

Osaka International Church
77 Times (Matthew 18: 21 – 35)

Dr. Dave Taylor
March 15, 2020

Introduction / Open with Prayer

²¹ Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?”

²² Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but **seventy-seven times**.”

Thank you for the opportunity to share a message from God’s word today. For those of you who do not know me, I’m Dave Taylor. I grew up in the US and I am a university business professor. Before becoming a professor, I worked in the hotel industry. Over 25 years ago, along with my wife Masako, we opened the Hyatt Regency Osaka hotel. Since then, I’ve lived in and outside the Kansai for many years. In fact, Masako and I raised our 2 sons here. Now, our older son, Joe, is working in the US and our younger son, Kent, is completing his US college studies and is currently studying abroad in Australia for a semester. Anyway, when living in Japan, I very much think of OIC as my church home. So, worshiping and sharing a message with you today is a real honor and a privilege.

In a moment, I will read today’s scripture but first let’s open with prayer. (Pray)

Through the years, I have lived and worked closely with Japanese and non-Japanese, believers and unbelievers and knowing that at OIC on any given Sunday, there are all types of people here - believers, seekers and others, I pray that my message today on forgiveness will be a blessing and helpful to all.

So, today, the message focus is on forgiveness and will consider 3 questions – what, why and how:

What is forgiveness – particularly, with an emphasis on God’s boundless forgiveness?

Why is forgiveness important – from a Biblical and health and well-being perspective?

How does forgiveness work? That is, how can I apply to my life my understanding of what forgiveness is and why it is important. At the end of today’s message, I will ask you to consider “1 thing” related to giving and getting forgiveness.

Let’s start with today’s scripture from Matthew 18: 21 – 35.

The Bible: Peter, Jesus and The Parable of an Unforgiving Man

²¹ Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” ²² Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but **seventy-seven times**.” ²³ “Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants.^[d] ²⁴ When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents.^[d] ²⁵ And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. ²⁶ So the servant^[e] fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ ²⁷ **And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt.** ²⁸ **But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii,^[f] and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’ ²⁹ So his**

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fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’³⁰ He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt.³¹ When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place.³² Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me.³³ And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’³⁴ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers,^[6] until he should pay all his debt.³⁵ **So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”**

Today’s scripture has several key areas: 1) Peter’s important question to Jesus about forgiveness and 2) Jesus’ unusual response. Also, in the verses that follow. Jesus shares the parable of the unforgiving man. This parable relates to **“getting”** and **“giving”** forgiveness and this is my message focus. But, **“getting”** and **“giving”** forgiveness is not isolated to Biblical times and relationships but also key to healthy relationships today.

Before we examine today’s scripture, I’d like to share a more recent true story. I’ll call this the parable of the unforgiving woman. It’s a parable about forgiveness (or lack thereof) and regret.

Our World: A Parable of the Unforgiving Woman



In 2016, on a Saturday in a supermarket parking lot in Saitama, an older Japanese man in his 80’s accidentally hit with his car a younger Japanese woman in her 50’s. The woman was struck by the car while walking in the parking lot. The driver who, intending to stop to let her pass, accelerated accidentally instead of braking and hit her.

The man felt awful for what he’d done. He asked “how could it have happened? How could it be?”

He hit this woman with his car when he just wanted to stop for her. Reportedly, the older man was in excellent health, had a perfect driving record, passed recently a test designed to detect dementia symptoms for older people renewing their licenses — and, suddenly, on a routine Saturday morning trip to the supermarket, he had perhaps killed someone!

The good news is that he didn’t kill her. The woman survived. However, the older man was arrested and then released. To this day, the woman is unable to walk properly and has not forgiven him. And, he feels great remorse. He would do anything to make amends...but what can he do?

In many ways, this is a story about forgiveness – the need to **get forgiveness (the older man)** and the need to **give forgiveness (the younger woman)**. The older man says he wants above all to meet her, to apologize, to be **forgiven** by her if possible; to humbly accept her rage if that’s how she wishes to respond. He would like to see this unanticipated relationship restored so they could both move forward with their lives.

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Yet, there is silence. There is no forgiveness. And, based on scripture, medical research findings and my experience, they are both suffering - largely in silence - because of it. (As an aside, I think there is a lot of suffering in silence – particularly in Japan, maybe even people in this church.)

OK, let's consider now forgiveness more deeply in light of today's scripture and the important role forgiveness can play in our lives and even the life of the church.

Q1. What is forgiveness? And, what might forgiveness look like for the Japanese man in the parking lot? What does forgiveness look like for all of us who believe?

