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PAYBACK

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It starts fairly early in life - the desire to pay back other people for what they do to us. When someone hurts us or offends us there's something deep in our psyche that wants to get even.

"Toby, why did you hit your sister?"

"She pushed me so I pushed her back"

"What happened then?"

"Well, then she hit me and that wasn't fair so I hit her back"

As young people and adults we get a bit more sophisticated in the way we payback.

We may not hit each other like children do but we can hurt each other very deeply, in all sorts of other ways. The trouble with payback is that even though we want to even things up it never works out that way. Someone always ends up feeling as though they owe the other person. Actually both parties usually end up feeling aggrieved.

Payback is like trying to balance a set of scales using rocks and uneven weights. Balance scales work ok with something we can pour out, like flour or sugar, but they don't work so well with rocks. Imagine a pile of rocks of different sizes and weights – we put one on the balance scale and try to balance it out with another rock but the second rock is too big so we need to balance it again on the other side of the scales.

As much as we try we can never quite get the scales to balance. It just never seems to even up. What's worse, is that both people trying to balance the scales end up feeling angry and hurt. Isn't it ironic that our attempts to get even by paying back leads to more imbalance in our lives? The fact is that our desire for satisfaction so often leaves everyone dissatisfied. Surely there's a better way to deal with things when someone treats us badly.

The Bible says "If someone has done you wrong, don't repay them with a wrong. Don't let evil defeat you. Instead, conquer evil with good." In other words, when someone does something wrong to you if you pay them back it means you've let that wrong thing defeat you. You've allowed yourself to act as wrongly as the other person who hurt you did. Two wrongs simply don't make a right. A big part of conquering evil with good, is learning and growing in the art of forgiveness. Forgiveness is hard. People can hurt us a lot and to truly forgive is a tough ask.

One of the things that helps me when I find forgiveness difficult is to remember that Jesus forgives me. Jesus told a great parable about forgiveness. It goes something like this

Once there was a king who decided to check on his servants' accounts. As he was doing it he noticed that one of them owed him an enormous amount of money, which in today's terms would amount to billions of dollars. Who knows how he racked up a debt like that? But he did. The king demanded that he pay it back, which is only fair. After all, it's his debt. Well the servant didn't have the money so the king ordered that everything he owned be sold and that he and his family also be sold into slavery to pay back at least part of the debt. But the servant fell on his knees and pleaded with the king. "Be patient with me and I will pay you everything."

Now the king knew that he couldn't repay the billions that he owed but his heart softened towards his servant and the king had mercy on him. He cancelled the debt and let him go free. He forgave him. Imagine being in that servant's shoes? How good would it feel to have this huge debt of billions of dollars lifted off you and to be a free person? You'd expect the servant to throw a party

and invite all his friends along and celebrate that he'd just been given his life back. But the story doesn't finish that way!

When he went out, he met another servant who owed him some money. In today's terms, probably something like \$10000. It's a fair amount of money. He grabbed his colleague by the throat and demanded that he pay the money back. The other servant fell to his knees and begged for time to pay. "Be patient with me and I will pay you everything". But the forgiven servant had no patience and no mercy and had his colleague thrown into prison until he paid back his debt.

It sounds crazy, doesn't it? I mean, a guy is forgiven billions of dollars, billions! And yet he can't forgive his fellow servant a few thousand dollars. It just doesn't make sense. Now don't get me wrong - I don't think \$10000 is a small amount of money, but compared to the billions he has been forgiven and the fact that he was given back his life, \$10000 is really nothing. The story should finish with the servant meeting the one who owed him \$10000 and saying "you know that \$10000 you owe me, forget it. I forgive you the debt! Let's go and celebrate. The king has just forgiven my debt of billions of dollars". Why did Jesus tell such a story? Simply to remind us that we have been forgiven by God.

A few years ago, Ted Kober of Peacemakers International, visited Australia to talk about the power of forgiveness and told the story of a young man. The young man was at a restaurant with his girlfriend and when the waitress delivered their meals she dropped his on the floor. The waitress apologised profusely and waited for the inevitable tirade of abuse for her clumsiness, but instead the young man said to her, "I forgive you."

She stopped cleaning up the mess she'd caused and looked at him and said, "You forgive me? Usually when something like this happens, customers get upset and grumpy but you forgive me. Why?"

The young man replied, "Well I know that I mess up sometimes and I have a God who forgives me and so I think he would want me to forgive you!"

Forgiveness reflects the heart of God. When we forgive we give others the experience of God's mercy, freedom and love. That's what he does when he forgives us. When we forgive we break the negative feelings and destructive relationships that happen when we look for payback. It makes a huge difference to our lives and our relationships when we take seriously God's offer of forgiveness for us. When we receive forgiveness and are able to forgive others then we experience true and lasting peace.

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