

**Psalm 103:(1-7), 8-13**

103:1 Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

103:2 Bless the LORD, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits--

103:3 who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases,

103:4 who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,

103:5 who satisfies you with good as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

103:6 The LORD works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed.

103:7 He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel.

103:8 The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

103:9 He will not always accuse, nor will he keep his anger forever.

103:10 He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.

103:11 For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;

103:12 as far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us.

103:13 As a father has compassion for his children, so the LORD has compassion for those who fear him.

**Matthew 18:21-35**

18:21 Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?"

18:22 Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.

18:23 "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves.

18:24 When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him;

18:25 and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made.

18:26 So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.'

18:27 And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt.

18:28 But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe.'

18:29 Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.'

18:30 But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt.

18:31 When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place.

18:32 Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt

because you pleaded with me.

18:33 Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?'

18:34 And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt.

18:35 So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

### **Proclamation of the Word**

Listen to these apologies from [letmeapologize.com](http://letmeapologize.com)<sup>i</sup>, a website where people post personal apologies:

From the lighter apology like this one:

*To Stefan, I am sorry for underestimating your dancing skills. From Marijke*

...to which Stefan can agree or accept. Apologies range from the silly to the more serious.

To Tiffany Weyand,

I would like to go on the Record and Apologize publicly to my Fiance for the following.

- #1 Being a Horrible speller.
- #2 Being a closet Survivor watcher.
- #3 Waking up in the morning.
- #4 Coming home from work at night.
- #5 Listening rarely.
- #6 Leaving my socks on the floor.

I realize that we will be getting married soon and I really thought that we should start with a clean slate. Love ya and hope you can forgive me. from Ryan Smith

To jas,

[I just wanted to say, that I am sorry if I said or did something to hurt you, I never meant it the way you may have taken it. I love you and I just want you to be happy. Once, again I am sorry. I hope you will accept this apology and we can move past this.](#)

From stepmonster

Perhaps some of the hardest words to say are "I am sorry" and "I forgive you." Apologies and forgiveness are such a difficult thing, so difficult these folks post them online publically instead of going to that person and speaking with them. Perhaps the person refuses to listen or is not available or maybe the idea of putting it in writing first makes the face to face easier. Any way about it, saying I am sorry, asking for forgiveness, and offering forgiveness can be one of life's hard things.

But imagine that wrongs and our sins are like pebbles, stones, rocks. If we keep clutching onto them or lugging them around, they become burdens. Burdens weigh you down, take effort and work. Forgiveness is the only way to release the pebbles, to lay down the stone rather than throw it, or to stop lugging around a boulder that is bulky. Forgiveness is the way to let go and eventually find peace.

Underestimating dance skills may be a wrong, but that is like a little pebble. Socks left on the floor may be a tiny thing, but it can become a big thing in a marriage. Like a little pebble, if it gets stuck in your shoe, it can be really annoying. Unresolved resentment and hurt can be a problem and harm a relationship. Both parties must confront it and come up with a way to reconcile and move ahead.

The other wrongs like the harm between parent and child can be bigger stones. They are not little pebbles, but become like a burden that is carried. And even bigger wrongs can be like heavy boulders that weigh down and choke the life, joy and peace out of someone.

Forgiveness and confession or apologies is needed between spouses, parent and children, church members, or even groups who have been wronged. This week our nation marked the wrongs that were committed against us on September 11, 2001. We remembered the over 3000 innocent civilians whose lives were cut short. And for 13 years we have engaged in a "war on terror." Our new normal includes more hostility, more anxiety about our safety, and more fear for the future. And the costs go beyond those lost in the twin towers to the thousands of men and women who soldier the wounds and trauma of that war, the thousands of innocent people who lost their lives, too. So what is the role of forgiveness between neighbors in that scenario? These are difficult questions.

Forgiveness and reconciliation are the ways God in Jesus Christ teaches us to live out our discipleship. Forgiveness is a path that eventually helps us release those pebbles, stones, and boulders that not only burden us, but harm are relationships with one another. For a follower of Jesus, forgiving one another is not a new law but a way in which we live out the greatest commandment to "love the Lord God with all your heart, mind and strength and love your neighbor as you love yourself." Forgiveness is a way that God first deals with us and then asks us to deal with one another.

Peter asks Jesus how often he should forgive another member of his church. Like 7 times, Jesus? Peter says. Peter is thinking he is being extravagantly forgiving, but Jesus says, No, seventy times seven...a number similar to "to infinity and beyond" with credit to Buzz Lightyear.

Then Jesus tells a parable that reminds us of how God treats us. We who have been shown mercy are called to live by that same mercy and offer it to others. Sometimes that is easier said than done.

The singer in Psalm 103 makes it clear,

*The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always accuse, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion for his children, so the LORD has compassion for those who fear him.*

Thank God! God forgives us our sins. The Greek word for sin is *h'armartia* which literally means "missing the mark." And we all miss the mark sometimes. We are human. One of my favorite phrases from a classic prayer of confession is "We confess we have sinned against you in word, thought, and deed by what we have done, and by what we have left undone."

