

God's Extravagant Forgiveness

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[0 : 00] It was in the 1940s, in war-torn Netherlands, that Corrie ten Boom and her sister were taken prisoner by the Nazis for being part of the Dutch underground and hiding Jews in their home.

! She and her sister suffered unimaginable horrors in the Nazi concentration camps. After the war, Corrie gave talks on forgiveness, hoping to heal the hurt of the past, until one day she came face to face with one of her cruelest guards.

She writes in her book, It was at a church service in Munich that I saw him, the former SS man who had stood guard at the shower door in the processing center of Ravensbrück.

It all came back with a rush, she wrote. The huge room with its harsh overhead lights, the pathetic pile of dresses and shoes piled in the corner, the shame of walking naked past this man.

He came up to me as the church was emptying, smiling. His hand was thrust out to shake mine. And I, who had spoken so glibly of forgiveness, fumbled with my pocketbook rather than take that hand.

[1 : 26] He continued, I was a guard at Ravensbrück, but since that time I became a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well, Fraulein.

Again, the hand came out. Will you forgive me? Oh, will you forgive me? Well, that is a question we all have to wrestle with in our lives.

What would you have done at that point? What would you have felt like doing? Well, that's an extreme situation. But many will face similar situations of heartbreak and hurt in their lives.

Whether it's from broken promises in business or marriage, from manipulative or abusive relationships, or maybe the evils of apartheid that are still busy causing problems in our world.

And so forgiveness is needed, but it's really hard to do. And that's why we all need to learn to forgive in the way that Jesus tells us to do. And the first thing he wants our forgiveness of others to be is over-the-top extravagant.

[2 : 42] And so our forgiveness of others must be over-the-top extravagant. In Matthew 18, Jesus gives us a straightforward command to forgive everything from anyone in the church community who has in some way sinned against us.

No ifs, no ands, no buts, no maybes. We are to forgive and to keep on forgiving. Have a look at verse 21 and 22 from Matthew 18.

Peter comes to Jesus and asks, Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times? Jesus answered, I tell you, not seven times.

But 77 times. Or depending on your translation, 70 times seven. Our Peter himself is going beyond what is culturally acceptable.

The rabbis had declared that you only need to forgive three times, but beyond that you're not obligated to forgive anyone. That's not enough for Jesus. He commands his people to give complete forgiveness all of the time.

[3 : 54] And that number, 77 times, or 70 times seven, is a number that indicates abundant, extravagant forgiveness. It's not just a random number.

It's a number that comes out of Leviticus 25 that covers the law of the year of Jubilee. In the year of Jubilee, all debts were cancelled.

It came around every 49 or 50 years. And every 49 or 50 years, everyone's debt in the land of Israel was cancelled. All property was returned to the owners.

All slaves were freed. God's people were to give freedom and release because God had done the same for them.

The highlight of the year of Jubilee was celebrated on the day of atonement, Yom Kippur. And so the release of all people's debts is linked to the atonement that God gives to his people.

[4 : 54] In just the same way, Jesus wants his people to be the instruments of Jubilee to the world around us, giving release and forgiveness and breaking the cycle of revenge.

Now, as we apply this difficult... Well, the idea of forgiveness is not difficult, but to do it is really difficult. And as we apply this to our lives, I want you to think of two people that you need to forgive. One of them, try and choose someone from church, and then another one from a member of your family. Now, I'm not saying we must forgive each other here in church because we're a particularly bad church, but we are a normal church.

And it is likely that you've got some sort of grudge with someone in church because they've done something wrong to you. Again, not because we're particularly evil, but because we are normal.

And just spending time with people, we're going to rub each other the wrong way.

So as we apply this idea of forgiveness and how to do it, have two people in your mind. One, probably a church that you know that you still need to forgive for something they've done or said, and then think of a family member that you are having difficulty with.

[6 : 11] Many of you will have a name that pops into your mind straight away. Don't shout them out. I've got 15. I mean, I've got one or two. And so as we apply it, have these people in your mind.

Because those are the people that I want you to go and forgive this week and days ahead. But before we do that, we need to know a few important things about forgiveness.

The first thing is that forgiveness is not a feeling, it's an action. Forgiveness is not a feeling, it's an action. Jesus doesn't say, forgive if you feel like it.

Those words don't occur in the text. Forgiveness, like love in the Bible, is an action. It doesn't require your feelings to do it.

It's not that feelings aren't important, but forgiveness is more of an action than a feeling. You can forgive even if you don't feel like forgiving, simply because it's a decision. Forgiveness, secondly, forgiveness must come from your side regardless of the other person.

[7 : 23] Forgiveness can come from your side regardless of what the other person does or says. The person that Peter is talking about, that Peter asks about, hasn't come back to say sorry or to make amends.

