

WEEKLY DEVOTIONS AT GLENKIRK



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OCT 29 – NOV 2, 2018

MONDAY

Matthew 18:21-35; Mark 14:66-72; John 21:15-17

Peter is so relatable that and human that I find him easy to appreciate. Playing the “teacher’s pet” in today’s featured scripture, Peter tries to impress Jesus and others with his insights and generosity regarding forgiveness. He increased the ancient Jewish standard for forgiveness, three times (Amos 1), and smugly raised it to seven. Jesus, however, shows Peter that he’s only scratched the surface regarding how the redeemed should forgive—“seventy-seven times” (Matt. 18:22) is not literal, but illustrative of “so readily that you’ll lose track.”

Like me periodically and, perhaps, you, Peter wanted “extra credit” for the standard of “goodness” he would display. Even if there was some merit in his principle, his self-satisfaction was a problem. And, as Jesus taught repeatedly, it’s the heart that matters, not mere externals. Peter was looking at forgiveness like a works and merit oriented religious person; Jesus was teaching him to view it in light of eternity.

Peter would soon learn how “pride goes before a fall” (Prov. 16:18). More than once he’d tried to wow others with various virtues—faithfulness (Mark 14:29), humility (John 13:8), insight (Matt. 16:22), etc.—mirroring us when we try to impress. Jesus predicted Peter’s threefold denial of Him (Mark 14:30), fulfilled later as Peter stood outside of Jesus’ false trial by the bloodthirsty Jewish leaders. Peter was devastated as his unfaithfulness was revealed (Mark 14:72).

It’s fascinating how Jesus reinstated Peter following His resurrection and appearance before the disciples. Jesus asked Peter three times, “Do you love Me?”—once for each of Peter’s earlier denials. Jesus lovingly illustrated the folly in Peter’s earlier self-righteousness by reminding him that, just like you, me and everyone else, Peter desperately needed the Savior and God’s vast forgiveness.

I’m finding this week’s devos very convicting. If I’m truly grateful for God’s salvation in Christ, why am I so easily irritated by others’ “selfishness” and “being inconsiderate”? Why do I grumble when facing setbacks instead of walking about in a constant state of overflowing joy? I’m keeping a mirror handy as we consider the parable of the unmerciful servant this week; perhaps you should as well.

QUESTION

Why did Peter suggest that we should forgive others seven times? What was wrong with how Peter was viewing forgiveness? Why did Jesus ask Peter three times, “Do you love Me?”?

PRAYER

Pray for a humble, surrendered heart. Offer up any recent sins to God, asking His forgiveness for these.

TUESDAY

Matthew 18:23-30; Psalm 58:6-10; Luke 18:9-14

It's common for us to "want justice for others" while expecting mercy for ourselves. And why not? We know that our intentions are good. But others'? Matthew 18's unmerciful servant falls into the "mercy for me, justice for others" camp. He owed ten thousand talents, equaling about 150,000 days' wages (Answers.com), an unpayable amount. After the king mercifully forgave his debt, he pressed his own debtor for a loan equaling 100 days' wages (1/1500th of what he'd owed) and had the other imprisoned upon default.

The principle illustrated today pertains meaningfully to believers. In Christ we have been forgiven everything, an unpayable debt to God which only Jesus could settle for us as our perfect Substitute. Accordingly, any earthly "debt" we're owed is trivial by comparison. If unable to forgive others for the relatively minor inconveniences we experience in this life, we're displaying hearts tending toward the unmerciful servant's.

Another, more subtle element of this parable is the destructive emphasis of a "horizontal perspective;" i.e., focusing upon others relative to me. If I've experienced any related "injustices" compared to another, I may conclude, "Unfair!"—reflecting a heart that is ungrateful for all that God has done and will provide (Deut. 32:18). Other byproducts of a horizontal view are some of the things the Bible teaches that God hates: pride (Rom. 12:16); envy (James 3:14-16); sowing discord (Prov. 6:19); slander (Ex. 23:1); gossip (Prov. 16:28); and a key feature of today's parable, unforgiveness (Matt. 18:35).

