

# Speaking to the soul



## Forgiveness

**Then Peter came to him and asked, “Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?” “No, not seven times,” Jesus replied: “but seventy times seven!” Matthew 18:21 - 22**

When Peter asked his question, he thought he was being incredibly generous. Tradition told him that you should be ready to forgive another person three times, and then you

could unleash your full fury on them. He suggested that the limit should be raised to seven times, but Jesus wasn't impressed. He told Peter that he should be ready to forgive other people on 70 times seven occasions, effectively saying: "Stop the counting game and just keep on forgiving."

Jesus was introducing Peter to the idea that forgiveness should be a way of life. There should be no limit to it. This is both an incredibly tough and totally liberating teaching. It's tough because forgiving someone when they have wronged you seems totally unjust. If you have ever been attacked, robbed or violated by another person every instinct in your body will cry out for justice. But Jesus calls us to forgive our attackers and, as we do so, we will be set free from the destructive emotions of bitterness, anger and resentment.

On 8 November 1987, Gordon Wilson attended the Remembrance Day Parade in Enniskillen along with his daughter, Marie, who was a nurse. The Provisional IRA set off a bomb at the town's war memorial which killed eleven people, including Marie. That same evening, Gordon was interviewed by the BBC and said this about Marie: "She held my hand tightly, and gripped me as hard as she could. She said: 'Daddy, I love you very much.' Those were her exact words to me, and those were the last words I ever heard her say." And then he added: "But I bear no ill will. I bear no grudge. Dirty sort of talk is not going to bring her back to life. She was a great wee lassie. She loved her profession. She was a pet. She's dead. She's in heaven and we shall meet again. I will pray for these men tonight and every night."

Forgiveness is never easy, but it is always God's loving way forward for us.

## **QUESTION**

What is your most recent experience of forgiving another person?

## **PRAYER**

Loving Father, thank you that you are willing to forgive all my failings. Help me to always be ready to pass on that forgiveness to others. Amen

*Photograph - near Slemish, County Antrim*

