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There was a woman who wrote a story in the Reader's Digest. She said she used to work in a grocery store and she would help the people who needed help, the elderly and the handicapped, when they came in to do their shopping. This little old lady came in everyday and bought just 3 or 4 items every day. Finally, one day, the little old lady looked up at the girl and she said, "I bet you wonder why I come in here every day and buy only 3 or 4 items." She continued, "it's because I live with my nephew and I can't stand him and I don't want to leave him with a refrigerator full of food." Well, we are talking about forgiveness. That's a good intro.

In our first reading from the book of Sirach. Sirach is Jesus ben Sirach or Joshua ben Sirach, son of Sirach. Joshua was a very very common name throughout the history of Israel. He lived about 600 years before Christ. He was writing this whole book on how Jews, outside of Israel, should conduct their lives, so they don't lose their faith, so they don't lose their identity. In today's reading, he talks about wrath and anger, and how the sinner hugs them tight. How we want revenge all the time; we won't let go, we won't forgive. Because we won't forgive, God won't forgive us. This is also in the "Our Father." He says, set all that enmity aside, forgive your neighbor, forgive the person that you have problems with. Because after all, you are not perfect either.

When we get to the gospel, in the time of Jesus and before, the rabbis taught, the Pharisees taught, that forgiveness three times was being generous, was being merciful. Peter comes up to Jesus and says, "How about seven times, Lord?" Peter thinks he is being really really generous. And Jesus says, "No, forgive all the time." Seventy-seven times would be equal to infinity. Forgive always. Never not forgive. Never withhold forgiveness. He talks about that story, where this one guy had debts so big, about a billion dollars, he could never pay it back. And, he was forgiven by the king. But, he wouldn't forgive a debt of five thousand from his fellow servant. So, he got put in prison and tortured until he paid it back. Now, looking back in history, I always wondered how he could be in prison and tortured, and still be able to pay back a debt. I always wondered that. Is everybody out there, that they know, getting money for him, I don't know. Always seemed kind of strange. The thing is, the debt that we owe God, is what this first servant owes the king. It is unpayable. But, because of the death of Jesus Christ, on the cross, it has been made forgiven, totally forgiven. So, if we come along and don't forgive our fellow people, our neighbors, our fellow servants of God, children of God, then we are like that servant not forgiving the five thousand dollars. Something that is attainable. If you go on the internet and you put in, "the power of forgiveness," you will bring up articles from atheists, from new age priestesses, from Catholic ministers, from non-Catholic ministers. All these different groups recognize the power of forgiveness. What the power of forgiveness does for us. If we don't forgive, psychiatrists, psychologists, write the same thing. If we don't forgive, we are stressing ourselves out. We are causing our bodies, undue pain, undue stress, undue illness. Same thing with mental and emotional. Unforgiveness doesn't hurt the person we are not forgiving, it hurts us. That's why Jesus says to forgive all the time, one reason. The other reason is because when we ask God for forgiveness, does he put a limit on it? No. He gives us constant forgiveness. That's why He asks us to do the same. Now it's very difficult, because there are usually four different entities that we have to forgive. Number one; whether we realize it or not, is ourselves. Number two; God. A lot of people cannot forgive God. That's a pretty big one right there. Three; loved ones. And, four; people that you just deal with every day. Sometimes, the forgiveness, we

can't do on our own. We have to involve Jesus. Cora ten Boom was a Dutch woman, she and her whole family, during World War II, hid Jewish people away from the Nazi's. One day, a deacon in the church turned them in. The whole family was put in a concentration camp. She was the only one left alive, after the war. She remembered this one sadistic guard, who would stand in the women's showers and cause tremendous pain. After the war, she decided to go into speaking and writing books. And what did she write and talk on? Forgiveness. The power of forgiveness. One day she was giving a talk, and she finished and as she did, she shook hands with everybody, and all of a sudden, who came up but that prison guard. He came up, he told her, "I've become a Christian and I beg your forgiveness." She wanted to reach out her hand and shake his; she couldn't move her hand. By herself, she could not forgive. So, she prayed, basically, "Jesus help me." Slowly her hand reached out to him and they shook hands. As they did, both of them were crying and both of them had this tremendous weight lifted off their shoulders.

It is that weight that causes us problems in our health and in our lives. That weight that we need to have lifted off. Many many times, we go to a doctor; they know what the problem is. They know that we haven't forgiven somebody; we're holding a grudge. We are angry with somebody. They know, but doctors know that people don't want to be told that, and that insurance won't cover forgiveness. They want, "Here's a pill, take a pill." A tranquilizer or one of those things for depression. But, we don't want to hear the truth. They say something like 8 out of 10 people coming to the doctor, if they would forgive somebody in their lives, wouldn't need that doctor. That's how powerful forgiveness is. And our society has taught us not to forgive. Yes, our politicians and everybody else say, "Oh, I'm sorry." And what do we say, "Yah, right. You're just saying that because you got caught." How often does that translate into our personal lives? How often does that translate into the people around us? They say they're sorry and we say, "Just words." We don't give them the benefit of the doubt. Forgiveness is a tremendous power over sickness, depression, anxiety, all these different kinds of illnesses, can be cured by forgiveness. But, we have a hard time with that.

Back when I could kneel down, I used to kneel down in front of the crucifix and ask Jesus to help me forgive this person, over and over and over again. You can't just do it one time. It has to be over and over again. That's what I would do. There is another way you can do that, if you really can't stand that person, if you want them dead beyond belief. You mentally, pick them up, look at them in your mind, and then you take them and you push them aside. Then, you picture all the wonderful people in your life, all the good things, and then you bring that person into play and you realize, this person and your unforgiveness and your anger, is affecting everybody you love. Now you have an idea and you can forgive that person. That's one way to do it. The whole thing is, they are not being hurt by our unforgiveness; only ourselves. So, we really really really need to listen to Jesus when he says, "Forgive always." And, truly mean it from your heart. Not just up here, in your head. "Okay, I forgive you." Mom and Dad, when my brothers and I would get in fights, when we were younger, Mom would bring us together, "Okay, say you forgive each other, say you're sorry." "I'm sorry." "Now, shake hands." (Looking away from each other) We'd shake hands. We didn't mean it. Later on we did, but right then we didn't mean it because somebody was making us. That's the way most of us do it. From up here, in the head, not from here, in the heart. And Jesus wants us to forgive from here; the heart. Why? Because it's good for us. Because then, we ask like God. Like followers of Jesus. "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." Then we truly become Christian. We truly become free.

God bless you.