

Conversation Starter

For the week of April 13 to 19, 2008

This Week's Theme: Forgiveness
Reading #1: Genesis 45:1-15
Reading #2: Matthew 18:21-35
Reading #3: Matthew 6:14-15

Reading #1 is a story from the Bible about forgiveness. In this story we learn about a man named Joseph who forgave his brothers for all the very mean things they said to him and did to him approximately 22 years earlier. At that time they plotted to kill Joseph because they were jealous of him, but instead of killing him they ended up taking the robe their father had given Joseph, they threw him into a cistern, and then they sold him to a group of Midianite merchants for 20 shekels of silver. It was as a result of the travels of the Midianite merchants that Joseph ended up living in Egypt where he experienced both good times and great hardships. (See Genesis 37) Even though Joseph's brothers greatly hurt him, he completely forgave them. Many, many years later Jesus was asked these questions by the apostle Peter: *Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times? (Reading #2: Matthew 18:21)* Peter likely thinking that forgiving someone seven times would be sufficient was probably surprised by Jesus' answer: *I tell you, not seven times, but seventy times seven. (Reading #2: Matthew 18:22)*

1. What does "to forgive" someone actual mean?
2. Are there times when it is justified to cease fellowship with someone you have truly forgiven? Explain your answer.
3. Why is it sometimes difficult to forgive?
4. When Jesus says to Peter that you are to forgive **not** seven times, but seventy times seven, does this mean that once someone has sinned against you (or hurt you) for the 491st time you no longer need to forgive them? Explain.
5. As Christians, are we ever justified to "not forgive" someone? Discuss this question in the context of Jesus' words in Matthew 6:14-15 (Reading #3) noted above.
6. If we find it difficult to forgive someone, how do we come to the place where we can fully forgive them?

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