

The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

Matthew 18:21-35 (amplified bible)

²¹ Then Peter came to Him and asked, "Lord, how many times will my brother sin against me and I forgive him *and* let it go? Up to seven times?" ²² Jesus answered him, "I say to you, not up to seven times, but seventy times seven.

²³ "Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. ²⁴ When he began the accounting, one who owed him 10,000 ^[a]talents was brought to him. ²⁵ "But because he could not repay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and his children and everything that he possessed, and payment to be made. ²⁶ So the slave fell on his knees and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you everything.' ²⁷ And his master's heart was moved with compassion and he released him and forgave him [canceling] the debt. ²⁸ But that same slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him ^[b]a hundred denarii; and he seized him and *began* choking him, saying, 'Pay what you owe!' ²⁹ So his fellow slave fell on his knees and begged him earnestly, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.' ³⁰ But he was unwilling and he went and had him thrown in prison until he paid back the debt. ³¹ When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and they went and reported to their master [with clarity and in detail] everything that had taken place. ³² Then his master called him and said to him, 'You wicked *and* contemptible slave, I forgave all that [great] debt of yours because you begged me. ³³ Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave [who owed you little by comparison], as I had mercy on you?' ³⁴ And in wrath his master turned him over to the torturers (jailers) until he paid all that he owed. ³⁵ My heavenly Father will also do the same to [every one of] you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."

Colossians 3v12-14 (the Message)

So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it.

Hebrews 12v15 (the Message)

Work at getting along with each other and with God. Otherwise you'll never get so much as a glimpse of God. Make sure no one gets left out of God's generosity. Keep a sharp eye out for weeds of bitter discontent. A thistle or two gone to seed can ruin a whole garden in no time.

THE PARABLE OF THE UNFORGIVING SERVANT

Not being fair

Should we try and be fair to people, act fairly? Who thinks so?

Was Jesus fair? It's a good question? When Paul lists the spiritual gifts to the Church in Galatia. In the list (Galatians 5v22-23) there is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility and self-control. No fairness?

I admit to not being a fair Dad. I actually think it's impossible, when you have three children, to always treat them in ways that each one of them thinks is fair. She had more presents than me? His presents were worth more? etc. So as small children, I banned the phrase "It's not fair". I told them "I will love you, and I will forgive you, and I will be the best possible Dad I can be to each of you, but I will never promise to treat you fairly, so don't say 'It's not fair' because that's not a commitment I am making to you". I can be a great Dad without being fair. I can be loving, kind, patient, gentle, generous, encouraging and forgiving without being fair.

Sometimes I am not the father I should be, sometimes I act childish and lose my temper, sometimes I act selfishly, sometimes I grumble and complain about nothing much. When I am like that, I expect my children to forgive me for those moments and move on, not to hold a grudge, just like I will when they behave like that. On balance I think

there are better Dads than me out there, and I have plenty of failings, but I think I do OK. I hope when they are older, they will look back fondly on me as their Father, even if I had not been fair.

Behind the statement 'It's not fair' is the sentiment 'I am not getting what I deserve'. In other words I am due stuff, I have my rights. If I don't get everything I feel I am deserving off, then I am not being treated justly. So it becomes about justice. I want what I deserve, and if I don't get it, then it's not fair.

Peter and forgiveness

There was the same expectation too in the time of Jesus. If you owe, you pay. Against this background, Jesus has brought his radical message of grace and forgiveness. Peter had been with Jesus nearly three years, and he got it. You must forgive people. He was taught to pray "Forgive us our wrong-doings, **as we** forgive others theirs". It was a given, but what was puzzling people, was exactly how far should you take it.

²¹ Then Peter came to Him and asked, "Lord, how many times will my brother sin against me and I forgive him and let it go? Up to seven times?" ²² Jesus answered him, "I say to you, not up to seven times, but seventy times seven.

Peter has some-one who has sinned against him. Perhaps you are feeling hurt today by some-one that has wronged you. In fact, there seems to have been a persistent offender, and perhaps the hot-headed Peter is running out of patience. When he asks Jesus, should I forgive 7 times, we smile and think he's being a bit simple. But he is actually being radical. One Jewish Rabbi taught that you should forgive three times but not a fourth time. When a Rabbi makes a judgement after much debate with his disciples, then they must live by that rule for the rest of their lives. So Peter is looking for a rule to live by, and is suggesting the perfect number 7 as a possible upper limit, or is that going too far Jesus? He was actually trying to push out the boundaries to new limits.

