

**70 x 7= What?**  
September 14, 2014

Matthew 18:21-35

*21 Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often shall 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 times seven. 23 "Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. 24 When he began the reckoning, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents; 25 and as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. 26 So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' 27 And out of pity for him the lord of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. 28 But that same servant, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat he said, 'Pay what you owe.' 29 So his fellow servant fell down and besought him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' 30 He refused and went and put him in prison till 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 lord all that had taken place. 32 Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you besought me; 33 and should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' 34 And in anger his lord delivered him to the jailers, till 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."*

Long ago there was a song I learned in children's choir. Its chorus said "how many times should I forgive, 70 x 7". This is one of the most familiar equations in scripture and it is about forgiveness. This particular scripture in Matthew follows after we learn how to deal with conflict and how we love people anyway. Peter after hearing Jesus on conflict came to him and asked him if he should forgive someone seven times and Jesus responds not seven times but in different versions it will say seventy-seven times or our most familiar 70 x 7. Seventy-seven times or four hundred ninety times makes little difference it is a lot of times to forgive someone who has wronged you.

We often interpret the 70 x 7 as continually sharing and showing God's grace to another who needs our forgiveness. This is not an incorrect interpretation but the parable that follows gives us an insight to the Master's Grace and forgiveness being extended and the expectation that because it has been extended that we also extended it.

Forgiveness in itself is difficult. We live in a world where we forgive but we do not necessarily forget. Our circle of trust has been broken and we are wary of ever trusting that person in similar circumstances or in others again. As humans we are inclined to typically think the best of people until given a reason not to do so. This is part of our natural inclination. We also as humans are once burned twice shy. It takes a significant amount for us to forgive. Yet Jesus is asking us in this scripture to not just forgive but continually forgive another who has sinned against you. Jesus is asking not just for forgiveness but for Radical Forgiveness.

Sounds ridiculous in a lot of ways and almost martyrdom. I mean to have someone continually sin against you over and over again and be asked to continually forgive them. It sounds almost too much to bear or even to do.

Yet we do this every day in every possible way to God and we are always forgiven. Remember that the parable of the master and the servant that follows Peter's question is for us to better understand forgiveness, grace, and mercy to one another. Just as the master forgave his servant when asked, God forgives us when asked.

The concept of asking for forgiveness for our sins is not foreign but it is not a very practiced spiritual practice. We do not often talk of confession within the life of the church. We have visions in our heads of confession as going into that little cubicle next to the priest saying "father forgive me for I have sinned" and receiving penance, that act of restitution, for our sins. As Disciples of Christ we have our confessions of faith. You know when you are asked the question "Do you believe in Jesus as the Christ, son of the Living God and do you accept him as Lord and Savior of your life and the world?" But as to confessing our sins to God we do not typically get in to it or even really discuss it as Protestants.

So why is it important to understand the relationship between confession and forgiveness? We will often particularly when we are young but even into adulthood confess our wrongdoing out of guilt and acknowledgement that we did something wrong. But we also have to remember the power of self-justification. We will often justify our wrongdoing as part of our survival. Confession takes a lot of humility.

Recall how if someone has sinned against you, you are to go to them and speak between you two to solve the issue. If we were all extremely humble and self-aware of one another and forgiving of one another that would be the end of it but Jesus recognized that we in our humanness can not always stop at that step.

It takes a lot for us to admit or confess that we have wronged another. It is easier to apologize when the one you have wronged comes to you and confronts you. But to go to them. What fortitude to go to another and say I have wronged you and I beg you to forgive me.

Radical Forgiveness has multiple parts to it. It has the confession part where we confess our sins to another when we have sinned against. It has the forgiving part where the person whom we sinned against forgives us. It also has a third part, forgiving ourselves and moving past our sin into a new way of life. This third part is both for the sinner and the sinned against.

You see forgiveness from others means little if we do not forgive ourselves both the sinner and the sinned against for whatever feelings we might have had during an interaction with one another. Life is full of choices we can forgive and truly let ourselves forget or we can hold on to our feelings of anger and resentment towards another and never truly give them the same grace that God extends towards us.

This past week was September 11<sup>th</sup>. The thirteenth anniversary of a day that shifted many lives on its axis. It has framed an entire generations understanding of life. It has affected many of us personally and it has changed our nation in ways we are still finding out. It is a day that most of us can recall in minute detail exactly what we were doing. For myself I was in my Junior year of High School walking into 4<sup>th</sup> period choir and one of the band teachers ran into the room and said you need to turn on the news. We watched in shock as the first tower was burning and saw the plane hit the second tower the bell rang and an announcement came on that we were to switch classes rooms as the next period was lunch but all teachers were to turn on their televisions and switch to the news stations. It was probably the quietest class change I have ever experienced. The rest of that week was a blur as we realized our generation would never be the same.

It has not been. Every year on that day we see posts of memory and remembrance. We also see the words "Never Forget". It has been thirteen years. I have lost a lot of friends in the military, a lot of families have been torn apart. We in never forgetting are also not forgiving and have carried a lot of resentment, anger, and frankly hatred.

Perception and perspective are powerful tools in our lives when it comes to forgiveness. We can say I forgive a person but without forgetting we do not truly forgive another. 70 x7 = Whatever we choose it to be if we not allow ourselves to forgive and forget as God forgives and forgets our sins against God. Remember the Master not only forgave the servant but forgot about the debt entirely.

Grace and forgiveness from God are radical. They are beyond our human comprehension and instinct. That is what makes God's grace so amazing it is not just forgiving and not forgetting it is wiping the slate clean and giving us each a chance to begin again. It is radical, it is God.