

**What do we humans need, really need to survive?** Now when I was at school, the answer they gave was threefold, we need **food, clothing and shelter**. And that makes sense, because without these necessities, life is impossible. But when you scratch a little deeper, you find **there are other needs**, not necessarily physical that are just important.

The Beatles sang, “all you need is **love**” and few would disagree that without love, life is next to impossible. Others would put forward **hope**, that if you don’t have something to look forward to, the present loses its meaning. Then again what about your **health or world peace**, aren’t they essential?

But I want to say tonight, that what we need more than anything else is **forgiveness**. That without relationships, this world loses its meaning. That if we are constantly in conflict with one another, with God, with ourselves, then what we create is a cycle that leads to more conflict, war, fighting, depression & eventually our own destruction.

So how important is forgiveness? Well **Jesus thought that forgiveness was very important**. He talked about it often, almost more often than any other subject. And in the passage that was read for us a little earlier tonight, he was asked, “*Lord how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to 7 times?*”

Now I think that is a reasonable question to ask someone that you consider wise. **When is enough, enough?** When are you just wasting your time with someone? When do you have to say, for their sake as well as your own, that from now on they have to learn the harsh realities of life? *So Jesus, how many times should I forgive.*

But Jesus answer staggers him, not just three times or even seven times, but seventy times seven. He couldn’t believe his ears! Seventy times seven? He got out his pocket calculator [BRING CALCULATOR] and punched in the numbers. That’s 490 times!

But Jesus **isn’t suggesting that we count the number of times** we forgive someone -- 298, 299, 300 -- only 190 to go! Not at all. A while ago, I heard of a Christian **minister asking his wife to forgive him** for something he did. Before she could answer he reminded her that Jesus wanted her to forgive him 490 times. She laughed & said, “Buddy, you’re already over 500 -- but I’ll forgive you anyway!”

70 times 7! Really what Jesus is saying, **we need to forgive someone and then keep on forgiving them**. So what are we to do? We are to be people of forgiveness. Rather than being people of **revenge and saying “I’m going to get even!”** Rather than being people of **resentment and saying “I’m going to stay angry!”** Rather than be people who **remember and who say “I’ll never forget!”** We need to be people of forgiveness.

Archbishop Tutu, when asked by his good friend Nelson Mandela to set up a national court to deal with the atrocities of both sides under South Africa’s Apartheid Regime, said that before he decided on the **Truth and Reconciliation Commission** which was to listen to the stories of injustice and seek forgiveness from both sides, that he **looked at the alternatives**.

And those two alternatives were the **Nuremberg** options, where you chased down those who committed atrocities, found some, and made them pay, often with their lives. But that didn’t bring

peace, it just continued to fuel the cycle of violence. The other approach was simply **draw a line in the sand and seek to forget what happened**. They decided that neither option was a good one, the best option, they discovered was one of admitting guilt and offering forgiveness from that guilt. So they began a process that was entitled, "*The Truth Hurts, but Silence Kills*"

And that I think is helpful in determining what forgiveness is all about. Its not a simple matter of forgiving and forgetting. Its about **remembering the past in order to move on from the past**.

For if someone has hurt you, really hurt you, no matter what you do **its almost impossible to forget** what they have done. You may get rid of it out of your mind and in the middle of the night, it sneaks back in. You think you have gotten rid of it and there inside of you, you feel that hurt rising up again. No forgiveness is not about forgetting. As the philosopher George Santayana haunting words, written on the entrance to the Dachau prison camp, clearly testify, "*Those who cannot remember the past, are condemned to repeat it.*"

Instead forgiveness is about **not nursing the hurt**. Its *not allowing* it to take over your thinking. Its seeking to banish it from your conscience. To gently say to yourself, *no I have forgiven that person for that hurt, so I am free to let it go*. I don't think for some things you ever forget, but instead **you don't allow it to control you** any longer.

And that gives us a clue as to why forgiveness is so important. For **forgiveness brings freedom**. We are no longer controlled by our sense of justice, for revenge, to strike back. We are free to choose, love over hatred, thankfulness rather than bitterness.

