

## Chapter Six

# Releasing Those Who Have Hurt Us

### How Many Times Must I Forgive Someone?

In Matthew 18 Jesus teaches Peter and the other disciples about genuine forgiveness in response to Peter's question, How many times do I need to forgive? Seven times? (see v. 21). Jesus tells him, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times" (v. 22). I can almost see Peter's shoulders slump at this point. I suspect that Peter asked Jesus this because he had forgiven someone many times, yet the person was not changing his behavior, and Peter was tired and hoping there was a forgiveness quota.

Jesus goes on to tell this story:

For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a certain king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. And when he had begun to settle them, there was brought to him one who owed him ten thousand talents [about millions in current United States dollars]. But since he did not have the means to repay [remember, he was a servant on slave wages], his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. The slave therefore falling down, prostrated himself before him, saying, "Have patience with me, and I will repay you everything" [which was a lie, since he had no money]. And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii [about a day's wage]; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, "Pay back what you owe." So his fellow slave fell down and began to entreat him, saying, "Have patience with me and I will repay you." He was unwilling however, but went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed (Matt. 18:23-30).

The traditional interpretation of this passage is that Jesus is trying to teach His disciples about the great love God has for us and the forgiveness He offers all who come to Him to receive it. I believe this passage also teaches us some important truths about forgiveness and how we can find release from those who have hurt us.

## **Take an Account**

Principle One: *Forgiveness requires we take an account. "And when he had begun to settle them [the accounts of the servants], there was brought to him one who owed him ten thousand talents" (Matt. 18:24).*

The king called his servants to give an account of what was owed because we cannot forgive a debt we do not know exists or if we do not know what the amount is on the note (here again is an example of dealing with the specific reasons for offense). Theophostic Prayer Ministry helps you to identify the specific reason for your pain by helping you follow the painful emotional trail back to the source of your emotional pain. Until you know what was done to you and the extent of the damage, you cannot completely forgive the offender.

People dissociate and bury their emotional pain in order to avoid feeling it all the time, but the pain has to be exposed before the true debt can be realized. All of us suppress bad feelings at times. This was one of my primary defenses against emotional pain as a child and for most of my adult life. If I felt bad about something I would just push the bad feelings down. By pushing the feelings down I was also suppressing the memory picture of the event itself. If you do this long enough, you will forget that the event even happened. The mind simply relocates the memory outside of your conscious reality.

Yet if we want true freedom from our offender, we must access the memory of the offenses, so we can take an account of them.

## **A Debt Only Jesus Can Repay**

Principle Two: *If we look to the offender for healing, restitution or compensation we will only be more wounded. The one who has caused the pain does not have the means to repay the debt or remove the pain from our lives. "He did not have the means to repay" (Matt. 18:25).*

The servant had a wife and children and was living on slave wages or less. He did not have the means to repay the millions he owed the king. The king needed to

know what the servant owed, but he also realized that the servant couldn't repay this enormous debt—in several lifetimes.

Often wounded people will look to their abuser for repayment. For example, when Tim came to me for ministry, he was a depressed and frustrated businessman. He described himself as a workaholic and very driven. I asked him to tell me about his relationship with his father, as there is often a correlation between emotionally driven men and their "Daddy wounds."

Many times a man's driven, workaholic behavior is the vain attempt of a suppressed little boy still looking to his father for approval and acceptance. The father's emotional absence in the boy's life created an insatiable wound that has never been filled. When the man was a little boy, he had a God-created need to receive love, acceptance and approval from his father. This need went unmet, and the result was a wound that neither the wounder nor anyone else could ever fill. The same is true for those who marry looking for someone to meet their childhood needs that have become wounds. No one can address these wounds and take away the pain. The only remedy is God's healing.

Tim went on to describe a father who was distant and often gone. To that day Tim's father still would not respond with words of affirmation when Tim would call and report his business successes. At one moment in our conversation Tim said, "No matter what I do, he never notices!" and began to weep. Tim was looking to one who did not have the means to repay for collection. This will never work.

