

21Then Peter came up and asked Jesus, “Lord, how many times must I forgive my brother when he sins against me? As many as seven times?”
22Jesus said to him, “Not seven times, but I tell you as many as seventy-seven times. **23**For this reason the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. **24**When he began to settle them, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. **25**Because the man was not able to pay the debt, his master ordered that he be sold, along with his wife, children, and all that he owned to repay the debt. **26**“Then the servant fell down on his knees in front of him, saying, ‘Master, be patient with me, and I will pay you everything!’ **27**The master of that servant had pity on him, released him, and forgave him the debt.
28“But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him one hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began choking him, saying, ‘Pay me what you owe!’ **29**“So his fellow servant fell down and begged him, saying, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back!’ **30**But he refused. Instead he went off and threw the man into prison until he could pay back what he owed.
31“When his fellow servants saw what had happened, they were very distressed. They went and reported to their master everything that had taken place. **32**“Then his master called him in and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt when you begged me to. **33**Should you not have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had mercy on you?’ **34**His master was angry and handed him over to the jailers until he could pay back everything he owed.
35“This is what my heavenly Father will also do to you unless each one of you forgives his brother from his heart.”

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

“How many times should I forgive my brother when he sins against me?”
This was Peter’s question to Jesus. It is not only his question, but also our question, too. *“How many times do I forgive him?”* says the wife who sees her husband lapse into sin. How long do I forgive my adult child, asks the retired person. Sometimes the adult children ask the same question

concerning a parent. Even little children have to forgive each other.

Peter's question raises a serious topic, because we face the task of forgiving those around us every day. Sometimes, perhaps more often than we realize, we feel like we don't want to forgive or we are slow to forgive. We may say it aloud or just think the question in our mind: **How Can I Ever Forgive You?** Jesus wants us to forgive. Jesus has strong words about forgiving others. These words show us what we must do and give us the motivation and strength to do it.

Transition: Jesus has been teaching his disciples about humility in the kingdom of God. They should not put themselves first, but be concerned about others. In fact, the disciples were told to look after lost souls. Last Sunday we heard that we should talk to a fellow Christian about an unrepentant sin and lead them back to the Lord. Peter's question is natural. What if a Christian brother or sister keeps on sinning against us with the implication that they keep repenting? Jesus answers this question with a story, or parable.

1. I will remember the way God forgives me.

One of the things they teach you to do when you are training to be a pastor is to listen. Over the years, I've learned that when someone is angry because they have been hurt, they tend to repeat their story over and over. When they are stuck in a loop of resentment and pain, it isn't good. So after I have listened for a while, I ask a question. *"How do you think God feels about your anger?"* Usually, I will get a response: *"He probably doesn't want me to be angry."* What I am doing is getting them out of their going-in-circles in their mind, and getting them to think about God, which will help.

Jesus does not immediately answer Peter's question. Jesus tells a parable that first of all focuses on God. He wants Peter, you, and me to remember that when I am upset and need to forgive someone, God has forgiven me first.

A. Jesus tells us that a king called in those who owed him. The first man mentioned owed the king 10,000 talents; today we would say billions of dollars. The man had no way to repay the debt. The king orders all the man's possessions to be sold to repay some of the debt. The man begs for mercy.

1. In the parable, we are the debtor, and God is the King. Our great debt to

God, our Creator, is all the sins we have committed or things that we have done wrong. We can't begin to repay it. It is billions of sins. We deserve to be punished until they are all paid off, and that is eternal.

2. In the story, the King has mercy on this servant. His heart was moved to compassion. He canceled it. The man walks free.

We recognize this as a picture of God forgiving our sins. Although God didn't just dismiss our sins. The huge debt was paid in full by the Son of God dying on the cross for our sins. So whatever was written on our account has now been wiped away or canceled.

B. What Jesus wanted Peter and all of us to see is that mercy leads to gratefulness. Gratefulness to God motivates us to forgive.