You see holding onto an offence against someone **is like being a jailer**, where the offending party is in the jail. You're keeping them in there for good. You alone have the key to let them out, but you just won't, because of what they did to you. The problem is, since you're the jailer, you're stuck there too. Oh, the person might be behind the bars, but you can't go anywhere either. The only way to set yourself free is by letting them go, too.

And forgiveness brings closure, **we are able to let go of our emotional baggage**. And lastly forgiveness breaks the cycle of evil. Martin Luther King, the leader of the Civil Rights movement in the States in the 1960's endured the southern sheriff's clubs and water cannons without resorting to violence themselves. Dr. King wrote, "*To our most bitter opponents we say: We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering.*" **Forgiveness doesn't escalate violence, it gives a way out from the cycle of violence**.

But let no one persuade you that its easy, that its natural, that its deserved. *No, no, no*. Its hard, it goes against the grain of what is right and just, its completely unnatural. But it is the way that God calls us to react, because this parable actually shows us that **forgiveness works on two levels**. Forgiveness for us and forgiveness from us.

**2. What do we need to receive?** You see going back to the parable. The first servant is forgiven a huge amount, ten thousand talents worth, why that would be something like a few million dollars in today's terms. He didn't deserve to have that amount forgiven, but the king was kind to him, he was merciful, he forgave out of the graciousness of his heart. And that is a picture of the forgiveness that God offers us.

For every time we turn our back on our creator, **we are racking up a massive debt!** Every time we forget about him, every time we ignore what he has to say, every time we break his

commandments, every time we sin, the amount we owe increases until, it is beyond our ability to ever pay.

And yet even when the King offers this servant, an amnesty from all his debts, what does he do? He finds someone who owes him a few lazy dollars and **refuses to forgive him his paltry debt.** And that is like when we hold a grudge over what our wife, our husband, our neighbour, our friends have done, all the while we are conveniently forgetting all the bad things we have done against God. So the question this parable raises, is not just what are we to do, but also what do we need to receive?

You see we need **to receive first of all God's forgiveness** for all our sins. We need to be unburdened from the great debt that we have racked up with our Creator. **We need to be released** from our prison, broken from our cycle of evil, have a line drawn below our wrongdoing, because it will be our thankfulness to God that will motivate us and strengthen us to start to forgive others around us from what they have done for us.

As the writer CS Lewis, the author of the Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe once said, *"To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable, because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you."*

That is why the parable ends with the sentence, *"this is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you, unless you forgive your brothers from the heart."* B/c there is a **relationship between God's forgiveness of you and your forgiveness of others.** And unless you avail yourself of God's forgiveness, you will be unable to carry through with the forgiveness that God is calling you to give to others.

Deweese Eunick is the mother of a 6 year old girl, killed by a 12 year old boy who was wrestling with her a few years ago. The 12 year old boy, Lionel Tate was being sentenced for life in prison for this murder. But the mother said to reporters on the ABC, *"It's more that he's a human being, you know?" she said. "And in spite of him murdering my daughter and taking my daughter's life, the thing is back in the olden days, you did an eye for an eye, right? (But) Jesus came, Jesus died for all our sins. When we do things wrong, we can go to him, we can ask for forgiveness, right? So who am I not to forgive him for what he did to my daughter and did to my life?"*

**3. What happens next?** What do we do with this teaching? How do we apply it to our everyday lives, as impossible as it seems?

Well I think the first thing we have to realise is that when we are talking about forgiveness, **it really starts with us.** Jesus said elsewhere, get rid of the log in your own eye, before you look to remove the speck in some one else's eye. Realise that each one of us owes a debt, a huge debt to our maker for refusing to live the way that he has called us to live. And so before we do anything else, **we need to turn to God and ask him for mercy.**

One time the famous American evangelist, **Billy Sunday**, was preparing for a revival meeting in a large city. He wrote a letter to the mayor of that city asking him for the names of people who had spiritual problems and needed help. Billy Sunday was somewhat surprised when he received from that Mayor a city telephone directory!

All of us have a serious spiritual problem and it's called sin. All of us have a deep indebtedness because of our sin! All of us are in a deep, dark hole because of our sin! **OUR DEBT TO GOD IS FAR GREATER THAN WE CAN PAY!** But Jesus does more about forgiveness than just teach

about it, he is willing to die to show us it. For on that cross, just before he died, he said to those around them, “Father forgive them for they don’t know what they do.”

