

I remember as a child being told to forgive and forget. I remember being told by my parents to hug my older sister as a sign of forgiveness, even when I didn't feel like it. Over the years, I've even heard my own children, upon my request for them to forgive their sibling, asking, "why should I?! What will they do for me? They wouldn't forgive me if our roles were reversed!"

The idea of forgiveness can easily and is unfortunately regularly placed in the category of law and being a legal matter. We hear about forgiveness, repentance, reconciliation, healing, accountability, and justice as all part of a process. But what if forgiveness can't be measured? What if forgiveness isn't even dependent on another knowing they are forgiven by you? What if forgiveness doesn't even originate with ME?!

Our LORD Jesus, answers Peter's question on how many times to forgive another with an extreme answer of exaggeration...70 x 7 times. The parable which follows is of exaggeration too! How many of us really keep a record book of how many times we've forgiven someone? Do we have little books with tally marks, crossing off every time we have had to forgive someone? I hope not! First of all, I personally would lose track if I had to go to 70 x 7 times!!- I'm horrible with math!!!

The account which Jesus shares, is a parable...and we MUST remember it is only a parable and therefore CANNOT be taken literally on all angles.

A servant owes 10,000 talents....now ONE talent was equivalent of 130 lbs of silver, or 15 years of hard labor. So 10,000 talents is equal to 150,000 years of labor. This is an UNPAYABLE debt.yet it is forgiven. The servant is released of this burden....freely released from it with no strings attached.

Now I don't know about you, but when some good fortune has taken place in my life, of such extravagance, I want to dance and rejoice, and share it with others! It would be rather hard for someone to upset me at that moment, as I would be bubbling over in great joy!

Yet, this free servant, does not act joyously or abundantly towards others, but rather the opposite.

He heard the words of grace and forgiveness by his master, **but** did not take them to heart....it did not change his heart.

When one is loved, one is changed forever.

When one forgives, one is changed as well....

Jesus' answer to Peter, is about **not** keeping track of how many times one forgives. It's about how we are changed by forgiveness and how we are changed by forgiving another. It's about forgiveness being an essential part of relationship. And that is the key....relationship. Forgiveness CANNOT be quantified or placed on a measuring scale or kept in a tally book..... Forgiveness is relational; it's a heart thing, not a head thing.

Forgiveness is the greatest point in all of the Christian faith. Forgiveness is an act of love...in fact.... the very act of the Living God of Love. We forgive because we have been forgiven. Forgiven and loved even unto death on a cross for our sins. We love because we have been loved first by a Creator that loves unconditionally, and doesn't keep a tally book, but loves extravagantly and forgives abundantly. God claims us and makes us into a new life in the baptismal waters....and then... we fail, and we fail horribly...and we sin...again and again...daily. And without keeping record, Jesus calls us again and again to the Table, and says, Here I AM....given for you, and for the forgiveness of sins...for ALL People...because I love YOU.

To receive forgiveness for debts or sins which we can never fix, we can never reverse... is humbling; very HUMBLING.....To be forgiven abundantly, when we don't deserve it, and we didn't earn it....

I cannot take back the words of harm I have spoken to another.

A shooter cannot take back the bullets which have killed others in a school.

A spouse cannot take back the blows which have hurt.

The alcoholic cannot take back their actions of a hit and run.

A terrorist cannot reverse their suicidal actions.

And where I fail to find the ability to forgive these of such actions, ...God does not. My inability to forgive does not have the last word! What seems impossible to forgive, is not impossible for God. I am not here to be God and to judge. I am merely gifted with an unspeakable and overwhelming amount of love and forgiveness by God. And in that act alone, I AM CHANGED!

The parable ends with the forgiven servant being tortured.....but the Greek actually translates this as an ongoing tormenting....

➔ When I choose not to forgive...and it is a choice...I remain in torment...in self-anguish, suffering, agony, and distress. My pain...my anger holds me captive. Forgiveness is giving up the right for revenge. It is the giving up the right to judge on God's behalf on if another is forgivable or not. That is where we leave it ---- in God's hands, and we pray. And in prayer, we are changed. In forgiving, we are changed.

My forgiveness of another doesn't even need to be known by them. I can forgive without them ever knowing. God's gift of forgiveness changes me to not keep track or tally any more. I simply do it without measure or a balancing scale, because God's abundant forgiveness and unconditional love overflows through me, to another.

Sure, it can be hard! No denying there!!!

That's why it is not a one-time deal though....

That's why its 70 x 7 times...an exaggerationits forever ongoing without true measure...it's impossible to measure it and keep track of it!!

And sometimes... forgiveness is a daily battle...sometimes it's an hourly one too....

Reconciliation is a whole other adventure **after** forgiveness. As forgiveness is what frees us and changes us, it does not mean though that we submit ourselves to continued harm or pain by the situation which caused us injury. Reconciliation takes both parties to face the injury, acknowledge repentance and forgiveness, and strive for a new course. You can never go back to being exactly the same in a relationship as before the injury, but you can start a new course. **Forgiveness is not dependent on reconciliation.** That's not what Jesus is talking about here. He's talking directly to the act of forgiveness...an act of love...an extravagant act of relationship and love.

And by the way, my parents were wrong....forgiveness is NOT about forgetting either. Otherwise I'd continue to do the same stupid mistakes and injuries again and again. Jesus never said to forget, he said to forgive. Forgetting is not the same as forgiving.

Forgiveness is an expression of love. Sure, we can make it as a response to law and make it a form of retributive justice and measurable and place it on the balancing scales.... Or, we can receive it humbly from the One who forgives and loves us even when we don't deserve it,..... allowing it to change us, make us new, and sending us into a world which is also just as broken as we are, and in need of that same unconditional love and forgiveness from God.

Jesus teaches that forgiveness should be a heart thing, not a head thing. That forgiveness is not so much something to be received as something to be shared.

May you know and trust in God's forgiveness in your life.

It doesn't matter what you have done or left undone...God forgives you....

God forgives you, because God loves you unconditionally, because God has claimed you.

May you know, trust, **and FEEL** God's greatly abundant forgiveness and love, and may you be changed....

...and may you be changed so that you may share that great humble gift with all whom you encounter, today and every day.

AMEN.