

# Forgive 490 Times Plus!

## Matthew 18:21-22

**Intro.** – There is a true story told about Leonardo da Vinci that illustrates the importance of forgiveness. Like many artists, da Vinci was temperamental and often alienated people by his attitude and actions. In painting the *Last Supper* he had delayed the painting of Christ until this great work was almost finished. Just before he started painting the face of Christ, he had a violent quarrel with a close friend. When he returned to his painting, he found that nothing went right. For days, he could not complete the painting. The days stretched into weeks and still he could not finish his work.

Finally, he came to realize his problem and in humility he went to his friend and sought forgiveness. With his soul cleansed of bitterness and anger, he quickly finished his great work.

This is exactly what our Lord had in mind when He told Peter to forgive seven times seventy. An unforgiving spirit hurts us more than it hurts the object of our anger. This is obviously true in relationships.

Let me illus. Even if husbands and wives stay *faithful* to one another, there are still areas where they continue to hurt one another with acts of thoughtlessness, selfishness and insensitive words. And unless these matters are addressed the downward spiral of bitterness will continue. Often, husbands and wives respond to each other in many ineffective/harmful ways. Let me quickly give three common responses along these lines:

1. RETALIATE – this is where the husband or wife or both take an *eye for an eye* approach. “I’ll get you for your having done that to me” may not be verbalized but it sure is thought and executed as these pictures would illustrate...
2. REBEL – this is where the husband or wife or both simply quit caring and shuck their responsibilities in subtle and blatant manners. It’s the “I dare you to even cross me” attitude...
3. ACCOMMODATE – this is where the husband or wife throw up their arms and say, “So, that’s how it’s going to be... men will be men... women will be women...” But each day, bitterness is fostered and the marriage becomes tense. “I’ll do my thing and you do your thing” is the attitude. “Let’s just keep the bills paid, the kids fed, and all appearances good...”

Each of these responses is as destructive as they are wrong themselves in themselves. But there is one response that is heads above all others. It is the response our God wants us to incorporate in all relationships. It is the one response that God can and will bless. He calls it *forgiveness*

*Purpose: to see how significant forgiveness is in any relationship*

How can you and I deal with the imperfections, flaws and sins that have, are and will take place in our relationships? The operative word is *forgiveness*.

## I LIFESTYLE of Forgiveness

- we all need to develop the mindset that forgiveness is something we do consistently and effortlessly – i.e. need to get to the point where it becomes natural or second nature in our character.

### A. Hosea Learned to Forgive

1. Instructed by God to marry a wayward woman (Hosea 1:2-3 “*When the Lord first spoke through Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea, ‘Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry, and have children of harlotry; for the land commits flagrant harlotry, forsaking the Lord.’ So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblamin, and she conceived and bore him a son.*”
2. Evidently the early stages of their marriage went all right – Gomer bore Hosea three children. But before long she had one adulterous affair, then another and another. Kids with names reflecting...
3. Eventually Gomer left Hosea, sold herself as a prostitute and wound up a slave. When her master put her up for sale, no one bid except one man. In an act of unconditional, undying love and forgiveness, Hosea bought Gomer and took her home not as a slave but as his wife (Hosea 3:1-2).
4. The account of Hosea and Gomer reveals one man’s unconditional love and forgiveness for his wife providing a compelling picture of God’s love for His wayward, spiritually adulterous people.

5. Point: the kind of forgiveness Hosea extended to his wife, God wants us to extend to one another, especially to our mates! Hosea learned to forgive, have you?

B. Peter Learned to Forgive

1. During the 1<sup>st</sup> century, the rabbis of the day required fellow Jews to forgive an offense 3 times – i.e. long before baseball, these religious leaders created a “3 strikes and you’re out” scenario.
2. In our text, Peter might as well have been saying, ‘Lord, 7 times is twice the legal requirement, plus one. Shouldn’t that be enough?!’
3. Jesus’ response? *“No Peter, you don’t forgive a mere seven times. You forgive seventy times seven.”* = 490 times!
  - a. saying to all of us that forgiveness is not merely a 1 time, 2 time or even 7 time decision but a way of life! To Christians it is to be a lifestyle!
  - b. if you forgive someone 490 times, around #300 you get in the HABIT of forgiving!
  - c. forgiveness is to be habitual, a practice that is second nature = practice of healthy marriage!