Think of some-one who may have repeated an offence or injustice to you. It may happen once or twice, but we are not often victims of multiple repeat offences. Perhaps a neighbour's child scratches your new car with his house key. You tell him not to do it again, but forgive him. Then he does it again, and again. At what point, do you go round and demand the neighbours pay for the car to be resprayed? Peter might be expecting an answer from Jesus, that forgiving some-one 7 times was a nice thought, but actually 5 times is enough. That is still more than other Rabbis teach. Jesus however comes back with an answer which would have surprised everyone. Not 7 times, but 70x7 times. (That's a lot of scratches on your new car). In other words, no matter how many times somebody wrongs you, you must forgive them. Whatever they have done to you, you must forgive them. Peter has got it right in that forgiveness is really important, but Jesus is taking forgiveness to a whole new level. It is not just something you do occasionally, it must become a life-style. You must live a life of forgiving Grace.

Jesus wants his disciple to think differently, he wants them to see that he is introducing a whole new economy, a new way of behaving with different rules. The heavenly economy is a radical change. It is not the earthly economy with a few bells and whistles added, such as forgiving a few times. It is a whole new way, a new economy, the economy of Grace. To demonstrate the importance of forgiveness Jesus tells this hard-hitting parable. The parable of the unforgiving servant. As we listen to and interpret this parable, it is not the whole gospel message, so the parable cannot stand alone as a description of our relationship with God, but it does carry a message which is vital to our happiness and progress as a Christian.

A huge debt

V23-25. ²³ "Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. ²⁴ When he began the accounting, one who owed him 10,000 talents was brought to him. ²⁵ "But because he could not repay, his

master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and his children and everything that he possessed, and payment to be made.

10,000 talents was not like 10,000 rupees which is worth about £100. A single talent of gold was a bag of gold coins weighing about 130 pounds (nearly 60kg). All of the gold that was sent to Rome from Judea in a single year only added up to 600 talents. So 10,000 talents was about 150,000 years of earnings for one person! It was an unimaginable amount of money for one person to owe. There was no way if you owed somebody that much, and no-one could have got into that much debt. Jesus is exaggerating to make the point. 10,000 was probably the biggest unit that people used in his days, and a talent of gold was the largest denomination of currency. So 10,000 talents of gold is the most single amount of money you can think of. Jesus uses a similar tactic, when he talks of how difficult it is for a camel to get through the eye of a needle, one being the biggest animal in that region, and the other being the smallest orifice in regular use. When I was at Primary School with my mates we could ask for what dinner portions we wanted. If we wanted a **large** portion of chocolate pudding, we employed a similar practice. We would look the dinner lady in the eyes and say 'hit the moon and back again'. The point Jesus is making is that the servant owed his master so much money, there is nothing he could do to redeem the situation.

The Gentile King or nobleman knew the deal, you owe, you pay. Matthew, who is telling the story, knows only too well about finances, as he had been a tax collector. There was no way the debt was ever going to be paid, and when the time of reckoning came, the King had to recover what little he could. So he said "sell his wife, sell his kids, and sell all his possessions". It was quite normal to sell a child to some-one else in those days, especially if you could not feed them, they would become a bonded servant to some-one that had a business and could use the labour. Everything he had would go. The master was not being overly harsh, that was normal life, that is what everyone would expect. That's just what happens when you owe and you can not pay. This is justice. This is the law of fair rights – if you owe then you pay or face the punishment.

An appeal for mercy

V26 So the slave fell on his knees and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you everything.'

The servant is desperate and he falls on his knees. Be patient with me and I will pay you back all that I owe you, every penny. There was of course no way that the servant could repay the master. He owed the equivalent of the national debt of a small European country. These were empty words. Everybody in that situation would have said the same words. He really went for it and put on an Oscar performance. This was the appeal of every debtor. He is not expecting mercy, but he will appeal anyway. Then comes the first surprise.

The Master shows mercy

V27 And his master's heart was moved with compassion and he released him and forgave him [canceling] the debt.

