

Conversation Starter

FOR the week of January 27 to February 2, 2008

This Week's Theme: Forgiveness

Reading #1: Genesis 45:1-15
Reading #2: Genesis 37
Reading #3: Matthew 18:21-22
Reading #4: Luke 23:34
Reading #5: Matthew 6:14-15

In *Genesis 45* we learned about Joseph forgiving his brothers for a very mean act committed against 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. (See *Genesis 37*) Even though Joseph's brothers "sinned against" him, he completely forgave them. Even though Joseph's brothers greatly hurt him, there was forgiveness in his heart. 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? (Matthew 18:21)* Peter likely thinking that forgiving someone seven times would be enough was probably surprised by Jesus' answer: *I tell you, not seven times, but seventy times seven. (Matthew 18:22)* To truly forgive someone, especially if he/she has caused you a lot of hurt and pain or betrayed your trust, is not easy. But as followers of Jesus, when it comes to forgiveness we are called to model Him ... we are called to respond as He would ... we are called to forgive not just *seven times*, but *seventy times seven*. It was Jesus who said as He hung on the cross: *Father, forgive them...* (See *Luke 23:34*)

1. What does "to forgive" someone actually mean?
2. Is there anyone you find difficult to forgive?
3. Are there times when it is justified to cease fellowship with someone you have truly forgiven? Explain your answer.
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. READ Matthew 6:14-15. As Christians, why are we never justified to "not forgive" someone?
6. If we find it difficult to forgive someone, how do we come to the place where we can fully forgive them?
7. Why is forgiveness essential in being a "light" for Jesus?