And that offer of forgiveness is available to each one of us, who want to acknowledge our sin and ask God to take away that sin. **So forgiveness starts with us, but it doesn’t end with us.** It needs to move on the relationships we have around us.

We have to ask the question, is there **anyone that we are holding a grudge against** this evening. Have you recently had a fight, that hasn’t been worked through? Is there **a relationship that is under pressure** because of what someone has done to you or due to something you have done to them? Is there an incident in the past, where someone has abused you physically, emotionally, sexually that is like a huge shadow over your life? Then you need to start doing something about it.

We can’t afford to continue to be a prisoner of that sinner, **we can’t afford to continue to plot on how to get even.** As Gandhi once said, *“if everyone followed the “an eye for an eye” principle of justice, eventually the whole world would go blind.”*

We need to think through the hurt, we need to take it to God. **We need to ask him for the help to forgive and then we need to seek to let go of the desire to strike back.** Now I’m not pretending this will be easy. Sometime the person who has hurt you is no longer alive and you might have to write them a letter that they will never receive. Sometimes that person may have **broken the law** in which case they may still need to face up to the implications of their crime. But you don’t have to continue to imprison yourself with what they have done to you.. Let me end with one last story.

During WWII, a German soldier plunged into a shell hole. There he found a wounded enemy. The fallen soldier was soaked with blood and only minutes from death. Touched by the plight of the man, the German soldier offered him water. Through that simple, small kindness a bond was formed. The dying man pointed to his shirt pocket. The German soldier took from it a wallet and removed some family pictures. He held them so the wounded man could look at his loved ones for the last time. With bullets raging overhead and war all around them, these two enemies were, for a few moments, friends.

WHAT HAPPENED IN THAT SHELL HOLE? Did all evil cease to exist? No. Were all wrongs made right? No. What happened was this: **Two enemies became friends,** Friends, forgiveness then is **rising above the war,** looking beyond what we are, and choosing to see others, not as enemies but as friends. And as we do that, we place ourselves in the situation that God is. And we are better able to understand his love, his forgiveness and why he sent Jesus Christ here on this earth for us.

What do we humans need, really need to survive?

Food, clothing, shelter?

Love, Hope, Health, World Peace?

Forgiveness. That without relationships, this world loses its meaning. That if we are constantly in conflict with one another, with God, with ourselves, then what we create is a cycle that leads to more conflict, war, fighting, depression, and eventually our own destruction.

Read Parable, Matthew 18

“Lord how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?”  
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But let no one persuade you that its easy, that its natural, that its deserved. *No, no, no.* Its hard, it goes against the grain of what is right and just, its completely unnatural. But it is the way that God calls us to react, because this parable of Jesus actually shows us that forgiveness works on two levels. Forgiveness for us and forgiveness from us.

Go through the parable...

You see we need to receive first of all God's forgiveness for all our sins. We need to be unburdened from the great debt that we have racked up with our Creator. We need to be released from our prison, broken from our cycle of evil, have a line drawn below our wrongdoing, because it will be our thankfulness to God that will motivate us and strengthen us and give us the perseverance to be able to start to forgive others around us from what they have done for us.

As the writer CS Lewis, the author of the Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe once said, *“To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable, because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you.”*

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So we start with ourselves, we move onto the relationships around us and then we use these principles as a template in seeking to deal with the even the biggest issues of life. As Martin Luther King once famously said, *“Non violence is the answer to the crucial political and moral questions of our time: . Man must evolve for all human conflict a method that rejects revenge, aggression, and retaliation. The foundation of such a method is love.*

*Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that. Hate multiplies hate, violence multiply violence, and toughness multiplies toughness in a descending spiral of destruction... The chain reaction of evil - hate begetting hate, wars producing more wars - must be broken or we shall be plunged into the dark abyss of annihilation”*

Not pretending this easy....

\*\*\*\*\*a

Now, forgiveness really exists on two main levels: forgiveness from God to us, and forgiveness from us to others. Most of us rejoice in the first and stumble on the second. We are glad that the Lord forgives us from our sins and failures. But we are troubled when we know that we need to forgive someone else.