Survivors of horrendous abuse as reported by people who claim to have ritual abuse memories (SRA), often feel a huge emotional void and live in a constant cycle of defeat because the void can never be filled.<sup>1</sup> Compassionate Christian ministers who try to fill these insatiable "love voids" may burn out trying to fill them. The truth is, only Jesus can heal this wound. The debt is too great, and only He can pay it back and restore the losses of these lives. God promises: "And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you. And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: and my people shall never be ashamed" (Joel 2:25-26, KJV).

When we seek to find resolution or restitution from those who were responsible for our original wounding or look to others later in life to fill these vacuums we will always be disappointed. Only truth from the Holy Spirit, spoken softly and gently, can calm the raging waves of our painful past.

## **Anger Must Be Released**

Principle Three: *Anger is a normal reaction to injustice but must be released before freedom will come.* “But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made” (Matt. 18:25).

When the king came to realize the severity of the situation, it appears that he reacted with anger. It looks like he may have even overreacted a bit. Not only did he command the servant to be sold into slavery, he sent the wife and innocent children away with him. It appears that the king was good and stirred up, and rightfully so. The king’s anger was actually a normal and healthy response to this servant’s apparent irresponsible behavior. How this servant could have ever gotten so deeply in debt is difficult to comprehend. The king knew the money was gone and he was never going to get it back. All there was to do was become angry and rightly punish the servant.

The Christian community has little tolerance for anger as an emotion. We’re told that anger is sin and that true spiritual people don’t get angry. Many parents also teach their children not to express their anger. Yet the Bible tells us to “be angry, and yet do not sin” (Eph. 4:26). Sinless anger sounds like an oxymoron. Anger becomes a sin when it is harbored and festers, or if it is acted out unrighteously. Paul describes how sinful anger originates in the last part of this verse when he says, “Don’t let the sun go down on your anger or you will give the devil an opportunity.”

Satan wants us to dwell on our anger day after day and do nothing about it. He wants us to turn the anger inward and bury it deeply. The reason for this is so that later, when something else happens that is remotely similar to the original offense, the demonic forces will take the opportunity to stir up this old anger so that we will react inappropriately and express more anger than the situation calls for. The problem with expressing old anger in a new situation is it never depletes the original anger. Until the anger is identified and then released by surrendering it to the Lord Jesus in the context of the original event (memory), we are destined to perpetually dump the old anger on whoever happens to trigger the original memory. It is not that we are just angry people. We are specifically angry in specific places for legitimate reasons. However, new events trigger this legitimate anger and it is illegitimately released in the new context. It is here that Satan has been given opportunity (see Eph. 4:26).

## **Forgiveness Is Not Dependent on the Offender**

Principle Four: *The integrity and sincerity of the indebted wounder is not critical for true forgiveness to be administered.* “The slave therefore falling down, prostrated himself before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will repay you everything’” (Matt. 18:26).

At first glance it seems the servant has come to his senses and is truly sorry for what he has done. However, something the servant says reveals his true heart even in that moment. When he promised, “I will repay you everything,” he lied and revealed a heart of deceit. He knew that he could never repay his debt, and he had no intention of ever doing so. The fact that he had run up such an enormous debt tells us that he was a thief through irresponsible behavior.

Many times we want to offer forgiveness that’s contingent on the attitude and integrity of the one we are forgiving. Yet genuine forgiveness has nothing to do with the condition of the one being forgiven. Forgiveness is not dependent on the person wanting or asking for it. Forgiveness is *aphiemy*, a cutting off, a release or sending away of the offense or debt. The king can cut off the debt, whether the servant wants it or has a change of heart or not.

Forgiveness is focused on the debt, not the debtor. When John the apostle wrote, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to *forgive us our sins* and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9, emphasis added), the focus of forgiveness is on the sin, not the sinner. The sin receives the action of the verb *forgive*. God releases or cuts off the sin, not the sinner. Actually, to pray correctly, we ought to say, “God forgive my sin,” not “forgive me.” I do not want God to cut me off, but I do want Him to release me of my sin and debt.