It was such a heart rendering appeal that the Master was moved with compassion. Literally translated he was moved down in his bowels! This is where the Greeks held that our emotions came from, deep in our bowels. He releases the man and his family, and then forgave him the full amount. This was a totally unexpected and inexplicable counter-cultural reaction from the Master. The debt was huge, and he cancelled it in its entirety. But we must think of the consequences of this. You cannot just forgive a debt, some-one has to pay the money owed, or lose the money from what you have. Some-one has to take the loss. The King pays. He is offering a whole new system of debt management. This is the economy of Grace. You owe, I pay. I am not going to live with a Justice system, I am going to introduce a Grace system.

The Economy of Grace

This is our story too. One day effectively God came to me and said Kevin, you are a selfish thrill-seeker, and you are heavily in debt for the wrong you have done and are doing. You owe your life in payment for your sin, but I'll pay instead. You bank with me, deposit your life under my safe-keeping and I will continue to pay all your sin debt. I said – I'll take that, and I will step out of the economy of fair rights (you get what you deserve) and I will step into the economy of grace (where you thankfully don't get what you deserve!). That's for me. I owe everything to Grace, because he radically forgave me for everything I have done. You also, owe everything to Grace.

The parable could have ended there, and it would still have made a good point. It was a shocking act of scandalous love and grace to cancel the debt. That is our God. It is a point well made. However there are more shocks to come in this parable. I think Jesus loved to shock people, shock them out of their comfort zones, shock them out of their narrow ways of thinking. The parable continues.

A small debt

v28 But that same slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii;

This time the very same servant is owed some money. It is a hundred silver coins. This would have been about 3 months wages for one worker, a relatively small and common debt. Most peasant farmers would have much larger debts like this on rented land, until their crops were harvested

His debtor made the same plea as he had done – he fell on his knees and asked for patience, for grace, for mercy. It was a small debt, he would pay it back, it wouldn't take him long. We would expect the man that had been forgiven so much, to smile, to laugh, and even to hug the man. Look, I have been forgiven so more debt than you can possibly imagine, if you can't pay now, then just forget it. You owe, I pay. In fact you have done me a favour because I can now show mercy (if even just to a small extent) in response to the vast mercy shown to me. Don't mention it ever again. Your debt is gone and forgotten. That is what we would expect to happen, but then comes the next shock in the story.

v28b-30 He seized him and began choking him, saying, 'Pay what you owe!' ²⁹ So his fellow slave fell on his knees and begged him earnestly, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.' ³⁰ But he was unwilling and he went and had him thrown in prison until he paid back the debt.

Sometimes a creditor was known to get so angry about being owed money that he would go looking for his debtor and grab him by the neck, choking him. This is the picture that Jesus paints here. It is an extreme action. Instead of taking on board himself this principle of Grace, that his Master had shown to him, he had instead decided to become ruthlessly efficient in getting any monies that were owed to him. Perhaps he had convinced himself that in this way he would ensure that he would not go into debt again himself. He has been the recipient of extreme Grace, but does not want to live by these rules himself. The old rules of fair justice would suit him fine, in dealing with others. He owes, he pays.

So he had the man thrown into jail until he could pay back the money, which of course he could not do if he was in jail, he could only ever escape jail if some-one else could pay his debt for him. Also by having him thrown into jail, he had taken another of his masters servants out of commission, so he was impacting negatively on his Master who had been so kind and merciful.

The servant has not taken on board into his life any of the Grace that had been shown to him. His actions show the level of wickedness that lived in his heart, both before and after the masters grace had been offered. His principles and his views were completely unaffected by the Grace shown to him.

How did the other servants feel about this. For one, they now had more work to do, but the injustice of it was too much for them to bear.

Exposed

v31 When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and they went and reported to their master [with clarity and in detail] everything that had taken place.

They grassed him up to their boss. As the parable unfolds, the listeners are shocked by the overwhelming grace shown by a King, then shocked by the injustice dished out by the forgiven servant, but there is a worse shock to come.

Reputation

v32 Then his master called him and said to him, 'You wicked and contemptible slave, I forgave all that [great] debt of yours because you begged me. ³³Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave [who owed you little by comparison], as I had mercy on you?' ³⁴And in wrath his master turned him over to the torturers (jailers) until he paid all that he owed.

A King or wealthy landowner wants to be seen as kind and benevolent. Reputation was very important to the culture.

