

In the name of the Father, and of the T Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Every single day—sometimes multiple times a day—we pray the Lord’s Prayer, which includes,
“*Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.*”

We say it...but we don’t really mean it—or, perhaps, we don’t really *know* what it means.

We know the Lord wants to be known for his mercy and generosity;
and forgiveness is central to who He is for us.

But like Peter, we think there are limits.

Sure, our Lord’s limits must be much broader and kinder than what we’d expect from others.
So I should forgive my brother, but how many times—*seven?*

That’s a lot, you know.

Imagine forgiving the same person seven times for the same thing?
And remember we’re talking about being *sinned* against—
not just slighted, or offended, or annoyed.

How many times will a wife forgive her adulterous husband?
Will she make it to the 7th affair?

How many children will endure the beating, or the berating from their parents with forgiveness?
After the third or fourth time, anger turns their hearts callous.

We’re rarely willing to forgive someone two or three times when our name’s dug through the dirt.

But Peter knows that the Christian is to be different—
our limits are to be more expansive,
our patience more enduring,
our love farther reaching—
seven times is a lot!

But Jesus corrects Peter—
not because he’s got the number *wrong*, but because he’s got a number at all.
“*I say to you, not seven, but seventy times seven.*”

Jesus doesn’t mean that after the 490th sin there’s no more forgiveness.
His point is that forgiveness is to be complete and perfect and whole.
There are no *limits* with forgiveness.

Our problem is that we just don’t *believe* it.

And it’s for that reason the Lord gives us the story of the Wicked Servant.
“*The Kingdom of heaven is like a man, who reigns as a king,*” He says.
And the day came when the King desired to settle accounts—
that’s judgment day.

The first servant He calls in owes 10,000 talents.
 A talent was about 20 years' wages for the average worker.
 10,000 x 20...well, it would take about 3,000 life-times to pay off that debt.

So the judgment comes:
 throw the miserable servant, along with his wife and children, into prison;
 liquidate his assets—he's done.

But the servant falls to the ground, a posture of humble and repentant prayer, and begs:
 "Have patience with me and I will pay you back everything." (Mt 18:26)

It's almost comical, but really quite sad.
 In fact, it moves the Master, the Lord, the King of Heaven, to mercy.
 Our translation says, "*and out of pity for him...*" but the word is more than that: *splangkna!*
 It's that words from which we get "spleen":
 His stomach churned,
 His heart leapt,
 He felt in Himself love move toward this poor man for the sake of his poverty.
 And from that merciful pity, the Lord *forgave* him the whole thing.

No jail, no slavery, no selling the house, no splitting the family apart, nothing.
 He was *free*.

You'd think that such a surprising generosity on the part of the Master would change the servant.
 You'd think he'd be full of joy and gratitude and love.

But he wasn't.
 On his way out from the Master's judgment hall, he immediately found a *fellow*-servant,
 one who owed him 100 denarii—roughly 3 months' wages.
 Finding him, he seized him, and choked him, and demanded payment in full, immediately.

With the very same words that this servant had just used a moment earlier,
 the fellow-servant fell to the ground, begging him, "*be patient with me, and I will repay you.*"

Rather than pity and love and great generosity,
 the servant locked his fellow-servant up until he paid the last penny.

The story is ridiculous.
 How is it even possible for the servant to be so wicked?
 What is it that makes him demand payment when he'd, literally, just been forgiven.
 And remember, the amount he was forgiven was by no means comparable to what was owed him.

When the other servants saw this gross injustice, they called out to the King.
 And hearing their prayers, he brings the servant in again.
 This time, however, it's not mercy and pity that moves within Him, but wrath—
 "*and his Lord handed him over to the jailers until he paid everything he owed.*" (Mt 18:34)

The only limit to our Lord's forgiveness is for it not to be received by faith.

That's the issue with the wicked servant.
He frankly didn't believe the King's words.
In his mind, his little stunt bought him a bit of time—
perhaps even enough to scrap together enough to show a good effort toward what's owed.

But that's not what the Kingdom of heaven is like—
or better, if that's how you're going to treat the King's word of forgiveness,
Then the Kingdom of heaven plays out like it did for this wicked servant...

But if His forgiveness is believed, received by faith,
then it can't help but to overflow in love and mercy to everyone.

Dear Christians, you've received just this sort of forgiveness.
You have a Lord and Master who is gracious and merciful, moved to pity by love for you.
His word comes with life and light and hope and joy.

But where you find anger, and bitterness, and a lack of love and forgiveness—
there you'll also find unbelief.

Our Lord has no limit to His forgiveness.
The only thing that cuts you off from it is your refusal to believe it.
And refusing to believe it, you'll find violence and rage.

Repent.

Believe your Master's word.
Your sins are forgiven, so you too are to forgive your brother from your heart.

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