

## How Many Times?!?

September 24, 2017 @ ABC church

Matthew 18:21-35

"Seventy times seven" is a lot of forgiveness. Once is tough enough. Twice for the same person is almost unreasonable. This world's wisdom tells us to remember the old adage: "Hurt me once, shame on you. Hurt me twice, shame on me." "Seventy times seven?" I believe a Mother Teresa would have trouble with that!

Yet that is precisely what Jesus advised in his dialogue with Simon Peter. Keep on forgiving, he counseled, even when forgiveness seems illogical by the world's wisdom, for what is forgiveness if it is not a gift that we give ourselves as much if not more than a favor we bestow on others.

### **I. Unforgiveness Carries a Heavy Cost**

1 denarius = 1 day's wages

1 talent = 20 years wages

10,000 talents = 200,000 year's wages

Apart from all of that, unforgiveness puts you in the debt of someone else, or at least at their mercy. We tend to look at it as we are in control if we don't forgive, because we don't want to be hurt again. But what really happens is we shackle ourselves to that person and how they hurt us, and by not forgiving, we choose to wear that shackle for as long as we choose not to forgive someone else. We tell ourselves we are staying in control, but in reality we are not.

**Living life out of control** – Rev. Allan Bevere Friday 9/22/2017  
Ashland TG.

English poet and artist, William Blake, said, "The glory of Christianity is to conquer by forgiveness."

In thinking about forgiveness, is it not the case that it is easier to forgive than to be forgiven; because to be forgiven means we must let go of our fate and put our destiny in the hands of another.

How true it is that we human beings like being in control of our lives. “I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul;” so goes the poem that so many learn in school and recite as if in fact it were true.

Falsehoods sound so believable when they are stated poetically.

But to live in forgiveness is to live life out of control; to live in forgiveness means that I must be willing to put my future, my fate in the hands of another.

That is just what we must do as we approach the throne of God. Without the willingness to be forgiven and to live life on the terms of another, we cannot find the grace we so desperately need.

In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was willing to place his destiny in the hands of his Heavenly Father, “not my will but yours be done;” and in so doing, God brought him through the valley of the shadow of death and out the other side to victory.

As difficult as it can be, we must learn to live our lives out of control as we live life as those forgiven, as those who understand that we get into trouble, not when we turn the helm over to another, but when we foolishly attempt to master our fate and captain our souls.

In placing our destiny in the hands of the God, who will bring history to its desired end, God will see us through — to our chief end as we love God and enjoy God forever.\*\*\*\*\*

Forgive seventy times seven? Jesus knew it was for our own good. People who refuse to forgive rarely do significant damage to the other person but can seriously jeopardize their own well-being. And those who choose not to forgive rarely truly understand what it means to be forgiven.

## **II. Our Forgiveness Is Linked to God's Forgiveness**

There is, of course, a keenly spiritual dimension to the forgiveness principle. It is an awareness of God's love for all. A woman who disliked a singularly obnoxious neighbor was put in a bad mood every morning when, while standing at her sink fixing breakfast, she would see him driving off to work. Finally, one morning she watched him drive away, and as the familiar feelings of resentment began to rise, she whispered, "He is a person for whom Christ died." That morsel of theological insight was the antidote to her resentment. If Jesus loves others enough to die for them, how dare we harbor unforgiveness against them? She was shackled by her unforgiveness to having her mood set by just seeing him, but when she chose to remember who he is and who she is in God's mercy, everything changed.

### **III. Practical application, how do we do this?**

Is it hard to forgive others? You bet! But part of that difficulty comes from the fact that we confuse forgiveness with forgetting. Forgiveness is not forgetting. Forgetting is something that most of us can never do, but forgiveness is something each of us can and must do. Even God, if you think about it does not forget our sins. If He is truly omniscient, all-knowing, He could not forget our sins. What He does do is remove them from us and Himself as far as the east is from the west. He resolves never to count those sins that have been forgiven against us again.

That is the essence of forgiveness. It is not as if the wrong or the hurt that has been done you never happened, because we would not be being honest if we were to try to convince ourselves of that. Forgiveness is the conscious, volitional act of the will to not count someone's sin against them. It is not ignorance of sin, it is disregard for it. It is not tolerance of sin, it is refusing to let a sin be part of the basis for your relationship with someone.

Forgiveness is one of the most difficult things you will do, because it screams out against our ideas of justice. Do not confuse these two, for forgiveness is not justice, it is mercy. We are incapable of being impartial judges, so how could we possibly be fair to someone who has sinned against us? We can't, and we shouldn't try. Only God

is capable of impartiality, so we must leave judgment up to Him. We are to be forgiving, God will be the judge.

Forgiveness means resolving to live with the consequences of another person's sin. You will have to learn to live with it anyway, because something done cannot usually be undone. If someone gossips about you, you can never completely undo what has been said. The fact that a lie has been told about you cannot be changed, and you will have to live with those consequences, regardless of whether or not you forgive them. You cannot retract gossip any more than you can put an egg back in its shell. No matter how you respond to the gossiper, it has been done. So you must choose to live in bitterness and unforgiveness or peace and forgiveness by deciding not to use the offense against them.

There are twelve steps that you can and should take to forgive someone. Let me share them with you.

1. Write on a sheet of paper the name of the person who has sinned against you, and their sin, in specific language. Don't forget to include forgiving yourself.
2. Face the hurt and the hate that those sins have caused to be part of your life. Write down how you feel about the people and the sins.
3. Acknowledge the significance of the cross. It is the cross that makes forgiveness legally and morally right. Jesus took upon Himself the cost of our sins and everyone else's sins. He did not deserve them, but they were laid on Him for our sakes. You may cry out, "It's not fair! Where's the justice?" Remember that it is in the cross.
4. Decide that you will bear the burden of each of those sins that you have written down, as we are told to do in Galatians 6:2. It is not only a possibility it is a prescription for the Christian life.
5. Make a conscious, vocal decision to forgive them. You must decide to let that person off of your hook, so that you can be freed from the snares of the past, and move on in life.
6. Take your list before God, and specifically tell God who it is you are going to forgive, and what they have done, and ask for His help. You may want to pray with someone else for accountability's sake.
7. Physically destroy the list, and do not tell the offenders what you have done. You are not expecting them to change because you

have forgiven them, it is you who are going to change, and for the better.

8. Do not wait for your decision to forgive someone to be manifest by a change in their behavior.

9. Try to understand how the person who you have forgiven feels or felt, or what may have prompted them to do the deed. They too are sinners saved by grace, just as you are, and need the compassion that you were given just as much.

10. Expect that there will be a positive result in you because of your decision to forgive.

11. Thank God for the lessons you will or have learned, and for the strength to do this difficult task.

12. Be absolutely certain before you start this that you have faced and confessed any part you may have had in this problem between yourself and these who have sinned against you. Confess your failure to God, and realize that if you have done something that someone needs to forgive you for, you need to go to them and seek forgiveness.

A final thought: God's willingness to forgive us is linked to our willingness to forgive others. Jesus said, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive..." as He taught us to pray. He also said in verse 35: My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from [g]your heart." That alone is all I need to know to "forgive not seven times, but seventy times seven." It is the only way to freedom, and not living your life shackled to what someone has done to you, or the fact that you choose not to forgive them.