1. In the story, the servant who had this impossible debt canceled should have been walking on clouds. He was looking forward to spending his life in debtors' prison paying back a sum that he couldn't repay. He had a chance to live his life freely. He should have been overflowing with joy and relief. If someone owed him money, anyone would assume that he would be patient, even forgiving, after he had been forgiven so much.

2. In the same way, God's grace is the Christian's motivation for forgiving. St. Paul instructs us, "*Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*" (Ephesians 4:32) God has forgiven us our billions of sins, a lifetime of sins. In fact, God's love continues to pour out from his heart to ours.

C. This answers one question for us. Can I forgive? Absolutely. With God's grace, I am empowered to forgive anyone, for anything they might do to me. Jesus gives me the power.

Forgiving is what Jesus wants us to do. He shows this with the parable.

2. I will respond by forgiving you.

In the story, the servant went out, and he found a fellow servant who owed him 100 denarii, about three months' wages; in our dollars, maybe \$10,000. It is not insignificant, but it is repayable.

The first servant demanded repayment from the second servant. The second servant begged for a little time, and he would repay the debt in full. This is reasonable. However, the first servant shows no patience or mercy

and has the man thrown into prison until the debt is paid.

Jesus is giving us a negative example to learn from. This first servant has no mercy. Jesus wants us to be different. You and I will respond by forgiving the brother or sister who sins against us.

A. Jesus makes this point in the parable by emphasizing the negative.

1. Other servants heard about the servant's lack of mercy, and they told the king about it. The master called the servant. He says, **“You wicked servant, I canceled all that debt because you begged me to. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had mercy on you?”**

Jesus includes these questions for a reason. They are meant to make us think. Do we appreciate the forgiveness we have received? If God has forgiven me so much, how can I not forgive the things that people do against me? When Jesus puts it in this light, forgiving becomes much easier.

2. Jesus goes on and tells us what will happen if we despise the forgiveness we have received. In the parable, the wicked servant receives a just and fair punishment. He is sent to prison to suffer. It is for the rest of his life, since he could never pay back the huge debt. Jesus adds the sharp warning.

“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.” Jesus point is clear: we MUST forgive.

B. It isn’t hard to see what Jesus wants, but what exactly does forgiveness look like? This is a good question. Scripture gives an answer.

1. When Jesus taught his disciples to pray the *Lord’s Prayer*, he told them to pray, **“Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.”** How many sins do we want forgiven? All. Jesus teaches us, so we should forgive our neighbor all their sins. We are to forgive repeatedly if they are repentant. There is no limit.

Think of Joseph in the Old Testament reading. (Genesis 50) He forgave his brothers unconditionally for selling him into slavery. They even wanted to set conditions: they would be his slaves. He had seen and understood God's forgiveness and love. He forgave them unconditionally. So Jesus wants us to forgive unconditionally.

2. Someone might think this is still hard, forgiving repeatedly and unconditionally. It is true that it seems hard. When someone really hurts me, our human nature doesn’t want to forgive. What we do is not focus on our feelings or desire for revenge. We are to focus our thoughts on Jesus

and his words. Then I see and understand God's incredible grace to me. My entire debt to him has been canceled. Now God has called me to forgive, repeatedly, the sins my brother or sister commits against me.

But it only happens through the gospel. When you are faced with a situation where it is hard to forgive, go to God's words and promises. Go to the cross and see Jesus' love. Remember how much he has forgiven you and what he has made you. You are a part of God's family. He will give you the strength. We can be like Jesus, who prayed as he was crucified, **"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."**

Conclusion: In 1838, thousands of Jamaican slaves were freed from bondage. When they were freed, they took a coffin. They placed in it the shackles and branding irons and other relics from their bondage. Then they buried the coffin and sang the hymn, *"Praise God from whom all blessings flow."* (CWH: 617)

They forgave the people for the terrible cruelty that had been done against them. A beautiful example of forgiving love in Christ.

We have been freed from the debt and punishment of sin by Jesus Christ. We sing God's praises, and we gratefully forgive, completely and repeatedly, those who sin against us. Amen.