As people made in God's image we are told by Jesus that we are to forgive to infinity and beyond. God does not keep a record of wrongs. The apostle Paul echoes this when he writes in 1 Corinthians 13, the famous chapter on love, that love keeps no record of wrongs. But is it not our nature sometimes to keep count just like ol' Peter. We want to write all the wrongs down in a ledger or plug them into a spreadsheet.

Peter says to Jesus, "I can only forgive 7 times, right?" Peter was probably thinking I am at 6 and I could go one more. But Jesus blows that out of the water with hyperbole. 70 X 7...then he tells a parable about a worker who was forgiven an enormous debt and then turns and does not forgive another. As one commentator reminds us,

*Remember a talent was about 130 lbs. of silver and was the equivalent to about fifteen years of a laborer's wages. Which means that the servant owed his master about 150,000 years of labor. In other words, he would never, ever, not in a million years, be able to pay his master back. A denarius, by comparison, was worth about a day's wage, which meant that the second servant owed the forgiven one about a hundred days of labor – no small debt. <sup>ii</sup>*

Such a debt could never be repaid, only forgiven. We pray to God each week or each day, "Forgive us our debts as we have forgiven." The as is important. As we have forgiven. Forgiven people seek to forgive.

Peter is confused. He is thinking of the Law in his accounting. He wants to satisfy a quota, do what is required. But Jesus reframes the conversation. Jesus says this is about Loving Relationships not Law. I have told you to love your neighbor as yourself. While Peter is picturing the scales of justice with

perfect balance, Jesus paints a picture using a parable that shows us God as the one who is merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, whose forgiveness is to infinity and beyond.

Forgiveness is an act of love that God bestows upon us when we turn toward God and acknowledge where we have missed the mark. We extend the same to one another. Forgiveness is a way forward for relationships. We confess to one another admitting where we are wrong. We seek to change. Now, to be honest, forgiveness is tricky when the other person does not admit their wrong or even their unintended wrongdoing. And sometimes that person never will. People commit horrible wrongs against one another some of which will never be acknowledged. But forgiveness is an act of the will more than a feeling of the heart.

As David Lose writes, <sup>iii</sup>

*Forgiveness, you see, is ultimately a decision about the past – the decision to accept both that you cannot change the past and also that the past does not have to hold you captive. Forgiveness is a decision about the past that ultimately determines the future. When you forgive, you release the past and enter into an open future. When you cannot forgive, you remain captive to that past until the end of time. Forgiveness, in this sense, is freedom, freedom from the past, freedom for the future, the kind of freedom God wants for each of us.*

REFLECT: Is there a something in your life from which you wish to be set free?

Is there something that you need to confess? something for which you need to apologize?

Jesus tells his disciples to go to the other and begin that process. In fact, he tells his disciples in the sermon on the mount, that before we come to bring our offerings to God, we must go to our brother or sister and first be reconciled.<sup>iv</sup> Our broken relationships with each other harm our relationship with God.

As we act as forgiving people our hearts can begin to change, to soften, to heal. Then the anger, the hurt, the resentment begins to subside. When we admit our wrong and apologize as an act, we can begin to let go of our guilt, shame. It is in letting go that we will find peace. In letting go, we will find that slowly the anger subsides and the joy returns. Sometimes forgiveness is letting go of the hope that the past will change. It is through prayer and God's healing that we might find redemption and peace.

In conclusion, I share a story from Ron Lee Davis' book, A Forgiving God in an Unforgiving World.<sup>v</sup> A much loved priest in the Philippines carried a secret burden, a sin he had committed many years before. Although he had led many to know the mercy and grace of Christ, he was not able to find peace. He had repented, but not accepted that God forgave him. A woman in his parish who loved God deeply claimed to have visions and dreams where she and Jesus spoke to one another. People

from all over the islands would come and ask her things to take to the Lord and wait for her response. The priest was skeptical, but he dared to hope and was desperate to find answers. He decided to put her to the test. He said, "When I was in Seminary, I did something wrong. No one else knows anything about it. The next time you talk to Jesus, I would like you to ask him what the sin is. If he tells you, I will know you are really talking to him."

The priest really hoped that he would receive some news to ease his guilt even if he put it to her as a test. He waited for hours and then days. Finally, two weeks later the woman came to him.

"Well," he said, "did you have any of your visions? Did you speak with Jesus?"

"Yes."

"Did you talk to him...about my question?"

"Yes, I did."

"Did he answer you?" the priest was getting agitated.

"Yes, as a matter of fact," He did.

By now the priest's heart was pounding and beads of sweat appeared on his head. "Well, what did he say?"

"I told him 'My priest committed sin in Seminary. He is still burdened by it. He wants to know if you know what that sin was.' Jesus looked right at me and said, 'Ah yes, your priest's sin. Funny thing. I just don't remember it anymore.'"

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<sup>i</sup> [www.letmeapologize.com](http://www.letmeapologize.com)

<sup>ii</sup> David Lose, In the Meantime, blog <http://www.davidlose.net/2014/09/pentecost-14-a/>

<sup>iii</sup> IBID

<sup>iv</sup> Matthew 5:23-24

<sup>v</sup> Ron Lee Davis, *A Forgiving God in an Unforgiving World*, (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House, 1984).