



# DEVOTIONS FOR LIFE

Aldersgate Church ~ St. Louis Park, MN

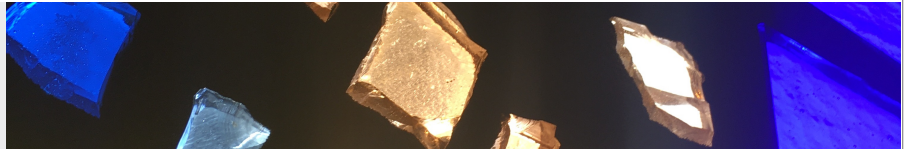
## Week of February 19, 2023 (Matthew 18:15-35)

### Prayer for Groups & Personal Devotion:

God, we tie ourselves and others in knots. Sometimes we are just trying so hard to get it right that we make it more difficult than it needs to be. May we grasp the simplicity of your good news—that we are forgiven and are called to forgive others. Simple, but not easy.

God, we thank you for stories that witness to freedom, for lives that testify to the capacity to forgive even in the most dire circumstances. We pray for victims of crime who find freedom in forgiving the perpetrators. We pray for those who have lost everything yet keep on hoping for better, because they are assured that your will for all your people is good.

God help us to be people who “pay it forward”, taking each small act of kindness and visiting it on someone else. Taking your huge gift of forgiveness and extending that to all whom we feel...



### Devotions for Life

**Context:** This week we jump a mere two chapters into chapter 18. In chapter 17 Jesus continues doing good work in Galilee, while he also sneaks in a few more predictions about his betrayal and death.

In chapter 18 things get real and practical. The disciples ask Jesus who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus calls a child forth and says *“truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me”* (NRSV).

Then Jesus moves into talking about how bad it is for anyone who puts a stumbling block in front of any child. He follows with a short parable about a shepherd leaving the 99 sheep to go find the one who is lost, who has “gone astray”.



After this we get to our passage for this week, a lengthy one, which is often said to be about “church discipline”. But as we look at what leads up to this in verses 18:1-14, we see that this is less about discipline than it is about

...have wronged us. As we look on our world today, may we see signs of your love and forgiveness being played out in the lives of others, especially those who lead and direct.

God, release us from our fear and give us the will to go and free others in the name of Christ who brings us freedom. Amen.

*(Prayer for Groups and Personal Devotion  
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## Compassion & Justice

**Black History Month:** We have given you a list of movies and a list of fiction for Black History Month. We wrap up Black History Month with a list of Biographies on great black Americans:

- *The Autobiography of Malcom X*
- *Harriet Tubman: The Road to Freedom* (Catherine Clinton)
- *Respect: The Life of Aretha Franklin* (David Ritz)
- *Arthur Ashe: A Life* (Raymond Arsenault)
- *My Life, My Love, My Legacy* (Coretta Scott King)
- *My Bondage and My Freedom* (Frederick Douglass).
- *My Life: Queen of the Court* (Serena Williams)

the community as a whole.

The passage for this week has three parts: One is about what to do to bring about healing and repair if a member of the community sins against you. One is about the importance of forgiveness. And one is a rather stark, terrifying, and violent parable about forgiveness.

As you read/hear these passages today, it's important to keep the big picture in mind: These are not mere rules to be followed "or else". They are about what a healthy community looks like.

### Questions for Reflection & Discussion:

1. What stood out to you in these passages? What parts resonated with you? What didn't? What, if anything troubled you?
2. Have you ever been "sinned against" by someone? How, if at all, did you reconcile the relationship and repair the harm?
3. Have you ever been confronted by someone because you "sinned against" them? How did that turn out? What emotions accompanied that situation for you?
4. What is the difference between "sinning against" someone and mere generalized "sin"?
5. Many easier manuscripts do not have the words "against you", leaving verse 18:15 saying, "if a member of the church sins...". How does this change the meaning? What are we to do with that?
6. Considering the context, what is Jesus talking about when he says "where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them" (verse 20)?
7. What do you think of Jesus' parable? What is his point? How does it resolve? How did you feel when hearing it?
8. What does it mean to forgive someone? What doesn't it mean? Why should we do it? Why is it so important to Jesus?
9. What happens when we don't forgive? What is the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation?