Updated Curriculum!

**Master Teacher**
- It includes ideas and suggestions to equip teachers to develop a plan for individual lessons within the quarter.
- Teachers are given biblical and theological focal points for each lesson and additional resources to help make the lessons come to life.
- It follows a five-point lesson plan sequence that is reinforced by a relevant contemporary point (God’s Word in Life) that highlights the meaning of each lesson.
- Thought-provoking questions and biblical and theological details are sprinkled throughout each lesson to aid instructors as they digest the text and its exposition for teaching others.
- The book also includes ample space for note-taking as each point of the lesson Scripture is broken down for a thorough explanation.

**Adult Christian Life**
- The lesson Scriptures are divided into two or three passages that pertain to the outline or thought that is being emphasized in each one.
- The lesson information formerly called “Exposition,” is now called “KNOW IT.” This section provides information about what the biblical text means, broken down into related sections.
- It is followed by several sections to help engage the student:
  1. REMEMBER IT: This section was formerly called “Summary.” It provides a review of the lesson.
  2. HEAR IT: This means repeating the point of the lesson over again. Emphasis is the goal here.
  3. LIVE IT: This is the application of the biblical text. It tells how to put the lesson into action.
  4. SHARE IT: This means to use the lesson point to evangelize others.
- There is more room for taking notes and activities.
- The book includes special articles that are intended to help the student to better understand the overall theme of the quarter.

**College and Career**
- Biblical text is divided into sections for easier study and analysis.
- The book includes additional imagery.
- The lessons have been reformatted for college and early-career–minded individuals to help them to get the most out of their study.
- The biblical text is supported by references to both historical and contemporary life situations.
- Life Point and Lesson Point questions and comments make the book an important curriculum resource to support learning by generating discussion.
The New Testament abounds with illustrations of the relationship between what a person believes and how that person behaves. Jesus said no good tree bears bad fruit (see Matt. 7:18). James, in writing about the relationship between faith and works, wrote that it does no good to tell someone in need, “Go eat your fill and be at peace” and do nothing to meet that need (2:16). John said (1 John 3:17, NIV): “If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?” When a grape is pressed, grape juice flows. Squeeze an olive and you will get olive oil. When life puts us under pressure, the true nature of our commitment to follow Christ will be revealed.

The Transfiguration had taken place shortly before the exchange in today’s passage. Soon afterward, Jesus would arrive in Jerusalem, greeted by wildly cheering multitudes who honored His presence by spreading their cloaks and palm tree branches on the ground before Him (see Matt. 21:8). Peter’s question about forgiveness seems to come out of nowhere. Jesus was gathered with the larger group of disciples in Capernaum for a teaching, when Peter questioned Jesus about how often he should forgive an offender. It is likely that something had occurred that prompted Peter to ask Jesus about forgiving others, but the Bible does not tell us what that might have been.

Think About It

People desire forgiveness even though they refuse to forgive. What are the consequences of an unforgiving heart?
I. A Forgiving Heart (Matthew 18:21–27)

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<tr>
<th>King James Version</th>
<th>New Revised Standard Version</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>THEN came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?</td>
<td>THEN Peter came and said to him, “Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?”</td>
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<td>22 Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.</td>
<td>22 Jesus said to him, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.</td>
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<td>23 Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants.</td>
<td>23 “For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves.</td>
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<td>24 And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents.</td>
<td>24 When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him;</td>
</tr>
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<td>25 But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.</td>
<td>25 and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.</td>
<td>26 So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.</td>
<td>27 And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Rabbinical tradition dictated that an observant Jew should forgive three times. Peter, hoping to demonstrate to Jesus the depth of commitment he had, wondered if seven times might be the more appropriate number. It was a number that Jewish tradition associated with completeness, so Peter may have reasoned that forgiving seven times would be the better number. When Jesus responded, He chose a number that some translations equate to seven times seventy (490) while others, including the NIV, translate as seventy-seven. The Greek is unclear as to which is correct, but the exact number is not really important.

As Craig Blomberg notes, “We dare not keep track of the number of times we grant forgiveness. Jesus takes Peter’s number of completeness and multiplies it considerably…. Jesus’ point is not to withhold forgiveness after the
seventy-eighth (or 491st) offense” (*Matthew* [Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1992]). What Jesus was implying is that our forgiveness of others should know no boundaries.

That said, what does a forgiving heart look like? Jesus used the example of a master (or “king,” on first mention) forgiving a servant to illustrate what forgiveness entails. The servant owed what the NIV translates as ten thousand bags of gold. Again, the exact value is not the issue. However one measures it, the servant owed a lot of money, more than he could ever hope to repay. Yet he was so desperate to avoid what he expected was coming, that he promised he would somehow repay every cent if the master would only be patient. The servant sought the kind of patience that is often translated in Scripture as “long-suffering.” Longsuffering allows us to walk away from what we may have the right to expect, and go about our business with no regard to how the other person is doing in honoring his or her promise. Matthew 18:27 tells us the master took pity on the servant.