They just keep on going sinning. And so forgiveness is not dependent on the other person's sorrow, on their attitude or even their willingness to make amends.

Yes, it helps if they are like that, but you don't need them to be sorry for you to make the decision to forgive them. And then, just to notice, there are two kinds of forgiveness.

There's an internal and an external forgiveness. Internal forgiveness is an attitude from your heart that can be done purely from your side.

External or relational forgiveness is when you go through the process of reconciliation with the offending party. And internal forgiveness is primarily what Jesus is speaking about here.

[8 : 26] He wants us to cultivate an attitude of forgiveness that will allow us to forgive as many times as necessary. We must be ready to forgive no matter how many times the other person sins against us.

Now let's apply these to the people you've had in your mind that you know you still need to forgive. Just ask yourself, have you yet given them unrelenting,

over the top, extravagant, continual forgiveness. Complete, total forgiveness for everything they've done all of the time.

Both in the past and in the present and knowing what they're like, you're going to have to forgive them in the future. That's the number that Jesus is talking about. It's a forgiveness that forgives everything they've done in the past, continues to forgive them in the present, and knowing that you're going to have to forgive them in the future.

It doesn't stop. Have you given them that? Or are you holding on to just a little bit of unforgiveness? Still trying to extract from them some form of payment that you feel is still owed.

[9 : 46] Extracting payment is not talking about money, although that could be the case. But maybe you feel that they owe you some relational or emotional payment to make up for the stuff that they've done wrong.

Forgiveness means to let go. The word, the Greek word literally means to send away. It's used in the law court and in accounting practices.

So someone owes you money, we use it in English still, don't we? We forgive them their debt. They would take your account, write it down, and then they would throw it on the ground because they used to write it on pottery. And they would smash it and they're like, hey, I've thrown your debt away.

I've forgiven your debt. Are you still trying to squeeze from them some form of payment that you still think that they owe you?

How can you tell if you've totally forgiven them? Well, you know. And everyone else knows because we can see it in your attitude, in your words and your actions towards them.

[10:57] Maybe you're giving them that little cold shoulder that's unnecessary, that uncharitable comment. Small little things, just driving that little poisonous knife, just a little jab, boop, just to let them know that you haven't quite forgiven them.

You say you've forgiven them, but your words and your actions and your attitudes will still shine through, will still come through. And you do these small things just to remind them they haven't quite forgiven them everything yet.

You've still got work to do. You've still got to release everything. And if you've released everything, just let it go. Don't hold on to it and let them know about it.

But complete release, complete letting go, this huge, extravagant forgiveness that Jesus wants us to give, it's impossible to do.

Which is why, well, it's impossible to do for ourselves and by ourselves. And that's why Jesus tells us this deep-hitting parable of the unforgiving servant.

[12:12] Because what happens in the parable of the unforgiving servant is it shows us the extravagant forgiveness that God has for us. And so that's God's extravagant forgiveness for us.

The parable of the unforgiving servant shows two things that will help us move from unforgiveness to the extravagant forgiveness God wants us to give to each other.

Firstly, it shows us the incredibly huge debt that God has forgiven us. And secondly, it shows us how God is forgiving towards us and therefore how we can be forgiving towards each other.

So we're going to look at the huge debt that God forgives us. And that's the first thing you notice in the parable is this huge debt that the king forgives his servant. So verse 23 and verse 24.

Jesus says, therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And as he began the settlement, a man who owed him 10,000 talents was brought to him.

[13:19] Now depending on your translation, it might explain that number to you. But that 10,000 talents, it's not the same as 10,000 rand, as much as that would be. One talent, a talent is a measure of weight.

One talent was worth 20 years of wages. My NIV says he had 10,000 bags of gold.

I think that's the one that Alan read for us. 10,000 bags of gold that he owes the king. The servant would need to work for over 200,000 years to pay everything off.

What is the point Jesus is making? The point he's making is that this person owes a debt he cannot repay.

Wonder of wonders, the king forgives him the debt. Amazing. All he has to do is ask and the king says, okay, I'll write it off.

[14:27] How would you feel if you've been forgiven a big debt? Many of us would have, that would have been, it would have happened to us. Someone would have forgiven us something, some money that we owed them.

Oh, it's such a nice feeling. Oh. Man, it makes you scratch your head as to what the servant does next to his fellow servants.

Just look what he does. Verse 28, when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a few hundred silver coins or a few hundred denarii.

It's pocket change. It's copper coins. Compared to this massive debt he was owed, it's nothing what this other guy owes him. Does he forgive him?

Is he soft towards him? No. He grabs him and begins to choke him. Here, pay him with Jeremy. It's like Homer Simpson and his kid Bart.

