

## Time for God – Take 2

**Purpose:** To assist the congregation with further reflection on the theme of the Sunday service and in particular with the Congregational Bible passage.

## Week beginning Sunday 19 February More than fair – hard sayings

**Pray** Pray that we would be open to Jesus' radical teaching on forgiveness not only in theoretical way but in exploring how we might need to change our behaviour to fit in with his kingdom thinking.

**Read** Read the passage (preferably in an easy to understand version). Matthew 5:38-48.

**Background** Jesus is still drawing from the Old Testament law and commenting on the raft of tradition that sought to explain and interpret it. As someone commented to me the other day "We have a tendency to want to come up with guidelines to explain hard laws/regulations. Often these are designed to interpret the laws according to our way of thinking." Jesus was far more interested in getting to the underlying meaning, wasn't at all impressed with attempts to water down the law, but was even more interested in encouraging people to go even further to show greater love and forgiveness in what was often a harsh regime.

**Possible questions/points to consider**

1. The Old Testament law (or at least the way it was often interpreted) often seems harsh and uncaring to us. Hard as we may find it, the rules of punishment were arguably put in place to limit escalating violence. An assault very often resulted in even more serious retribution being taken sometimes leading to death. That death would then need to be paid for and so on – things all too easily got out of hand. In the modern era gangland wars, drug barons and people traffickers can often inflict severe penalties and violence can spiral. How can such a cycle be broken? At lower levels of conflict – can you think of examples of how things have got out of hand through a tit for tat response (maybe not violence, but a falling out which led to people digging in)?
2. How does Jesus' approach differ? Why does his stance not sit comfortably with us? He never pretends that it is easy to "turn the other cheek"? Why are we so hesitant to concede ground to others? How might it help if we thought more about just how forgiving God has been to us? Does this approach mean that there is no need for law, police, courts, etc?
3. If we are willing to forgive and go on forgiving does that mean that we will immediately receive justice and that all our problems will disappear? How do we cope with ongoing unfairness and injustice? How do we face the "cost" of forgiving? How might it change other people's behaviour? What do we do about it when we see little or no change?
4. Is Jesus' approach super-spiritual? Is it enough to say that it just wouldn't work in the modern era? How do you think Jesus wanted his original hearers to respond? What Jesus want us to do in 2017 Scotland? Are we too ready to fall in with the crowd? What resources does God provide for us to be Jesus' disciples today? Are there any differences between the stance we should take as individuals to disputes that a) affect only us b) affect others and as a society issues that c) affect people generally?
5. Ordinary people were obliged to carry a Roman soldiers pack for a mile if asked. Jesus said that his disciples should be willing to go beyond that and carry the pack a second mile. That would really prompt questions. How might we be willing to show greater love to others than what is expected or demanded? How might that prompt questions and give scope for us to "give an account of the faith that is in us"?
6. Discuss anything else that the passage or service threw up.

**Prayer** Lord, help us not to dismiss your teaching on turning the other cheek and going the second mile. Help us to work out and put into practice what you expect of your followers in our day and age. Amen.