\*\*\*\*\*b

It sure looks as if God considers our forgiveness of others as important as His forgiveness of us. A man named General Oglethorpe once said to John Wesley: "I never forgive and I never forget." To which Wesley replied: "Then, sir, I hope that you never sin."

\*\*\*\*\*f

The mother ran into the bedroom when she heard her seven-year-old son scream. She found his two-year-old sister pulling his hair. She gently released the little girl's grip and said comfortingly to the boy, "There, there. She didn't mean it. She doesn't know that hurts." He nodded his acknowledgement, and she left the room.

As she started down the hall the little girl screamed. Rushing back in, she asked, "What happened?"

The little boy replied, "She knows now."

\*\*\*\*\*g

Albert Tomei is a justice of the New York State Supreme Court. A young defendant was convicted in Judge Tomei's court of gunning down another person execution style. The murderer had a bad record, was no stranger to the system, and only stared in anger as the jury returned its guilty verdict.

The victim's family had attended every day of the two-week trial. On the day of sentencing, the victim's mother and grandmother addressed the court. When they spoke, neither addressed the jury. Both spoke directly to the murderer. They both forgave him.

"You broke the Golden Rule——loving God with all your heart, soul, and mind. You broke the law——loving your neighbor as yourself. I am your neighbor," the older of the two women told him, "so you have my address. If you want to write, I'll write you back. I sat in this trial for two weeks, and for the last sixteen months I tried to hate you. But you know what? I could not hate you. I feel sorry for you because you made a wrong choice."

Judge Tomei writes: "For the first time since the trial began, the defendant's eyes lost their laser force and appeared to surrender to a life force that only a mother can generate: nurturing, unconditional love. After the grandmother finished, I looked at the defendant. His head was hanging low. There was no more swagger, no more stare. The destructive and evil forces within him collapsed helplessly before this remarkable display of humaneness."

[source: [www.preachingtoday.com](http://www.preachingtoday.com)]

\*\*\*\*\*I

I heard about a man who really loved dogs. He devoted his life to them - he read about them, studied them, and even gave talks about them to other dog lovers. One day he decided to pour a new sidewalk in front of his house. His neighbor watched from his window as he smoothed out the last square foot of cement.

Just then, a large dog appeared and walked through the fresh cement, leaving paw prints behind. The man muttered something under his breath and smoothed out the damage.

He then went inside to get some twine so he could put up a fence around the sidewalk. But, when he got back outside, he discovered some more dog tracks in his fresh cement. He smoothed out the cement and put up the fence.

He then went into the house. Five minutes later he looked outside and saw some more paw prints. He was really mad now. He got out his trowel and smoothed the cement one more time. As he got back to his porch, the dog reappeared and sat right in the middle of the sidewalk.

He went inside, grabbed his gun and shot the dog dead. The neighbor rushed over and said, "Why did you do that? I thought you loved dogs." The man thought for a minute and said, "I do, I do like dogs. But that's in the abstract. I hate dogs in the concrete."

\*\*\*\*\*o

Did you hear about the two men who were in a nursing home and had been quarreling for years? One of the guys thought he was on his deathbed so he called his foe over to his bed and said, "John, I forgive you for what you have said and done against me over the years, and I want you to do the same for me."

The other man, with tears in his eyes, agreed that he too would like to forgive and be forgiven. Then the man in the bed said, "But if I get better, this doesn't count!"

\*\*\*\*\*p

C

Ernest Hemingway loved to write about the country of Spain. In his short story, The Capital of the World, Hemingway tells of a father and son who had stopped talking to one another. Things got so bad that the son left home. After several years, the father wanted to mend the relationship and so he looked everywhere for his son. When he came to the capital city of Madrid, he decided to go to the newspaper office and take out a big ad in the newspaper that said this: "Paco, please meet me at 12 noon tomorrow in front of the newspaper office -- all is forgiven. I love you. Your Father."

The next day at 12 noon, there were 800 men named Paco standing in front of the building! I suspect we have some Paco's here this morning in need of forgiveness. We also have some who need to give the gift of forgiveness to others.

\*\*\*\*\*r

When you delete a worthless document on a computer you make the effort of putting it in the computers waste basket. But it isn't gone from your computer.

