

*Then Peter came to him and asked, "Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?" "No, not seven times," Jesus replied, "but seventy times seven."
Matthew 18:21-22*

Introduction

This side of heaven, we are all imperfect people. Which means we will all say and do stupid things that hurt each other.

That's where forgiveness comes in. Or, at least it should. Especially for a Christ-follower. We are to forgive like we've been forgiven.

Really? Like we've been forgiven?!

Consider that for a minute. Think about how much you have been forgiven, and how many times God continues to forgive us as we walk through this world. How many times have you done things, even as a Christ-follower, that God again covered with His forgiveness and grace? Once? Twice? How about 490 times?

That's a big number. Yet that was the number Jesus surfaced in a jaw-dropping conversation with Peter – the disciple who asked Jesus if seven was a good number of times to forgive someone.

Peter probably thought he was being very gracious and kind by suggesting forgiving someone seven times! Surely the Lord didn't expect His followers to forgive someone who had sinned against them more than seven times.

Peter also probably thought his recommendation would result in the Lord's praise and maybe even a pat on the back. But instead it led to the Lord's correction.

"Not seven times," Jesus replied, but "seventy times seven!"

Can you imagine the shock on Peter's face after he did the math? Four hundred and ninety times?! What? Are you kidding me?

Obviously, Jesus wasn't saying that they should start counting and when they hit 491 they could let 'em have it. His seventy-times-seven reply was a Jewish idiom. It was the Lord's way of saying He wants His followers to forgive offenses an "unlimited number of times." He wants forgiveness to be our default, go-to response when someone hurts us or sins against us. He wants us to forgive each other again, and again, and again.

I once heard Pastor Chuck Swindoll say that forgiveness is not an elective in the curriculum of Christian living. It's a required course!

Here are three things Peter learned about forgiveness during his time with Jesus that all of us need to know and remember:

- All of us need forgiveness.
- All of us need to forgive.
- All of us need to be willing to forgive an unlimited number of times.

Those words are easy to say, but not so easy to do. Many of us will have a hard time getting our heads around the idea that we are to forgive those who have hurt us, even if they do it over and over and over again. Whether they acknowledge their sin against us and ask forgiveness, or not. But that's God's desire for us as we work at maintaining unity within the Body of Christ.

This week our hope and prayer is that we might seek out and come to know God's plan for forgiveness in the relationships we as a church family share with each other. And that His Spirit will step in and help us when doing what Jesus asked us to do is really hard.

Group Video Discussion

Watch Video 4 Forgive those who hurt us

Your notes:

Why was Joseph able to forgive his brothers?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

Questions for Group Discussion

1. In what ways do you identify with Joseph's story?
2. What is it about Joseph's story that comforts you? Challenges you? Troubles you?
3. What qualities, characteristics, or actions would you expect and even hope to see in a forgiving church?
4. What makes forgiveness in the church so hard?
5. For people in our church to be more forgiving of each other, what must we do to move forward?
6. How has your life been changed by the forgiveness of others?
7. How have you in the last year showed forgiveness like Joseph to other members of God's family?

Personal Daily Devotions

Day 22

Imperfect people need your forgiveness

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another.

Colossians 3:13a

Imperfections R Us. They're a given. That's not an excuse, it's a fact. Within the church, the Body of Christ, we will have both legitimate and sometimes simply assumed *grievances* with each other. We will have complaints against each other. And our failures, faults, and foolishness will either pull us apart or draw us together. Which is why *forbearance* and *forgiveness* are essential in the relationships we share with each other. Both are indispensable for building and preserving unity within the Body of Christ.

Forbearance is patience in action. It doesn't quit, walk out, or give up. It endures each other's sins and shortcomings. It hangs in there when it would be easier to walk away.

Forgiveness gives grace to those we have *grievances* against. Those who have hurt or wounded us. Like God through Christ forgave us our unpayable debts, forgiveness cancels, pardons, lets go of, and releases the debts others owe us.

To forgive is to extend unconditional love to others *by no longer taking into account* (1 Corinthians 13:5) the wrong they've done to us. Instead of waiting for, demanding, or expecting them to make things right, forgiveness views their debt as paid in full.

Now in your mind you may be saying, "But they don't deserve that!" But neither did we. We are forgiven by God's grace alone. It's undeserved. And in the same way, the gift of forgiveness is one of the best gifts we can give one another. No matter what wrong has been done.

Your Personal Reflection and Application

Are you living with unresolved complaints toward others in God's family? Is there anyone that comes to mind that's in some way "done you wrong" and you are still holding it against them?

How forbearing have you been toward other Christians you have a grievance with? Can you say you've manifested godly restraint and enduring patience?

Forbearance alone toward others in the church who've hurt you is not enough. The Lord wants you to forgive. What next step would that mean you should take?

Can you say you've cancelled all outstanding relational debts with others in the church? If not, what's holding you back?

