

Worship at Home—13 September 2020

The Scripture Readings are taken from:

Genesis 50: 15-21

Matthew 18: 21-35

Call to Worship

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases.
God's mercies never fail us; they are new every morning. Great is his faithfulness.
Let us worship the living God.
Let us pray

Opening Prayer

Holy, loving, powerful, compassionate and wise God
You are eternal, righteous, merciful and just
You created our world and all that is in it through the power of your Word.
Your thoughts and ways are infinitely higher than ours
Yet you invite us to come to you.
You forgive us our failings and you love us despite of them.

Grant us a sense of fellowship with one another in you
Forgive us our indifference at times to the suffering of others
Forgive the pride that leads us to trust ourselves and not you
Forgive our misplaced desire for material things as a source of happiness
When all that we have comes from you -
No gift that we have to give does not come from you.

Grant that we who have been forgiven much may reflect your love and mercy to others.
Help us to be slow to anger and abounding in compassionate love
Where we have been hurt or wounded, enable us to forgive each other
Just as in Christ, you forgive us.

This sabbath day as we approach you in our worship, free us from any barriers or boundaries of our own making.

Help us to surrender all that we have and all that we are to your love so that you may renew us and empower us by your love, and our joy in your presence may be complete.

Hear us now as we share our Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven; hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever.
AMEN

Scripture Readings

Genesis 50: 15-21

Joseph Reassures His Brothers

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?" So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept.



His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said.

But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?"

Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

"Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

"At this the servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' The servant's master took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go.

"But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded.



"His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.'

"But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

"Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

"This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.

Sermon on Forgiveness

CS Lewis, in a telling remark said, “Everyone thinks forgiveness is a lovely idea until they have something to forgive.” I wonder if you have ever had an experience where someone betrayed your trust, or let you down. Perhaps you remember when someone stabbed you in the back to get up the ladder at work, or maybe even lied about you or to you.

There is so much debate going on in politics. Perhaps you have seen an exchange on social media over Brexit or Covid and the US elections where someone was unpleasant—because they didn’t like another perspective. Social media is a source of so much strife and stress. So when someone is unkind . . . it is natural to feel upset or angry—maybe even tempting to write something unkind back.

When someone has offended or hurt us, our feelings towards them can get stronger and more entrenched over time. It is normal to react if someone does something mean or disrespectful . . . this can be an instinct to protect ourselves or others. But grudges can get heavier and weigh us down if we begin to wallow in the unfairness. We may put our feelings on the backburner for a while but they can still simmer away. People sometimes tell me that they can have a tendency to think about a scenario that hurt them over and over again. This is called rumination. Someone once said that grudges are like a pebble in a shoe. They might not be big but they can cause a blister and make us miserable.

In the gospels, Jesus calls his followers to forgive any brothers and sisters who have wronged them. You can name examples of his forgiving ministry I am sure. How many sinners did Jesus free and how many tax collectors like Zacchaeus did he forgive. In the parable of the Prodigal Son, the father forgives his wayward son, just as God forgives us.

In today’s scripture Peter asks Jesus, “How many times do I have to forgive?” According to Jewish Law, a person was obliged to forgive three times. If someone wronged you, you had to forgive them three times but after that you could cut somebody off. This was the law.

So Peter wants to ask Jesus whether seven times would be enough under the ‘new law.’ Jesus had upturned so many of the religious rules of the day. Peter wants to understand what Jesus expects . . . if the new law would be set at seven—a sacred number.

However Jesus replies to Peter, “Not seven, not seven times seven . . . not even seventy times seven.” Jesus teaches that we should learn to forgive again and again, *ad infinitum*. Jesus wants Peter to understand that forgiveness is not a number, not a duty, nor a law. Forgiveness is an attitude of the heart. Forgiveness is an act of love; an act of deep compassion, and at times selfless love.

Christianity is the only religion that really requires such forgiveness. Some faiths talk about an ‘eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.’ Others encourage forgiveness, but the Christian emphasis on forgiveness sets our faith apart. Luke’s Gospel also puts forgiveness like this:

‘Do good to those who hate you, Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who mistreat you.’

