

Session 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?

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, let the Word of God run through you, removing any remnants of resentment and 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.

Jesus told a 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 Peter was the one who asked about 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. Peter upped the ante on grace, doubling the “grace” of the religious leaders and even raising the bar an extra notch beyond that.

Jesus surely stunned Peter with His response: “I take your seven and raise it seventy fold.”

“Seventy times seven” or “seventy seven times” are both possible interpretations of Jesus’ forgiveness formula. Either route you take, the point is perfectly clear: the grace you offer to others should have no limits. Few people are ever offended fifty, sixty, or seventy 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. Essentially, He says: Even if your brother insults you a seventy-eighth time or a four hundredth time, forgive and let it go. Don’t keep track; just keep forgiving.

QUESTION 2:

What can happen when we forgive someone?

Corrie ten Boom was a woman who lived through the nightmare of a Nazi concentration camp. In that hellish place, she was humiliated, especially in the delousing shower where they 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 Munich, after sharing her story, a man approached her with his hand outstretched. “A fine message, Fraulein! ... I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did ... but I would like to hear it from your lips as well. Fraulein, ... will you forgive me?”

She recognized him as 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.

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 seven times” 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.

QUESTION 3:

What hinders us from offering forgiveness to someone who has hurt us?

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 he owed. *All* of it.

In Jewish parables, a king symbolized God and the idea of settling accounts symbolized judgment. Each of us is like the servant with an incredible debt. How big is our debt? Jesus used the outrageous amount of “ten thousand talents.” Jesus was using hyperbole to make a point. A talent was the highest denomination of currency at that time, and 10,000 was the largest number in the Greek language. A worker typically earned one denarius a day, and it took 6,000 denarii to equal one talent. To earn one talent, then, would take about twenty years. And with a debt of 10,000 talents, it would take this debtor 200,000 years to pay off his debt!

That is an impossible feat.

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!

GENUINE FORGIVENESS

Circle the answer that most accurately describes how our culture feels about forgiveness.

Forgive only if they say they're sorry.

If I don't feel like it, I won't forgive.

Some things just can't be forgiven.

You have to earn forgiveness over time.

Revenge is better than forgiveness.

Why must genuine forgiveness mark the lives and relationships of Christians?

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 enormous debt. He was allowed to run free, but unfortunately 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. The second man’s debt was a hundred denarii, about three month’s wages, but what’s that compared to 60,000,000 denarii—200,000 years worth of wages?

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 not always easy. It is costly too. After all, look at what it cost Jesus. But even as Christ has forgiven us, He empowers us by His Spirit to extend that same forgiveness to others. We can overcome past hurts and set our relationships free from unforgiveness.

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. He 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?” To use modern lingo, why would this man not choose to pay it forward?

Herein lies the real questions: Why do we behave like this? Why do we withhold forgiveness when we’ve been forgiven so much, and it is in our power to give it so easily?

QUESTION 5:

How have you seen forgiveness strengthen or restore a relationship?

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.

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

LORD HERBERT



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LIVE IT OUT

Imagine three bills in your hand. Each bill represents a person who has hurt you and “owes” you. How can you apply grace, mercy, and forgiveness to the situation?

- ▶ **Evaluate for unforgiveness.** Consider your current relationships and spend time identifying areas of unforgiveness in your heart.
- ▶ **Take a small step.** Make an effort to extend forgiveness in a relationship where you’ve been wronged or slighted. Take the first step even if you’ve done nothing wrong.
- ▶ **Take a large step.** Identify a relationship in which you need to be forgiven—one where you’ve contributed to bad feelings, or even where you’re completely in the wrong. With humility, make an effort to bridge the gap.

Realizing how Christ has forgiven us should cause us to freely forgive those who wrong us. **Therefore, we should focus on the Word of God to remove any remnants of resentment and unforgiveness as often as necessary.**

1. Corrie ten Boom, *Tramp for the Lord* (CLC Publications, 1974), 55-56.