

O God, because without you we are not able to please you, mercifully grant that your Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

## LOOK

How would you define forgiveness?

Describe a time when you have forgiven; and a time when you have been forgiven.

## BOOK

### Matthew 18:21-35

<sup>21</sup>Then Peter came and said to him, “Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” <sup>22</sup>Jesus said to him, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times. <sup>23</sup>“For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. <sup>24</sup>When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; <sup>25</sup>and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. <sup>26</sup>So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ <sup>27</sup>And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. <sup>28</sup>But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, ‘Pay what you owe.’ <sup>29</sup>Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ <sup>30</sup>But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. <sup>31</sup>When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were

greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. <sup>32</sup>Then his lord summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. <sup>33</sup>Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?’ <sup>34</sup>And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. <sup>35</sup>So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

- 1) 10,000 talents, in Jesus’ time, was more than a lifetime of earnings, more than anyone could ever pay. One hundred denarii was probably one day’s pay. Why didn’t the first slave, who had been forgiven of such a great debt, forgive the other who owed relatively little?
- 2) Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive...we pray in the Lord’s Prayer each week. Is this conditional forgiveness? How does this inform your image of God?
- 3) What does Jesus mean when he says, ‘forgive from your heart’?
- 4)

## TOOK

- 1) To forgive is not to forget, nor to condone, nor to submit to injury or oppression. To forgive is to make a conscious choice to unbind oneself to evil, to release the power another person or system has over us, and to refuse to let our future be defined by past mistakes or events. Why do we find true forgiveness so difficult?

2) What is the relationship between healthy self-esteem and the choice to forgive? How is forgiveness liberating?

3) Is forgiveness an act, or a process? What keeps us from forgiving?

3) How can we begin to practice forgiveness when a wound is deep, painful, or old?

4) Consider forgiveness less a one-time act and more of a way of life. How would a life grounded in forgiveness look? Feel?

5) Name one small change you can make this week to practice forgiveness.

The Hardest Blessing

By Jan Richardson

*If we cannot  
lay aside the wound  
then let us say  
it will not always  
bind us.*

*Let us say  
the damage  
will not eternally  
determine our path.*

*Let us say  
the line of our life  
will not forever follow  
the tearing, the rending  
we have borne.*

*Let us say  
that forgiveness  
can take some practice,  
can take some patience,  
can take a long  
and struggling time.*

*Let us say  
that to offer  
the hardest blessing  
we will need  
the deepest grace,  
that to forgive  
the sharpest pain  
we will need  
the fiercest love,  
that to release*

*the ancient ache  
we will need  
new strength  
for every day.*

*Let us say  
the wound  
will not be  
our final home;  
that through it  
runs a road,  
a way we would not  
have chosen  
but on which  
we will finally see  
forgiveness,  
so long practiced,  
coming toward us*

*shining with the joy*

*so well deserved.*