

DEALING WITH TROUBLESOME PEOPLE

What do you do when someone really bugs you? What do you do when you have a troublesome relationship? Time and time again this person says things which irritates you. Time and time again this person does things which annoy you. The person may mean well, but it is just so hard to like that person. Do you know what I mean?

Last week we said that relationships are among the best gifts that God has for us. And it's true! The relationships we have with others are valuable. They are priceless. Especially the relationships we have with people who are close to us - with friends, with family, with brothers and sisters in Christ. God wants us to have good relationships, healthy relationships, loving relationships, joy-filled relationships.

But what about that person who really bugs you? What about that person who tries your patience? Try as you will to get along, that person continually finds new ways to get under your skin. It is tempting to turn away from that person. It is tempting to have nothing to do with that person. It is tempting to write that person off. It is tempting to say, "enough is enough," and put an end to the relationship.

Do you know what I am saying? Do you have such a person in your life? Or maybe you have two or three or even more people like that in your life. What do you do?

I think that's what Peter had in mind when he came to Jesus and said, "Lord, if someone sins against me, how often should I forgive?" He was looking for an out. He was looking for an excuse to say, "OK, that's it. I've had enough. This relationship is over."

But Jesus thought otherwise. "Forgive," said Jesus. "Well, yes," said Peter, "I know you are supposed to forgive. But how many times?" And then Peter tried to take the high road and make himself look quite magnanimous and said, "As many as seven times?"

Peter was setting the bar high. Seven times! How many people have you forgiven seven times? A person lies and you forgive. A person lies again and you forgive a second time. A person lies a third time and you forgive again. At that point you are probably ready to say, "three strikes and you're out." But seven strikes? Seven times? Are you kidding? That's really stretching it. That's what Peter thought. Surely there must be a limit.

But Jesus said, "not seven times, but seventy seven times." In other words, you don't count. You don't stop. You never write a person off. You never say, "That's enough. I've had it. I'm done with you." You forgive. And you forgive. And you forgive. Over and over and over again! You never stop forgiving! That's the way of Jesus.

That's what Jesus does with you. How many times have you let Jesus down? How many times have you disappointed him by the words that came out of your mouth? How many times have

you hurt him by the way you treated others? How many times have you stood here in church and confessed, "I have sinned?" And how many times has Jesus forgiven you? Seven times? Or is it more like seventy times seven?

That's how you deal with troublesome people. You deal with them the way the Lord deals with you.

The kids at school looked forward each day to recess. Some days they organized teams and played kick ball. Other days they played on the swings and the slides. And still other days they huddled together and told stories.

No matter what they did, they tried to avoid playing with Billy. It wasn't that Billy couldn't play ball. It wasn't that Billy couldn't swing high or race down the slides. It wasn't that Billy couldn't tell funny or scary stories. He could. But he was annoying. He poked fun at the others. He shoved other kids around. He cut into line. And besides that, his clothes smelled. And so the rest of the kids didn't want to play with him.

Except for Sally. Sally was the new kid at school. She played with Billy when no one else would. She saved a place in line for Billy when the others demanded that he go to the back of the line. And no matter how bad the smell, Sally never complained. And even when Billy made fun of her or shoved her or ignored her, she kept playing with him.

The teacher noticed what Sally was doing. "Why are you trying to be Billy's friend?" the teacher asked her. "In my old school," said Sally, "I was like Billy and nobody would play with me."

Sally understood the way of Christ. Jesus never gives up on you or me and neither should we give up on those who annoy us. We just can't give up on anyone. We just can't!

After all, Jesus died for that person, just as he died for you!