

Forgiveness and Mercy

Matthew 18: 21-35

■ Estimate/guesstimate how many times God has forgiven you

■ 77 times

■ 490 times

■ 4,900 times

■ more than 10,000 X

■ How did you come up with this answer?

■ If God forgives us once a day ...

- 20 yr old ($365 \text{ days/yr} \times 20$) $\sim 7,300 \text{ X}$
- 40 yr old (365×49) $\sim 14,600 \text{ X}$
- 60 yr old (365×60) $\sim 21,900 \text{ X}$

RECAP

“Constructive anger happens when we identify something is wrong and are moved to make a positive difference through mercy, which is marked by patience, forgiveness, charity, and constructive conflict.”

(*Good & Angry* by David Powlison,
New Growth Press, 2016, p.76)

RECAP

- Jesus uses image of “debt” to describe sin
- Forgiveness is a choice not to hold a debt (or sin) against a person any longer
- Forgiveness is giving up the right for repayment from person who harmed/hurt you

What if I choose not to forgive?



What if I choose not to forgive?

- “Unforgiveness is the poison we drink hoping another will die.” - Thomas Chalmers (1780 -1847)
- “Holding a grudge is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die.” - AA saying

What do we need in order to forgive?

- A real experience of the mercy and grace of God
- Emotional humility
- Emotional wealth

Emotional Humility

- Unforgiveness: I exclude my enemy from the community of humans while I exclude myself from the community of sinners
- The person who hurt me is a “monster”!
- “I would never do anything like that!”
- Unforgiveness happens because I refuse to acknowledge my own sinfulness and need for forgiveness
- Repentance

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. (1 Tim. 1: 15)

For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. (1 Cor. 15: 9-10)

Emotional Wealth

- The more we realize how much God loves us (how much we have been forgiven), the easier it will be to forgive others
- Won't be gracious to others if too needy or insecure
- "... when one knows that God's love is greater than all sin, one is free to see oneself ... and so rediscover one's own sinfulness."

– Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*,
Abingdon, 1996, p. 124.

What do we need in order to forgive?

A real experience of the mercy and grace of God



Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?”

22 Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.[g] (Matthew 18: 21-22)

[g. or *seventy times seven*]

Jesus tells a story in response to Peter's question

- How many times must I forgive others?
- How can we forgive someone an infinite number of times?
- What happens if we don't forgive?

“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 ten thousand bags of gold[h] 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.” (Matt. 18: 23-25)

[h. Greek *ten thousand talents*; a talent was worth about 20 years of a day laborer’s wages.

Worth of “10,000 talents” today

- a talent was worth about 20 years of a day laborer's wages
- At \$11.35/hr \rightarrow \$19,097.51 per year
- one talent = \$19,100 per year \times 20 yrs = \$382,000
- 10,000 talents = \$ 3.82 billion!

“At this 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. (Matt. 18: 26-27)

“But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins.[i] He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘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 it back.’

“But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. (Matt. 18: 28-30)

[i. Greek *a hundred denarii*; a denarius was the usual daily wage of a day laborer]

Worth of “100 denarii” today

- a denarius = daily wage of a laborer
- 1 denarius \sim $\$11.35/\text{hr} \times 8 \text{ hrs.} = \90.80
- 100 denarii \sim $\$90.80 \times 100 = \$9,080$

Compare these two pleas

Servant #1 to King:

“Be patient with me and I will pay back everything.”
(Matt. 18: 26)

Servant #2 to Servant #1:

“Be patient with me and I will pay it back.”
(Matt. 18: 29)

If it took place today ...

- Servant forgiven debt of \$3.82 billion did not show any mercy to a fellow servant who owed him \$9,080.

When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

(Matt. 18: 31)

“Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled 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 handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.” (Matt. 18: 32-35)

Who/What are the torturers?

Benefits of forgiving

- Healthier relationships
- Improved mental health
- Less anxiety, stress and hostility
- Lower blood pressure
- Fewer symptoms of depression
- A stronger immune system
- Improved heart health
- Improved self-esteem
- <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/forgiveness/art-20047692>

Negative effects of Unforgiveness

- Bring anger and bitterness into every relationship and new experience
- Become so wrapped up in the wrong that you can't enjoy the present
- Become depressed or anxious
- Feel that your life lacks meaning or purpose, or that you're at odds with your spiritual beliefs
- <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/forgiveness/art-20047692>

Some practical questions:

- What if the person who hurt me does not ask for forgiveness?
- What if that person won't even admit any wrong?

Answer:

- We can forgive that person before God
- Forgiveness reflects our heart attitude toward God and the person who hurt us

Vertical-dimension of forgiveness

“And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.” (Mark 11: 25)

“And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.” (Matt. 6: 12)

Horizontal-dimension of forgiveness

“If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying ‘I repent,’ you must forgive them.”

(Luke 17: 3-4)

Two common and complicated situations

- Other person won't hear you out?
- It takes two to reconcile
- But one can forgive even when the other is still at war; called "loving your enemy"
- Person who hurt you is unreachable, too dangerous to approach, or perhaps already dead?
- Can still proceed with vertical-dimension of forgiveness

What do we need in order to forgive?

A real experience of the mercy and grace of God



Recognize that God is sovereign

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

(Romans 8: 28)

But Joseph said to them, “Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

(Genesis 50: 19-20)