What exactly is forgiveness? I heard about a boy who asked God to give him a bike. When his mother told him “God doesn’t work like that,” he decided to take matters into his own hands. He decided instead to steal a bike and ask God for forgiveness.

It is all very well to talk about our need to forgive, but forgiving can be hard. If a family member cheats you out of your inheritance, or a young woman tries to seduce your husband at work. Some things are simply hard . . . it takes time.

Robert Louise Stevenson, whose grandfather was a minister in Colinton grew up with a very strong faith. He was very religious and every evening he insisted on family worship. After he died, his widow wrote a book called, "Prayers." She describes how one evening before evening prayer was over, he left to go outside. She went after him to see if he was ok. She recounts that he was fine, except for feeling a sense of anger. He had learned of a treachery on the part of someone he had every reason to trust. He told her, "I had to leave before the Lord's Prayer. I am not yet fit to say, 'forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.'"

I remember reading Reverend Julie Nicholson's book, "A Song for Jenny: The Story of a Mother's Love and Loss." Her daughter was killed in one of the four terrorist bomb explosions on 7/7 in 2005. As a priest, Julie could not feel forgiveness towards the bombers who plotted to take innocent lives. She resigned her role as vicar of St Aidan's church in Bristol. She admitted, "It's very difficult to stand behind an altar and lead people in words of peace and reconciliation and forgiveness when I feel very far from that myself." I for one, could only commend her honesty. She did not lose her faith, but she could not feel forgiveness and I am quite sure that God understands.

Some abuses are abominable. It is important to note that forgiving is not the same as forgetting. Some atrocities must never be forgotten. Most of us have not suffered someone we love be murdered. History reminds us that sometimes the road to forgiveness is not a once-and-for-all gesture. Sometimes it may need a process. When there is no opportunity to reconcile and no opportunity for justice, it is more difficult.

That is the power of the Joseph story. This is a family story of brothers who became so jealous of their father's favourite that they wanted to kill him and sold him to slavery. Their actions are unforgivable. Their brother, Joseph rises to power in Egypt and saves the lands from famine through many miraculous happenings. Perhaps the most important miracle in the Joseph story is the denouement in today's reading where Joseph has truly forgiven his brothers. He was able to do so because he recognised that God is still in charge. Despite all that had happened, God can still lead these brothers through, helping them to recognise their failings and to forgive themselves and one another. Seeing the bigger picture can help.

Sometimes it might be more tempting, not to bother to forgive. It is perhaps easier to deny our part in any conflict, to only see one side, to be self-righteous, to blame the other party as they deserve. It is hard to let go. We have all had those moments when someone cuts us off in the car and signs something offensive. Perhaps there are people at work or in the family who know just how to get to you—always with the put down or the cutting comment.

Dr Janet Merkel is a psychologist. In an article, 'Spirituality and Wellness,' she says that making ourselves whole and our relationships right requires the endless work of forgiveness. She provides four practical steps to help with the work of forgiving. Here they are—see what you think.

Firstly she recommends, "Take less personal offence." When someone is unkind it is often more of a reflection on them than you. This is particularly true of bullies. If someone makes a cutting remark, she says, "Don't let it crush you or define you."

Secondly, she recommends letting go of the grudges. She says grudges can make us bitter. Research shows that harbouring grudges throughout the day causes negative energy that increases blood pressure, the likelihood of depression and creates stress in the body. She suggests breathing out the anger saying aloud as we exhale, "I forgive you," and breathing in the desire to forgive feel understanding for the situation and mindset of the other person.

Thirdly she encourages us not to desire to get even. This is exactly what Joseph's brothers wanted to do because they were jealous. They wanted to get him, to punish him. Dr Merkel describes a hard working woman who always excelled in her company. When her employer gave her a poor appraisal she was so offended that she began to work harder to prove him wrong. And yet in a desire to get back at him, she also started bad-mouthing her boss to everyone. Weeks later, he called her into his office. He told her the last appraisal was a test. The company was going through a hard time and she had helped pull everyone through. He was going to promote her. She was upset. Mahatma Ghandi once said, "If we all take an eye for an eye we will all go blind." Dr Merkel says we should lose the desire to get even.