In this parable of the unforgiving servant, there was no way, the servant could pay back ten thousand talents or 6 million silver coins. He would only get about 1000 silver coins for his wife, and the same for each child. By selling the servants whole family, the King would not even get him one of the ten thousand talents back. However by acting in Grace and mercy, his reputation of benevolence would be enhanced.

However, what his servant did to a fellow servant changed everything. His behaviour would be seen as representative of his Masters. Once he heard that his servant was acting angrily and without mercy to a fellow servant, the King knew it would severely harm his own reputation. In terms of his reputation, the servants actions would undo the good he had done. Overall he would have lost a lot of money and gained nothing in reputation. So the parable concludes with him handing over jailers to be tortured, until he could pay back his debt.

Grace demands a change in you

V35 My heavenly Father will also do the same to [every one of] you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."

This is a tough verse, one we might wish was not in the bible, and we must be careful in its interpretation. I said earlier that this parable is not the whole gospel message, and must be understood in the context of a fuller gospel message. If the parable is taken on its own, you might conclude that when we become Christians we receive God full grace and forgiveness, but if we fail to forgive some-one then his Grace and hence our Salvation is taken away again. That is not true. Jesus promises to be with us always even to the end of time (Mt 28v20). When you have truly received Jesus into your hearts, you are saved, and ushered into the economy of Grace. He will not leave you, or change his mind about you when you do wrong. You continually come under the flow of his forgiveness and Grace. However it does not seem possible to me for some-one to truly accept Jesus into one's life, and his behaviour, thoughts, principles and life-style be exactly the same as before. If you are a follower and disciple of

Jesus then your life will change. If not, then your supposed new faith is just words, you have not truly accepted Jesus into your life.

This parable is principally about the importance of forgiveness. If I have to stretch it further I would say that the first servant is being offered to live in the economy of Grace but never actually receives it into his life. It's a bit like going to an evangelistic event, you hear the talk, you let people pray for you, have a free supper, meet some nice people, receive some free books and you have had a good night, but you then leave the event intentionally the same person as you went in, and immediately go out and swear at your parents for some minor oversight.

You had the opportunity but did not make a commitment in your heart. The first servant of course wants to receive good things, free things, don't we all? What was on offer was amazing grace. But his actions show that inside he was evil and viscous on the inside both before and after his successful appeal. He is showing he has not taken on board the Grace of his master into his own life. Despite the offer of moving into this new economy of Grace, he still wanted to live by the 'economy of fair rights'. So that's what he got. You can't have both. By law, he was entitled to treat his own debtor in a bad way (perhaps not the choking bit!) – you owe you pay, and have him thrown into prison. He had chosen to stay living by 'Rights' so was entitled to do that, as mean as it was. But by making that choice, the same measure would have been applied to him, and he would have to be judged by the same standard – you owe you pay. So the master had no choice, but to throw him jail.

Jesus is saying that there is no room for unforgiveness in the economy of Grace. If you insist on being an unforgiving person then you must live in the economy of fair rights, and equally be judged by those standards.

Torture?

Why did Jesus mention torturers? Isn't the removal of forgiveness and a life in prison enough, when you insist on taking on the world's ways. Was the king adding in something extra bad because of his behaviour. No these men, the torturers were the jailers. Though harsh, this was normal practice for jailers in eastern culture, and for some time in Europe too. When a debtor was imprisoned, torture was used to compel him to confess where if he had any hidden treasures concealed. It may not be enough to pay your full debt, keeping you in prison, but could be a tidy sum for one of your family, if you hide it from the one you owe. In both Greece and Rome torture was used on prisoners to compel confession until enough money was retrieved to pay his debt. Otherwise it was perpetual imprisonment.

But in one sense it can be like torture, if you exclude yourself from the economy of Grace, and choose to live without forgiveness. You get to live a life hanging on to the rage, bitterness, jealousy, pain and competition that comes from the 'economy of fair rights', from the selfish life, from the me-centred life. You have to live with all that stuff that is inconsistent with the 'economy of Grace'. Eventually it could tear you apart.

The Proverbs (14v10) says that Your joy is your own, your bitterness is your own. No-one can share it with you'.

The writer to the Hebrews (12v15) says "Keep a sharp eye out for weeds of bitter discontent. A thistle or two gone to seed can ruin a whole garden in no time"

You probably know people who are like that infused with bitterness and always on a rant. What a torturous burden to carry!

