

RIVER *Flow*

Seven Days of Devotional Practice
September 13 – 19, 2026

Sixty Million Days

A Note Before You Sit

Peter asked his question at the end of a long conversation about what to do when someone in the community does damage. He had been listening. He wanted a number.

We tend to hear the parable that follows as an answer to how much forgiveness is enough. This week we are going to sit with a different possibility: that Jesus is not raising Peter's number but dismantling the kind of thinking that produces numbers at all. That is harder than it sounds, because the counting is usually not spite. It is simply a different kind of thing. It is bookkeeping.

Take the days slowly. Some of them will not settle anything.

— *Pastor Mel Baga, D.Min.*
Lead Pastor, Auburn SDA Church

Daily Devotional Guide

SUNDAY, September 13 — The Question in the Room

*“Lord, how often will my brother sin against me?” — Matthew
18:21*

Read: Matthew 18:15–22

Reflect: Peter's question does not arrive out of nowhere. It comes at the close of a stretch about the little one who wanders off, the shepherd who goes after the sheep, and the member who has done real harm and must be gone to, alone, then with two, then before the whole church. That last word — *élencho*, to expose, to bring into the light — is not gentle. Jesus has just spent a long time on the labor of confronting sin in the community. Peter asks his question as a man who has been paying attention and now wants to know where the labor ends.

Seven was not a stingy answer. In the world Peter knew, three was the customary limit of obligation. He doubled it and added one. The number was an act of generosity, offered by someone who had a specific person in mind.

Notice: When you read Peter's question, notice whether a face came with it.

Pray: Lord, I have been listening too, and I also want to know where the end of this is. Sit with me before you answer. Amen.

Stay: After the prayer, sit in silence. Twenty minutes is the goal; take less if that is what you have. Sit upright and close your eyes. Before you begin, choose one word to return to — a single syllable is best — or simply return to your breath, noticing it at the tip of your nose. Once you have recentered, you can release the word as well, and release the focus on the breath, and return to the silence. When you find that your mind has generated a thought or a sensation, let it go quietly, say the word or come back to the breath, and continue sitting. Do this as often as the interruptions come. You are not emptying your mind. You are

resting it, and consenting to God's presence and to his unseen work in you. That is the practice each day of the week.

MONDAY, September 14 — What the Number Means

“Ten thousand talents.” — Matthew 18:24

Read: Matthew 18:23–25

Reflect: Myrioi is the largest number in Greek, and the talent is the largest unit of currency. Jesus has stacked one on the other. There is nothing further up. Josephus records the annual tax revenue of Herod Antipas's territory at two hundred talents; the figure in the parable is fifty times that. A day laborer earned a denarius, and a talent ran to six thousand denarii. Paid off at a denarius a day, the debt would take something over sixty million days. This is not a large debt. It is a debt outside the category of debts, and the man's proposal to repay it is the detail Jesus wants us to catch.

Everything in the scene is legally proper. The accounting is proper, the sentence is proper, the sale of the family is proper. Nothing goes wrong in the first half of this parable. That is what makes the arithmetic so difficult to see as the problem.

Notice: Notice what happens in you when you read that he promised to pay it back.

Pray: God, I am fluent in what I can manage. Show me the size of what I cannot. Amen.

Stay: As on Sunday. When the sum in the parable pulls your mind into calculation, return to the word.

TUESDAY, September 15 — Moved in the Body

“Out of pity for him.” — Matthew 18:27

Read: Matthew 18:26–27

Reflect: The word is *splanchnistheís*, from the noun for the inward organs. Matthew uses it of Jesus seeing the crowds harassed and helpless, of Jesus with the hungry, of Jesus stopping for two blind men who would not stop shouting. It is not a decision reached and then implemented. It is something that happens in the gut when a person is actually seen.

The master had a right to the sentence he had already passed. What moves is not his sense of justice but his body. Then the release follows.

Notice: Notice where in your own body you register the memory of the person you are having trouble forgiving.

Pray: Jesus, you were not persuaded into mercy. It moved in you. Let me be looked at that way, and let it change what I do next. Amen.

Stay: As on Sunday. Let the breath be slow; the practice today is bodily as much as mental.

WEDNESDAY, September 16 — Release Was Already in the Calendar

“Proclaim liberty throughout the land.” — Leviticus 25:10

Read: Leviticus 25:8–13

Reflect: The Greek word for what the master does — *aphíemi*, to release, to let go — is the same word the Greek Old Testament uses for the Jubilee. Israel's God did not leave debt cancellation to the goodwill of creditors. He built it into time. Every seventh year debts were released, and every fiftieth year land returned and people went home. The release did not depend on whether the debtor deserved it or whether the creditor felt generous. It came around because the calendar came around.