[15:33] It's a cultural reference from the days of TV to the younger generation. So the parable is of course talking about us and about what happens when we don't have the forgiveness that God wants.

However, we may not think that we owe a debt to God like the slave owed his master. We don't think we owe a debt to God but the Bible says that we do. We rack up the debt of sin every second of every day.

Every sin we commit increases our debt that we owe to God and that's not just everything that we do wrong. As Adrian mentioned earlier, what was it Adrian? That's the worst thing you can do, a really bad thing, a seriously bad action, something like that.

But in the biblical way of looking at sin, there's always a thing that you're not supposed to do and a thing you're supposed to do. And we very quickly latch onto things we've done wrong, which is right, but we forget to think about the things that we should have done.

So you've got this counter, this debt counter, this spiritual debt counter, just rolling over on your life. Ching, ching, ching, ching.

[16:55] Every horrible word, every slight, every angry response, every time you don't help someone that needs help, every time you spend money on yourself for yourself, when you could have helped someone else, every bit of love that you haven't given, every good thing you could have done that you haven't done, and every bad thing that you do all the time.

What are we supposed to do with this debt? One of the commentators said that that amount was worth a gazillion dollars. What are we supposed to do with the debt that we owe?

How can you pay it? Well, the Bible tells you how you can pay it. It says that your soul is forfeit to God.

Meaning that on the day of judgment, he's going to require your life from you in payment for all the things that you've done wrong. You might think that's not fair, you might think I haven't done as much bad things as that.

You can think what you like, but unless you're a Christian, unless Jesus has forgiven you your debt, you're going to be required to make a payment that you can't make and survive.

[18:24] The good news, the gospel news, the best news, is that because of Jesus we have received the biggest possible debt forgiveness that there is. We have received the ransom of our very souls.

This is from Colossians chapter 2. When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ.

He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us. He has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.

Isn't that the most amazing news? That debt counter that you got ticking over your whole life? All that stuff that God has written down and recorded in his books?

I mentioned earlier that they took your accounts written on a piece of property and threw it away and it was gone. Here what God does is he writes it on a piece of wood and puts it hanging over Jesus' head and says he'll pay it so that you don't have to.

[19:43] Jesus has set us free. from having to make payment for our sins ourselves. Instead he has made the most extravagant and outrageous payment for us.

How then outrageous is it of us to not forgive the trickling trifles of sins of our fellow Christians compared to what God has forgiven us?

as Jesus says in the parable in verse 32 when the master hears about what this servant has done. The master called the servant in.

You wicked servant. I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had mercy on you.

Friends, Jesus wants us to forgive as he has forgiven us. So when you're stuck with forgiveness or unforgiveness I should say towards someone what you need to do is go back to the gospel and spend time thinking about that extravagantly huge amount of sin and debt that Jesus has forgiven you and then compare that to the tiny small amount that you think is owing you from whatever someone in church or in your family has done to you.

[21:23] Now just to make the point that some things that are done to us are not small. They can be very hurtful depending on your background. You could have been very badly treated and very badly hurt.

this isn't to say that sin against you is small but compare it to what God has forgiven you in Christ it pales in comparison and then it becomes much easier to forgive them when you think about how much you've been forgiven.

But there's one more lesson in the parable that will help us with overcoming forgiveness and that is the macro patience of God.

So the parable highlights two things the incredibly huge debt that God has forgiven us and secondly how God is forgiving towards us and we're going to look at that now. And what I want to highlight is the macro patience of God although there are three words in the parable that tell us why the king forgives his servant.

And those three words are and it tells us about the king. It's his patience, his pity and his mercy. His patience, his pity and his mercy. And so in verse 26 when the king first requires payment the servant falls on his knees before him and says be patient with me.

[22 : 49] He begs and I will pay everything back. In verse 27 the response the servant's master took pity on him and cancelled the debt.

And let him go. And what we've just seen in verse 33 mercy. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you.

Now the NIV I think just glosses over that but the word mercy occurs twice in the Greek and so it reads shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had mercy on you.

Patience, pity and mercy. Now just to highlight those words for a second or for a few minutes the word pity is the same word that we came across when Jesus feels what Jesus feels when he is moved with compassion to help those in need.

Remember we looked at that a few weeks ago in this gospel stories when Jesus is going around and he sees someone in need that just needs his help and they can't help themselves it says he's moved to pity. Do you remember it was the spleen word?

[23 : 52] Do you remember that? What's interesting in the gospel that's always referred to Jesus is the one that is moved to pity and here this king or God is moved to pity as well and we saw from our Old Testament reading that God is a compassionate God that's the pity word.

