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God has an infinite capacity to forgive...do we? Forgiveness...is more than just a Christian buzzword. To paraphrase C.S. Lewis, author of *Mere Christianity*, we all say forgiveness is a great idea...until we have something to forgive.

In the Gospel, Peter asks Jesus how many times he should forgive someone who continued to hurt him. According to rabbinical rules of the time...three times was enough. Peter may have thought he was being especially generous when he suggested to Jesus seven was more than enough times to forgive someone. Nice try, Peter, but wrong!

When Jesus tells Peter he must be able to forgive 7 times 70 times...he means we are to show the same boundless capacity God shows for forgiveness. To make his point, Jesus tells the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant.

The king in a foreign country decides to check on his workers' accounts. One man owes the king 10,000 talents and is told to pay up...or else. A talent is a weight of measure. Depending on whether it was gold or silver...the man owed the king about \$12 billion or \$160 million in today's money.

If we were to take the lower amount...it would have taken the man about 150,000 years to pay back his debt. It appears his bad money management was about to make his life worse than he could imagine. His options...pay up now or face a life sentence at hard labor.

But the king does something unexpected. He is moved with compassion. He pulls out his ledger and writes-off the debt completely. The king has given the man a fresh start...a new beginning...free from debt or threat of jail time.

One would expect the man to be grateful and to have learned a valuable lesson. Instead, when he meets a co-worker who owes him 100 pence...about \$8,000 in today's money...he beats him up and has him thrown in jail. His co-worker could have paid his debt...he wasn't even given a chance.

The ungrateful worker should have showed the same compassion toward his fellow worker the king showed toward him. When the king finds out what has happened he is furious and reinstates the ungrateful worker's life sentence without parole.

There is an important lesson to learn here...the king did not take back his forgiveness of the ungrateful worker...the ungrateful worker rejected it. The king expected the worker to show the same kind of mercy toward his fellow worker the king had shown him. While God does not take back his love and compassion we can reject them and that will leave us in a spiritual prison...escape comes when we say we are sorry...and start over...refreshed and renewed.

God's enormous capacity to forgive should be the model for the way we forgive others. It should be a basic part of our nature as God's people. Jesus taught us in that most perfect prayer...the Lord's Prayer...forgive others just as God forgives us. What God wants us to do is adopt his standard of forgiveness as our own. And yes, that does take hard work.

What about those who refuse to acknowledge they have hurt us or ask for our forgiveness? Most of us have been hurt deeply by someone...a friend or relative...perhaps even someone within the Church. Adamantly refusing to forgive them offends God.

We may not hold a grudge against anyone who thinks they don't need God's forgiveness or ours. We must pray that God will give them his grace and open their hearts to his forgiveness. But we can't force our forgiveness on them or forgive them "just because"...to do so would make our forgiveness disingenuous and cheap.

When it comes to forgiveness we must start with taking a good hard look at the person in the mirror. Have we hurt someone and refused to acknowledge it? Do we blame others for our own faults and shortcomings? Then let's make some changes.

God has forgiven us...we should be grateful for that and not hold back when the opportunity to forgive others comes our way.