When we think of pity, we often think of an emotion that is somewhere between empathy and feeling sorry for another. Pity in this case, however, was not shown or felt, but was “taken.” It is all well and good to feel sorry for another person who is in a tough situation, but when we have the ability to ease that burden, Christian pity demands we put feet to our feelings and remove the burden to the greatest extent we can. The master did this by not simply granting the servant time to repay, but by canceling the debt completely.

When another person is in your debt and you refuse to release the person from the debt, you, in effect, keep that person in a kind of prison. This person is trapped by the knowledge that he or she owes you, wondering when you will come to collect and perhaps also worrying how terrible might be your demand once you do. By cancelling the debt, the master lifted the burden of the debt off the back of the servant and set the servant free to live a life unencumbered by the debt. This is a vivid illustration of not only God’s forgiveness to us as sinners but also of how we as Christians ought to forgive.

Above all, Christian forgiveness values people over material goods and over anything else that this world has to offer. When the master looked at his servant as that servant begged for mercy, he saw a man in trouble. Setting others free is another mark of Christian forgiveness, of a forgiving heart.

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“Be patient” (18:26, 29): Greek makrothymeō [mä-kro-thü-me’-ô] — To be long-suffering, to wait with utmost (macro) patience. The word implies that one puts his or her own interests aside for a time in favor of what is best for another. 2 Peter 3:9 says God is patient with us, holding His anger and judgment in abeyance so that we have maximum time to come to repentance before Him.
II. A Hard Heart (Matthew 18:28–35)

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<td>28 But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest.</td>
<td>28 But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, ‘Pay what you owe.’</td>
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<td>29 And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.</td>
<td>29 Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’</td>
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<td>30 And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.</td>
<td>30 But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt.</td>
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<td>31 So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done.</td>
<td>31 When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place.</td>
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<td>32 Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me:</td>
<td>32 Then his lord summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me.</td>
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<td>33 Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee?</td>
<td>33 Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?’</td>
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<td>34 And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.</td>
<td>34 And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.</td>
<td>35 So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”</td>
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Despite the mercy he had been shown by the master, the servant turned right around and demanded repayment of a much smaller sum from a fellow servant (see v. 28). Let us be clear: the servant had every legal right to demand repayment. In a court of law, the judge, however much sympathy he or she
might feel for the second servant, would rule the debt was valid and must be repaid. Legalism, whether in society or the life of the Church, goes strictly by the rules.

A hard, unforgiving heart is willing to do violence to another human being to get what is owed. The servant grabbed his fellow servant and began to choke him. Stories from organized crime often feature people being beaten or killed because they could not repay debts. But violence can take other forms. One might tell others about the deadbeat who welched on a debt, ruining that person’s reputation. Another might loudly belittle the one who could not repay, causing embarrassment. The heart of the one who refuses to forgive also suffers violence via feelings of anger, vengeance, and betrayal that further hardens an already cold heart.

Do we only need to forgive those who ask us to do so?

When we refuse to forgive, we compound the burden of the one we won’t forgive. Now, in addition to the debt, that person may bear shame, guilt, fear, and feelings of inadequacy. That is why, when the servant was brought back before the master, the master called him “wicked” (see v. 32). The Greek word used is a derivative of the word for pain, and suggests a wicked person is one who increases the pain of another. Initially, the servant had been let go, set free from not only the debt but from all the heartache that debt caused the servant. However, when the servant refused to forgive in turn, he was handed over, put back into the bondage from which he had been released.

The debt that had been canceled was put back upon the shoulders of the servant. Where the master had taken pity, now the master acted “in anger” (see v. 34). Our natural inclination is to exhibit the hallmarks of a hard heart. If we wish to obey Christ as Lord, however, we must learn to rise above our natural tendencies. We must choose to forgive even when every fiber of our being wishes otherwise, and even when the cost is great. Jesus told us why in verse 35: “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive…” (NIV). Put another way, if you want forgiveness from God, you absolutely must learn to forgive others.
You are under obligation to forgive anyone who owes you a debt of any kind. The good news is that obedience brings a terrific blessing. Hebrews 12:11 (NIV) assures us that “no discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.” By obeying Jesus’ command to forgive without counting the cost and without limit, we reap that promised reward. It only hurts for a moment.

“Trying to follow our Savior and King, Shaping our lives by His blessed example, Happy, how happy, the songs that we bring.”

Listen to the relevant message of this week’s lesson through New National Baptist Hymnal 21st Century Edition #315: “Stepping in the Light.” Sing it communally, read the lyrics personally, or search online for an online recording to listen to during devotions.

When an opportunity to forgive comes your way but you just don’t feel like doing it, do it anyhow. That is living the crucified life.

What are some ways you can encourage forgiveness? Share what you learned from this week’s lesson on social media. Use the hashtag #SeventyTimesSeven.

Devotional Readings for July 2–8, 2018

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