

## How Many Times Do We Need to Forgive?

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Sometimes I'm amazed at how young I feel and then my body and mind remind me that I am in fact not so young. Oh yeah, some of you older folks are thinking that I'm not all THAT old. But the younger ones, the Millennials and Gen X'rs and Gen Y'rs and so forth –you're sitting there thinking that I really AM old. But let me tell you a couple things about getting old.

First of all, there's good old AARP. Yes, for those of you who are near or over 50, you know what I mean. I find it fascinating how wonderful the discounts can be on cars and hotels and so forth. Second, there's the senior part of the menu at most restaurants. The deals are pretty good and the portions are, for the most part, just right. And sometimes they even throw in a free desert. At this point, you are probably asking yourselves: where is he going with all this? Well, because I am 69 years old, I figure I've more than made the 77 count quota on forgiveness; forgiveness doesn't have to even be on my radar.

Of course you know I'm kidding. Acts of forgiveness never go away and should never get old spiritually, regardless of how old one is physically. Let me try to give you a picture of the amounts Jesus is talking about in the parable. One commentary suggested 10,000 talents was roughly 60 million days' wages, equivalent to 1/3 of the yearly expenditure on the Roman army. Another said it was equal to \$1.5 billion in today's terms. Still another said it would take an army of 100,000 with each soldier carrying a 100 lb. pack of silver to pay off the servant's debt.

So when the servant begged the king for more time to raise the money, it would have been sheer nonsense to think he could come close. He could not raise that much if he worked every day for 150,000 years. And now the kicker – the king doesn't reduce the debt – he forgives all of it, every last denarius.

One would think that servant would be changed forever, overwhelmed by the incredible and undeserved forgiveness of the king. But no, he probably thought he got away with something. He then

encounters a fellow servant who owed him a mere pittance in comparison – 100 denarii, equal to a 90-day loan. Yet this forgiven man does not pass on the forgiveness but torments and punishes. Some would cheer when the first servant gets what's coming to him but that's not the point either.

Jesus is calling us to stop counting and calculating and scheming when it comes to forgiveness. The limits to forgiveness should not even be considered. As one author suggests, forgiveness is not born out of our goodness, but out of our gratitude.

In the year 2000, in a kitchen somewhere in New York, two fathers met and talked. The one, Bud Welch, lost his daughter, Julie, in the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing. The other, William McVeigh, is the father of the convicted bomber. Welch, a Catholic, fought to prevent the execution of Timothy McVeigh. At first, he would have killed the bomber with his own hands. Gradually, he realized the execution would not help his healing.

Few of us are trying to forgive murder, but all of us hold grudges against someone – a noisy neighbor, a coworker who claimed credit for our idea, a family member who took advantage. What person or situation plagues you? First ask God for guidance then write in your journal about the forgiveness you're struggling to extend. You'll be amazed at how good it will make you feel.

Let me finish by going back to the idea of monetary debt. Fr. Robert Duggan wants us to ask ourselves who owes us money? Or who do we owe? We would expect to repay and be repaid financial debts. But what of the other kind of debt, the kind McVeigh owed Welch? What about repaying kindnesses done, favors given, or confidences kept? We might feel embittered or angry that we didn't receive in return the gratitude, credit, and kindness we deserve. But that's not what Bud Welch did. Just like the king, he forgave the entire debt. All of it. We should all be so charitably inclined.