Today's Psalm 58 passage is one of many in the Bible calling for God's justice upon the unfaithful. Is it a righteous appeal? It's horizontal, self-righteous and vengeful feel leads me to believe that this psalm is not prescriptive [sharing a righteous example] but, rather, descriptive [illustrating something real that's uncommendable].

Luke 18's Pharisee surveys others and self-righteously brags about his relative "goodness" under the pretense of prayer. Our model here, however, is the humble tax collector. His perspective is "vertical"—God-directed—attuning him to his lowliness relative to God and desperate need for mercy. He displays a heart I desire, one useful for godly service and God's glory.

QUESTION

What was the difference between what the wicked, unforgiving servant owed and what he was owed? What are the problems with a "horizontal perspective"? What was the "vertical" perspective exhibited by the praying tax collector in the temple?

PRAYER

Ask God to show you where ingratitude and entitlement are blocking you from greater growth in Christ. Pray for his forgiveness here and to help you prevail over these tendencies.

WEDNESDAY

Matthew 18:24-27; Matthew 26:14-16; John 1:9-14

It's pretty easy to glibly offer, "How can we not forgive when we've been forgiven so much by God?" And while this is valid, as touched upon yesterday, how often do we reflect upon the incredible magnitude of Jesus Christ's sacrifice?

I've heard a characterization of God's work through Christ by comparing it to a human becoming an ant both to rescue the ants and enable them to relate to him. However, this analogy falls infinitely short of what God has done. The Son is the Creator of all things (Col. 1:16) who suffered the most painful, humiliating execution imaginable. And He was betrayed for thirty pieces of silver, the value attached to a slave (Ex. 21:32), illustrating how far He stooped and how little Jesus was esteemed (Is. 53:3).

If Jesus was merely a created being, as the cults maintain, "His death would not have been sufficient to pay the penalty for the sins of the world (1 John 2:2). A created being...could not pay the infinite penalty required for sin against an infinite God..."

"Jesus, as God incarnate, sacrificed Himself...laid down His life willingly... (John 10:18). God the Son sacrificed Himself to God the Father and thereby fulfilled all the requirements of the Law...He laid down His life and took it up again, thereby providing eternal life for all who would ever believe in Him and accept His sacrifice for their sins. He did this out of love for the Father and for all those the Father has given Him (John 6:37-40)." (GotQuestions.org)

Jesus is our Great Reconciler, the One whose sacrifice enables us to restore right relationship with God. But we must confess our sins to God, seek forgiveness and ask Jesus to be our Lord and Savior. A stumbling block for so many: "I'm a good person, better than most—good enough for heaven." For others: "I've done too many bad things—God couldn't want someone like me." How can we help them see that God has done it all in Christ, that "It is finished" (John 19:30)? That personal worthiness is irrelevant, that only His merit and infinite sacrifice matter?

QUESTION

What's the significance of the thirty pieces of silver Judas gained for betraying Jesus? Why is it so fundamental that Jesus Christ is God incarnate, not merely a Man?

PRAYER

Pray for a heart more like Christ's, a heart that endures sacrifice out of love for others. Ask God what He would have you sacrifice for His glory.

THURSDAY

Matthew 18:32-35; Luke 16:19-26; Revelation 20:11-15

Jesus' last statement regarding this week's parable is chilling: "So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart." (Matt. 18:35) The escape artist in me looks for loopholes: "Is 'every one of you' only unbelievers?" "Jesus isn't indicating that we can 'lose our salvation,' is He—can a pardon be revoked?" "Who is my 'brother' I must forgive—everyone, or just other believers?" "Is Jesus being literal, or intentionally overstating to amplify a point?"

I'm uncertain, but this I can conclude from today's other Scripture and Jesus' teaching elsewhere: hell is a real place and, if we're loving and humble, we wish it upon no one. Hell underpins a leading objection to Christianity: "How could a loving God send people to hell?" ["So, God's either unloving or isn't real and/or hell doesn't exist."]

