

One time Peter asked the Lord how often he should forgive his brother. He suggested seven times, as though that would be a bountiful number. Jesus answered, "I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:22).

Four hundred ninety times! Someone may come and ask our forgiveness, and we may reply, "I will forgive you, but . . ." God does not want any exceptions in forgiveness. If we forgive our enemies, those who despitefully use and persecute us, we will have a reward from our Father in Heaven. If we love and befriend only those who love and befriend us, we are no better than sinners, for they do that.

If we have done some wrong to someone else, it is necessary to seek forgiveness. "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (Matthew 5:23-24).

Some have made restitution but never received forgiveness. If we have done all in our power to make things right, obeying God's instructions, then there is nothing more we can do. If we cannot achieve reconciliation after we have humbled ourselves and made

confession, we can leave the situation in God's hands. He will handle it from there.

The Bible does not tell us to question who is right and who is wrong. The all-important issue is getting wrongs made right, if possible. It takes the love of God in the heart to do that. Our personalities are not all alike, and some people will be more difficult to get along with than others. We need to overlook others' mistakes and shortcomings; after all, we all have something that others must tolerate in us. God will honor us if we have a spirit of forbearance, love, and forgiveness.

An unforgiving spirit is a tool of the enemy of our souls to drive people from God. Rather than allow Satan to defeat us, let's choose to seek God for forgiving hearts.

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FORGIVENESS

A VITAL NECESSITY

All of us encounter situations where forgiveness is needed. Offenses may range from minor irritations in marriage to infidelity, from hasty words spoken by parents to years of child abuse. They may occur on the playground, in the classroom, on the job, in the church. Whether it's an apparent slight of a friend or deliberate mistreatment, everyone faces circumstances which demand forgiveness. And each new situation requires a new decision to do so.

What does it mean to forgive? It means ceasing to feel resentment against an offender. Or in other words, letting go of our right to hurt back. Many people carry grudges for years. They may have been wronged, falsely accused, or mistreated. They may think they have good grounds for the feelings held in their hearts. However, the Bible gives no excuse for resentment, ill will, or lack of forgiveness, no matter what the provocation may be.

Jesus said, "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14-15).

All of us need forgiveness. We were born sinners and have no chance of entering Heaven without it. Even after we are saved and delivered from sin, we find it

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necessary to be forgiven for unwise decisions, inappropriate words, and errors. Jesus was telling us that if we want to be forgiven, we must forgive.

Does knowing we must forgive make it easy? Perhaps the hurt is so deep that forgiveness seems an impossibility. Yet, Jesus said in Matthew 18:35 that we must forgive from our hearts. How is that possible when the heart rebels against it? At times there is no easy way to have a forgiving heart; the only route is through prayer. Some people have found it necessary to pray earnestly over a period of time for a spirit of forgiveness. Then sometimes more prayers must be prayed to retain that spirit. How quickly the enemy would slide the bitterness back inside!

No, forgiveness is not always easy. But what is the result if we don't pray until we can

forgive? The Bible says that we should watch diligently "lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled" (Hebrews 12:15). Without forgiveness, bitterness grows in the heart. At some point that resentment will spill out. It may come tagged onto an unrelated disagreement, and that may result in a hard attitude toward someone. Whatever form it takes, the bitterness will grow. Unfortunately, if unresolved, it will result in that person standing before God unforgiven. What a price to pay!

An unforgiving spirit will also hinder our prayers. Jesus warned: "When ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses" (Mark 11:25).

Although forgiving does not instantly solve the complications of every situation, it frees us to work on those situations with God's help and wisdom. It helps us lay down the defense of ourselves and endeavor to find solutions.

Jesus himself is the best example of a forgiving heart. Sinless and holy, He was falsely accused, beaten, and nailed to the cross. In His dying agony He cried, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). If we want to follow Him, we must seek to follow His example.