

GROWING *Together*

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FORGIVENESS

*“How many times should I forgive? Seven times?”
“No,” said Jesus, “seventy times seven.”
(Matthew 18:21-22)*

What if I have been so badly hurt that it seems impossible to forgive? My religious training, prompts me to forgive. Parents, teachers and therapists counsel forgiving others and moving on. Current wisdom in the self-help industry promotes forgiveness as a healthy path to wholesome living.

“Forgive” is easy to say, but what do I do when I am hurt and angry to the point of feeling blind hatred and rage? If anger changes the way I think and act, I am no longer in control of myself. Negative feelings like shame and worthlessness take over. I am not the person that I once was and want to be. I have changed.

Jesus knows this. He knows very well how we hurt each other and what happens to a human heart in pain. It becomes hard, diseased and icy with anger. A hardened heart can no longer freely give or accept love. Lives consumed with anger become restricted and limited. So Jesus counsels Peter to forgive, to turn things around, to keep his heart alive. “Seventy times seven,” says Jesus. He means that forgiveness is not a matter of keeping count.

Forgiveness has no boundaries in Jesus’ way of thinking. Forgiveness starts with us and in us. It comes from deep within: the power of Christ embodied in each one of us. Jesus’ concern for us is that we find God’s peace in the midst of trouble.

Forgiveness allows us to return again and again to our true selves. It does not mean forgetting. It does not mean pretending that nothing bad has happened or that “it’s O.K.” Forgiveness is not necessarily an instantaneous thing, although it can be.

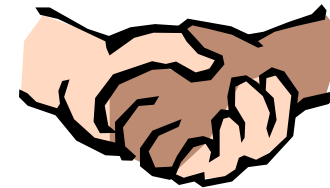
Forgiveness may take months or years, involving a careful process of self-searching, therapy or mediation. Prayer and deep reflection on scripture have the power to transform wounds of the heart into decisive, healthy action.

Forgiveness may mean confronting the person or persons who have hurt us. Sometimes forgiveness simply means that, with God’s help, we are able to “walk away” from a hurtful situation that is beyond our power to change. In other words, we leave behind a hurt that has, within it, the power to dominate and eventually destroy us.

Forgiveness sets us free! We are freed from the tyranny of the one who has violated us. We are freed from becoming the bitter, caged person that we don’t want to become. We are freed from the anger and hatred that threatens to consume us. We are freed from a victimization that leads to isolation.

“Seventy times seven.” There need be no boundaries to our forgiveness when we love God and our neighbour as ourselves. Through the thoughtful and deliberate process of forgiving someone who has offended us, Jesus restores our souls. Again and again the Spirit creates in us hearts that freely give and accept love.

When I feel that I can’t forgive, I must stop and look at what I have become. How does Jesus see me now? Could “seventy times seven” mean the beginning of something new?



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