

## Conversation Between Philip and Matthew

### Reader's Theater

*This Reader's Theater has three parts. The instructor will invite three students to read the story, following the assigned numbers. For the ideal "chorus" effect, the readers will be spaced out in the room. Invite these three children to read without looking away from the page to keep a steady rhythm. The others will listen attentively.*

**Narrator:** We're in Jerusalem. Not long ago, Jesus was condemned to death on the Cross. Yet three days later, Jesus appeared to his disciples. Now they know that he is truly risen; they are witnesses of this miracle. Philip, an Apostle of Jesus, is sitting, praying. When Matthew (another of Jesus' Apostles) arrives, he seems very irritated...

**Philip:** Hey Matthew, I was just about to start praying. Will you join me?

**Matthew:** Yeah, sure, if you insist...

**Philip:** Why the sad face? What happened?

**Matthew:** I was arguing with Cleopas again. He saw the Risen Jesus. And since then, he's been telling everyone about how he ate dinner with him in Emmaus. He won't stop bragging about it! I'm sick of it! I'm done; I'm not talking to him anymore.

**Philip:** Is this a Christian attitude, Matthew? Remember—Cleopas is your brother in Christ! You spent so much time with him, following Jesus through Judea. You know how he is! Come on—don't hold it against him.

**Matthew:** Nope, I can't. Who does he think he is? He's constantly interrupting me and thinks he's more important than anyone else. And it happens all the time! It's so humiliating for me; I'm fed up!

**Philip:** Alright, calm down; anger won't help. Let's sit down and pray: "Again, I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them."

**Matthew:** I remember when Jesus said that. His words are so beautiful. He doesn't want us shutting ourselves away to pray by ourselves. He wants us to be together, as brothers and sisters!

**Philip:** Right, I'll keep reading. "Then Peter came to Jesus and asked him, 'Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him? As many as seven times?'"

**Matthew:** Philip, you're doing this on purpose. You chose that reading because of my argument. Peter's question is exactly what I've been thinking about. How many times will I have to forgive Cleopas for his pride?

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**Philip:** Listen to the next part: “Jesus answered, ‘I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times.’”

**Matthew:** That’s practically all the time! But that’s easy for Jesus to say. He’s the Son of God, so forgiveness is always in his heart. But that’s not true for me. I don’t know if I can do that.

**Philip:** You’re right—Jesus does radiate God’s mercy. His words and actions are proof. Do you remember the story he told us about the two brothers who lived with their father? One day, the younger brother decided to ask his father for his share of the inheritance. And off he went on an adventure, free and untroubled...

**Matthew:** (*shocked*) And the father agreed to give his money away just like that? He’s not even dead yet, and then he shared his riches just because his son demanded it?!

**Philip:** Ah, well he loved his young son. His love was unconditional, so he didn’t stop his son from leaving.

**Matthew:** I bet it wasn’t easy for the father to see him leave.

**Philip:** That’s for sure! You see, Matthew, in addition to his money, he gave his younger son a gift that money can’t buy: freedom.

**Matthew:** Ok, but you told me there were two brothers in this story. What did the second one think of all this?

**Philip:** The older brother was very serious. He worked every day with his father and never asked for anything. He didn’t say anything when his little brother left.

**Matthew:** He probably thought, “What a selfish little brother!”

**Philip:** The story doesn’t reveal anything about his feelings at the beginning. But in the end, the older brother had a rough time.

**Matthew:** At first, with all that money, the younger brother must have partied a lot and made new friends.

**Philip:** Yes, at first. But then once he spent all his money, he was completely miserable. All his friends abandoned him.

**Matthew:** I bet he was lonely and started missing his life at home.

**Philip:** He felt absolutely terrible because he understood just how foolish he was. He thought about his father and of all the good things he used to have.

**Matthew:** He had no more money, no more friends, and no more food.

**Philip:** Exactly! So he got up and decided to return to his father. All throughout the journey, he repeated the same words: “I’ll say: Father, I’ve sinned heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Father, I’ve sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son...”

(*Short pause*)

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**Matthew:** Wow—and the father forgave him for everything as soon as he heard those words?

**Philip:** That's not exactly how it happened. Every day, the father was waiting, watching for the young son to come back.

**Matthew:** He didn't lose hope, even after months of no news.

**Philip:** And then one day, someone was walking towards the house from far away. The father looked closer, and his heart started to beat faster, filled with hope. What if it was his son, his dear little one? Could it be... yes, it was him! So the father ran out and embraced his son without giving him time to say a single word.

**Matthew:** The father must have celebrated the joy of finding his son! And the older brother—did he come running out to hug his brother?

**Philip:** No, he didn't—it was too much for him to take! He worked hard every day, from morning to evening, without ever asking his father for anything. The father didn't scold the younger son for anything he did. Instead, he celebrated his return with a feast! But the feast wasn't for the older brother, who was always faithful...

**Matthew:** That older brother was definitely jealous and not ready to forgive.

*(Silence, then Matthew looks towards the audience)*

I think I understand why Jesus told us this story; the father represents God.

**Philip:** God is our Father, for every one of us!

**Matthew:** Because he loves us and gives us free will.

**Philip:** God loves every person unconditionally, and this love is His gift to us.

**Matthew:** We're sometimes like the angry older brother, or like the younger brother who only thinks of himself. Yet God waits patiently for us to be ready to come back to him.

**Philip:** Because above all, he respects our choices and our freedom. His mercy is a gift that never runs out.

**Matthew:** Like the father with the two sons, he waits for us to return so he can offer us his love and mercy. And he prepares a feast for that day—a celebration of forgiveness!

**Philip:** Now you understand why Jesus told us this story. He wants us to understand that God, who is our Father, is a father filled with love for His children!

**Matthew:** Even if I forget God, he never forgets me...

**Philip:** Yes. God knows our weaknesses, so He invites us to change our attitudes and adjust our lives.

**Matthew:** His mercy puts joy back into life!

*(Short pause)*

**Philip:** Matthew, do you remember what Jesus asked us to do when we were gathered around him for the Passover meal on Thursday night? He said: “I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

**Matthew:** Love one another, like he has loved us...

**Philip:** His love was put to a tremendous trial. He was betrayed by his friends, tortured by soldiers, abandoned by everyone. He died on the Cross.

**Matthew:** And despite all that, He still loves us!

**Philip:** He has forgiven all because his love is greater than all. Stronger than death, stronger than our sins... Mercy is the most beautiful proof of his love!

**Matthew:** He knows that we often stray away from the right path and that our good intentions don't last very long.

**Philip:** But with the Father, he loves us for who we are. He has already forgiven us for everything. We just have to go to him because he's waiting for us with open arms.

*(Short pause)*

**Matthew:** Jesus forgives through love, but he's the Son of God. I don't have the courage to forgive like he does! How can I go ask Cleopas to forgive me?

**Philip:** Forgiving or asking for forgiveness is very difficult. It's the first step that's the hardest. But Jesus's love will be with you! Ask him to be your strength if you are scared.

**Matthew:** Alright, asking another person for forgiveness is one thing, but what about asking forgiveness from God? I don't know what to tell Him.

**Philip:** Here's a tip: take time to reflect, like the younger son did. Think about how you behave, what you say to others, and how you react. And then, remember that God is always there, very close to you. He's waiting for you! His love can help you become a better person, if you allow it. Like the father in the story, he wants to celebrate your return.

**Matthew:** Not everything is perfect in my life, I should know that! There are things that I'd like to change to be a better follower of Jesus. Well, if God is waiting for my return, I'm not going to make him wait any longer. Now I understand that forgiveness is unconditional—the ultimate story of love!