



*This Sunday we are looking at the wide-ranging issue of Forgiveness, following a week of atrocity in France and violence in Turkey. How do Christians live out 'forgiveness' intentionally: so illustrating God's heart for the world? 1 Timothy 4:7 tells us to 'Train yourself in Godliness'. The Greek verb for 'train' is **gymnazo** which means to exercise vigorously, in a focussed way. Similarly forgiveness needs to be worked at, like core fitness exercises in the gym, and we will discover that a lot of spiritual 'muscles' (that you didn't know you had) are used! Read **Luke 6: 37 – 38**.*

1. When you are asked to forgive, it's not about:

- Making light of the situation or denying the damage done: pride finds us trying to pretend it didn't happen
- Pitying the supplicant: our ego can shrug, 'It's their problem.....' and forgiveness turns into a power game.
- Trying to force reconciliation. Forgiveness doesn't always lead to a perfectly restored relationship. It takes time to rebuild trust and to safeguard against reoffending: our offer of forgiveness may not be accepted.

2. When you are asked to forgive, it is about:

- Choosing to forgive – it's an act of the will. We cannot be coerced into authentic forgiveness: with God's help we must consciously release bitterness and revenge. 'Forgiving means abandoning your right to pay back the perpetrator in his own coin'. (Desmond Tutu).
- Owning our part in the situation:
 - There's no room for 'I'm sorry but - it was your fault/I was having a bad day/I was hungry, nor for 'I'm sorry that - you feel this way/you saw it like that'. These statements turn forgiveness into rejection.
 - Integrity! Be sincere, unlike the automated voice announcing 'it' is sorry the train is delayed.
- Realising that forgiveness is a process that takes time. We have had many tragedies in the news this week. Sometimes we see (usually) Christians 'forgiving' immediately but it's unlikely that they are really in touch with what they have lost. Even a decade away they may find they still need to forgive the losses incurred. 'Forgiveness is not an occasional act, it is a constant attitude'. (Martin Luther King)

3. How does Forgiveness work?

- In Jesus' time it was more obvious that forgiveness is both relational and transactional: often involving the creation of separation and division between peoples and also damage to their livelihood (e.g. lost sheep). Nowadays we have phrases like, 'this is business: it's not personal'. Relationship and cost go hand in hand
- So, when we ask forgiveness we should be recognising the debt or damage for which we are responsible.
- When we ask for an apology we need to explain how our last encounter ended up being costly financially, emotionally and relationally. Both parties will have suffered: it's not about which one was most at fault.
- When relationship and right order in society is restored, (counter-intuitively) justice is exercised, mercy done and relationship re-connected. Owning our part checks our pride and reminds us that God is judge.

4. Who do we look to for a Model?

- To Jesus who is model, guide, coach and trainer in the exercise of forgiving the sins of the people around Him throughout His life. On the cross he cried out to His Father to forgive His torturers, **Luke 23:34**
- The Jewish sacrificial system was all about forgiveness and restoration. God is quick to forgive **Ps 130** Jesus shows us the love and compassion of His Father towards all who need forgiveness and are yet accepted.
- How do we forgive ourselves our own failings and inadequacies? By remembering that the worst we have done never disqualifies us from God's compassionate love, as long as we are committed to Him. God is the Ultimate Forgiver and when we choose to see ourselves as He sees us: loved, accepted as His child and trying to get it right, we find a lot more self-compassion and inner strength is released in us.

Questions for discussion or to think about at home.

1. *Are there some aspects of forgiveness generally, with which we really struggle?*
2. *If we have relationship problems with someone, how do we begin to work towards forgiveness?*
3. *Do we sometimes feel distanced from someone, or even from God, and know forgiveness is the key but don't know how to start?*
4. *Thinking of forgiveness as a gymnastic exercise suggests we could isolate particular areas to 'work on' e.g:
Getting better at owning our part in a relationship breakdown.
Admitting to a situation where there is distance or injustice in a relationship.
Admitting to being rather bad about 'sorry buts' or sorry that's*