

Come to the Table of Forgiveness - Let's begin by saying the Lord's Prayer.

We all know that the Bible says we should forgive our enemies. But when someone keeps on hurting you, when someone keeps on playing underhanded tricks on you behind your back, what then?

When a **close relative**, maybe a brother or sister or a parent, insults you or tells lies about you to other family members, how many times do you have to forgive them?

That's a good question. Peter asked it about two thousand years ago. In Matthew 18:21, "*Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when the sins against me? Up to seven times?*" Peter says, "How many times shall I forgive **my brother**."

Ninety percent of all resentment occurs in the family. It occurs between husbands and wives, between brothers and sisters and between parents and children. We spend the most time with them and sometimes things get on our nerves and we get irritated.

I don't think Peter was referring to his **actual brother**. But maybe he had something he was irritated about. Maybe Andrew was always leaving the milk out or borrows his fishing pole and doesn't return it. In any event, he says, "*How many times do I have to forgive people who offend me?*"

Peter thinks he's being real **magnanimous** when he says, **Seven times**. Jewish law only required you to forgive a person three times. And maybe he was expecting Jesus to think, "*What a spiritual giant! Willing to forgive seven times.*" But Jesus surprises him and says, "*...not seven times, but seventy-seven times.*"

Jesus is saying there's "no limits to forgiveness" and tells us a story and the point of the story is we need to forgive on a continual basis for **three very important reasons**. Matt 18:21-34

Matt 18:23, "*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 talents 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.*"

This servant is hopelessly in debt. He owns ten thousand talents to the king. You know how much that is in today's money? It's twelve million dollars.

Maybe he's invested in the wrong fund I don't know. But there's no way he's going to repay this amount. And in those days there's no bankruptcy court. There's no chapter 11. There are only two alternatives. You're either put in jail or you're sold as a slave to pay off your debts.

So the king says, you own me twelve million bucks and you can't pay up. Just sell him and his family into slavery.

The servant begs for mercy, Matt 18:26, "*The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.'* He's twelve million dollars in debt and he says, Give me a few more days. **That's pretty funny.** There's no way he's going to pay this debt back.

But in the next verse it says, (27) "*The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.*" That's pretty amazing. He takes pity on him and cancels the debt and says, "*We'll wipe the slate clean. You no longer owe me anything let alone twelve million dollars.*" Amazing story!

Jesus never told stories just to entertain. There's always truths, insights, and purposes behind His parables. He says the first reason I must learn to forgive is...

1. I have been forgiven by God.

In this story this guy piles up this amazing debt and he's forgiven by the king. But that is **nothing compared to the debt that I owe God.** I have amassed a huge debt that I owe Him. A debt I could never repay. The Bible says "*All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.*" We are all in debt. (Romans 3:23)

But God has chosen, out of love, to forgive us. He has said, "*Ok, Bob, we'll wipe the slate clean. You can be forgiven.*" That's called grace. And everything you've ever done wrong can be forgiven and forgotten. That's called grace.

Romans 8:1 says "*There is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.*" Completely forgiven.

But here's the deal. Whatever God has done for me, He expects me to do for other people.

If you were the guy in this story and you had just been forgiven twelve million dollars do you think you would respond a little differently in life? Do you think you might have a little gratitude?

Do you think you might treat other people a little bit differently? **Of course you would.** If you just had a twelve million dollar debt wiped out you'd probably cut other people some slack.

You'd expect that this is the way the servant would react. But look what happened. Verse 28 *“But when that servant [who had just been forgiven] found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denari he grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay me back what you owe me,’ he demanded. His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Please be patient with me and I’ll pay you back.’ [The same thing the first guy had said to the king.] But he refused. Instead he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay his debt.”*

This guy's been forgiven twelve million dollars and he finds a guy who owes him a hundred **denari**. You know how much that is? **Seventeen bucks.** He starts choking him and yelling *“Pay up! Pay up!”* The guy says, *“Please be patient with me.”* But is he going to be? No. He throws him into prison.

Why in the world would a guy do that? Evidently, he didn't really understand the enormity of what he had been forgiven. Maybe he thought he was a **pretty good con man** and that the king was an easy mark. Maybe instead of thinking of the king as being tremendously gracious, he thought of himself as being pretty clever.