The inconsistent life

Peter has asked Jesus about forgiveness, and what point can we become unforgiving? Jesus has answered directly by saying not for less than 70x7 offences, or in other words it is never acceptable to be unforgiving. He then tells

this parable which demonstrates that there is a choice between two ways and you can't do both. You can forgive and be forgiven, or you can judge and be judged. **There is no place for Unforgiveness in the Economy of Grace.**

Paul writes to the Colossians 3v13 Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you.

Grace is the most important word in the New Testament. We do not deserve grace but it is lavished on us. Father, Son and the Holy Spirit love each other and live together in the economy of Grace. Let's say it is up there. It is full of compassion and mercy and truth. We are invited to live in this economy, to receive and give out the grace, mercy, forgiveness and love of God. When I was a student, I had a poster on my wall of a bird flying through a bright blue sky, with the caption 'Let Go and Let God'. It is a good metaphor, we have to let go of our 'economy of Fair rights; you owe, you pay' mentality, and let God's grace and love flow through us. It is the only way we can fly.

However my own tendency in my natural state is to live down there in the economy of Fair Rights. I get what I deserve. I am running around sinning, doing my own thing, living in fear and shame, not forgiving people. Living less than the person that God has created me to be. Then God sends Jesus to die for me and change my economic state. He says Kevin, I forgive you, come live in Grace, come into my economy with the Father and Spirit and live with Grace.

I have accepted Jesus into my life, I am saved and I am assured of eternal life. Thankyou Jesus. The difficulty comes when we want both economies in our life. We fall into this danger of wanting Grace for ourselves, but justice for others. Every time I choose not to operate out of Grace and forgiveness, but instead operate out of rights, shame, fear, jealousy, or competition, then I have stepped out of the economy of Grace and operate in the economy of Fair Rights. We do not lose our salvation by doing this, but we do get ourselves into trouble. Why? Because we have taken back on board the way of the world, and in one sense we have stepped backed into enemy territory, operating on his turf. And when you are messing on his turf, you give him permission to mess with you. Your unforgiveness, gives the enemy a foothold in your life. He can use this to rob you of some of the promises and blessings that God has put in your heart and replace them with lies. Life becomes more difficult for you and you get stuck.

We can get sucked into this dual living, where we want to receive all the blessings of Grace from God for ourselves, but still want justice for others. I think that's often true of me. Is that true of you? You want to be forgiven and let off for all your messed up stuff, but you want others to pay for what they have done, especially for ways in which they have hurt you, lied about you, taken what's yours, ruined your reputation, made life difficult for you. Perhaps it is what they didn't do, didn't love you, weren't a good parent to you, didn't nurture you, stuff you didn't get. Stuff that messed you up. You want them to get what you think they deserve.

I signed up for the 'Economy of Grace' and banked my life with Jesus. It is on deposit with him, and he won't cancel my account, and yet if I leave the confines of Gods bank, and start living in the 'economy of fair rights', judging people, wanting what I deserve, and holding back my forgiveness then my account is open to abuse. The devil can start depositing stuff there which is not nice, such as negative attitudes. He can also withdraw stuff from my account, such as taking away my belief in some of the promises that God had spoken over my life. It all becomes more confusing and less certain than it was, and I struggle more with my daily life.

Jesus is saying that it **is not an option** to live in both economies. You can not choose Grace for yourself, but fair rights and judgement for others. If you want Grace then you get Grace, but if you want 'Fair Rights' then you have stepped back into that old arena, in that old economy, and life will become tougher for you. You **can** choose the

latter as a saved Christian, then but you will find yourself getting more stuck, you will miss out on the higher road he has planned for you, and never get to fly. “ Forgive us our wrong-doings, **as we** forgive others theirs”.

The enemy wants to create a foothold in our life. Paul tell the church at Ephesus [Eph 4v26]. “ Don’t let the sun go down on your anger and give the devil a foothold.” If you let anger, judgement, fear, shame, or condemnation hang out with you, then you are playing on the enemies turf. If you welcome anything like that which is inconsistent with Jesus and let it hang out with you, then you give the enemy a permission slip to mess with your life and that is why you get stuck.