God feels it in his guts when people come to him and say I just need your help I'm sorry I need you to forgive me.

And that moves him to forgive. The mercy word that he speaks of speaks of showing undeserved grace. To be merciful is just to do something nice for someone that doesn't deserve it and can't do it for themselves.

But it is to an action word. It's literally to go and do something nice to give them the thing that they need. But I just want to look at that patience word for a bit.

And I mentioned that we need God's macro patience. And that's because the Greek word behind the word patient is macrothumos. Macro is the word for big.

[25 : 06] We've got a big shopping center down the road in Artery called macro. That's what it means. Patience is macrothumos.

Macro means big. Thumos means anger. So it doesn't mean that God is going to have big anger. It doesn't say have big anger with me, but it means to wait a long time before you get angry. Have big patience.

Wait a long time before you take your anger out on the person that you think needs it. do you really have any idea how patient God has been with you and your sin?

Imagine God was micro patient with you. Imagine he waited just a little bit of time before he poured out the anger and the justice on you that you deserve.

life. But to land this with us, God hasn't just been personally patient with you, although he has if you're a Christian, but he's also been patient with your family down the generations so that he could have patience with you.

[26 : 27] We don't often think of that. God has generational patience. patience. This is the point of the Old Testament reading we saw from Nehemiah. It was to make you realize how long God had to bear with his people.

Again and again and again they sinned. God brings him out of Egypt with his huge miracles. Moses goes up the mountain for 40 days, he comes back, oh, golden cough.

God is patient with them in the desert. Oh, they're too scared to go into the promised land. God is patient with them for 40 years, sends them into the promised land. Oh, they keep on sinning, God sends them a savior.

Thank you God, then they sin again, God sends them another savior, until he sends them David, then they continue sinning. From the time of the exodus till the time of Jesus, one and a half

thousand years of God having patience with one generation after the next, so that he could get to the Messiah, so that Jesus could come.

And then he's had another two thousand years of patience in your own family line, so that he could get to you, so that he could forgive you your sins. Macro patience.

[27 : 52] And then compare that to the micro patience we've got.

I just can't handle it. I can't even drive five minutes down the road before I want to have not enough patience with the people driving with me on the road. Compare your micro patience with God's macro patience, and it's just too embarrassing to talk about.

So we need to practice macro level patience, macro level pity, macro level mercy. Think of those people we thought of earlier.

There's people in the church that you need to forgive, there's people in the family that you need to forgive. Don't give them krimokis of patience and mercy and pity.

Give them the same stuff that God has given you. We can only do that properly if we've experienced God's forgiveness in Jesus.

[29 : 04] So if you've not yet trusted in Christ, you're going to struggle with forgiveness your whole life. You need to turn to Jesus and say, Lord, forgive me for what I owe you.

Help me to be as forgiving to others. If you are a Christian and you're struggling, you need to spend time reminding yourself just how much God has forgiven you.

Think about the patience, pity, and mercy that God has had on you. Think about the years it's taken for him to not cut off your family line so that he could forgive you.

If you're not a Christian, what kind of service is that to God to say, ah, yeah, you've had all that patience, I don't need your patience.

I'll just carry my own debt. That's why there's the sting at the tail at the end of the parable.

[30 : 11] this is how my heavenly father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.

Talking about sending that unforgiving servant away to the dungeon to be tortured to learn his lesson.

If you're a Christian, spend your time reminding yourself about God's patience and pity towards you and ask him to help you give that to others. We looked at Colossians 3 about God putting our sins on the cross.

Colossians 3, that was Colossians 2, Colossians 3 goes on to say, Therefore as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, macro patience, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

Bear with each other and forgive one another. If any of you has a grievance against someone, forgive as the Lord forgave you.

[31 : 43] At the beginning of the sermon we pause the story of Corrie Tin Boehm as she struggled to forgive her tormentor. She continues, Lord Jesus, Lord Jesus, I prayed, forgive me and help me to forgive him.

I tried to smile. I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. I felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or charity.

And so again, I breathed a silent prayer. Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give me your forgiveness. As I took his hand, the most incredible thing happened.

From my shoulder, along my arm, and through my hand, a current seemed to pass from me to him. While into my heart sprang a love for the stranger that almost overwhelmed me.

And so I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than on our goodness that the world's healing hinges, but on God's. When he tells us to love our enemies, he gives, along with the command, the love itself.

[33 : 02] Let me pray for us as I close. Lord Jesus, we have in you the ultimate example compassion, patience, mercy, pity, and love, and forgiveness.

Lord Jesus, we ask for you to give us a special heart for those we're struggling to forgive. Give us your spirit, Lord. Help us to spend time in prayer and to actively go out and forgive those who need it from us.

Amen. Amen. Amen.