

February 16, 2021

Loving as Jesus loved can feel like a lofty, unreachable goal; especially when one considers the directive to love one's enemies. How can this be accomplished in our miserable humanity? Where does one even begin to aspire to such love? In Matthew 18, we find an important, first step toward loving one's enemies. It all begins with a question that Peter poses to Jesus:

*Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times." Matthew 18:21-22*

Then Jesus provided a story to paint the great truth He was trying to reveal.

*"Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. At this the servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.*

*But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins— He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded. His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.' But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.*

*Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.*

*"This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart." Matthew 18:21-35.*

After telling the story, Jesus returns to the original question about forgiveness. He reminds us that we all need forgiveness, alluding that His Father is the benevolent King in the parable. We must be willing to forgive. This is where we can start to love like Jesus, to follow His admonition to love our enemies, and to do good to those who hate us. Choosing to forgive is the first step.

Today, let's determine in our minds to forgive those with whom we do not agree, those who have wronged us, those who continue to speak ill of us or do evil toward us. Let go of the judgment we long to see in their lives, and pray that God will show them mercy. Forgiveness is a choice, and it will melt away the barriers that prevent us from loving one another.