



Links Players

A High Bar

If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him. (Luke 17:2-4)

I went out for track in the Spring of my senior year in high school. I ran hurdles because the hurdlers didn't have to do as much running in practice as the sprinters or the distance crowd did.

Turned out, being on the steep part of the learning curve, I improved pretty rapidly. I shaved about a second off my high hurdle time in my second race (obvious proof of how bad I was). I plotted these times and figured that in three or four more races, I'd own the World Record. Didn't happen.

I took up golf around age 50. As difficult as golf is, it took some time before I broke 90.

But progress was made. I crunched the numbers and figured that in roughly two years I ought to be breaking 80 regularly. That estimate relied on extrapolating the existing performance curve and a handful of untested assumptions. That was maybe fifteen years ago. Haven't gotten there yet.

In all this, I never really appreciated how high the bar was set. A "friend" laughs at my sub-80 aspirations, arguing that "par" is really designed for professional golfers, not schmucks like me whose short game is a dumpster fire.

The whole "forgiving your brother seven times" thing is another bar set pretty high. Remarkable that, in the passage we're looking at today, it is required to forgive someone who has sinned against us seven times in a day.

A seriously high bar, for sure. I think if someone asked me whether I thought I was capable of that, I'd try to change the subject.

Jesus does this a lot - setting the bar high. He tells the rich young ruler to sell everything he has and give it to the poor. Everything he has. High bar!

When they bring the adulterous woman to Him and want to stone her, Jesus says that anyone without sin can start throwing stones. Without sin? An extremely high bar. Jesus tells us we can't call our brother a fool, or we're a murderer. The bar's high there, too. Even lust in our hearts makes us adulterers. Yikes!

I can't do any of this. Well, maybe I could sell everything I have and give it to the poor, but I'd have to get my financial advisor to sign off on it, which I don't see as particularly likely.

And forgiving someone seven times a day? If you repeatedly punched me and then apologized, I'm pretty sure my forgiveness tank would be empty after three or four whacks. Of course, none of this is about me. Rather, it's about Jesus.

Jesus forgives freely. He was the one present without sin during the incident with the adulterous woman. He was the one who, unlike the rich young ruler, gave all his wealth (righteousness) to the poor (us, the woefully unrighteous).

As He was dying on the cross, He asked, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" It wasn't because He didn't know the answer.

It was His last sermon, the final teaching, in which He told us that God the Father was forsaking Him to forgive all the sin unleashed by Adam and Eve in their (and our) fall. He was forsaken that we might be accepted.

Quite a high bar!

Prayer: Lord, thank you that your forgiveness dwarfs our meager efforts.

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