Day 23

We must forgive like Jesus forgave

Forgive as the Lord forgave you.
Colossians 3:13b

God wants forgiven people to forgive like He forgave them. That expectation is central to the story Jesus told in Matthew 18:23-35 about a servant who begged his master to forgive his “unpayable” debt. Fortunately for him and his family, the master he served took pity on him and completely cancelled his debt.

Talk about a memorable day. A “can you believe what just happened to me?!” life-changing day. The kind of day that you’d think would have caused him to pay that goodness forward.

Well, not this guy. When given the chance to give the same kindness to someone else, he hardened his heart. Unlike the compassion his master graciously extended toward him, this forgiven servant refused to cancel the “payable” debt of a fellow servant who begged for more time.

When his master found out, he called him wicked and unmerciful. Harsh but fitting words for someone who’d been forgiven but then refused to offer forgiveness of his own.

The Lord, our Master, expects us, His servants, to forgive like we’ve been forgiven. With hearts of goodness and compassion, He wants us to cancel the debts we have against each other. We who have been forgiven much are to forgive each other in the same way.

Those forgiven by God of greater sins, must forgive others of lesser sins. That’s not only reasonable, it’s what the Lord expects from those He’s forgiven.

Your Personal Reflection and Application

Can you think of a time in your life when you were forgiven of a debt? Was it an unpayable or a payable debt?

What do you hope would be your response after someone paid an outstanding debt of yours? In what ways could you see yourself changing in the aftermath?

Who do you need to forgive as God has forgiven you? What do you need to forgive them for?

What do you think would happen in your life and in the life of the church if God's children readily forgive each other like they've been forgiven by the Lord?

Day 24

Forgiveness doesn't wait for an apology

And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.

Mark 11:25

Anyone who's been hurt by someone would love for the person who hurt them to admit what they did and apologize for their words or actions. But the fact is, sometimes an apology will never come. Even within the Body of Christ.

Yes, Jesus clearly tells His followers that He wants us to make things right when we have hurt someone. When we have sinned against them (Matthew 5:23-24). But sometimes when another believer has hurt us, it's just not going to happen.

So what are you supposed to do then?

Should you hold a grudge against the other person? Keep rehearsing in your mind the wrong they've done? Make sure other people know about it? Vow to never have anything to do with that person again?

No. That's not what God asks of us. Instead, He wants us to let it go. Forgive them. Even if they never apologize.

God does the same for us, day after day. In times when we hold on to our sins or try to hide them away or minimize them. And in times when we don't even recognize the fact that we're sinning!

When we are talking to God and we remember something that we are holding against someone, He wants us to forgive them. That's it. Forgive.

Your Personal Reflection and Application

During your personal times of prayer, has God ever brought to your mind another believer who has hurt you in the past, that you haven't forgiven? What did you feel God was telling you about that broken relationship?

If God were to bring to mind someone who has hurt you, who hasn't told you they were sorry, and whom you haven't forgiven, what response options would you have before you? Which response to His prompting would God want you to take?

What difference can forgiveness make, even when an apology doesn't come?

How does knowing God has forgiven you a countless number of times impact your view on Jesus' expectation that we forgive others?

Day 25

Going beyond forgiveness to kindness

*Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other,
just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.*

Ephesians 4:32

“Sure, I’ll forgive John, but I never want to have anything to do with him again.”

Who hasn’t heard that? Or maybe even thought that themselves! Even in the church. And in the flesh it makes sense. Even if you’ve forgiven someone, the pain remains. And we can’t make ourselves literally forget what they did to us.

Remember the story Jesus told of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32)? Do you remember how the father forgave his younger son for the wrong he had done? Not because he deserved forgiveness. He didn’t. But that’s what he got from his kind, tenderhearted, forgiving dad...and even more! It went beyond forgiveness to a huge celebratory steak feast.

The older son, however, didn’t join in the celebration. He wanted nothing to do with his brother. In fact, the party his dad threw for his younger brother made him really mad. As far as he was concerned, any act of kindness or compassion that went out to his younger brother was wrong. In every way.

“Not so,” said this wise and loving earthly father. And, “Not so,” according to our Heavenly Father too. Kindness and compassion are what forgiveness does. It’s what forgiveness looks like.

Forgiveness turns toward the person who needs forgiveness. It doesn’t distance itself from the offender. It draws near. A forgiving heart gives undeserved kindness and compassion, just like God offers undeserved kindness and compassion to us.

Your Personal Reflection and Application

Have you ever thought or said that you never wanted to have anything to do with a particular believer again because of something they had said or done to you? Why did you respond that way?

Is there a place in God's family for performance-based relationships?

Forgiveness is more than just an emotion. It must play out in our attitudes and actions toward the person we are forgiving. And a good place to begin is with acts of kindness and tender-hearted compassion. In what simple ways could you apply these things toward another believer that you've been avoiding?

Is there ever a time when a Christ-follower would be justified in never having anything to do with a particular believer again?

