

How many chances should I give Him? Nearly everybody has asked that question in one way or another. When someone at church has hurt your feelings on several occasions, you may erupt with this question. When a neighbor of yours is badmouthing things they say you have done, you may want to scream out his question. When one of your kids takes advantage of you again and again, you may want to explode asking that question. Haven't we all asked that question at one time or another about someone who has hurt us? You may be the housewife whose husbands abuse seems as regular as the full moon. You may be the husband who has absorbed the acid from your wives' tongue so often that you feel you cannot take it any longer. You may be the Christian who has been repeatedly misrepresented, slandered, or ridiculed by the people who are not trying to be fair. You may be tired of taking it. You've tried to love them, and you've prayed for the strength to forgive them. But now you're reached your limit. They just don't deserve another chance, do they? Peter may have felt the same way when he asked Jesus the question in our text. In fact, he may have felt he was being very generous to offer the trespassing brother seven chances for forgiveness. Notice too, that there is nothing in Peter's question to indicate that the brother wants forgiveness. Surely, the suffering victim would be justified, if after 7 times forgiving his tormentor, he allowed his love to turn to hate. Not so says, Jesus. The Christians love of those sinning against him is to be patterned after Christ's love for us sinners. It has no limit. Seven times seventy represents a boundless willingness to forgive. Therefore Christians are "Always Ready To Forgive".

To explain how Jesus wants us to be always ready to forgive, he tells us a parable. A certain king had an employee who owed him a tremendous amount of money. This servant owed his king 10,000 talents. In today's monetary standard, the servant owed his master millions of dollars. With the job he presently had, it would take him 164,384 years to pay off his debt. Impossible. It was impossible for him to pay off his own debt. And so the king attempted to get back part of his debt by having the man and his family sold into slavery. It is like today when a company files chapter 11. The creditors try to get back a portion of their losses. The company sells its buildings, office furniture, and its creditors maybe receive 10 cents on a dollar.

The servant pleaded with his master for mercy. He said he would try and pay the amount back. The master knew that the servant could never pay the amount back. Instead of punishing him or selling him into slavery, the master simply gave the servant a clean slate.

Now how does this story relate to you and me? Well, we are that servant pictured in the opening portion of the text. The staggering debt we have is our sins. Every bad thought, word, deed, we have done is sin. Who here today can even begin to count his transgressions? Even if we would commit only one sin during our entire life, the debt of sin would still be a crushing burden. James wrote in his letter, "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it." The debt of one sin deserves the wages of sin, which is death. Our debt of sin is impossible to pay back to God. But this servant felt he could pay back the 10,000 talents if he only had the time. Likewise, we also are tempted to imagine we in some way can pay off the debt of our sins. We might fall into the trap of thinking that sacrifices, suffering, or service in some way will help to do away with all that we've done wrong. But no matter how hard

we try, we cannot repay the debt of our sins to God. WE just fall deeper and deeper into debt. Our God then does a remarkable thing. He takes care of the debt. He pardons us. God doesn't pardon us because he sees some qualities in us which He needs to get his work done. He does not release us from the burden of sin after we have suffered enough to earn the right to freedom. God forgives us for all that we are, for all that we have done, for all that we have not done, for one simple reason. He loves us. His love moved him to pay the penalty we owed him. He himself paid it in full, when His son suffered what we deserved to endure for sin. Yes, because of Jesus Christ, our debt of sin has been removed. In Psalm 103:12 it says, "As far as the east is from the west, so far have I removed your transgressions from my sight. If you owed millions of dollars to creditors, wouldn't you be happy if someone paid the debt for you? Jesus Christ has paid completely your debt of sin. We learn to forgive others by reviewing how God has forgiven us.