The Consequences of unforgiveness

i) Distortion. The road of judgement and unforgiveness is a slippery road to go down. By compromising our faith by messing with ways outside of the economy of Grace, one way that we get messed up is in our thinking, our view of the world can be changed. We develop a way of thinking in our culture which seems reasonable to us, but is inconsistent with God, i.e. has nothing to do with the Kingdom of God. We start to justify ways that are not of God because it seems so plausible when we are not in the economy of Grace. We might say “ It is perfectly reasonable to have a culture of individualism. Be your own person, do your own thing, go your own way with the gifts you’ve been born with. Its OK to do this just man up and be strong in yourself”. However this approach robs us of community, which is where God can best be reflected in us. You might get convinced enough to create your own culture of hedonism - more wealth and fun for me. You start to think that there is nothing wrong with just enjoying life in your own way, doing whatever you feel like doing as long as it doesn’t hurt anyone. You take charge of your own life, and miss out on the better what God had planned for you. We also end up trying to glorify ourselves not God. Another trick is to creates a culture of Religion, become a modern day Pharisee with lots of rules and a clear pecking order –a form of Godliness without the fun, or the life. These patterns and rules are often self-promoting, making ourselves feel holy and good at the judgemental expenses of others. We get bound by our religious rules, traditions and practices. It stops us from letting go and letting God. It stops us becoming the person he intended. In all these things we are acting outside of Gods economy, and moving into areas where we can get stuck and be ineffective for God. This is where our enemy wants us to be.

ii) Theft

Once you choose the path of unforgiveness and judgement, then the enemy will try and steal good things from you that you received by Grace. Take the good things that you have experienced and destroy it in your mind, accuse you of your past and say that those things of Grace and forgiveness are not for you. He wants to mess about with your faith, and destroy it. You can be convinced that prophecies you received, those promises from God for your life, don’t apply. That somehow you’re just not good enough, and you deserve bad things to happen to you. Lies are sown into your life and your hope and promises slip through your fingers. You still believe, but you are stuck, going nowhere. Life is a dirge.

Forgiveness is hard work

Forgiveness can feel like hard work. We might think we’ve forgiven some-one, but our feelings of anger rise up again towards that person, and we may need to try again. To pray, say sorry to God, ask him to release us from our unforgiveness. Some of what has happened to us has been really serious and really hurtful. I am not belittling any of that. I have been really hurt myself in recent years, treated badly, lied to and lied about, by some folk that I was serving and I thought loved me. It has been hard work to forgive and I have had to really want it and work at it.

His level and mercy and forgiveness towards us and our fellows is like the Grace shown by the king, the biggest debt imaginable has been paid off for us and it is impossible for us to pay it back. In comparison what we need to do is small, but we need to do it, reflecting that portion of Grace shown to us. Keep his forgiveness in mind, when you are trying to forgive others. Keep in your mind, his Grace, his ways, and all that you have received from Jesus. Keep coming back to that forgiveness, and ask that, his forgiveness, grace, joy and love can flow through you to others.

We all know what it is like to need to forgive people. We need to live within the economy of Grace. We will not take up our true identities of sons and daughter of the living Christ, and be who we were designed to be unless we can find forgiveness in our hearts. You will never move in power, until you receive forgiveness and flow in forgiveness. Otherwise you get stuck. You won't dance and be filled with Joy, because you will get stuck.

Hurts

Lord, forgive our debts as we forgive our debtors. Maybe today you have got some debtors. What hurts are you nursing today? Perhaps your Mum or Dad were a poor reflection of your heavenly father. Perhaps you were betrayed by a brother or sister. Perhaps an old church or church friends have caused you pain. I am not minimising any of that, it can be very painful, but you can **not** live in two economies. It will torture you, and others will be hurt from the shrapnel of your life. Jesus comes running to you with his Grace, "I offer you grace, stop living for justice, for fair rights, for revenge. Its why you find it so hard to rejoice, why it is so easy to criticise others and your opinions are so strong, because you are living down here in the 'economy of fair rights', where every-one gets their just desserts. But Jesus is offering you grace and can free you from all that stuff. You can begin to walk into your calling if you can choose the economy of grace. Lord Jesus, I have been hurt so much, but I choose forgiveness, I choose Grace. I don't deserve the grace myself, but I choose to accept it and live in it. I choose to free up my heart.

