

WE WILL BE FORGIVEN AS WE FORGIVE

When we have been wronged, it may be tempting to hold a grudge against the person who wronged us. This harms us more than it harms them and allows the growth of bitterness and resentment to take hold. In Luke 6:37, we read, "*Forgive, and you will be forgiven*" Colossians 3:13 tells us to, "*Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*"

Forgiveness is a choice made through a decision of our will, and motivated by obedience to God and his command to forgive. Forgiveness goes against our nature. We forgive by faith, out of obedience. It is often not a one-time event, but rather is a process where we choose to forgive until the matter is settled in our heart. Jesus told Peter he was to forgive his brother seventy times seven times in Matthew 18:22. Jesus was not saying that 490 was the magic number of times we were to forgive, but rather that we are to keep on forgiving as many times as it takes.

Jesus followed his advice to Peter with a parable about forgiveness (Matthew 18:23-35). To paraphrase this parable, the king forgave a man who owed him a \$10 million debt after the man begged for mercy. Yet this same man who was forgiven by the king for so large a debt refused to grant mercy and forgiveness to another man who owed him \$2,000. He had him thrown in prison! The king heard about this and angrily sent the man who had been forgiven to prison until he had paid every last penny of the debt he owed.

Can we really comprehend the depth of God's forgiveness toward us? He has forgiven us our debt, so is it too much to ask that we forgive the lesser debts that are owed us?

There is a story about Clara Barton, the founder of the American Red Cross, that illustrates the choice we can make to forgive others. One day, Clara was reminded of a vicious deed that someone had done to her years before. She acted as if she had never heard of the incident. "Don't you remember it?"

her friend asked. "No," came Clara's reply. "I distinctly remember forgetting it." She had made a conscious choice to continue forgiving when reminded of the deed. Clara was saying, "I remember choosing to forgive and I still choose to forgive."

Prayer is one of the best ways to break down the wall of unforgiveness in our hearts. When we pray for the one who has wronged us, God gives us new eyes and a new perspective of humility. As we pray, we start to see that person as precious to God and we see ourselves as someone who has wronged others. We stand in need of forgiveness; if God forgives me, so I must forgive others.

We will know the work of forgiveness is complete when we experience the freedom that comes as a result. We are the ones who suffer most when we choose not to forgive. When we do forgive others honestly and deeply from the heart, the Lord sets our hearts free from anger, bitterness, resentment and the hurt that previously imprisoned us. "When you release the wrongdoer from the wrong, you cut a malignant tumor out of your inner life. You set a prisoner free, but you discover the real prisoner was yourself."

(Forgive and Forget: Healing the Hurts We Don't Deserve by Louis Smedes)