Per Scripture, I don't believe God "sends people to hell." By choosing to live your life apart from God, you've likewise chosen your eternity. One has to step over the body of the crucified Christ to go there. "Hell...is a natural extension of the way we live...It is a place [those going there] would, in the end, choose for themselves, rather than...humble themselves before God and accept who He is." (Dallas Willard) "Hell, then, is the trajectory of the soul, living a self-absorbed, self-centered life, going on and on forever." (Timothy Keller) "Hell...is a place of perpetual disintegration of the soul into greater and greater self-centeredness." (Josh and Sean McDowell)

"The only just punishment for high treason against our perfect Creator is eternal separation from Him. That separation means the absence of goodness, light, relationship, and joy, which are all facets of God's nature." (GotQuestions.org) "The wages of sin is death." (Rom. 6:23)

"There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, in the end, 'Thy will be done.' All that are in Hell, choose it." (C.S. Lewis) Whom do you know who's hurtling toward eternal damnation? How can you lovingly warn them?

QUESTION

How could a loving God send people to hell? What types of people will end up there?

PRAYER

Pray that God would impress upon you the reality and horror of hell for those who reject Christ. Ask Him to give you a heart that breaks for the lost, for greater capacity to "love the unlovable" more like He does.

FRIDAY

Matthew 18:21-35; Luke 23:32-34; 2 Corinthians 5:18-19

It's helpful to remind ourselves that forgiveness is not only biblical, but healthy psychologically—"When you forgive you set a captive free; that captive is yourself." (Lewis Smedes) Unforgiveness, often underlying unresolved anger, roots deeply and spawns bitterness that can overwhelm. In certain situations, I can be dysfunctionally competitive or flash angrily almost unprovoked. Do I need to forgive my dad for being so demanding? Or myself for "not measuring up"? Somewhere and somehow I've got some forgiving to do.

Jesus is our Example here. In the midst of His brutal crucifixion, He appealed to the Father to "forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34) But wait a minute! How can Jesus' executors be forgiven if they were unrepentant? Doesn't the offender need to "own" their problem and beg for forgiveness? Is wrongdoing forgivable if its cause is ignorance? Was Jesus "out of line" here?

There's a difference between forgiveness and reconciliation. Forgiveness is giving up any claim to retribution or payback, letting go of any grudge or rightful anger—"It takes a stronger person to restrain from retaliation, then opposing to someone who's filled with vengeance" (Takina Cupp) We're commanded to forgive others (Luke 6:37), which we can do whether they repent or not. "When we forgive someone, it doesn't justify what they've done. It releases them into God's hands so He can deal with them." (Stormie Omartian)

Reconciliation—restoring relationship—is possible when the offender(s) admits wrongdoing, apologizes sincerely, and turns from their error. So we can, and should, forgive whether the wrongdoer repents or not; however, reconciliation requires repentance and mutual agreement. "You can forgive someone...anything. But you cannot tolerate everything... We don't have to tolerate what people do just because we forgive them for doing it. Forgiving heals us personally. To tolerate everything only hurts us all in the long run." (Smedes)

"This Man receives sinners and eats with them!" (Luke 15:2) We can be eternally grateful that we're among those He's chosen. Have you thanked Jesus recently for reconciling you to God? Are you praying for others, even those "owing you," to be reconciled likewise?

QUESTION

Is it reasonable and biblical to "forgive and forget"? Why is it important to forgive others? What's the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation?

PRAYER

Ask God to show you where you need to forgive another, perhaps even yourself. Pray for greater capacity to forgive and for more intense gratitude for all that He has done in Christ to enable your forgiveness.

Sources:

- Answers.com information is from http://science.answers.com/Q/How_much_is_10000_talents_worth.
- GotQuestions.org quotes can be found at www.gotquestions.org.
- Dallas Willard's, Lewis Smedes', Takina Cupp's, and Stormie Omartian's quotes can be found at www.goodreads.com.
- Tim Keller's quote is from his book, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism*, Penguin Books (August 4, 2009).
- Josh and Sean McDowell's quote are from their book, *77 FAQs About God and the Bible*, Harvest House Publishers (August 1, 2012).
- C.S. Lewis' quote is from his book, *The Great Divorce*, Collins (1 April 2012).