Here's the point. Maybe you've accepted Jesus into your life. You've accepted His salvation. But down deep you don't really understand what a big deal that is. The fellow in the story grabs the guy and demands his money.

Many times when you find someone who's demanding, who is harsh, critical, judgmental, rigid and unbending they have unresolved guilt. If I don't feel good about me I certainly don't want you feeling good about you.

On the other hand when you **remember how much God has forgiven you** you're going to be gentler with people. When you realize you are an example of God's grace and there's no way you can ever repay all that He's done for you, you become more gracious.

When we feel unforgiven we tend to be unforgiving. We don't want anyone else to get off the hook because we don't feel we are. What's the key? Ephesians 4:32 *“Be kind and compassionate to one another forgiving each other **just as in Christ God forgave you.**”*

The first key to learning how to forgive people is to realize how much God forgives you every day. We need to remember that we walk in the forgiveness of God. So we ought to be able to cut other people some slack.

Remember we are all sinners in the need of forgiveness. Here is a time when Jesus drove home this point.

Video with sound.

I need to be forgiving...**2. Because resentment makes me miserable.**

It always hurts me more than it does the other person. I lock myself up in a prison of bitterness. I hold grudges and torture myself with my own emotions.

Have you ever done that? Sure you have. You've done it with worry, with guilt, with fear and you've done it with bitterness and resentment.

The word gets back to the king that the guy he forgave of a \$12,000,000 debt chokes a guy for \$17 and the King is livid with anger.

In verse 33 he says to the servant *“Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servants just as I had on you?” In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured.* Let him taste his own medicine. Throw him in jail.

What is Jesus talking about here? He's talking about the hell on earth that you create when you refuse to forgive people. **Unforgiveness always hurts you.** The other person may be totally oblivious to it. But you keep mulling it over and over in your mind making yourself miserable.

Resentment is a poison. It can ruin you emotionally and spiritually as well as physically. **Bitterness** comes from what others do to us. **Resentment** makes us miserable.

Let me ask you this morning. **What bitter memory is making you miserable?** What **resentment** are you holding onto? What hidden hurt keeps gnawing away at your peace of mind? Let it go. Let it go for your own sake. All it does is hurt you.

Job 5:2 (Good News) *“To worry yourself to death with resentment would be a foolish, senseless thing to do.”* It's not worth it.

When we fail to forgive others God doesn't have to lock us up in a jail. We do it to ourselves. We say things like, *"Never again will I let another man hurt me.... Never again am I going to let a woman break my heart!"*

We start building walls and we don't let people get close to us because we're afraid we're going to be hurt. When we build those walls who are we walling inside? Ourselves. It's a self-imposed prison.

Millions of people are imprisoned by resentment. They're held captive by a grudge. They're locked up in anxiety and anger about someone who's hurt them.

How do we get out of that prison? **There's a key. It is the key of the forgiveness.** We accept God's forgiveness and we offer it to others. That is the only key that will unlock the jail so you can begin to live the life that God meant for you to live all along.

I need to learn to forgive because God has forgiven me. I'll never have to forgive anybody else more than God's forgiven me.

3. Because I'll need more forgiveness in the future.

Now this is scary, Verses 34-35 *"Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servants just as I had on you?' In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured."* **This** is how My heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart." He's saying how I treat other people is way I'm going to be treated by God.

The Bible says very clearly: **We cannot expect to receive what we are unwilling to give.** I need to learn to forgive because I'm going to need more forgiveness in the future.

When you pray the **Lord's prayer**, *"Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."* You're saying, "God, I want you to forgive me as much as I forgive everybody else." Uh oh! Did you really want to pray that?

The Bible says, Matt 5:7, *"Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy."* If you're unwilling to give forgiveness why do you think you deserve it yourself? You say, *"They don't deserve it!"* **Neither do you.**

What this parable is teaching is that **forgiveness is to be a way of life**. It is to be continual; it is to be ongoing. I am getting forgiveness and I'm going to give forgiveness. I am to enjoy it and I am to employ it. Use it on others.

You say, *"But Bob If I forgive that person they'll get away scot-free. That's not fair."* Is forgiveness fair? Of course not. Is it fair that you just be scot-free forgiven by God? No. That's not fair. **That's called grace**. That's not fairness. That's grace. You don't get what you deserve. It's not fair, but it was **very expensive**.