So when the master cancels, he is not inventing a private kindness. He is doing what the God of Israel had been doing on a schedule for centuries. What the second half of the parable exposes is a man who received a Jubilee and went out to run a collection.

Notice: Notice what you assume has to be earned before it can be released.

Pray: Lord of the seventh year, you made release a season and not a mood. Teach me to live inside your calendar. Amen.

Stay: As on Sunday. Let the silence be a small Jubilee — nothing owed, nothing produced.

THURSDAY, September 17 — The Clause We Say Out Loud

“Forgive us our debts.” — Matthew 6:12

Read: Matthew 6:9–15

Reflect: The word in the Lord’s Prayer is *opheilēmata*, debts, the same commercial root that runs through the parable. Of the prayer’s six petitions, this is the only one Jesus circles back to explain when the prayer is finished, and the explanation is not comforting. He states it twice, positively and then negatively.

Read carefully, the clause is not a condition we satisfy in order to earn a pardon. It is a description of what has and has not happened in a person. A closed hand cannot receive. If we are still holding the account, we are holding something in the hand God is trying to fill.

Notice: Notice which line of the prayer you say fastest.

Pray: Father, I have prayed this sentence for years without meaning all of it. I mean the first half. Do something about the second. Amen.

Stay: As on Sunday. If words come, let them be the one word only, not the prayer.

FRIDAY, September 18 — The Fellow Servants

“They were greatly distressed.” — Matthew 18:31

Read: Matthew 18:28–31

Reflect: Matthew uses one word, *syndouloi*, for both men — the one seized by the throat and the one doing the seizing. They are fellow slaves of the same master, and so are the ones watching. The verb for what the watchers feel is the same one Matthew uses for the disciples at the table when Jesus says one of them will betray him. It is grief, and it is severe.

They do not look away and they do not make the man's behavior smaller than it was. They also do not settle it themselves. They carry what they saw to the one with authority to deal with it. That is a narrow path, and most of us leave it in one direction or the other — by pretending the harm was minor, or by taking the harm into our own hands. Naming the injury honestly is not the opposite of forgiveness. It is the condition of it. You cannot release what you have refused to weigh.

Notice: Notice where you have made a harm smaller so you would not have to deal with it.

Pray: God, give me the honesty to say what was actually done, and keep me from doing anything with it except bringing it to you. Amen.

Stay: As on Sunday. If the injury surfaces, do not work on it. Name the word and return.

SABBATH, September 19 — From the Heart

“From your heart.” — Matthew 18:35

Read: Matthew 18:32–35

Reflect: The master's question is *ought* — *édei*, a word of necessity. Nothing in law required the master to cancel the debt, and nothing in law required the servant to do the same for his neighbor. Yet the moment mercy landed on him, something became necessary that had not been necessary an hour before. Mercy received creates an obligation that law by itself cannot create.

Israel already knew this. When the Sabbath command is repeated in Deuteronomy, the reason given is not creation but rescue: remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out. The seventh day rests on a debt someone else cancelled. Every Sabbath is a return to that fact, and the command that follows from it is not gratitude in the abstract but release extended to everyone under your roof. This is why the parable ends *from your heart* — not from your policy, not from your agreement with the doctrine, but from the place in you where the cancellation actually landed.

Notice: Notice whether today feels like an obligation met or a debt remembered.

Pray: Lord, you were not required to be merciful to me. I have rested on that all day. Make me unable to forget it tomorrow. Amen.

Stay: As on Sunday. Take the full twenty minutes today if you can. The week has been going somewhere; sit in it without asking what it produced.

Group Discussion Questions

1. Where did the week make you uncomfortable, and what were you doing when it happened?
2. Peter asked his question with someone in mind. Did the week change anything about how you hold that person, or only how you think about them?
3. Monday put a figure on the debt that no working life could clear. Where do you still keep a private ledger of what you owe God, and what does it have written on it?
4. Wednesday put release on a calendar rather than in a mood. What would it change if forgiveness in this church were a practice with a rhythm rather than an event we wait to feel ready for?
5. Tuesday located mercy in the body before the will. When has forgiving someone begun in you as something felt rather than decided — and what do you do in the seasons when nothing moves?
6. The fellow servants named the harm and then handed it over. Which of those two is harder for you?
7. What is still closed?