

## Forgiveness

Luke 23:34; Matthew 18:21-35

### 1. What makes it difficult to forgive

- a. Greater the pain, the more difficult to forgive  
 Forgiving another person is not easy. A lot depends on the amount of pain the other person has caused us. The greater the pain or injury, the more difficult it is to forgive.
- b. Forgiveness is not a natural response.  
 Forgiveness is different than an apology.  
 People can still harbor resentment after giving an apology.
- c. It is easier to be bitter.  
 Bitterness is the outcome of not forgiving another person. It is like a poison that can work its way through everything. We fool ourselves into thinking that we do not need to forgive people. Somehow, we justify our bitterness. We wish harm upon the other person. We think bitterness is a way to take revenge. We justify our attitude and think that we are getting even. The other person deserves us to ignore them.
- d. We make up excuses.  
 When we feel wronged, we can come up with 100 reasons why we should not forgive. "She needs to learn a lesson. I don't want to encourage irresponsible behavior. I'll let him stew for a while, it will do him good. She needs to learn that actions have consequences. I was the wronged party-it's not up to me to make the first move. How can I forgive if he's not even sorry?" We can build up all these arguments into our defense, so that if we do finally make a decision to forgive it feels like a kind of capitulation, a kind of abandonment of reason and a weakness, a sentimentality.

Leviticus 19:18 "You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord."

Forgiving someone who has hurt us may be one of the most difficult things we ever do.

### 2. Jesus' example of forgiveness

- a. Jesus revealed the mercy of God.
  - Jesus as God in the flesh.
  - What we see in Jesus are the character qualities of God.
  - John 1:14 *The word became flesh and dwelt among us.*
- b. We experience God's mercy through forgiveness.  
 Beautiful Old Testament promises:
  - Psalm 103:12 *As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.*
  - Micah 7:18-19 *Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love. He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.*

- c. Jesus lived forgiveness.
- Woman caught in adultery John 4
  - The paralyzed man in Capernaum let down through the roof Mark 2
  - Jesus said on the cross in Luke 23:34 *“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”*
  - Matthew 26:28 *For this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.*

### 3. What Jesus taught about forgiveness

Read Matthew 18:21-35

Peter came up with a good question. Seven in the Jewish mind was the number of perfection or completion. Seven times forgiving should solve the problem. After that, there was no hope. A rabbinic saying, “If a man transgresses once, forgive him; if a second time, forgive him; if a third time, forgive him; if fourth time, do not forgive him.” Based on Amos 1:2.

Jesus’ response must have shocked His disciples. His point is clear. This is not a math lesson but a grace lesson. Forgiveness is not a matter of numbers but of lifestyle. Forgiveness does not keep track of numbers. Buttrick: “Seventy times seven is four hundred and ninety: we can ‘do it in our heads.’ But (what Jesus proposes) is celestial arithmetic: We must ‘do it in our hearts’” (Buttrick, 475).

The Parable

#### a. The Forgiving Master

Denarius 1 day’s wages

Talent 6000 day’s wages; 10,000 talents = 60,000,000 days or 164,383 years for the average Palestinian. This would represent the Gross National Product of a nation.

The first servant could never repay, the second could repay with a little time.

v. 25 Selling the man, his family, and his possessions could never begin to recover the enormity of the debt. The debt shows more than what the man owed the king but the king’s trust in the man. The man had put the king’s entire nation into debt. He had violated the king’s trust. The king showed his great mercy by forgiving the man and putting trust back in him.

The man was quite desperate: “Have patience with me, and I will repay you everything.” This man knows that the debt is beyond his ability to repay. The situation is hopeless.

The master of the slave is moved by “compassion.”

#### b. The Unforgiving Servant

The unforgiving servant did not need to throw the other servant in prison because he could repay.

**c. The Unforgiving Master**

The injustice of the slave moves the master to anger. The slave is called to accountability. v. 33 is the key theological statement of the parable: “should you not have mercy on your fellow slave as I have had mercy on you?”

Downward spiral for this man.

This is a difficult story because we find forgiveness difficult to give and receive.

Mark 11:25 *And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.*

**4. How to forgive others**

A Sunday School teacher had just concluded her lesson and wanted to make sure she had made her point. She said, “Can anyone tell me what you must do before you can obtain forgiveness of sin?” There was a short pause and then, from the back of the room, a small boy spoke up. “Sin,” he said.

We must follow the same path for all other characteristics of Jesus: the way of the cross.

**a. Grow in God’s love**

Show unconditional love. Does not depend on emotions, feelings. It is a decision of the will.

Luke 6:27-29 *But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, <sup>28</sup> bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. <sup>29</sup> If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them.*

Example of Stephen Acts 7:60: his last words “*Lord, do not hold this sin against them.*”

**b. Let the past go**

Ephesians 4:31-32 *Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*

These are part of the old life.

**5. What happens if we do not forgive**

**a. Spiritual sickness**

Unforgiveness is a disease that eats away at our souls, causing us to lose awareness of others’ pain and our own pain.

**b. Ruined relationships.**

Forgiving someone may not necessary restore a relationship.

I may forgive someone but that person may not forgive me. By forgiving that person, you free yourself and put the burden on the other person.

**6. Is there ever a point when a Christian should not forgive?**

Is there anything a person can do to us that is unforgiveable?  
No, forgiveness is not an option for Christians.

We must forgive everyone, but that does not mean we have to be friends. We may need to stay away from a person to protect ourselves or our loved ones.

There were times when Jesus turned his back on people. Luke 4:28-30 in Nazareth

We must love all people, but that does not mean we like them or are close friends with them. Love accepts people and hopes they will grow and change to become better people. But that is always up to the other person. Some people may reject our forgiveness and keep hitting us back with guilt. When we forgive someone, we can walk away without guilt. We release the burden from us and put it on them. Do not let someone shame you just because that person will not forgive you. When you forgive someone, you are free.

## 7. How important is forgiveness?

**Our relationship with God depends on it.**

If we do not forgive, God will not forgive us.

Matthew 6:14-15 *For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

We must forgive like God forgives us.

Forgiveness is not cheap. It will cost us

## Conclusion:

Forgiveness is not a one time thing. Jesus said to forgive 70 x 7.

We pass on what we have received. We receive God's love and we want to pass it along to others.

Forgiveness is not based on a human quality but a divine characteristic.

When we are drowning in water, it does matter if it is only one foot or 1,000 feet.

Just as there are no limits to God's forgiveness, there should be no limits to ours.

Forgiveness must come from the heart (v. 35). The only way to forgive others from the heart is out of gratitude for our own forgiveness. If we forgive from the heart, how can we keep count? If we have forgiven from the heart, how can we ask for repayment? How can we do anything but love the other person?

Forgiveness is never completely a human endeavor but a gift from God. It results from the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. It is how we live out our faith and holiness.

Part of the Lord's Prayer (say it together).

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  - c. Jesus lived forgiveness. John 4; Mark 2; Luke 23:34; Matthew 26:28
- 3. What Jesus taught about forgiveness.** Matthew 18:21-35
  - a. **The Forgiving Master**
  - b. **The Unforgiving Servant**
  - c. **The Unforgiving Master.** Mark 11:25
- 4. How to forgive others**
  - a. **Grow in God's love.** Luke 6:27-29; Acts 7:60
  - b. **Let the past go.** Ephesians 4:31-32
- 5. What happens if we do not forgive**
  - a. **Spiritual sickness**
  - b. **Ruined relationships.**
- 6. Is there ever a point when a Christian should not forgive? No**
- 7. How important is forgiveness?**

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