Someone has already paid for your sins. You either accept it or you reject it. **Forgiveness is free. But it is not cheap**. It is the most expensive thing there is. It cost Jesus Christ His life.

Now, why in the world would anyone forgive someone who has offended them? Because you have been forgiven by God, because resentment makes you miserable and because you're going to need more forgiveness in the future.

You say want to forgive but you can't. Romans 12:2 says, *"I am changed by the renewing of my mind."* Forgiveness has to start in your mind. Not in your emotions and not in your feelings. As your mind begins to change, the emotions and feelings follow. We also know what Matthew 6 says, *"If you do not forgive others your heavenly Father will not forgive you."*

Do you want to be released from the hurt, the anger, the damage that unforgiveness causes? The damage that it does to you personally and to your relationship with the Lord? Do you want to be a better person and not a bitter person?

When you offer forgiveness you will begin to feel a **closeness** with God. James 1:22-25, *"If we hear God's word and do not apply it in our lives we are deceiving ourselves. But if we hear God's word and do it He will bless us."* Do you want to be blessed by God?

It does not matter what the other person has done to you. If you want to have God's blessing in your life, if you want to experience the **cleansing power** of God in your life, **you must forgive**. So today I invite you to experience the joy of guilt free living, the cleansing of your heart because you have been obedient to God's word.

You say, *"It's too hard, what they did to me was too awful."* Isaiah 61:3, *"Out of the ashes will come a crown of beauty."* As we give the ashes of our life to our Lord He will give us something of beauty and worth. Forgive and be freed.

So. Who do you need to forgive? *You say, I don't need to forgive anyone!* Well, here is a little quiz just for you.

The first is the **Blame Test**: Who are you blaming for your unhappiness? Who are you blaming for the hurt and the pain in your life? **"If** it hadn't been for my parents..." **"If** only they had..." **"If** only my brother (or sister) had..." **"If** that person hadn't done that..." **"If** that spouse hadn't gotten involved in another relationship ..." **Who are you blaming for your unhappiness?**

The **second** is the **Bitterness Test**. Are you keeping score? Are you never letting people off the hook? In the past did your spouse make a major mistake? And you have never let them forget it.

Every time you have an argument it's always there in the background ready to be brought up again. Every time they do something good for you it's just repayment in your mind. In fact you have become **unpleasable**.

No matter what they do, no matter how good they are to you, *"There's a twelve million dollar debt they owe and no matter what they do, it's never going to pay for what they owe you."* If that is you, you are **killing your marriage** by your unforgiveness.

Maybe you were hurt as a child. Maybe you were neglected. Maybe you were abused. I'm sorry, it was wrong, **sometimes I despair** that there isn't a woman who wasn't abused as a child. But don't let the resentment bind you up in a prison forever. When you do that, you are allowing them to hurt you over and over again.

Maybe you had a friend who was disloyal. He or she stabbed you in the back. That really hurt you and you have held on to that hurt and you kept score.

The **third is** the **Behavior Test**. That's when you act differently because of resentment. **You're going to be hurt in life**. You have **two options**. What do I do with the hurt? I can either rehearse it or I can release it.

You go over and over it in your mind and **it gets bigger and bigger** and makes you more miserable. Or you can release it. You can release it (and them) by first accepting God's gracious forgiveness for **your** twelve million dollar debt.

Here's your **homework**. **Let somebody off the hook this week** – and you know whom I'm talking about. Let them off the hook.

Some of you need to go home and make a phone call or write a letter, some of you may need to sit down with your spouse and say, *"From this day forward I'm never bringing it up again. It's a dead issue. It's settled. I forgive you."*

If you do that... Watch God begin to work in your life.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, I want to thank You that You have forgiven me and everyone who has accepted You as their Savior. We'll either accept Your forgiveness or pay for our sins ourselves. Thank You that You paid a debt that none of us could ever repay. I pray today that if there's anyone here who has not opened their heart to You that they would invite You into their lives to heal that hurt, to drain off that poison and bitterness and to fill it and replace it with Your love. I know that resentment just makes me miserable. I know that I'm going to need more forgiveness in the future. Help me to let people off the hook. To offer forgiveness and to enjoy the freedom that brings. In Your name I pray. Amen.