

Forgiveness - how often?

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[0:00] There you go. Thank you. Yeah, we're talking about forgiveness. And it really is important, isn't it? Have you ever been in a situation where you had to apologize? If you just stop and ask yourself how you feel at that moment, you'll realize why forgiveness is such good news.

Because all of that kind of anxiety builds up, your blood pressure goes up, your nervous tension kind of increases, and you just got to get it out. If not, you'll explode. That's the point. And Jesus knows how important forgiveness is because he teaches his disciples about the need to forgive and forgive and to forgive again.

How often? Well, as often as needed. Never put a limit on it, no matter what people have done to you. Now, that's a big ask. That's a big challenge.

But we're not being asked to do something natural here, but supernatural. We're being asked to do something we can't do unless God helps us to forgive as God forgives us.

So, we're going to read Matthew 18, 21 to 35. It's coming on the screen. Very quickly, just comment on the essentials here. Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to 70 times.

[1:25] Jesus answered, I tell you not seven times, but 77 times. Or some people translate this 70 times seven. It's just a question of where you place the emphasis in the translation.

But you don't have to calculate it. Good news. The point is that you don't restrict it. Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him 10,000 talents, that's a lot of money, was brought to him.

Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. The servant fell on his knees before him. Be patient with me, he begged, and I will pay back everything.

The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt, and let him go. But when that servant went out and he found one of his fellow servants who owed him 100 denarii, that is 100 days' work. So it's significant, but not as significant by a long way. 100 denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him.

[2:35] Pay back what you owe me, he demanded. His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, Be patient with me and I will pay you back. The exact same language that he himself had used.

But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told the master everything that had happened.

Then the master called the servant in. You wicked servant, he said, I cancel all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?

In anger, his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured until he should pay back all he owed. And this is the scary bit. This is how my heavenly father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.

So forgiveness is not an option for the people of God. It is an obligation. It is a duty. It is also a very real challenge. How often, how often should I forgive my brother who would sin against me?

[3:45] Asked Peter. The story is told about a little boy who was looking in dreadful pain as he sat on a park bench. A man walked by and asked him what was wrong. The boy answered, I'm sitting on a bumblebee.

Then why don't you get up? The man asked the boy. The boy replied, because I figure that I'm hurting him more than he is hurting me. But of course, the healing process can only begin when you

get up off the park bench.

When you stop seeking to inflict pain on others. And where you surrender your pain to God. Too many people live sad, damaged, hurt lives because they refuse to forgive.

And we know what it does to us when we need to apologize. Imagine what it does to us when week on week, year on year, we refuse to forgive.

And all of that anger and that bitterness builds up within us. Little wonder we explode. We believe in the forgiveness of sins.

[4:54] That's an article of our creed. We believe in the forgiveness of sins. And it's a very precious thing. Imagine a world where husbands did not forgive wives.

Or wives did not forgive husbands. Or parents did not forgive children. Or children did not forgive parents. Or where nations did not forgive nations after fighting in wars. Imagine such a world, how horrible it would be.

To live in a world without forgiveness. Imagine living in a world where all that counted was doing the right thing. Pure justice without mercy.

It would be an impossible world for us to live. Because, as my mother-in-law likes to say, be sure your sins will find you out. Well, she got that from Ezekiel. But never mind.

It's a good word, Deidre. Good word. They will find us out in the end. And so we have to do something with them. Or we have to surrender them to God in order to be forgiven.

[5:56] If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, oh Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness before you are feared.

Right, try and count up your sins from the time you were born until now. Okay? Now, I get when you were very young, you won't remember them. But think of your first, if you can.

Think of that first time you felt guilt or shame. Think of that first time you got into trouble somewhere. And then begin to add to them all the others that you've done over the years.

Against your better judgment. You know you shouldn't have done them. You know it was your fault. Begin to kind of try and analyze those. How many have you got to? How many of those are forgiven?

What about the person who wouldn't forgive you? What about the thing you couldn't rectify? What about that? What about that? If God should keep a record of our wrongs, would any of us get away with it?

[7:02] No, no. And yet the wonderful story of good news in Jesus is that all of our sins can be forgiven. 1 John chapter 2 verses 1 and 2.

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous one. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins. And not only for ours, but for the sins of the whole world. Thank God he paid it all. And next slide, please. As John Piper reminds us, it's tremendously good news for sinners.

Sorry about that. You can't see that. Christ bore our sins. And we need to linger here, he says. The implications of this is huge.

It means that we can leave the past with God. We can say, I trust you, Jesus, that all my sins, all the ones that are public, and all the ones that are private, all of them have been lifted, born, suffered for, and therefore removed from me.

[8:05] I bear them no more. I do not carry guilt in the future with me. Let this sink in, he says. You do not have to carry your sins or be burdened by them.

You do not have to wake up with guilt or go to bed with guilt. You can bank your hope on the commitment of God in Jesus Christ. Wonderful. He carries them all.

He bears them all on the cross so that you can be forgiven and be completely set free. How often then should I forgive my brother who sins against me?

In the light of what Jesus has done in forgiving all of my sin, how often should I forgive? Up to seven times? Yes. Peter was thinking, I'm being very generous here because the Jews taught that you should forgive for three, and then on the fourth time, if they would not accept forgiveness or they would not repent, then you were no longer obligated.

Three at the most, four. But Jesus tells a story about a man who needed forgiveness, a servant who went to a king and he needed this forgiveness.

[9:15] He had a massive, massive debt that he could never pay. A single talent was the weight of silver or gold to the value of 3,000 shekels.

So imagine owing all of these talents to the master. All of those talents that he simply could not pay back. Not in his lifetime.