No-one has harmed you as much as God has forgiven you. You may have been through a mountain of hurt and harm, but it is still true that no-one has harmed you as much as God has forgiven you. The pivotal moment in all of history is when Jesus hangs on a cross, and says Father forgive them.

At that moment, he opened a floodgate which let out a stream of love, grace, mercy and forgiveness. We need to stand in that stream of forgiveness and let it channel through us to others.

Unforgiveness is so binding that it will imprison your heart and destroy your life, but forgiveness is the key to your prison cell. It is time to forgive. Some people you say you have forgiven, but actually you haven't let go, it still plays on your mind. But God's Grace is always there, we can choose to step back into that economy, and ask God to help us be less judgemental, help us to forgive even the hardest of hurts. Do it for Christ's sake, because of what he has done for you. Even though you may not want to do it for yourself, even though you know it frees you, still do it for Christ's sake. If you are in that position of hurt then do it today.

The first person that might need forgiveness is you. It is hard to give forgiveness when you have not received it. You may have thought that Jesus can't really actually forgive all the most terrible things that you have done, so you have not bothered asking him to do so. Accept not just his forgiveness, but his deep assurance that you are forgiven. Then full with that assurance, throw yourself back into his economy and forgive those who have hurt you, and keep forgiving not just 3 times, or 7 times, or 77, or 490 but again and again. That's the economy of Grace where there is no place for unforgiveness. Amen.

Praying to accept forgiveness

[If you feel you need forgiveness yourself then place your hand on your heart, and quietly say this prayer with me.]

Jesus I come to you with all the things that I've done wrong, all of which you already know about it. I come with my own unforgiveness, my pain and my anger, and my bitterness and I ask Jesus that you forgive me, and wash me clean of my sin. I come with my shame and addictions and trust that the blood of Jesus can deal with that too. Father forgive me for what I have done.

[Now in this moments silence, name in your mind the things that you know you need forgiveness, and believe that the Lord will deal with it and forgive it.]

Lord, thankyou for your forgiveness, and the assurance that I am forgiven.

Praying to forgive others

[Having accepted forgiveness yourself. Now think of some-one that you need to forgive, some-one that you need, a person, or a group of people. I will lead you in prayer, which you do not need to pray out loud, but I do pray it with me in your heart. Clench a fist hard as if you are holding on to unforgiveness for that person]

Father, I come asking for the grace to forgive as you forgive.

[Name that person or people in your heart]

Father I forgive them. I forgive them. I cancel the IOU that I have written in my memory. Will you help me not to recall it. I say that you are free to go. It will affect me no more because I choose to live in Grace.

[Open up your fist slowly and let the unforgiveness and hurt go]

And now Father I face you and I ask you to be my Dad, to love me perfectly, to remind me of Grace daily that I may bear fruit in the kingdom of God. And I ask for Grace to forgive myself, for every time that I have refused to be free, every time that I have stepped outside of the economy of Grace and into the economy of Fair rights. Will you forgive me and now will you free me, because I am a child of Grace. I am a child of Grace and I love you Father. Thankyou Lord.

May the LORD bless you and keep you;

May the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you;

May the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Love God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all for evermore Amen

Bullets:

Being Fair – Fruits; Being Dad

What I deserve!

Economy of Fair Rights. U owe U pay

What about forgiveness?

V 21 Peter & Forgiveness

V23-25 – A huge debt

V26 – The appeal

V27 – Mercy – new economy – you owe, I pay.

V28 – A small debt

V28b-30 – Choked

V31 – Grassed Up

V32-34 – Reputation

Not whole gospel – Mt 28v20

Grace demands a change – Evang' Event

No place for unforgiveness in Ec of Gr - Col 3v13

Torturers (Greece/Rome) – rage/bitterness/pain

Prov 14v10: Heb 12v15

My grace economy bank a/c & Rogue dealers

Distortion / lies and theft

Forgiveness is hard work – persist with Gods help

Don't get bitter get better

No-one's hurt U as much as God has forgiven U

Cross: Forgive them. Floodgates. Channel. 70x7 more

Prayers.

Col3v13 Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you

Prov 14v10 Your joy is your own, Your bitterness is your own.

No-one can share it with you'.

Heb 12v15 "Keep a sharp eye out for weeds of bitter discontent.

A thistle or two gone to seed can ruin a whole garden in no time"