

You have probably heard the words of Alexander Pope more than once in your lifetime, "To err is human. To forgive, Divine." He touches on one of the most difficult ideas for many to grasp: forgiveness.

The Bible has a ton of examples of people who lived out very difficult forgiveness. Joseph, sold into slavery, wrongly accused, left to die, stills his brothers fears of his revenge with "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? 20 But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. 21 Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

It has always been interesting to me that Joseph answers with "Am I in the place of God?" That question causes us to realize that when we do not forgive we ARE trying to play the role of God in our lives.

David had every reason to hate Saul. Samuel had already anointed David as the next king of Israel. Saul had tried to kill him and his best friend on numerous occasions. Saul had made David Israel's public enemy number one; so he lived a life of constant fear and running. However, whenever he was given the chance to take vengeance on Saul, he warned Abishai "Do not destroy him; for who can stretch out his hand against the Lord's anointed, and be guiltless."

We learn that not forgiving someone (even someone as wretched as Saul) makes a person guilty.

In the New Testament, we have the example of Barnabas who is the first to reach out to a terrorist turned Christian, Saul. Barnabas practices

such free forgiveness that he literally takes an ex-ISIS member into his own house and care. Barnabas will later live out that same principle with John Mark—the young missionary who left his ministry to go home—even at the cost of his long-time friendship and mentoring of Paul.

Barnabas teaches us that forgiveness is not always popular or safe, but it is right.

Probably one of my favorite examples of continual forgiveness outside of Christ in my life is that of Hosea and Gomer. Hosea was a prophet of God who was told by God to marry a wife of “whoredoms.” While we do not know whether or not Gomer was a prostitute before Hosea married her, we do know that Hosea knew she would not be faithful. She runs off multiple times with different men. She births three children (we are never told explicitly whether or not they are his) Each time she runs away, Hosea is close behind her, having to even buy her back from the slave markets to redeem her.

From Hosea we learn that forgiveness is often not just a one-time thing. It is meant to be offered often and liberally.

That is the issue which brings us to tonight’s parable. We are to forgive regardless of the offense, but first let’s talk about what forgiveness is not.

1. Forgiveness is NOT throwing caution to the wind.
2. Forgiveness is NOT the absence of consequences.
3. Forgiveness is NOT passive.
4. Forgiveness is NOT forgetting.
5. Forgiveness does NOT always mean restoration.

I think far too often well-meaning people give a wrong view of what forgiveness is. I always want to make sure we understand because Jesus is not advocating naivety. There are many times when forgiveness needs to lead to restoration, and there are many times, through the passage of time and the work of the Spirit, that you can forget something that was done wrong against you. There are even times when mercy and grace should reign in our forgiveness so we lessen or do not enforce the consequences, but that is not all the time.

We are to forgive regardless of the offense, but how many times? Let's lean into Matthew 18:21 because Peter is just about to ask Jesus that question and then give what he thinks is a fair enough assessment of what he thinks.

**18:21** Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?"

The Pharisees taught that based upon some references to God's forgiveness of other nations in Amos<sup>1</sup> that a reasonable number of times to forgive someone is three. Maybe I am just picking on Peter, but I can see him thinking, "I'll impress Jesus by doubling what is the accepted number of times and then throw in another time just because it's the number of completion and God likes sevens so...SEVEN it is!" After all, the way this question is asked, it seems as though Peter is asking about the same offense committed against you by the same person. Perhaps he had been taught, "Fool me once. Shame on you. Fool me twice. Shame on me."

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<sup>1</sup> Amos 1:3,6,9,11,13

Seriously, how many of us would forgive someone of the same sin they had committed against us next week? Not many.

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

You know this, but with Jesus is not pushing us to count and then stop at 491 times. Or to keep a ledger of OFFENSE / FORGIVENESS “Sorry, you have reached your quota of forgiveness this lifetime. I’m going to have to hold a grudge against you until we meet Jesus.” In fact, He is doing quite the opposite. **Don’t keep records of offenses.** Why?

(1)Because while we are not always able to forget the offense, we ought not dwell on it either. (2)Counting the number of times you forgive someone is not forgiveness. It is self-righteousness.

In order to affirm His point and teach us to forgive like God forgives, Jesus tells a story. Before we read it, however, I want to point out to you the fact that this story is for Christians. Outside of my normal hypothesis that all of the parables were meant only for Christ’s followers and not mere illustrations of a sermon, Peter asks how many times he should forgive his **brother**. He could be speaking of a fellow Jew; it was common for them to reference each other in that way. But Jesus also introduces the parable as one which has special significance to the **kingdom of God**. With that in mind, (as most of you are familiar with this story) pay particular attention to how severely the king treats the unforgiving servant.

23 Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants.

24 And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him **ten thousand talents**.

25 But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made.

26 The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all. '

27 Then the master of that servant was **moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.**

Notice how God forgives:

1. He forgives based upon His character—with compassion
2. He forgives unbegrudgingly—released him
3. He forgives totally—forgave him the debt; The servant only asked for time to repay, but the king granted him total forgiveness.

While we read 10,000 talents was the payment to be made, the idea is that his payment was impossible to pay back.

Ten thousand is the largest numerical term in the Greek language. Googolplexian- a 1 followed by a googolplex zeroes.

28 “ But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, ‘Pay me what you owe! ’

29 So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all. '

30 And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt.

Notice the unforgiving servant's cruelty

1. The sum owed him was 100 denarii. One denarii was one day's wages. It is not that this is a small loan, but in reference to what the king has just forgiven the other servant, it is definitely straining at gnats.
2. He laid his hands on him and began to choke him.
3. The man asked the same thing, "Have patience and I will pay you all," yet the unforgiving slave reacts cruelly. He does not give him a loan. In fact, he throws him into debtor's prison where he will NEVER work off the loan.

31 So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done.

32 Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me.

33 Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you? '

34 And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him.

35 “ So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.”

An unforgiving person is dealt cruelly by the Almighty. After what He has forgiven us, how can we help but not forgive another.

**You don't know what he has done to me.** I don't, but God is very aware.

**It won't do any good.** Who are we to question God's plan? Obedience to God always works out to our good

**It was so long ago, it doesn't matter.** There is no expiration date on forgiveness. Jesus never says to forgive within a certain time period or forget about it.

Why don't we forgive?

1. It involves humility.
2. It's not fair.
3. It hurts too much
4. They never asked for forgiveness.