According to researchers at the University of California, psychologists generally define forgiveness as:

“a conscious, deliberate decision to release feelings of resentment or vengeance toward a person or group who has harmed you, regardless of whether they actually deserve your forgiveness ... Forgiveness does not mean forgetting, nor does it mean condoning or excusing offenses.”

That seems like a reasonable definition. Doesn't it? My sense is that the Japanese man would likely take that type of forgiveness from the woman in the parking lot.

Yet, as we hold up this definition of forgiveness to the light of Holy scripture, something seems to be missing. There seems to be something more. And, this is where Peter comes in. Peter, according to the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke is listed as the very first disciple called by Jesus. He was part of Christ's inner circle. He knew Christ well.

Yet, like all of us, Peter was a sinful man. He needed and wanted to know more about Christ's thoughts on forgiveness. So, he asked:

²¹ ...“Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?”

Again, sounds like a pretty good answer – seven times seems like a lot...doesn't it? Certainly, in the cultural context and norms of Biblical times...where people take an “eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot” (Exodus 21:24). For Peter, maybe us, forgiving 7 times appears to be pretty generous...doesn't it?

Do you think Christ was impressed with Peter's “generous” response?

Nope. Like most things, Christ's response turns our human thinking on its head. And directly challenges our cultural norms as well as sin-laden thinking and behavior.

²² Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.”



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What does that mean?

Simply, for Jesus', this was his way to say that we should not stop forgiving – even after 77 times. Forgive without limits. In other words, our forgiveness is to be boundless – like His. He is the example to follow – not the legalistic and cultural dictates of the time. Jesus' response and parable tells clearly that believers are to forgive a brother or sister who sins against them an infinite number of times. God's grace does not keep track of wrongs. It is not just forgiven but forgotten. Embodied in Jesus' words is God's amazing grace.

So, practically, what can we learn from Peter's question and Jesus words?

We see that forgiveness has at least two dimensions or levels – the human and the holy.

Human Level: Forgiveness “Light”

From a human perspective, forgiveness as defined by man is the act and attitude toward those who have wronged us. In this case, forgiveness ideally provides closure and restores a relationship – but not necessarily. People may forgive but they often won't forget. I'll call forgiveness at this level **“forgiveness light”**. At the human level, “forgiveness light” is good but there is clearly a better way – Jesus' way.

Holy Level: Forgiveness+ (“Plus”)

At a Biblical level, forgiveness as defined by Jesus goes much further – above and beyond – because it has a holy dimension. It recognizes the amazing act of God's grace to forget forever and not hold people of faith accountable for the sins they confess – it is a boundless forgiveness. I'll call it **“forgiveness+”**. With Jesus Christ, you receive **forgiveness + forgetfulness**.

Although Peter did not know it at the time, “forgiveness+” would be very important to him in the future as he later denied Christ 3 times (Luke 22: 54 – 62).

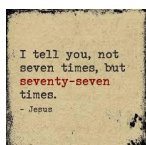
Peter needed forgiveness +. How about you?

In sum, **forgiveness +** is a Biblical and boundless forgiveness. It has no limits.

- 1) Forgiveness+ is the gracious act of God by which believers are put into right relationship to God. And, transfers them from spiritual death to spiritual life through the loving sacrifice of Jesus Christ.
- 2) Forgiveness+ is ongoing without which our lives as Christians would be “off” and full of guilt.

What version of forgiveness do you want? Whether we accept the “light” or “plus” version of forgiveness, both versions are 1) relationship-driven, 2) not unique to certain people groups and 3) not just relevant to Biblical times. That is, forgiveness, and forgiveness+ is relevant and important to Japanese/non-Japanese people and believers and unbelievers in today's contemporary context.

Q2. Why is forgiveness important? Why is a Biblical perspective (forgiveness+) important?



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From my experience in the workplace and in my personal life, I have seen many people – believers (yes, believers) and non-believers hold anger, hostility and bitterness toward others. By not giving forgiveness, relationships were then diminished and often the individual’s health and well-being impaired. And, if you are a believer, your relationship with God suffers too. You suffer because you know that God has mercifully, graciously forgiven you and you are commanded to forgive others. But you are not experiencing those benefits.

Forgiveness	“Give” Forgiveness = Benefits	“Don’t Give” Forgiveness = Costs
Scripture	Master to the Servant “Example to Follow”	Servant to Servant “Example <u>Not</u> to Follow”

More on that in a moment. But, now let’s return to today’s scripture. In today’s parable, we saw a master give a servant forgiveness. We also saw that same servant not give forgiveness to another servant. Based on the parable of the unforgiving man and Jesus teaching, the master who gave forgiveness to his servant is clearly the example to follow:

27 And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt.

Conversely, the servant who did not give forgiveness, is clearly the example not to follow.

