

3

Forgive



QUESTION 1:

When was the last time it cost you a lot to fix something?

THE POINT

Relationships grow deeper with forgiveness.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Sometimes we're better off paying a higher price.

- ▶ Ever bought the generic brand of peanut butter, only to discover you should've paid the higher price to get something that actually tasted like peanut butter?
- ▶ Ever bought a cheap appliance, only to replace it a year later because its low price was matched by its low quality?
- ▶ Ever tried to save some money by staying in an inexpensive hotel room, only to discover management kept prices down by not investing in bug extermination?

A lot of things come at a high price, but they're worth it. I'd put forgiveness in that "high-priced" category. But even though it can be costly, forgiveness is a great investment in any relationship. Forgiveness is the stuff of healthy marriages, healthy families, and healthy churches. Relationships grow when we let go of a hurt, a wound, or a critical remark. As you examine Jesus' story of the unforgiving servant, allow the Word of God to run through you, removing any remnants of unforgiveness.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

MATTHEW 18:21-22

²¹ Then Peter approached him and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? As many as seven times?” ²² “I tell you, not as many as seven,” Jesus replied, “but seventy times seven.”

We’re going to look at a parable where Jesus spoke about forgiveness, but He told the parable in response to a curious question Peter asked. Since Peter was a leader among the twelve apostles, he often spoke for the group. All the disciples may have been wondering about this question, but we know Peter was the one who asked if there was a quota on grace. How many times are we called to let the same person slide off the hook? A legit question.

Peter proceeded to speculate at the answer to his own question. He filled in the blank with the number seven, the number of completeness. The rabbis of that day challenged people to overlook an offense up to three times. Three strikes and you’re out. To Peter’s way of thinking, he was being generous. Forgiving someone seven times

more than doubled the cultural expectations for grace. Peter upped the ante on grace, doubling the “grace” of the religious leaders and even raising the bar an extra notch beyond that.

QUESTION 2:

What can happen when we forgive someone?

Peter was probably feeling pretty good about himself in this moment, perhaps like we might feel giving a waitress a \$50 tip on a \$20 dinner. In these rare moments of bigheartedness, we like to pat ourselves on the back.

Jesus surely stunned Peter with His response: “I take your seven and raise it seventy fold.” Jesus is saying the grace you offer others should have no limits. Few people are ever offended 50, 60, or 70 times by the same person in a short time. The Lord is exaggerating here for effect, creating a ridiculous scenario to capture the attention of the disciples. He’s essentially saying: just keep forgiving.

Corrie ten Boom lived through the nightmare of a Nazi concentration camp. She was the only one in her family who made it out alive. In that hellish place, she was humiliated, especially in the shower where the women were watched by the leering guards. By the grace of God, Corrie survived it all and found it in her heart to forgive—or so she thought.

Corrie traveled extensively to share her testimony of God’s forgiveness. One Sunday in a church in Munich, a man approach her

with his hand outstretched. “A fine message, Fraulein! How good it is to know that, as you say, all our sins are at the bottom of the sea! . . . I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well. Fraulein . . . will you forgive me?”

She recognized his face instantly. This was the leering, mocking face of one of the cruelest guards in the shower stall. Her hand froze by her side. Coldness clutched her heart. Ashamed at herself, she prayed, “Jesus, help me! . . . I can lift my hand. I can do that much. You supply the feeling.” As she prayed, her hand became unfrozen. The ice of hate melted, and her hand went out. “I forgive you, brother! With all my heart!” She forgave as she was forgiven.¹

Have you ever prayed a prayer like that? Have you asked Jesus to supply the power to set others free with extravagant grace?

MATTHEW 18:23-27

²³ “For this reason, the kingdom of heaven can be compared to a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ When he began to settle accounts, one who owed ten thousand talents was brought before him. ²⁵ Since he did not have the money to pay it back, his master commanded that he, his wife, his children, and everything he had be sold to pay the debt. ²⁶ “At this, the servant fell facedown before him and said, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you everything.’ ²⁷ Then the master of that servant had compassion, released him, and forgave him the loan.”

