

The Joy of MERCY

Forgiving and Forgiven



F R . J O E K E M P F

Day 1

Joyful Second Chance

Who forgives all your iniquity,
who heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the Pit,
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy...

Psalm 103:3-4

There is a story told that when Thomas Edison was working on improving his first light bulb, he handed the finished bulb to a young helper, who nervously and slowly carried it upstairs, but near the top dropped and shattered it. After a moment of horrified silence, the whole team set back to work. It took them 24 more hours of hard work to make another bulb.

When it was finished and they needed someone to take it upstairs again, Edison looked around, found the same boy and handed the new bulb to him to do the job. Edison knew that something more important than the bulb was at stake.

Can you believe that that is how God is with us? That again and again God gives you the chance to begin again? Can you trust that God is excited to, so to speak, give the light bulb back to you? The truth is, you do not have enough power to make God not love you. You don't. Can you believe that, right now, God is again giving you the grace of a new beginning?

Two Minutes Toward Meaningful Living

Merciful God, you have forgiven me countless times. Again and again you have given me the grace of a new beginning. In the presence of such love, bless me with a humble, grateful heart.

Day 2

To Love as Jesus Loves

God is love.

1 John 4:8

Offering forgiveness is one of the most important—and difficult things—we could ever do. We have all been wronged. Each of us, in small ways or big ways, has been treated unfairly, taken advantage of or harmed by some injustice. What we do with that will—perhaps more than anything else—determine the kind of person we become, the kind of lives we will have.

Many Scripture scholars call forgiveness the heart of the gospel, the clearest summary of the message of Jesus. We see Jesus forgive again and again...and we hear his clarion call that we do the same. Why is forgiveness so important to Jesus? It's simple: Jesus loves us so much, he wants us to be free. He knows that un-forgiveness is a false light, a black hole that sucks the very life from our souls. If we want a joy-filled life, Jesus knows that we have to forgive. He invites us to forgive that we might find the joy and beauty that comes in no other way.

Mercy: You Are More Than Your Sin

Merciful God, it is so hard to forgive, yet you want me to be free. Help me, God of all goodness; help me.

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Day 3

Surrender to God's Mercy

Be pleased, O God, to deliver me.

O LORD, make haste to help me!

Psalm 70:1

Once, a coworker and I sat down with a volunteer to tell him that because of his inability to keep confidential, we would need to find a different role for him in the parish. We worked hard to be respectful and kind in this conversation. The man's response, however, was to try to make my life miserable. For about a year, he put a lot of effort into that, until suddenly he decided he was done, and now we would be friends... Right.

My anger may have been natural, but I didn't want it to eat me up. So I typed up a list of all the ways this man had hurt me, and it helped to have it all recorded somewhere. But I knew I was called to forgive, and that I would need God's help. Onto the list, I wrote a letter to God, asked God's help and lit that note on fire. As it burned, I let go of my anger as best I could into the hands of the one who was all forgiveness. That helped so much...for exactly seven minutes. Because then I remembered something else, and again felt the flash of anger. I turned to God and said, "See, God, I can't do this by myself. You are going to have to help me. I again turn this to you." That helped for exactly eleven minutes, until I again found myself angry. So I surrendered it again... and again...and again...until now it no longer had any power over me at all. God set me free.

Mercy: Offering Mercy and Being Set Free

Merciful God, it is so hard to let go. Yet your Son has shown me that forgiveness is the path to joy. Help me be more and more like your Son, Jesus, who forgave others even when they were at their worst.

Day 4

As We Forgive Those...

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

Matthew 6:11-12

Once, I did something that must have annoyed my pastor at the time. It wasn't on purpose, and I didn't think it was a big deal, but he was upset so I apologized. His response? "I will forgive you, but I will never forget it." In other words he never forgave me.

Some think God is like that, that God "forgives" us but will never forget. Jesus tells us that that is not at all what God is like.