Lastly, Dr Merkel advises that we should set up new patterns and boundaries to free ourselves from situations which are upsetting. If someone is constantly giving you a hard time, try to distance from them. If that isn't possible, talk to them or ask someone—a third party to be involved.

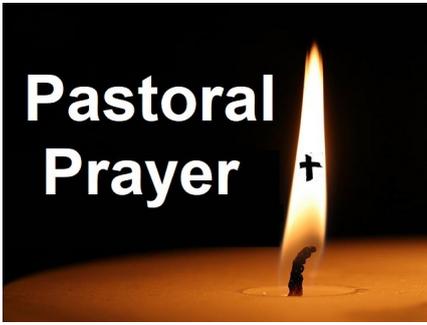
When Peter asked Jesus how often we should forgive, he said seventy . . . seventy and seventy more times. Jesus goes on to illustrate with the parable of the boss who goes to his employee and asks for what he owes. The chap begs for more time . . . just give me a chance and I will pay you. And so the boss writes off the debt—it is a big debt, a million pound debt. But soon enough the chap goes out and finds someone who owes him some money. This fellow also begs him, "Please give me more time I will pay you." But the first chap tells him NO. Give me what you owe me now. He shows no mercy. The merciful boss who forgave the debt was furious when he heard this and locked him up.

I think all Dr Merkel's advice is illustrated in the teachings of Jesus. I encourage you to read all of Matthew 18 again. Jesus knew that when we hold onto hurts and grudges, to the unfair things or unkind actions of others, well we are never free. We are the ones in bondage to these negative emotions and attitudes. When we desire to get back at someone or won't let go the anger . . . we are hurting our own lives both spiritually and mentally. We are literally locked up.

The Good News of the Gospel is that God is always there to help us. Forgiveness is a ministry which Christ entrusts to us because we are first reconciled to him and he promises that God is there to help each and every one of us overcome the hardest things to overcome; genuine hurt, understandable anger, righteous indignation at injustice, and even the slow burn of bitterness. When we release our feelings to God in prayer, He can make us free.

Jesus died on the cross with the burdens of the whole world's sin on his shoulders so that we can be forgiven and made holy and blameless when we come to God. God wanted to forgive us and loves us enough to do so. Jesus' death on the cross was an act of selfless compassion on our behalf. Forgiveness is not an obligation. It is a matter of the heart and sometimes we can only do it when we lay all our troubles at the foot of that cross in prayer. Then we can, with open hearts, pray the words, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors."





Prayer for Others

(adapted from Susan Sayers)

In the knowledge of all that God has done for us—
Let us bring to him our concerns for the Church and the world.

Thank you God for the love which forgives again and again,
And is prepared to trust us to care for one another and your people
To care for your creation and all of life
Even though we have let you down many times,
Teach us to minister to one another with compassion, sensitivity and creativity
So that all are affirmed and encouraged.
Thank you for the gifts of medical science to heal us
Thank you for farmers who produce food
Thank you for all that humankind is able to do
Help us to use our gifts wisely and well for the good of all.

We thank you that we have been forgiven and for the opportunities we learn each day to learn the joy of forgiving others and keeping us learning humility.

We pray today for all who are ill—in body, mind or spirit
We pray for those whose lives have been drastically changed by Covid 19
We pray you sustain and help those in pain or distress of any kind.

We thank you for disturbing our complacency and for challenging us.
We pray for all people who are at the receiving end of hate, deceit, suspicion or abuse
We pray that we may all learn from movements like Black Lives Matter
That we may see everyone through your loving eyes.

We lift to you the needs of our war weary world—the plight of refugees, those recovering from storms.
We pray that fires will be contained and life protected amidst this epidemic.
Give those in power wisdom and grace. We pray that our leaders may care about our earth, its peoples,
its climate and the need for nations to work together and not against one another.

Thank you for the gift of faith. Thank you that Jesus challenged all that is wrong in our world when he laid his life down for us. Bless each of us and help us to grow closer to your love, whatever our circumstances or concerns, we offer them to you now and always.