## II LEVELS of Forgiveness

- Bible makes clear that great marriages are made up by a husband and a wife committing themselves to daily forgiving one another.
- forgiveness doesn’t mean tossing a few *kind words* at the offending partner... other significant issues come into play for genuine Biblical forgiveness to occur:

A. It’s a Heart Issue

1. Acceptance = i.e. must learn to accept our spouse if we are ever going to deal with their offenses – acknowledging that the hurtful event(s) actually happened
  - a. some tragically deny either they have been hurt or that they have hurt their mate...
  - b. when people fall into denial, such individuals wind up living a fantasy world, rejecting reality.
2. Emotions = how one responds when their spouse commits some wrong against them... The key is knowing how to best use our God given emotions... Dwell on it and never get over it... no healing
3. Will = are you willing to forgive the hurt/wrong done to you by your mate?
  - a. parable that follows in our text concerns a servant who was *forgiven* a large debt ...
  - b. after being released this same servant sought out and found a fellow slave who owed him small amount compared to what he owed...
4. Jesus finished this parable with these words: *“So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.”* Matthew 18:35

B. It’s a Mind Issue

1. Once we forgive and release old hurts, we must take another step – *“...taking every thought captive”* i.e. we are to bring our minds closer and closer into conformity with Christ (2 Cor 10:5).
2. Our minds are battlefields. Satan knows if he can conquer this area, he can rule the individual:
  - a. Satan has and uses ability to flood our minds with thoughts alien to the mind of Christ
  - b. these thoughts take on differing disguises – immoral, deceitful, angry, lustful, selfish etc.
3. Ephesians 4:31 *“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.”*
4. The Cross of Christ ought to be our *forgiveness classroom* – Jesus made a statement to the world, to you and me while on the cross: *“I’ll take the punishment you deserve so you can live!”*
5. Summary:
  - a. must learn forgiveness from the example of Christ – Roman 5:10 *“For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.”*
  - b. must trust God to right all the wrongs and balance all the books ultimately – Romans 12:19 *“Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord.”*

### III LESSONS of Forgiveness

#### A. God Commands Us to Forgive

1. Ephesians 4:32 “*And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.*”
2. What kind of affect would this principle alone have on most marriages today? It would revolutionize most marriages right here!

#### B. Forgiveness is Vital to God’s Character

1. Colossians 3:13 “*...just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.*”
2. The very nature of God wants to forgive. He longs to forgive you and me... Do we long to forgive each other as He longs to forgive us? Do we long to forgive our mates in like manner?
3. Forgiveness is vital to our character “in Christ”!

#### C. God Really Does Forgive

1. The Lord’s *east-west* promise: Psalm 103:12 “*As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.*”
2. The Lord’s *amnesia* promise: Jeremiah 31:34 “*... ‘for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.’*”
3. The Lord’s *deep-sea* promise: Micah 7:19 “*He will again have compassion on us; He will tread our iniquities under foot. Yes, You will cast all their sins in the depths of the sea.*”
4. Ironically, the very individuals who have wronged us continue to control us when we refuse to forgive them. This is especially true in the sacred institution of marriage.
5. C.S. Lewis “To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable, because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you. This is hard; ...how can we do it? Only, I think by remember where we stand... We are offered forgiveness on no other terms. To refuse it means to refuse God’s mercy for ourselves.”

**Conclusion:** In 1744, the British navy compelled John Newton to serve on a ship. He went AWOL , was captured and publicly flogged. Upon his own request, Newton was assigned by the navy to slave ship. He eventually became the master of this ship. On May 10, 1748, this ship plowed through a massive storm. Newton was sure he and the ship were lost. He cried out to God for mercy. When the storm subsided, Newton returned to his cabin and contemplated the irony of his asking for mercy when had a ship full of chained human beings headed for the slave market. Overwhelmed at his own unworthiness, Newton realized God had extended to him a grace that was unearned, undeserved and unmerited. He could and did describe it hymn – *Amazing Grace*.

Today, our world hums, sings and even bagpipes the hymn *Amazing Grace*. But how often does the world even come close to understanding the significance behind that song.

How about you? Do you have an *Amazing Grace* story? Do you realize just how unworthy, undeserving you are of God’s forgiveness? If you do, if you really do understand God’s *Amazing Grace* I promise, you will forgive your friend, neighbor, mate 490 times plus!!!