You must make the additional effort to empty your computers waste basket. But even then it isn't deleted from your computers memory. It's still there. All your computer did was replace the first letter with its own code symbol to say it may be written over if the space is needed. It is hid from you. But it can be recovered even then by simply replacing the first letter.

Only after time will your computer write over that file. Then it will be completely gone.

Forgiving others and forgiving self is much the same. We have to make a real effort a definite decision to forgive. Then our memory has to be written over. Our mind has to be filled with the word of God to such that it writes over the hurt and desire for revenge.

\*\*\*\*\*t

In this parable, the ruler didn't stop the forgiven man on the way out of the throne room and say, "By the way, pal, do you need any extra cash." The man had proven that he couldn't handle money.

· I give Scott Cherry \$100 to go pick up pizzas for a big children's rally and he goes and buys lottery tickets with the money. Can I forgive him? Yes. Will I send somebody else next time to pick up the pizzas? YES!

\*\*\*\*\*u

Say the Lord's Prayer with me. "Our Father, which art ..." Did you catch that? "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." How do you want God to offer forgiveness to you, with an open hand or with a tight fist?

\*\*\*\*\*v

Years after her concentration camp experiences in Nazi Germany, Corrie ten Boom met face to face one of the most cruel and heartless German guards that she had ever contacted. He had humiliated and degraded her and her sister. He had jeered and taunted, leering at them as they stood in the delousing shower.

Now he stood before her with hand outstretched and said, "Will you forgive me?" She writes: "I stood there with coldness clutching at my heart, but I know that the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart. I prayed, Jesus, help me!

"Woodenly, mechanically I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me and I experienced an incredible thing. The current started in my shoulder, raced down into my arms and sprang into our clutched hands.

"Then this warm reconciliation seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes. 'I forgive you, brother,' I cried with my whole heart. For a long moment we grasped each other's hands, the former guard, the former prisoner. I have never known the love of God so intensely as I did in that moment!" To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover the prisoner was you.

\*\*\*\*\*x

"I DON'T GET MAD. I GET EVEN."

\*\*\*y

ILL.- Each week Kevin Tunell was required to mail a dollar to a family he'd rather forget. How's that? They sued him for \$1.5 million dollars but settled for \$936 to be paid a dollar at a time. The family expected the payment each Friday so Tunell wouldn't forget what happened on the first Friday of 1982.

That's the day their daughter was killed. Tunell was convicted of manslaughter and drunken driving. He was 17 years-old at that time. She was 18. Tunell served a court sentence. He also spent seven years campaigning against drunk driving, 6 years more than his sentence required. **BUT HE KEPT FORGETTING TO SEND THE DOLLAR.**

The weekly restitution was to last until the year 2000. In other words, 18 years. Tunell was to make the check out to the victim, mail it to her family and it was to be deposited in a scholarship fund.

The girl's family took Tunell to court four times for failure to comply. After one court appearance, Tunell spent 30 days in jail. He insisted that he wasn't defying the order, but was haunted by the girl's death and tormented by the reminders.

He offered the family two boxes of checks covering the payments until the year 2001, one year more than required. BUT THEY REFUSED THE CHECKS. It's not the money they were after, but penance, they said. PROBABLY MORE LIKE VENGEANCE THAN PENANCE.

The mother said, "We want to receive the check every week on time. He must understand we are going to pursue this until August of the year 2000. We'll go back to court every month if we have to."

I know that most of us would never question that family's anger. BUT IS 936 PAYMENTS ENOUGH? Is 936 payments enough for that family to demand from Kevin Tunell? Will that family ever be able to put the matter to rest? In some ways, no. I realize this. But will they ever try to forgive? How much restitution is enough?

\*\*\*\*\*1

A lady had recently been baptized. One of her co-workers asked her what it was like to be a Christian. She was caught off guard and didn't know how to answer, but when she looked up she saw a jack-o'-lantern on the desk and answered: "It's like being a pumpkin." The worker asked her to explain that one.

"Well, God picks you from the patch and brings you in and washes off all the dirt on the outside that you got from being around all the other pumpkins. Then he cuts off the top and takes all the yucky stuff out from inside. He removes all those seeds of doubt, hate, greed, etc. Then he carves you a new smiling face and puts his light inside of you to shine for all to see.

That's what Jesus did for us. Cute story.