Day 26

Forgiveness doesn't fight back

*Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing,
because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.*

1 Peter 3:9

Forgiveness is two-sided. One side is focused on how God would have us treat someone who has hurt or offended us. As we saw yesterday, God wants us to treat them with kindness and compassion. The second side of forgiveness is focused on what we must *not* do – we are not to hurt the person who hurt us.

Let's face it - we like things to be fair. And when they're not, we're prone to take matters into our own hands. Our natural tendency is to repay evil with evil. Insult with insult. Dirty looks with dirty looks.

But vengeance isn't sweet. It will only result in greater pain for the wounded and the wounder. God tells us, "Don't go there."

This is not to say that Christ-followers should be indifferent to another Christian's sin. As already stated, sin must be rebuked (Luke 17:3a), with a spirit of gentleness (Galatians 6:1), in the hope that the one who has done wrong will admit their sin and repent and make amends with those they've hurt.

But what if they don't repent? What if they don't apologize for their wrongdoing? What then? Fairness screams "Don't forgive them! Make them pay! Make them hurt too!"

But forgiveness responds otherwise. It doesn't pay back evil with evil, but rather overcomes evil with good (Romans 12:21). It trusts God to deal with the other person's unrepentant sin, and compassionately gives them food and water in Jesus' name. In other words, it forgives.

Your Personal Reflection and Application

When do you find it hardest to forgive?

When hurt by another believer, what is your natural response? Be specific. What are you likely to think and do when someone wounds you within the Body of Christ?

Why does forgiveness make complete sense to us after someone repents and apologizes for their wrongdoing?

Why do you think God expects us to forgive other believers even when there has been no apology or admission of wrongdoing?

Have you treated another believer badly because they have hurt you in the past? Is there anything you need to stop doing in order to make that right?

Day 27

Forgiveness Chooses to Forget

*I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions,
for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.*

Isaiah 43:25

Forgive and forget. Really? It's difficult enough to forgive someone if you have been hurt deeply by them. But if we actually manage to achieve the forgiveness part, are we also supposed to forget that they ever hurt us or sinned against us? Is that even possible?

The Children of Israel had a long list of sins they had committed against God, but that didn't stop God from extending forgiveness to them. He longed for His people to return to their Redeemer and Forgiver (Isaiah 44:22). To the one who would sweep away their offenses. Even bury them in the depths of the sea (Micah 7:19). God promised to remember their sins no more.

When God says He will not remember a sinner's sin, He doesn't mean that He literally can't remember our past sins or that we were ever sinners. Instead, it's His way of saying, "What's past is past. Your sins are buried in the sea of forgiveness. I'm not going to bring them up again. I'm not going to throw them in your face the next time you do something wrong. I've moved on. I've chosen to forget."

The next best thing we can do after forgiving someone, is to choose to forget. In the same way God blots out our sins and buries them in the sea of forgiveness - never to dredge them up again - we should do the same.

Forgiveness is a choice. So is forgetting. When someone has hurt us, God wants us to choose to move past the past, by leaving the past in the past.

Your Personal Reflection and Application

Think of a past sin against you that you've intentionally forgotten. If you thought of one, does that mean you hadn't really forgotten it?! Or had you? In what way?

The Lord wants His followers to know that their sins are forgiven and forgotten. How is your life impacted by this knowledge?

Within the Body of Christ, have you been choosing to remember someone's sins that you should be choosing to forget? What next step would the Lord have you take? Will you?

Day 28

This is desirable but may not be possible

*If it is possible, as far as it depends on you,
live at peace with everyone.*

Romans 12:18

Forgiveness and reconciliation are two different things. The former may not necessarily lead to the latter. Forgiveness can happen with only one person, while reconciliation can't happen without both people being actively involved.

Forgiveness is something you can do alone. You can cancel another's debt. You can choose to not take someone's offense into account (1 Corinthians 13:5), and you can choose to treat that person with kindness and love.

But one person can't do reconciliation alone. That takes both people who are involved in the relationship. It requires admitting offenses that were made and seeking and offering forgiveness.

Just because you forgive someone does not mean the relationship you once had will be restored. And if the other person hasn't acknowledged their offense and repented from it, it probably means that any trust in that person that you once had is now gone.

Forgiveness is grace-based. It's unearned. Restoration of trust is earned. It follows repentance. Which means it may not come.

It won't always be possible to reconcile. That will depend on more than just you. But as far as it depends on you...be forgiving, and kind, and ready for reconciliation if the opportunity comes your way.

Your Personal Reflection and Application

Is there a relationship with another believer in your life that has been broken because one or both of you have never repented? What state is that relationship in today?

Think back on a time when you or someone you know experienced reconciliation. What part did forgiveness and repentance play in bringing trust back into the relationship?

Will forgiveness always precede relational reconciliation?

Is there someone in your life that you'd love to reconcile with? Is there anything more you can do to heighten the possibility of relational reconciliation?