Consider this story about a monk who had a vision. He told the abbot that Jesus was appearing to him face-to-face. The abbot knew he was a sincere young man but also believed that such appearances were very rare. "I tell you what" the abbot said, "the next time Jesus appears, ask him what I confessed in the Sacrament of Reconciliation that weekend. If it was truly Jesus, he would know, correct?" They agreed. The next week when the two met the abbot asked if Jesus came and if he had an answer. The young monk said, "Yes. He told me to tell you 'I forgot.'"

That is what our God is like. No matter how much you have messed up, no matter how far off track your life has gotten, no matter the wrong you have done, do you realize you can begin again? You can!

Two Minutes Toward Meaningful Living

Merciful God, it is so easy to despair. But you never give up on us. Help me trust your great mercy. Help me begin again.

Day 5

The Grace to Forgive

Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?

Matthew 18:33

To forgive does NOT mean to act like no wrong was done. When we forgive, we are not saying that what that other person did or did not do was okay. It is not forgiveness if we don't think there is any wrong. Many people don't forgive because they wrongly think that means they would be saying that what the other person did was okay. No.

Nor does forgiveness mean we have to stay in a situation where we will be wronged again and again. We are not meant to live in abusive situations. Sometimes, abusers will try to manipulate the other to make him or her stay in an abusive situation by making statements like: "The Bible says we must forgive" or "Aren't you a Christian?" Or, whatever. No, we need to set boundaries. And sometimes, forgiveness means we need to step away from someone.

Jesus knows that forgiveness is tremendously difficult. Jesus also knows that the damage of not forgiving is terrible. You and I will never know the freedom and joy that God wants for our lives unless we do the hard work of forgiveness.

Mercy: Offering Mercy and Being Set Free

Merciful God, you understand the pain in my heart: my anger, my hurt, my fear. And you love me, just like I am. Please, dear God, I need you. I cannot do this without you.

Day 6

Steps Toward Forgiveness

So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.

Matthew 18:35

HOW do we forgive? How can we be set free from the power of our anger and not let ourselves become bitter persons?

To NOT forgive is like trying to get rid of a pesky rat by drinking rat poison and then waiting for the rat to die. The rat will be just fine. We die. (Or as Buddy Hackett put it: “While you’re holding a grudge, the other guy’s out dancing.”)

As I see it, the three steps of forgiveness are:

ONE: We make an act of the will and choose it.

TWO: We surrender it to God.

THREE: We do steps one and two again and again.

Perhaps the reason Jesus said we must forgive 70 x 7 times is not necessarily because there are that many transgressions, but because we often feel anger again and again over the same wrong.

Forgiveness is essential to our souls. The process is not easy. But it is THE path to a meaningful and joy-filled life. Forgiveness will truly set us free.

Mercy: You Are More Than Your Sin

Merciful God, you call me to forgive. But you will not force me. You made me free. Help me surrender to your wisdom. Give me a heart like yours.

The Joy of MERCY

Forgiving and Forgiven



Pope Francis has described Jesus as “the face of the Father’s Mercy.” To be a Christian, we must love as Jesus loved. To live as a Christian we follow Jesus’ example to act with mercy, to forgive those who hurt us and to accept that we, too, are forgiven and loved by God. For 30 days, let this little booklet be your guide to living with mercy in the joy of forgiveness and love.

In these pages, we offer excerpts from the homilies, books, reflections and videos of Fr. Joe Kempf on forgiveness and merciful love. Each daily exercise begins with Scripture followed by a brief reflection. Take a moment after the reflection to sit quietly and listen as God speaks to you. When you are ready, end with the prayer at the bottom of the page or a prayer of your own.

But you, O LORD,
are a God merciful
and gracious, slow to
anger and abounding
in steadfast love and
faithfulness.

Psalm 86:15

Father Joe Kempf is the pastor of Most Sacred Heart parish in Eureka, MO, and an author of faith formation videos and books for adults and children. He is the founder of Gospel Values, an organization dedicated to proclaiming the message of Jesus to all children. Visit him and his blue, furry helper, Big Al, at welovebigal.org.

This book, along with many other Creative Communications for the Parish products, is available on [amazonkindle](#) and [nook](#).