FORGIVING OTHERS

Circle some of the ways you have been hurt or offended. Then answer the questions.

Betrayal **Hurtful words** **Unkept promises** **Lies**
Bullying **Shut out from friendships** **Not included**
Physically harmed **Being treated unfairly**

What would it cost you to forgive the person who has hurt you?

What did it cost God in order for Him to forgive you?

What could be the rewards of forgiving someone?

“He that cannot forgive others breaks the bridge over which he must pass himself; for every man had need to be forgiven.”

LORD HERBERT OF CHERBURY

Every preacher knows the power of storytelling. Logic and reason can appeal to an audience, but nothing captures a crowd like an imaginative tale. People lean in and listen to a well-told story, and Jesus was the master narrator.

To drive home His shocking “seventy times seven” statement to Peter, Jesus told a parable. This was not an actual story, but an illustration of the truth Jesus wanted to teach. The parable is about a man with a major debt crisis. He owed the king a crazy amount of cash and had no means of paying it off. When the king called in the note, the indebted man fell face down on the ground, begging his master to give him additional time to pay it all back.

The king was seasoned and wise. He knew this man could burn the candle at both ends, working 24/7 for the rest of his life, and still

not produce the cash required to pay this bill. What was the king to do? In an astonishing act of grace and mercy, the king relieved the man of his responsibility and pardoned the debt. All of it.

Similarly, our debt of rebellion and offense against God is so huge it is an impossible feat for us to pay off the debt. But Jesus paid the debt in full for us, and God has forgiven the debt. We do not deserve forgiveness, but God in His grace and mercy has extended forgiveness to us through Jesus. We are free!

QUESTION 3:

What are some obstacles that hinder us from forgiving others?

MATTHEW 18:28,32-33

28 “That servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him, started choking him, and said, ‘Pay what you owe!’

32 “Then, after he had summoned him, his master said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. 33 Shouldn’t you also have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’”



The king set the man free from his huge debt. He was allowed to run free, but sadly, he ran in the wrong direction. He ran after someone who owed him money. The second man's debt was not small, but it was insignificant compared to the debt just canceled.

QUESTION 4:

How do the king's actions in this parable mirror God's actions toward us?

Jesus' story was designed to produce outrage in the heart of the hearers. Jesus wanted Peter and the others to ask themselves the question: "What kind of person would be so cruel as to require his friend to pay, right after he just got pardoned?"

Herein lies the real question. Why do we withhold forgiveness when we've been forgiven so much, and when we have it in our power to give it so easily?

We can wrongly rationalize lots of reasons for postponing forgiveness, but one of the leading reasons for withholding grace is the desire to "teach the offender a lesson." Sometimes we think our offer of forgiveness could send the wrong message. If I forgive and let go of the offense, he will think I am condoning his behavior, which could encourage him to keep doing wrong.

Practicing tough love is not out of bounds. The local church occasionally and collectively will alienate a believer who shames the name of Jesus by a sinful lifestyle (1 Cor. 5:9-13). Church discipline exists to drive a person to the place of repentance and restoration. But that doesn't preclude the act of forgiveness.

Forgiveness is not always easy, but it is always right. Only a heartless, cruel person would make a friend pay a petty bill in the wake of his own extravagant pardon. As children of a compassionate Father, we must find it in our hearts to forgive. We need to be forgiven . . . and we need to become forgivers. This means more than a one-time transaction. It means we strive to continually forgive and clear the hurts that hold us back.

Forgiveness is costly too. After all, look at what it cost Jesus. The extravagant form of forgiveness Jesus calls for is only possible when performed as an act of worship. Forgiveness is not an emotional reaction to a person but a grateful response to our loving Lord. We forgive for His sake, as an offering to Him who has forgiven us.

QUESTION 5:

How have you seen forgiveness deepen or restore a relationship?