This was an unpayable debt. It was an unforgivable situation. And if pure justice is applied, the man should be sent to prison and made to work as a slave until he could pay everything back.

And his children should also be sent to prison. That was the law. That's what the law required. But the king said, or the servant said, please have mercy on me.

Pity me. Have mercy on me. And so the king did. Knowing it was an unpayable debt, the king was prepared to cancel the debt and let him go.

[10 : 21] Keep him in his employ. And so off he goes. And he thinks, I know somebody owes me. A hundred denarii. That's a lot of money.

A hundred days work. But it's not unpayable. Give me what you owe. I can't. Please have mercy on me.

Be patient with me. Give me a chance. Never. Never. So he had him thrown into prison and his wife and children with him. And then news got back to the king.

And the king was angry, rightly angry. Why? Because what did that reveal about the heart of the one whose unpayable debt had been forgiven?

What did it reveal about it? It revealed that he didn't have forgiveness in his heart. That he was a person who wanted forgiveness, but who was not prepared to forgive others.

[11 : 21] And that's what's so inexcusable about this. And so he got his comeuppance when the king had him punished. And then Jesus made the application.

And the application is simply this. God will do this to you if you do not forgive your brother. Where from? From your heart. From your heart.

Why from your heart? Because it's very easy to use words like I'm sorry. It's very easy to say, God, please forgive me. Although really, God, if I'm honest, I have no intention of repenting.

Please forgive me for this thing that I do, even though I love to do it, and I intend to keep on doing it. God will not be fooled by that. And the point here is that a person who has really, truly been forgiven because he knows the wickedness and evil of his own heart is a person who is willing to forgive others who sin against us.

I think I have a slide for this. If not, don't worry, C.S. Lewis. C.S. Lewis was asked the question about forgiveness. How can you forgive somebody? And how can you forgive them when it hurts so much inside?

[12 : 40] Especially when they've done something so bad that it's unforgivable. And C.S. Lewis said, I realized that it was possible to forgive. I can forgive because God has forgiven the unforgivable in me.

And if that's your starting point, forgiveness will not be a difficulty. I can forgive somebody who sins against me because God has forgiven the unforgivable in me.

I know how much my debt has been paid. I know the full weight of all of my sin. I know I am undeserving of the mercy and grace of God. God has forgiven me.

How can I withhold it from others? So the person who says, God, I surely don't have to keep forgiving, is a person who has forgot the value of being forgiven.

So what is forgiveness? Forgiveness is not just saying sorry. Forgiveness is letting go. Next slide. It is not glossing over the wrongdoing.

[13 : 47] It is not pretending it doesn't exist. And it is not a forgiving spirit. I really would like to forgive you, but I just feel I can't at the moment. Yes, be honest about that, but that's not forgiveness.

That's forgiveness withheld. Forgiveness is going against the need for revenge. It's going against the need to feel better about it before I do it.

Forgiveness is freely giving something by the grace of God that you could not naturally give yourself. Even as I forgive, I say, Jesus, please help me to mean it.

And not to pick it up and take it back and brood over it and be angry again in some future date.

Maybe that's just me and not you. I don't know. It's not simply a forgiving spirit.

It is a proper acknowledgement that sin has happened and I have been hurt and I have been damaged. But I am willing, I am willing in Jesus' name to forgive you and release you of this debt.

[15 : 00] By the grace of God, I will do that. Forgiveness. And then, why do we need it? We need it because we have such an unpayable debt.

We have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God. And people will always cause hurt. They will always damage us. They will always let us down.

There will always be somebody in our life, sadly, that will have done that to us. And we carry the scars and we carry the wounds and we carry the pain. Jesus knows. But by the grace of God, I will nail that too to the cross of Jesus.

And I will let it go. For forgiveness is not an optional extra, but a difficult duty that I must be willing to perform.

Because freely I have received it. And freely I give. If we will not forgive, then how can we say we are being forgiven?

[16:16] Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. So how do I forgive? How do I forgive?

Next slide. Well, realize just how much you have been forgiven. Realize that God is actively seeking to settle accounts with you.

And then realize that those of us who receive the mercy of God must show mercy to those who have offended us. And now as the music group comes back, we're going to forgive.

We're going to forgive. And if you say, in response to that, I have no one to forgive. Thank God.

I honestly, really thank God. But don't be too hasty. If the Holy Spirit prompts you to say, I need to forgive X.

[17:27] I need to let go of Y. I need to be free of Z. And I've run out after that. Then take a moment to forgive.

To forgive means to acknowledge the pain. You don't hide from the hurt.

You admit it. It means to make the choice. You decide to forgive as an act of your will. You don't wait till it feels right.

You let it go. You give it to Jesus. It means separating the person who hurt you from their wrongdoing. I listened to a psychology professor say, behind every evil, monstrous act, there is a traumatized child.

I don't know if that's true. But do realize that people who hurt have themselves been hurt. So separate the person from the wrongdoing.

[18:42] You can forgive without approving of what was done to you. Let go of the anger, of the bad feelings, of the things that keep you hurt and depressed and low.

Let it go. Pray for them. Pray for them. And then release the debt. By the way, when you pray for somebody, you can't hate them.

When you pray for God to bless them, you can't hate them. You've got to forgive. Release the debt.

And then, crucially, refuse to play back the anger in your head.

Refuse to let the video run again. Watch that film. It's not worth watching again. And never, never, never, never stop forgiving.

Never stop. Not seven times, not 70 times, never, not 490. It is unlimited. For to forgive is to be forgiven.

[19:48] To be forgiven. Amen. Amen.