**FORGIVENESS**

When I saw this illustration of forgiveness, it reminded me of those wonderful words we often sing:

Who breaks the power of sin and darkness?
Whose love is mighty and so much stronger?
The King of glory, the King above all kings

This is amazing grace, This is unfailing love
That You would take my place, That You would bear my cross

You laid down Your life, That I would be set free
Oh, Jesus, I sing for all that You've done for me

Forgiveness is at the heart of the message of salvation. God is holy and cannot look on sin. [*Habakkuk 1:13*](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hab%201.13) *“Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrongdoing”* To “look on” is parallel with “tolerate.” Habakkuk is pointing to God’s [holiness](https://www.gotquestions.org/holy-holy-holy.html) and saying, “You are too holy to look favourably on evil.” Therefore, it follows that if we wanted to come into God’s presence, there had to be a way by which our sins are covered. Thankfully we know that Jesus Christ gave up his life on the cross and through the shedding of his blood, we can have forgiveness for our sins. As we have learned from our recent study of the book of Hebrews, verse 22 of chapter 9 tells us: “*And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and***without shedding of blood***is***no***remission (forgiveness).”*

*(For those unfamiliar with Habakkuk, it is unusual as a prophetic book. It never addresses the people of Judah directly. Rather it is a dialogue between the prophet and God. The prophet Habakkuk was probably a contemporary of Zephaniah and Jeremiah, and possibly even of Ezekiel and Daniel. He probably prophesied no later than the end of Josiah’s reign (640–609 B.C.).* ***Although Habakkuk may not fully understand, he has learned to rely totally on God’s wisdom and justice. He knows God can resolve issues in ways he could never have imagined.*** *This God is certainly worthy of Habakkuk’s praise and worship, which is how the book ends.)*

In his book ‘FORGIVENESS’, Bishop J. C. Ryle, the first bishop of Liverpool, writes: *In 1 John 2:12 it says: “your sins are forgiven you.” He goes to comment: “There is a clause near the end of the Apostle’s Creed which, I fear, is often repeated without thought or consideration. I refer to the clause which contains these words, ‘I believe in the forgiveness of sins.’ Thousands, I am afraid, never reflect what those words mean.”*

* Have we given those words serious consideration?

***Read: Matthew 18:21-35***

In this passage, Peter is asking a very reasonable question regarding forgiving someone who has sinned against him. We ourselves may have asked the same thing. How bad, or how frequently, we learn, is irrelevant. Maybe we too think forgiving someone seven times is quite magnanimous but not, according to Jesus.

* How difficult do we find it to forgive someone if they have done us harm by their words or actions?
* What are our thoughts about this passage?
* Could we ever envisage ourselves behaving like the servant who had been forgiven so much?

One writer puts it like this: *But if you don't practice forgiveness, you might be the one who pays most dearly. By embracing forgiveness, you can also embrace peace, hope, gratitude, and joy.*

Two recent events, related to our home area, have highlighted this issue of forgiveness, or in each case, unforgiveness. There have been many studies that demonstrate how holding on to unforgiveness blights the lives of people. They cannot move on in their lives and become extremely bitter.

Maya Angelou, the American Civil Rights activist said: *"****Forgiveness is the greatest gift you can give yourself.”***

C. S. Lewis writes on this topic: “To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you. It is a common saying that to err is human but to forgive is divine. This is because it is inherent for humans to be fallible yet wreak revenge when wronged, so to overlook such offences would be a transcendent act. But just as God forgives all our iniquities, we must also pardon the mistakes of others. Yes, it is difficult, but God expects us to strive for perfection (Hebrews 6:1) through loving each other, even our enemies, unconditionally (Matthew 5:44). After all, love covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8).

Many of the studies done on this subject of forgiveness are not necessarily Christian based. How much more then, should we as Christians, practice forgiveness?

* Have you ever found it difficult to forgive someone?
* Have you ever found it difficult to forgive yourself?

Many people excuse their behaviour by saying that people don’t understand what they have been through. However, there are others who have forgiven the most terrible atrocities. One example comes from the Amish Community:

*“On October 2, 2006, Charles C. Roberts walked into an Amish schoolhouse armed with three guns. There were 26 students in the schoolhouse. He allowed the 15 boys, a pregnant female student, and three other adult females with infant children to leave safely but held the remaining 15 girls captive and tied their feet together.*

*His deranged rationale for his actions was that he wanted to exact revenge for something that had happened*[*in his past*](http://www.foxnews.com/story/0%2C2933%2C217240%2C00.html)*. Notes that he left behind indicate anger toward himself and God for the death of his newborn daughter almost nine years earlier.*

*Authorities were alerted and soon arrived on the scene. Not long after police arrived,*[*Roberts started shooting*](https://www.cnn.com/2006/US/10/02/amish.shooting/)*, killing three children and himself. Two more children died later from their injuries.*

*In the face of such tragedy, one can only imagine the hurt and anger the loved ones of the victims might feel. In an*[*extraordinary demonstration*](http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=14900930)*of forgiveness, members of the Amish community, including family members of the deceased victims, attended Robert’s funeral and comforted his widow. The Amish community did not stop there—they also offered financial support to Robert’s widow.”*

Another amazing example of forgiveness has been shared by Revd. Irene on occasions: that of Corrie Ten Boom. She and her sister had hidden Jews in their home town in Holland but when discovered, they were sent to the concentration camp of Ravensbrück where they suffered at the hands of the German guards. In 1972, she was speaking of her experiences and about forgiveness, when she saw a man making his way to the front. She immediately recognised him as one of those guards. He offered his hand and she managed to take it. Then he explained who he was (not realising she already knew), *“But since that time,” he went on, “I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well.*Fräulein*”– again the hand came out –“will you forgive me?”*

For Corrie Ten Boom, it was the most difficult thing she had ever done but knew there was no choice. For a few seconds, she stood, then grabbed his hand and said: *“I forgive you, brother! With all my heart!”*

We can never ask ourselves what we would have done in these two accounts because it is impossible to do so.

In his book ***FORGIVENESS****,* Bishop J. C. Ryle, the first bishop of Liverpool, says in relation to 1 John 2:12 - *I am writing to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name – There is a clause near the end of the Apostle’s Creed, which I fear, is often repeated without thought or consideration. I refer to the clause which contains these words, “I believe in the forgiveness of sins”*

* Do we think about the words we so easily repeat?

**But, what about Jesus?**

*Read Phiippians 2:5-11*

*You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.*

*Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to.*

*Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross.*

*Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honour and gave him the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Jesus gave up everything to come to this earth to die for us. He was willing to suffer the most painful death in order that we might be forgiven.

Whilst he carried out his time of ministry, there were many occasions when he spoke about forgiveness, such as that in Matthew 18.

In Matthew 6:13, we have what has become known as *The Lord’s Prayer.*

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Let your Kingdom come.

Let your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread and forgive us our debts,

As we also forgive our debtors.

Let us not come into temptation,

But deliver us from the evil one.

{For yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen}

Verses 14-15 in this chapter put the picture very clearly:

*For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

* When do we find it difficult to forgive other people?
* How do we develop our Christian faith and love to the extent that we can forgive all things?

The return of the prodigal son to a loving and forgiving father

**Prayer**

**Let’s say the Lord’s prayer together**