



When I was 11 years old some friends and I were exploring a partially built house. This was before cities required fencing around building projects, and these houses provided great play areas for kids. We'd climb up the open studs. We'd find creative ways to get onto the roof trusses. We'd play in big holes that would become a swimming pool. It was so much fun.

On this particular day, we decided to test our strength and manliness by kicking out the sheet rock in the partially completed walls. We'd load up with all our strength and deliver a front kick. Let me tell you, it took multiple kicks to make the initial opening and then we'd continue kicking the broken edges to remove all the sheetrock. It was a lot of work but a lot of fun; boys love to break things!

When our parents found out, we were in major trouble. The builder wanted reimbursement for the damages; our parents wanted explanations for our stupid behavior. I remember the grip of despair in my gut as I sat in front of my parents and offered my lame excuse for why kicking in the walls seemed like a good idea at the time. I felt horrible about the incident. I apologized profusely and made arrangements to earn the money to pay my share of the damages.

How would you rate the difficulty of my parents to forgive me?

Very easy – Easy – Mediocre – Hard – Impossible?

Very easy, right? I messed up, apologized and made promises to pay for the damages.

Now imagine this. What if my friends and I kicked in the sheetrock of a different house a month later? How would you rate the difficulty of my parents forgiving me a second time?

Very easy – Easy – Mediocre – Hard – Impossible?

Now what if my friends and I kicked in the sheetrock of different houses a 3rd time, a 4th time, a 5th time, a 6th time and a 7th time? How would you rate the difficulty of my parents forgiving me after repeating an offense 7 times?

If they had forgiven me 7 times, you'd be pretty impressed with their generous heart, wouldn't you? Forgiving someone up to 7 times for repeating the same hurtful action is pretty impressive, we should admit.

In our parable today, Jesus is going to blow away our expectations for justice and forgiveness. He's going to teach that we

should go way beyond 7 times in our offers for forgiveness but instead to offer it without limit.

**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?" (Matt. 18:21).**

There's the question. Being a reasonable and spiritually mature person, how many times should I offer forgiveness to a person? What if I offer forgiveness to someone, even if they don't ask for it? What if I offer forgiveness a bunch of times, for the same thing ... perhaps even up to 7 times?

**Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times" (v. 22).**

Jesus' reply of 77 times, translated 70 times 7 times (490) in some translations, is given to Peter's question. These numbers imply perfection and completeness. Jesus does this to show that the spirit of genuine forgiveness recognizes no boundaries. It is a state of heart, not a matter of calculation. William Hendriksen puts it this way: "Clearly what he meant was, 'Forgive without ever stopping. Be kind toward your brother ... always.'"

Jesus is calling for an extreme practice of forgiving others. He knows that. If your heart has been hurt to shallow depths, this unlimited forgiveness might inspire you to go further than you felt you could go.

However, if you've been hurt to the core of your heart, this unlimited forgiveness not only seems impossible, it's scandalous. How could Jesus instruct us to forgive a drunk driver who kills our child? How could Jesus instruct us to forgive a boss who intentionally mistreats us? How could Jesus instruct us to forgive someone who's abused our child or us?

With that in mind, Jesus wants to offer further explanation on this topic so we, "the hearers," can understand the rationale behind such an extreme call to forgiveness and equip us to be able to live this way.

**"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 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.**

**"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” (verses 23–27).**

The amount of money this servant owes the king is 10,000 bags of gold.

1 denarii = 1 day of labor

6 denarii = 1 week of labor

1000 weeks = 1 bag of gold (also called a talent)

10,000 bags of gold = 192,000 years of labor

This formula assumes that a person could save every penny made, spending none on living expenses. The numbers are interesting but the point is: this servant was completely and utterly unable to repay his debt to the king. It was impossible for him to right the wrong he'd done to the king. Impossible.

This situation is a mess with no ability to make things right. The best solution the king can come up with and one that administers a thimble of justice is to sell the man and his family into indentured slavery so they can work off a bit of this debt. Every member of this family would be a slave for the rest of their lives.

This is a crushing judgment to swallow, so the servant falls on his knees—literally he's prostrating himself before the king. He makes no offer to make a down payment on the debt because he has nothing. He is shamefully desperate. He's begging for mercy. That's his last hope—mercy.

Have you ever felt so desperate? Have you ever felt so undeserving that you felt utterly helpless to repair damage you'd caused? Have you ever stared at a mountain of wreckage you caused knowing there was nothing you could do to repair the devastation?

The king was moved with pity and granted far more than the servant asked for. The servant asked for time to repay the debt, in essence to repair the damage, but the King knew this was impossible so he completely cancelled the debt. What a reversal! Staring at a life of slavery switched to freedom! Can you feel the liberation!

**“But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded” (v. 28).**

In comparison, 100 silver coins would take two years to earn. But the first guy had just been forgiven a debt that equaled 192,000 years of labor.

**“His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.’**

**“But he refused ...” (verses 29–30a).**

“But he refused.” The imperfect usage of the Greek language for this phrase means that he not only refused once but persisted in his refusal to show mercy.

**“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 outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.**

**“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” (verses 30b–35).**

The king doesn't hold back in his indignation against this servant declaring him wicked and ordering that he be tortured “until he can repay his debt.”

Jesus gives the lesson to the parable by saying in essence, with awareness of the forgiveness you've been given, the sinner must always yearn to forgive whoever wrongs them. This reminds me of Matthew 6:15: **“But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”**

Jesus is pushing the boundaries of forgiveness so far because often our understanding of being forgiven is too small and our offer of forgiveness is too cheap. Jesus loves us lavishly and lavish forgiveness is a byproduct.