28 But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii,^[1] and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’ 29 So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ 30 He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt.

In this case, the lower bar of forgiveness “light” is not even met. This is clearly not a good or God’s way. God’s better way was simply and powerfully summarized by Jesus when he said to Peter:

22 ...“I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.

So why is a Biblical perspective on forgiveness important?

The Biblical benefits of forgiveness and the costs of a lack of forgiveness in our lives do impact negatively our relationships and often our health and well-being. God’s word and medical research shows us that there are definite benefits to giving and getting forgiveness. Likewise, there are definite costs too if we don’t get and give forgiveness.

Let’s look at God’s word and the research findings, many of these findings ae from the world-rekknowned Mayo Clinic in the US.

Forgiveness vs. Unforgiveness

For Believers, the Biblical Benefits of Forgiveness: Forgiveness supports...	For Believers and Unbelievers, there are Human Costs to Unforgiveness: <u>Unforgiveness leads to...</u>
Healthier Relationships (Colossians 3:12-13)	Unhealthier Relationships
Improved Mental Health (1 John 1:9)	Deteriorating Mental Health
Improved Physical/Heart Health (Ephesians 4:31-	Reduced Physical Health

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32)	
Reduced Anxiety, Stress and Hostility (Romans 12:19)	Increased Anxiety, Stress and Hostility
Fewer Symptoms of Depression/Increased Self Worth (1 Corinthians: 13: 4-7)	Greater Symptoms of Depression/Reduced Self-Worth

Healthier Relationships (Colossians 3:12-13)

For believers, we are called to forgive. And, when we do forgive, our relationships improve. From Colossians, we are commanded:

¹² Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

As you forgive, your relationships improve. Medical research from the Mayo clinic suggests that a lack of forgiveness makes resolving relational conflict less likely. Follow Jesus advice – **give forgiveness**.

Improved Mental Health (1 John 1:9)

When we acknowledge God for who He is and what He has done and does, there are also mental health benefits – we are no longer bound by our unrighteousness and negative emotions or by what other people think. From 1 John, we are reassured:

⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

If we confess our sins to God, we **get forgiveness** and improved mental health. Unfortunately, research also shows that a lack of forgiveness stirs up negative emotions and creates more conflict that often leads to deteriorating mental health.

Improved Physical/Heart Health (Ephesians: 4:31-32)

The research also argues that bitterness, rage and anger reduce your physical health and can have detrimental effects on your heart. Yet, by letting go of bitterness and letting God takeover, our physical health is more likely to improve. In Ephesians, we are told to:

³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Reduced Anxiety, Stress and Hostility (Romans 12:19)

In Romans, we see that in following God’s word is the better way. God’s word tells us what to do and what NOT to do. And in doing so, reduces our anxiety, stress and relieves us from hostility.

¹⁹ Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,”^[a] says the Lord.

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Research from Johns Hopkins University suggests that forgiveness can help maintain normal levels of anxiety and stress, which in turn, supports your health and well-being. But, if you don't forgive, researchers warn that it may lead to increased anxiety, stress and hostility.

Fewer Symptoms of Depression (1 Corinthians: 13: 4-7)

What does forgiveness have to do with depression? Research and scripture says it turns darkness into light. It is the loving option. In Corinthians, forgiveness and love go hand in hand.

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

On the other hand, research suggests that holding on to your hurt feelings and resentments increases depression and reduces your love.

In sum, holy scripture and current research demonstrates that everyone needs to give and get forgiveness – Japanese people, non-Japanese people, Christians and non-Christians. And, if we all did this a little better, imagine what the world would look like?

For believers, the Biblical version of forgiveness (“forgiveness+”) offered by Christ puts our sins and burdens on God. With burdens lifted, believers are better able to experience healthier relationships, improved mental/physical health, reduced anxiety, lower levels of stress and hostility as well as fewer symptoms of depression. Conversely, for believer or unbeliever, for those who harbor feelings of unforgiveness carry a heavy burden. A lack of forgiveness often leads to unhealthier relationships, reduced mental and physical health, greater anxiety, stress, anger and more symptoms of depression. Unforgiveness is costly.

Q3. How does forgiveness work? Are you (and me), the man or the woman in the parking lot?

As we think about this question, let's keep Jesus' 77 times simple but not simplistic response to Peter's question in mind. And, let's also go back to the supermarket parking lot in Saitama for a moment.