However, how often don't we practice double standard behavior. The Servant in our text found another servant, who owed him a 100 denari, and when he couldn't pay him back, choked him, and threw him into jail. He who had been forgiven much, would not forgive his neighbor. Double standard behavior. . Don't we do it too? We are tempted to view other peoples' sins against us as more serious than ours against God. We are inclined to remember many more of the injuries others have done us than those we have committed against our God. We are more than ready to plead for non violence from God while violently abusing those who may have insulted us. We may plead mercy from God for all our offenses, and then attempt to justify our merciless mistreatment of those who have wronged us. Double Standard behavior. Yes, Lord, that's me. Forgive me Lord this day for not extending always the same forgiveness you have extended to us. But what really is forgiveness? **1. Real forgiveness is relinquishing my right to get even.**

This is the heart of real forgiveness. You don't seek revenge. The Bible says it like this in Romans 12:19, "*Never avenge yourselves. Leave that to God. For He has said that He will repay those who deserve it.*"

One day, God is going to have the last word. One day, God is going to settle the score. One day, God is going to right the wrong. One day, God is going to balance the ledger. So you let God settle the score. You forgive so there can be peace in your heart and you can get on with your life, and you leave the justice part to God. Who can do a better job of justice? Who can do a better job of getting even? You or God? Who has more ways at His disposal of righting wrongs, you or God? The starting point is to relinquish my right to get even.

2. Responding to evil with good.

The Bible says it like this in Luke 6:27-28, "*Do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you and pray for those who mistreat you.*" Circle those three verbs – "do good," "bless," and "pray for." That's part of forgiveness. You return good for evil. How do you know when you've genuinely forgiven somebody? You actually start praying for them. You also understand their hurt. You start seeing their hurt. Hurt people hurt people. When people are hurting inside, they take it out on others. That parent who hurt you a lot, they were hurting a lot. They were hurting in all kinds of ways. When you learn to forgive, you can not only see your own hurt, but you see their hurt,

too. Then you start to understand why they acted in such evil or selfish or hurtful or abusive ways. You can pray for them. Let's now look at what forgiveness is not.

3. It isn't conditional. In other words, it's not based on somebody else's response. Real forgiveness is unconditional. It's not earned. It's not deserved. It's not bargained for. It's not paid for. It's not based on some promise that you'll never do it again. If you say to someone "I'll forgive you if..." that's not forgiveness. That's called bargaining. "I forgive you if..." is not forgiveness at all. Genuine forgiveness is unconditional.

4. Forgiveness is not minimizing the seriousness of the offense. It's not saying, "It's not a big deal." Or "It's OK. It didn't really hurt me." Or if somebody tries to ask forgiveness, you say, "Don't worry about it. It's no big deal. It didn't hurt." That is not forgiveness.

How about if I would say to Osama bin Laden, "It's no big deal. That's not forgiveness. That's called insanity. Four years ago this quote came out from the Taliban saying, "American should get over Sept. 11." Just get over it. Get on with your life. Minimizing what had happened. That is not forgiveness. The offense hurt us. It hurt deeply. It was not ok what they did to us.

5. It isn't resuming a relationship. This is one of the most misunderstood concepts about forgiveness. Forgiveness is not the same as restoring a relationship. Some of you are afraid to forgive because you're afraid you're going to have to go back with that person. And you'll have to be their best friend again or you'll have to remarry them or whatever. No, restoring relationship and forgiveness are two different things, the Bible teaches. Forgiveness is instant. Trust must be built over a long period of time. The Bible says that those are two different things. Forgiveness takes care of the damage done. It just lets the person off the hook. You let them go – scott free. But it doesn't guarantee that the relationship will be restored. Those are two different issues.

6. Forgiveness is not forgetting what happened. You've all heard the cliché "Forgive and forget". Isn't that nice? It sounds so sweet! Forgive and forget. The only problem is it's impossible to do. It's impossible.

In the first place, it's impossible to try to forget something. You can't try to forget anything. When you're trying to forget something, what are you focusing on? The very thing you want to forget. And whatever you focus on, you tend to move toward. You can't try to forget anything. You have to try to put something in its place.

I want to say, though, is that there's something better than forgetting. This will take you to a new level of spiritual maturity. There's something better than forgetting. It's remembering but realizing how God can bring good even out of bad. You can't thank God for something you've forgotten. Thank God that even though this terrible thing happened to me and it hurt a lot, I believe that God could turn it around and use it for good.

I have no doubt that many of you are carrying deep painful wounds from the way you've been hurt by other people. And from the bottom of my heart, I am sorry. I'm really sorry. But there is only one proper way to deal with this. Forgive. It's the only way you're going to get on with your life and get over the hurt. Forgive Why should I do that? Because of Jesus. Forgive as God in Christ has forgiven you. Amen.