## **Forgiveness Requires Compassion**

Principle Five: *Genuine forgiveness requires that we find compassion.* “And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt” (Matt. 18:27).

If we try to forgive while we are still feeling the pain of the offense, forgiveness will be impossible. When we are able to follow our pain to its true source and find God’s truth, the pain of the offense leaves. When the pain is gone, it will be replaced with peace and a sense of compassion. The peace and compassion we feel enable us to truly release another’s debt.

The king felt compassion, and this allowed him freely to release the servant of the debt. His compassion for the servant exposed the true heart of the king and his true

belief system. Compassion is the benevolent action we take toward another as a result of our own healing, and the resulting emotional identification we are able to make with the one who has offended us. When we come into truth and receive God's grace and forgiveness, we can more clearly see the person who has hurt us from God's perspective. We are able to identify with the offender as a fellow sinner who is in need of truth, just as we are. I can forgive you when I see in you that which is also present in at least some measure in myself. I may not have ever sexually abused anyone, but I have offended others with my words and actions in other ways.

Apparently the Church of Rome had a noncompassionate, judging attitude toward others, which caused Paul to write "you are without excuse, every man of you who passes judgment, for in that you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things" (Rom. 2:1). These Roman Christians had not yet identified themselves in the lives of others. When we come into the truth God has for us and receive His perfect peace, we can experience the release of the need for revenge and the cutting off of the debt (forgiveness). When the king found compassion, he released the slave and forgave the debt.

Sharon and I had been married about 10 years when the Lord blessed us with our first child. Sarah was a delightful child who had an effervescent personality that could win over anyone's heart. However, this blessing came to a tragic end when little Sarah developed an undetected brain hemorrhage. She survived three brain surgeries, but eventually lost her fight for life and the Lord took her home. Sharon and I entered into the darkest time of our lives as we grieved the loss of our little girl.

Before Sarah died, I had already begun to counsel people who came to me with different issues and losses. Now and then someone would come who had suffered the loss of a loved one. I would say, "I know how you feel," and give other pat answers. The truth is, I did not know how they felt, because I had not experienced anything like what they were experiencing. I could offer sympathy but not compassion. Sympathy says, "I feel sorry for you." Compassion says, "I know the pain you carry, for I, too, have carried a similar burden."

Compassion can bear up the one in pain in a way that nothing else can. This is only possible because we can feel the pain. Many people tried to console me through my grief, and I appreciated it. However, when someone came and said, "I know what you feel; I, too, have experienced the death of a child," something inside of me reached out and grabbed hold of that person's words of encouragement. This person knew the pain of what I was feeling and could offer me true compassion.

The Scripture says that the king “felt compassion” (Matt. 18:27). I do not know what the king saw in the servant, because we know the servant wasn’t sincere, but something struck the chords of compassion in the king’s heart. The king “released him and forgave him his debt” (v. 27).

## **Forgiveness Offers Emotional Release**

*Principle Six: Forgiveness emotionally releases the one offering the forgiveness, but may have no impact on the one whose debt is cleared.* The king “released him and forgave him the debt. But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii [a day’s wage]; and he seized him” (Matt. 18:27-28).

Notice the two contrasting words in this verse: released and seized. Here you see the true benefactor of forgiveness. When the king *released* the servant, he became free of the anger and the stresses of maintaining the note. The servant, on the other hand, was still in bondage to his evil heart, and *seized* his fellow worker.

Jesus wanted Peter to understand that forgiveness frees the forgiver. The fellow who caused trouble for Peter needed to be forgiven so that Peter could be free. Peter’s concern was how long he would have to carry his resentment, frustration and pain before he could cut this guy off and bury him, as the king had planned to do to the servant. Jesus suggested here that if Peter looked closely enough at this man, he might just find something with which he could identify. He might discover, like the lady I mentioned earlier, that his offender, like her abuser, was a lonely, hurting soul who was also deceived and wounded by lies that needed God’s grace and mercy.