The Man

Metaphorically speaking, are you the man who hit the woman in the parking lot with his car?

Do you need to **get forgiveness**? Are you him today— where you would do almost do anything to receive true forgiveness?

He wants some type of relationship restoration. In fact, he strongly desires restoration and closure. He wants to be truly forgiven before he dies. If you are him, I would say you are in the right place today – whether you are a believer or not. If you are a believer, take a moment now to reconsider anew the one where true forgiveness comes from – Jesus Christ. Or, if you do not yet have a relationship with Jesus Christ, consider the promise of Jesus Christ's forgiveness for the first time today.

You can **get forgiveness**. Forgiveness is within reach.

The Woman

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Or, are you the woman that was hit – maybe due to no apparent fault of your own – and your hurt and bitterness is real and has been eating you up inside for long time and still is today?

You continuously ask - how could this have happened? How could this have happened to me? But, it did happen...and to you.

Do you need to **give forgiveness** – Are you suffering through anger and hostility for what this person did to you? Are you her?

Are you ready to be released from all the negative effects of a lack of forgiveness? If you are her...**give forgiveness**. Set yourself free. The time is now.

Or, are you both him and her? Really. Do you need to **get** and **give** forgiveness?

In my case, that's where I think I am. As a believer, I know I am ultimately forgiven and find my identity and worth in Christ. I **get forgiveness** ultimately through Him and His precious blood shed on the cross for me. And, I know I have hurt others. People I care deeply about and am called to care about - with things that I have said and done (or not done). I need to **get forgiveness**.

And, as I prepared this message and examined myself more deeply, I thought and prayed on also the need to **give forgiveness** more fully as Christ has forgiven me – each and everyday.

So, today, I stand here as both that man and that woman in the parking lot – in need of getting and giving forgiveness. Perhaps, in some ways, we all are like that man and woman in the parking lot. But, I'll leave that up to you to decide.

Application

Let me close with a challenge to believers and unbelievers/skeptics.

Believer: Give Forgiveness

If you call yourself a believer, the Bible tells us that the forgiven life is really the forgiving life. In other words, giving forgiveness is a habit to be cultivated. And, if you want to experience all those forgiveness “benefits”, you must forgive as God has forgiven you. That is, forgive and lead the forgiven life.

So, as a believer, ask yourself now, how are you living your life? Have you been living in a way that minimizes God's great gift of forgiveness? Through a lack of forgiveness and repentance, have you made God's mercy too small and His grace less amazing?

In Jesus' final words from the cross, Jesus said (Luke 23: 34):

³⁴ Jesus said, “Father, **forgive them**, for they do not know what they are doing.”^[a] And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

We are called to follow Christ's example and forgive so please consider accepting now a “1 person” challenge to **give forgiveness**.

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“Give Forgiveness”/1 Person Challenge: As you have been forgiven, forgive someone – anyone (in your home/in your workplace). Really. Settle in your heart. Today (tomorrow, this week) you will give forgiveness to someone, somewhere in or outside Japan. Remember:

²¹ Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” ²² Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.

Trust God. Give forgiveness.

Unbeliever: Get Forgiveness

And, if you are not a believer, I hope you can see that giving and getting forgiveness is essential to healthy relationships and contributes to a better life. I hope that is clear at a very human level.

And, I would encourage you not to stop there but to dig deeper. I believe you are here today for a reason. Your life has purpose and meaning. You can have better relationships, a higher quality life and even eternal life that begins with acknowledging your need to **get forgiveness** from the true and living God through his son Jesus Christ.

Please consider Jesus’ “Forgiveness+” promise and possibly praying this prayer today.

“Get Forgiveness”/Jesus Forgiveness+ Promise: That is, take time now to reflect on Jesus’ example and promise of 77 times...boundless forgiveness. Consider praying this prayer today and **getting forgiveness**.

Dear Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner and I ask for Your forgiveness. I believe You died for my sins and rose from the dead. I turn from my sins and invite You to come into my heart and life. I want to be truly, completely forgiven. I want to trust and follow You as my Lord and Savior.

Final Thought

How does true forgiveness work?

In many ways, our understanding of how forgiveness works reflects our understanding and experience of God’s forgiveness. If we don’t know the true forgiveness of Christ, then often rules and people’s whims take over and govern whether we are forgiven and impact our health and relationships in bad ways. Conversely, Christ’s 77 times, boundless forgiveness - not rules or cultural norms – provide a better pathway to life now and forever.

Let us pray.