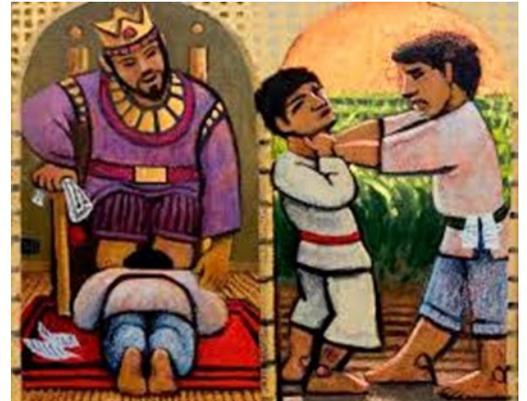
Amen

How many times?

These resources are designed to help you explore the Bible as a family together at home while we can't go to church. Be as creative as you want to be and enjoy spending time with each other and with God.

Prepare yourself...

All-encompassing God, just as we are,
we come.
Help us to understand how good it
feels to forgive
and to be forgiven.
Help us to remember that you forgive
us again,
and again.
Thank you for your unexplainable,
unimaginable, unbelievable, incom-
prehensible love,
that reaches us wherever we are and
however we come.
Amen.



Question...

Has anyone ever forgiven you for something? How did it feel?
Have you ever forgiven someone? Why did you forgive them? How did it feel?



Read the Bible...

Today's verses are found in Matthew 18:21-35. You can read them in a Bible or find them here: <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2018%3A21-35&version=GNT>

Or you could watch this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ED3fzKS-bhA>

Play together...

Play a game of pass the parcel. What happens if someone doesn't pass the parcel on? Remember that God's forgiveness is a gift, we should want to share it and pass it onto others.

Praise together...



Forgiveness (Matthew West): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h1Lu5udXEZI>

You forgive me (Lifetree kids): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LO-2fm7IKCU>

Talk together...

Do you find forgiving easy? What if someone hurt you more than once? How many times could you forgive someone?

What do you think Peter expected Jesus' answer to be when he asked how many times he should forgive?

Most Jewish leaders in Jesus' time would have said that to forgive 3 times is enough, so Peter is already seeming generous when he suggests 7 times. But Jesus reply is to say that we should stop counting. Forgiveness is not about keeping count, but a way of life that we should strive for.

How do you think Peter might have felt listening to Jesus' story and answer?

Who do you think each character in the parable (the king, the servant and his fellow servant) represents?

What does that teach us about forgiveness?

God's forgiveness to us is like a gift, and because we are forgiven by God we should also forgive others – it is a gift we can pass on.

How are people changed as a result of forgiveness?

Pray together...

You'll need: laminated heart shapes (if you don't have a laminator you could draw a heart shape on a white-board, or using chalk on a board or on the ground.)

Write or draw things that need forgiveness on their heart using washable felt tip pens.

Then using a bowl of water wash your heart until all the writing/drawings have gone.

This is like God's forgiveness, once we ask for God's forgiveness, he wipes us clean. The good news is that there is no limit to the number of times this can be done. We might make mistakes time and time again but God's forgiveness never fades. What do you want to say to God?

Make together...

If you have Hamma beads or similar then use those to make a heart shape. How many beads did it take to complete your heart? Do you think you could forgive someone that many times? Would you be able to keep count?!

If you don't have beads, then use something else small to make a heart shape eg. Lego bricks, coins, pasta shapes, mini pom-poms, buttons, Smarties, sticky dots, painty fingerprints! Use what you have!

Dear Friends of Currie Kirk. Please get in touch with the Kirk Office (451 5141) if you need anything.

The office is now open on Tuesday mornings from 9.30—12.30 (Tuesdays only) which will allow you to bring along your knitting, milk bottle tops or stamps. Also any items you may have for Fresh Start.

The electronic doors will be open and two boxes will be placed on a table in front of the swing doors to accommodate any deliveries.

Hand Gels will be available. You must wear masks when entering and exiting the Hall. Entry beyond the swing doors is not allowed.

We have friends willing to listen, shop, walk a dog, fix a garden.

Website: <https://www.curriekirk.org/> or <https://www.facebook.com/CurrieKirk/>

[You can also find the sermon on YouTube—search Currie Kirk.](#)

