



FREEDOM IN FORGIVENESS

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Hey guys, Emilie here:

When I was living in Texas and attending The Austin Stone church, one of their leaders was killed while living in Libya. It was a horrific time of course, but the same theme ran through every message, story, and interview: ridiculous, radical, unheard-of forgiveness. To this day, when I hear about forgiveness, my mind wanders to this story:

Ronnie Smith was a pastor at the Austin Stone Church in Austin TX. No one who knew the Smiths was surprised when Ronnie and his wife Anita and their infant son moved to Benghazi Libya in the Fall 2012 to love the Libyan people and share the Gospel of Jesus. Ronnie taught chemistry to high school students at an international school.

In November Anita returned to Austin with their son to celebrate the holidays. Ronnie stayed in Benghazi to encourage his students as they took their finals with plans to join his family in Austin in mid-December.

Early morning, December 5, Ronnie was shot and killed by gunmen as he jogged near his home.

A few days before Christmas, Ronnie's widow Anita sent a message to the Libyan people and her husband's murders. Her message was immediately featured on every major news outlet across America.

Why? Because few could believe her spirit of forgiveness.

She wrote,

“Ronnie and I came to Libya because we saw the suffering of the Libyan people, but we also saw your hope, and we wanted to partner with you to build a better future. Libya was very different from what we had experienced before, but we were excited to learn about Libyan culture. Ronnie grew to love you and your way of life, as did I. Ronnie really was “Libya’s best friend.” I hear people speaking with hate, anger and blame over Ronnie’s death, but that’s not what Ronnie would want. Ronnie would want his death to be an opportunity for us to show one another love and forgiveness, because that’s what God has shown to us.”

To her husband’s killers, who have yet to be captured, Anita wrote: “I love them. And I forgive them, and I have nothing against them.”

Amazingly, Anita Smith says she wants to make a return trip to Benghazi to visit friends and neighbors, and to mourn together.

Reporters across the world were dumbfounded by Anita's forgiveness. It's not natural. It's not how the world works. Forgiveness is not easy. But, for Jesus followers, it's also not optional. Thankfully, we're not alone! Through our own forgiveness from God, we have been given the power to ridiculously, radically, unheard-of-ly forgive others too!

IN THE BIBLE.

Matthew 18:21-35

21 Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?”

22 Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.

23 “Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. 24 When he began to

settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. 25 And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. 26 .. he debt. 28 But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.' 29 So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' 30 He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. 31 When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. 32 Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33 And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' 34 And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. 35 So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

Colossians 1:13-14

For he has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son, who purchased our freedom and forgave our sins.

Colossians 3:13

Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

QUESTIONS.

1. Have you ever experienced "freedom in forgiveness"? Talk about that experience.
2. How do you know if you've truly forgiven someone?
3. Who do you need to forgive? Is there someone you need to ask to forgive you? What would it take to start with a clean slate in 2017?