When we forgive someone, it doesn’t mean that person will change his or her offensive behavior. Only God can change people; and He will do so only if they want to change. Of course, our forgiveness could have a positive impact on the offender and might motivate that person to seek change and renewal, but we have no guarantee this will happen.

Forgiveness has the power to change only the one forgiving, not the one being forgiven. The good news is that we can be emotionally free from other people and their behavior, whether they ever change or not. Other people’s behavior does not have the power to control us emotionally. Of course, people do exert control over others in marriages and other relationships, but this is not true control. The one being controlled believes the lie that the other person has control over him or her. If we believe that we

are powerless and weak (even though we are not), we will be rendered powerless by others' words and actions.

Battered wives are dominated by their husband's emotional control, and that's why they feel trapped. Of course, in some cases the husband physically holds the wife against her will, but most of the time the woman cannot be free because she does not believe she can be. The angry husband triggers her childhood lie-based thinking, causing her to feel the same powerlessness that she may have felt as a child in a similar abusive situation. As a child, she was helpless and powerless to do anything to change her world, but today she is an adult. The problem is that her childhood experiential feelings are more powerful than the logical truth of the present.

If Peter forgave his offender 7 times 70 (490 times), he would still be in the same place as he started if he did not find freedom from the bondage he had with his offender. The number of times we forgive will have little or no impact on whether the person who has offended us will act differently in the future. When we forgive, we must do so without any expectation that the person being forgiven will change. We must let go of any expectation that the one who wounded us will or can repay the debt. Christ can release us from the pain of the wounder's indebtedness, as we are willing to let go and look to Him who can replace pain with perfect peace.

## **Forgiveness Is Not Reconciliation**

Principle Seven: *Forgiveness should not be confused with reconciliation.* There is no indication that the king and the servant ever became friends, ate lunch together or sat with each other in church. As a matter of fact, the Scripture says their relationship never got any better than it was the day the servant was called in to give an account. Yet the king truly released the servant and forgave him his debt.

Remember, forgiveness is focused on the debt, not the debtor. My banker could call me and inform me that he has made the decision to cancel all my debts. It really does not matter if I am happy, grateful, desirous or even willing to receive. If he chooses to release me of the debt, I have no choice but to be released. I can scream, cuss or protest loudly. I can tell him I will not accept it. I can even continue to send in my monthly payments, but the bottom line is, I owe the bank nothing if the banker decides to tear up my note.

The power to forgive lies totally in the hands of the one who holds the note. The one in debt has nothing to say about whether forgiveness occurs. Reconciliation,

however, is a completely different matter, and the two shouldn't be confused. Forgiveness is letting go of the debts others owe you. Reconciliation is about relationship. I cannot have a relationship with someone who has hurt me, yet has never come clean with what he or she has done. Relationship requires transparency and integrity from both parties. I can forgive you (release you of your debt) whether you want me to or not, but I cannot be reconciled to you until you accept responsibility for your sin. Reconciliation requires the debtor to take full responsibility for his or her actions, confess the error of his or her way and in penitent brokenness seek reconciliation from the one he or she has offended. At this time the one offended is in the position to receive God's grace to enter into relationship if he or she chooses.

However, if the debtor does not admit the wrong and accept full responsibility for his or her offense, reconciliation is not possible. Paul says, "If possible, *so far as it depends on you*, be at peace with all men" (Rom. 12:18, emphasis added). Reconciliation is based upon relationship. You cannot have relationship in the context where an offender refuses to do the right thing.

I used to believe recovery from abuse necessitated confronting one's abuser. I believed that as victims of abuse became more emotionally stable and strong, they would need to confront and hold their abusers accountable. Somehow I believed that doing this would empower them. I now see that this is not true or necessary. As people come into perfect peace, they are able to view their abusers through the eyes of Christ, with genuine compassion and forgiveness. It is here they find true freedom.

