

Bible Studies for Life: August 21

Forgive Your Neighbor • Matthew 18:21-35

By Clay Anthony



Anthony

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Peter speaks up with a question that each of us could think up: just how many times do I need to practice this process of seek out and forgive? Will seven times be good enough? Peter used seven times knowing that seven was a perfect number in his culture. If he forgave up to that number, then he had done everything that could be expected of a human that had been wronged. Peter was willing to forgive, but he admitted that he had his limits in dealing with people. Peter, like us, needs to correct his thinking.

Forgiveness is to be unlimited. The number seven is just an abstract perfection. It is just a number. Jesus expands the perimeters of forgiving and thus all who may be wrong in their minds when it comes to this topic. Forget a mere seven times limitation. Instead shoot for seventy-seven times (22). Jesus took Peter's idea of a perfect number and multiplied it to

itself. That math means nothing to us but to His listeners, Jesus just said that forgiveness has no cap limit. You are to forgive anyone as many times as they need forgiving. Christians are to never use the words, "No, I will not forgive you."

What does that look like played out in real life? It looks like God's forgiveness which is also unlimited. Jesus uses real world objects to make His point. An earthly king decided to call in what his servants owed him. One is found to owe a debt of ten thousand talents. That number would have made Jesus' listeners roll their eyes. Nobody could realistically pay off that amount. Today we speak of dollars and cents. A talent was the highest amount of money that Judea knew. Take that amount and multiply it by ten thousand and you are looking at lifetime of wages. In other words, this is an uncountable number. The modern language exchange rate sounds something like a trillion-billion-million dollars. Again, this was an eye rolling answer for Jesus' listeners. Was He being for real?

Jesus never kids when it comes to forgiveness. Just take a moment to meditate on your own sin and how much God has forgiven you. In God's economy, money means nothing. He operates on mercy and grace. We sin. He forgives. We sin again. He forgives again. See the pattern? Peter wanted to know what the debt ceiling was in forgiving those who hurt, shame and forget us. Jesus is clear: that limit does not exist.

Consider the times you have been hurt by a loved one. Think about the last church member to cross you in a bothersome way. Be it in traffic, school hallways or the grocery store, we all can name a list of times that others have sinned against us. Our hearts get bruised.

Our egos suffer. We get embarrassed. Someone has done something against us, and our first thought is to seek revenge

or at least hang on to the hurt and let it fester. Who in their right minds would go to the offender and seek to make things right? *They hurt me. Why should I go to them?*

Be reminded: we are not in our right minds (2 Cor. 5:13, 1 Cor. 1:16). We are not allowed to think for ourselves when it comes to forgiving others. How deep is the well of God's forgiveness towards you? If we live ten thousand lifetimes, we will never repay the debt of sin we owe towards our King. Keep two thoughts in mind:

First, we wronged God, and He came to us and forgave us. There is no limit to His forgiveness.

Secondly, when God stops forgiving us, then we can stop forgiving the people that hurt us.

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