.

Fellow Servant: *(satirically)* Lucky me!

(The narrators stop the renewed tension with a very stern look, and the mimes relax. They realize that they are behaving badly. The Narrators motion for them to shake hand, and reluctantly, they do.)

Narrator 2: *(earnestly, to the warring mimes)* **Are we ready to tell the story now?**

(The Mimes nod and begin to return to their assigned spots. They are careful to stay out of each other's way. They motion with their arms, "after you," trying to be gracious and avoid another altercation. The Narrators step back up on their boxes and begin again.)

Narrator 1: *(to Narrator 1)* **I'm glad that's settled.**

Narrator 2: *(to Narrator 2)* **Me too; "A Mime is a terrible thing to waste."**

(All the players glance at Narrator 2 as though to say, "terrible joke!" The Mimes take their places on stage. The Narrators clear their throats, open their scripts, and prepare to tell the story of "The Unmerciful Servant.")

Narrator 1: **In the Gospel, according to Matthew,**

Narrator 2: **Chapter 18,**

Narrator 1: **Verse 23**

Narrator 2: **Jesus tells a story about forgiveness**

Narrator 1: **The kingdom of heaven is like a king**

(The King puts on his crown, turns around, and adopts a regal countenance.)

who wanted to settle accounts with his servants.

(The King begins to turn imaginary pages, as he works an imaginary adding machine with his other hand.)

Narrator 2: **As he was settling his accounts,
he discovered that there was one servant**

(The Unmerciful Servant turn to face the audience, looks proud of himself, and begins to play with his imaginary yoyo.)

who owed him ten thousand dollars.

(The King looks shocked as he stops his finger along one column of figures. He looks up at the audience and mouths these words: "Wow! That's a lot of cash!")

Narrator 1: *(in a "kingly" tone)* **"Wow! That's a lot of cash!"**

Narrator 2: **So, he summoned his messenger**

(The King claps his hands as a command; then, the Messenger turns around and bows before the King.)

and said,

Narrator 1: *(in the same "kingly" tone)*
"Bring me the servant who owes me ten thousand dollars."

Narrator 2: **So she went at once to find him.**

(The Messenger looks right and left across the stage, until she spots the Unmerciful Servant, who is at downstage right, playing with his imaginary yoyo. She approaches him, taps him on the shoulder, and takes his arm. She leads him to the King and bows with respect.)

And she brought the indebted servant to the King.

(The Messenger "knees" the Unmerciful Servant so that he also bows before the king.)

Narrator 1: *(in his "kingly" voice)* **Pay me what you owe,**

(The King points to his ledger and shows the Unmerciful Servant what he owes.)

Narrator 2: **demanded the King.**

(The King points to his outstretched hand, as though waiting to receive the money.)

**But the servant did not have the means to repay,
and asked for more time!**

(The Unmerciful Servant goes through the following begging routine:

--He points to his watch, asking for more time.

--He reaches into his pockets and pulls them inside out.

--He takes out an imaginary wallet, turns it upside down, and shows that it is empty.)

Narrator 1: **So the master ordered that he and his wife
and his children
and all that he had
be sold to repay the debt.**

(With a stern expression, the King points in the direction of downstage right, at the imaginary dungeon. The servant takes out imaginary pictures of his children, and pretends to have a fat tummy, to show that his wife is also pregnant.)

**Since he was not able to pay,
the servant fell on his knees before his master
and began to plead with him.**

(The Unmerciful Servant falls flat on the floor, grabs the King's feet and kicks his own feet as though he were throwing a temper tantrum.)

Narrator 2: *(in a pathetic voice)* **"Be patient with me,**

Narrator 1: **he begged,**

(The messenger is moved by this pathetic show.)

Narrator 2: **and I will pay back everything."**

Narrator 1: **The King took pity on him,**

(The King clutches his heart, then wipes a tear from his eye. He picks the Unmerciful Servant up by the back of the neck, then he tears the paper out of the imaginary ledger and shreds it into many pieces.)

**and the King canceled the debt,
and let him go.
And the servant went away rejoicing.**

(The Unmerciful servant shakes hands with the King, jumps for joy, and gives the King a "high five" as he crosses in front of him and heads back to downstage right where he was when the story began. He takes his imaginary yoyo out of his pocket and begins to play with it again.)

(The King and the messenger turn their backs to the audience as though they were "out of the scene.")

Narrator 1: **But on that same day,
the servant,**

Narrator 2: **Who just been forgiven,**

(The Unmerciful Servant taps his head as though he were remembering something.)

Narrator 1: **remembered that his fellow servant**

(The Fellow Servant turns around and pantomimes digging a ditch. He throws the dirt over his shoulder in the direction of stage right.)

**owed him ten dollars.
He thought to himself,**

(The Unmerciful Servant mouths these words:)

Narrator 2: **"Wow! That's a lot of cash!"**

Narrator 1: **So the servant,**

Narrator 2: **who had just been forgiven,**

Narrator 1: **began to search until he found his fellow servant.**

(The Messenger of the King turns around and tiptoes to stage left. She pretends to hide behind an imaginary bush, and then peeks out from between the branches. Actually, she stands directly upstage from the two servants, who are downstage, but they do not notice her because she is "hiding.")

(The Unmerciful Servant begins to look all over the stage until he ends up at downstage left, where the Fellow servant is still digging his ditch. The Fellow Servant does not see him, so he shovels a load of dirt all over the Unmerciful servant. He is mortified when he sees what he has done, and he quickly begins to brush the dirt off of the Unmerciful Servant.)