There's a connection here to last week's sermon. Remember the prayer of the Pharisee? He prayed as if he had it all together and God rejected his prayer because his heart was prideful. In contrast, the tax collector prayed with desperation revealing a broken heart and God showed him mercy.

Do you see the connection? Humble people see that they bring absolutely, utterly nothing to God. They see that they are bankrupt morally and spiritually. Yet God offers mercy and forgiveness to a broken humble person. It's like what it says in Matthew 5:3: **“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”**

Here's the main idea of this passage: Our capacity to understand the lengths that God has gone and continues to go as he forgives us will fuel our forgiveness of those who have wronged us. First, we'll look at our personal awareness of the forgiveness that God has extended to us. Then we'll look at how that should fuel our forgiveness of others.

Once Saint Francis of Assisi was confronted by a Christian brother who asked him repeatedly, “Why you? Why you? Why does everyone want to see you? Hear you? Obey you? You are not handsome, nor learned, nor from a noble family. Yet the world seems to want to follow you.” Francis replied, “God continually watches and His most holy eyes have not found among sinners any smaller man, nor any more insufficient and sinful, therefore he has chosen me to accomplish the marvelous work which God

has undertaken; He chose me because He could find none more worthless.”

Some questions for reflection are: How good of a person do you think you are? Do you feel like God loves you more on a day when you're a good person and less on a day when you've really blown it? How would you rate your awareness this week that you have been accepted and are cherished by the holy God of the universe, and there's **nothing** you can do that will cause him to love you more?

God wants you to make an assessment of yourself and conclude, “what a wreck I am! I need a Savior.” We'd be more patient and kind with people and less hurt if we regularly remembered that we all have deep core faults.

Everything in our flesh resists this admission of utter brokenness. The insecure person is petrified to admit they have any faults because the admission destroys their life like the crumbling of a house of cards. The proud person is so diluted with themselves that they actually believe they deserve the good things that are in their life.

Sadly, neither are experiencing the liberating forgiveness that Jesus offers, nor are they passing that forgiveness along to others. Then, out of gratitude he wants us to forgive others like God has forgiven us. For all of us, this is difficult. For some who have been hurt deeply, this feels like an impossibility.

From a place of understanding being forgiven, how does that fuel our forgiveness of others? Simply put, we forgive like we've been forgiven—freely, without limits. Verse 35 says I need to forgive from the heart. What does this mean? It means that you are willing to pay the price for the punishment they deserve.

Tim Keller says it this way: “God's grace and forgiveness, while free to the recipient, are always costly for the giver.... From the earliest parts of the Bible, it was understood that God could not forgive without sacrifice. No one who is seriously wronged can “just forgive” the perpetrator.... But when you forgive, that means you absorb the loss and the debt. You bear it yourself. All forgiveness, then, is costly.”

You could think of forgiveness as a form of voluntary suffering. And the price you bear is to let them go freely. Here are some specific examples of how you bear the cost:

- You no longer make cutting remarks about them.
- You refuse to use innuendo or “spin” or gossip or complain about someone who's hurt you.
- You no longer punish them in your thoughts for the wrong they did to you. Your fantasies about punishing them are gone.
- You no longer dwell upon the hurt they inflicted upon you.

- You refuse to continue the inner dialogue that goes something like this, “I could do that so much better.” Or “If I was in charge of that, it would be so much better.” This reveals a self-righteous spirit.

Notice the change in attitude toward them. You would be justified to punish them but you have chosen something better than justice—mercy. You are bearing the cost so they can go free. You have a definitive, clear moment when you say, “I forgive you.”

After you've forgiven someone from the heart, what do you do with the recurring negative thoughts toward them? Don't believe that “forgiving from the heart” means you'll never want to punish them in your thoughts or talk them down! You're going to want to; it's normal. Expect it and be prepared to combat these thoughts when they come. Here's a great defensive strategy: You have an inner dialogue with yourself and it goes like this.

“Self, I have already released them from the punishment they deserved. I paid their punishment and continue to pay it. They are free. I have released them.” This is how we continually forgive them. Then offer a prayer for them. Pray for them to be blessed. Pray that God would show them his love in overwhelming, lavish ways.

For deep wounds this will more than you can handle. But remember, this kind of forgiveness is possible as we live with a high awareness of the forgiveness that God grants us. What if I just don't think I can forgive someone? What's a next step for me? This is a dangerous place to be because you're in the camp with the wicked servant. Please don't stay here. Go to God in prayer today and ask him this simple question: God, will you show me deeper levels of my rebellion toward you?

This is a raw and vulnerable question, I realize. But the problem is you're splashing in the shallows of God's forgiveness. And the shallows are inadequate to fuel the forgiveness you need to grant to someone.

Listen to the Holy Spirit as he reveals deeper levels of your sin and rebellion. Have the courage of character to enter a place to be broken. You can forgive today and the forgiveness God has granted you is your model.

I don't think the first servant experienced this. In some twisted way, he either felt his pardon was deserved or had such a hard heart that he didn't understand what his pardon meant.

If you are wrestling to forgive someone or even yourself today, in addition to this warning, there's also a great reward involved. It's joy. When the Bible talks about joy it describes a freedom from the entanglements of the ups and downs of our circumstances. Instead of tethering ourselves to these circumstances, we are tethered to the sovereign plan of God. This is the path to true joy.

When we hold on to unforgiveness we plant a seed of bitterness in our heart. That seed, if not pulled out, will become a

root of bitterness that will rob us of the joy that Christ wants us to experience.

Can you imagine the freedom that's waiting for you? Do you want to leave today continuing to carry your burden or do you want to leave today with freedom in your soul? Jesus offers you a full pardon today for everything you've done. Have you received

this forgiveness? Jesus, your Savior and your Lord, is calling you to forgive. Is there anyone you are refusing to forgive?

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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