Sometimes the victim stills feels a need to confront, but it is done from a different posture than before. I used to encourage victims to connect with their righteous anger on the inside and use this as strength to face those who had hurt them. Today I neither encourage nor discourage confrontation. If the person feels a need to confront, I want to discern what is driving the need to do so. If it is anger, revenge or any other negative emotion, I encourage the person to continue in healing until he or she can confront with perfect peace. When we confront from a place of peace rather than anger, the impact on the one accused of the abuse is incredible. There is much more power in confronting with peace than in doing so with anger.

The members of my sexual abuse survivors' group were some of the first recipients of Theophostic Prayer Ministry. Wanda was a young lady who had worked very hard for several years with me, and she was finally experiencing freedom as we used the Theophostic Prayer Ministry approach to healing. Wanda had been abused by her grandfather many times as a little girl. Before she underwent Theophostic Prayer Ministry, the very thought of confronting him caused her to feel small and powerless.

We practiced the confrontation many times in group sessions through role-playing and talking to empty chairs, but Wanda made very little progress in this area.

As we began to use Theophostic Prayer Ministry, she became less and less fearful, and the feelings of powerlessness vanished as her lies were replaced with truth. She said that it was as if she was growing up on the inside with each healing moment. She reported feeling more and more like an adult, rather than feeling like a little child all the time. When she thought of the abusive memories, she felt strong and confident and had perfect peace.

Wanda called me at home one night a few days after finding release from her fears. She was very emotional when she first started speaking, and I thought she was having a crisis and needed help. It suddenly occurred to me, however, that she was excited, not upset. She told me, "Well, I did it!"

I had no idea what it was she had done, so I asked, "Did what?"

She went on to tell me that she had confronted her grandfather. Just by chance she had come face-to-face with him in the city park earlier that same day. When she saw him, she said she had expected to feel childlike, fearful and overwhelmed. Instead, she felt no fear or panic, only calmness and confidence. She walked over to him and proceeded to confront him with what he had done to her. She did not feel angry, small or fearful, and wasn't acting out of revenge. She was simply letting him know that the secret was out and that he was going to have to face it and its consequences.

After she finished telling him all she wanted to say, he denied it, but his response didn't bother her. She simply restated the facts with the same adultlike confidence. When he saw that she was not wavering, he began to panic and expressed fear of being put in jail and begged her not to tell anyone else. She told him that at this point she had forgiven him, and would leave the consequences of his crime to God and move on with her life. She also let him know that her forgiveness did not release him of being responsible for his actions in relation to God or those whom he had hurt.

Later on she did report his crimes to some members of the family she suspected he had also hurt. Several of her cousins came forward with similar stories of their grandfather's abuse.

The change in Wanda's feelings and behavior clearly indicates her genuine healing and newfound freedom.

Again, I am not suggesting that victims confront their abusers. This is between the person and God. Yet when genuine healing occurs, a change of perspective also occurs. Victims see their abusers through the eyes of Christ, and they can do the impossible by forgiving their abusers with genuine heartfelt compassion. Jesus truly

loves the vilest of sinners and desires for their complete redemption. When victims receive His eyes, they are released to love with His love.

### **What Will You Do with Your Pain?**

You may have people in your life with whom you are angry, bitter or resentful – and you probably have a right to feel this way. If they hurt you unjustly then they were wrong. Yet what are you going to do with this pain? You may believe that the anger protects you from further abuse or harm. This is not true. You may believe that if you forgive your abuser then he or she will be getting away with the crime. This also is not true. The anger, hate and desire for revenge onto which you hold are stealing the good things that God has for you. He will go with you to the painful places in your mind and remove the deep hurt. He is willing to relieve you of all the anger and resentment, if you will allow Him to do so.

If you are in emotional bondage to someone who has hurt you, I encourage you to seek ministry from someone who understands the principles in this book and to go to Jesus with your pain. “Cast all your anxieties on him, for he [really] cares about you” (1 Pet. 5:7, *RSV*).