(Sternly) **"Pay me what you owe!"
He demanded.**

Narrator 2: **But the servant did not have the means to repay.**

(The Fellow Servant goes through the following begging routine:

--He points to his watch, asking for more time.

--He reaches into his pockets and pulls them inside out.

--He takes out an imaginary wallet, turns it upside down, and shows that it is empty.)

So the servant,

Narrator 1: *(with amazement)* **Who had just been forgiven,**

Narrator 2: **grabbed his fellow servant and began to choke him.**

(The Unmerciful Servant wraps both of his hands around his Fellow Servant's neck and begins to choke him. The Fellow Servant sticks out his tongue and pretends to gag.)

(The Messenger of the King is shocked to see this display of violence. She shakes her head in disbelief.)

Narrator 1: *(sternly)* **"Pay back what you owe me!"
He demanded.**

(The servant takes out imaginary pictures of his children, and pretends to have a fat tummy, to show that his wife is also pregnant.)

**But he was not able to pay,
and the Fellow Servant fell on his knees before him**

(The Fellow Servant falls flat on the floor, grabs the Unmerciful Servant's feet and kicks his own feet as though he were throwing a temper tantrum.)

(The King's Messenger, who is still hiding, is moved to tears.)

Narrator 2: *(pleading)* **"Be patient with me...**

Narrator 1: **he begged...**

Narrator 2: **...and I will pay back everything."**

Narrator 1: **But the servant,**

(The Unmerciful Servant stands with arms folded and nose in the air, unaffected by the pathetic rage of his Fellow Servant.)

Narrator 2: *(incredulously)* **Who had just been forgiven!**

Narrator 1: **refused.
Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison
until he could pay the debt.**

(The Unmerciful Servant picks his Fellow Servant up by the nape of the neck, bends his arm behind his back and forces him across the stage to downstage right. He opens an imaginary door and throws his Fellow Servant into the dungeon.)

(The Fellow servant grabs imaginary bars in his hands and pretends to scream out toward the audience. The Unmerciful Servant slaps his hands together to indicate "a job well done," and

takes out his yoyo, symbolizing that "all is well." Both servants freeze at downstage right so they will not take away from what the King's Messenger is about to do.)

Narrator 2: **Well, when the King's Messenger saw what had happened,**

(The Messenger looks off in the direction of downstage right and shakes her head.)

**she was greatly distressed
and went and told her master everything that had happened.**

(The Messenger walks over to the King, taps him on the shoulder, he turns around, and she begins to re-enact both sides of the scene she has just witnessed, while pantomiming the dialogue as though she were telling him the story. The King grows progressively more furious as her story goes on. This is the order of her sight gags:

NOTE:

This must be done quickly in order to make it really funny; play some carousel music, or "Keystone Cops-like," music if you can.

- She mimics the Unmerciful Servant and stomps over from stage right to stage left.*
- She jumps over and mimics the Fellow Servant and shovels dirt.*
- She jumps over and mimics the Unmerciful Servant and wipes the dirt off, then points accusingly at the Fellow Servant.*
- She jumps over and mimics the Unmerciful Servant, who demands payment.*
- She jumps over and mimics the Fellow Servant who asks for more time, empties his pockets, takes out the pictures of the children, pretends to be pregnant, falls down on the floor, and kicks his feet.*
- She jumps over and mimics the Unmerciful Servant who grabs an imaginary neck and begins to choke it in mid-air.*
- She jumps over and mimics the Fellow Servant by swinging her head and gagging.*
- She jumps over and mimics the Unmerciful Servant by grabbing an imaginary arm and pushing toward downstage right.*
- She jumps over and mimics the Fellow Servant being pushed across the stage. She stands beside the real Fellow Servant and adopts his pose of screaming out of the barred window.*
- She jumps over and mimics the Unmerciful Servant, slaps her hands together, then plays with an imaginary yoyo.*
- She hurries over to the King and shrugs her shoulders as if to say, "Can you believe this?"*)

Narrator 2: **The master was furious! And he called the unforgiving servant in.**

(The Messenger of the King marches over to stage right where the Unmerciful Servant is standing. She grabs him by the nape of the neck and forces him before the King. He is terrified when he arrives before the King. She forces him to bow.)

(The King acts out the following sequence:)

Narrator 1: *(with vengeance)* **"You wicked servant!
I forgave all that debt of yours because you begged me to.
Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant
just as I had mercy on you?"**

(The Unmerciful Servant hangs his head in shame.)

**Because you did not forgive,
I will not forgive you!**

(The King points to the dungeon at stage right. The King's Messenger bends the arm of the Unmerciful Servant behind his back and forces him to the dungeon.)

Narrator 2: **In anger, the King ordered the unmerciful servant
to be turned over to the jailers
to be tortured,
until he paid back all he owed.**

(The King's Messenger opens the imaginary door to the dungeon and takes the Fellow Servant out. She pushes the Unmerciful Servant into the jail. The Unmerciful Servant immediately grabs the bars and begins to scream in pantomime. The Fellow Servant stands by, baffled.)

(The King's Messenger sticks her hands back into the dungeon and demands that the Unmerciful Servant surrender his yoyo. He does so, reluctantly, and she hands the yoyo to the Fellow Servant, who gleefully begins to play with it. The King looks with disdain at the Unmerciful Servant, while the King's Messenger gazes at the Fellow Servant with mercy.)

Narrator 1: **This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you,**

Narrator 2: **if you do not forgive your brother from your heart. "**

THE END