



Believe #6

What Is Forgiveness?

“I believe in the forgiveness of sins...”

“Forgiveness remains the work of the whole community... To forgive is, in a broad sense, to live by the Spirit... Forgiveness of sins is the whole life’s work of a Christian.”

- David G Truemper & Frederick A Niedner, Keeping The Faith, Pg 133

Romans 12:18-21.

If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God... To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Colossians 3:13.

forgive each other - as the Lord has forgiven you so you also must forgive...

Matthew 6:14-15.

For if you forgive others their sins, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their sins, neither will your Father forgive your sins.

Luke 6:37.

Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven;

Luke 17:3-4.

“If your friend sins, rebuke them, and if they repent, forgive them. If they sin against you seven times in a day, and seven times come back to you and say, ‘I repent,’ forgive them.”

Luke 23:33-34.

... There they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. And Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

Forgiveness is the opposite of how humans normally live. We fight back, hurt back, strike back, Or we tend to run away. But to forgive is a supernatural thing. To forgive is not to become a victim. It’s not to accept evil. To forgive is to use power in an unusual and radical way! When forgiveness happens it is a miracle of God. It is the work of the Holy Spirit.

1. FORGIVENESS SETS A PLACE AT THE TABLE

Luke 15:11-13. There was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country...

There's the angry sinful son going off to live a life of selfishness on his own. But what does the Father do? No change! No change in behaviour is recorded. Does he forget the son or remove his place? The granted forgiveness is the place at the table. God sets a place for you. And no matter how far you run, That place, that feast, that joy, is just waiting for you. When we say "I believe in the forgiveness of sins" we are saying we believe God sets a place at the table for sinners!

So if someone hurts you, forgiveness means continuing to set a place at the table for them. No matter how far they run, no matter what they say or do, Forgiveness is an attitude that is granted up-front, first, without any action from the other. It's leaving that place set, so that if they should return, they can receive it. Instead of choosing hate you choose acceptance of them (not their acts). Praying for them to come to their senses, for them to be loved, for their good.

Who do you need to set a place at the table for?

2. FORGIVENESS WAITS AT THE GATE , READY TO RUN AND RESTORE!

Luke 15:20. And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.

Notice the Father saw the son 'at a distance'. He was waiting. This is God's attitude to us. God does not make us into obedient robots who can make no mistakes. But God watches at the gate, attentive, ready, loving. Not offended, hating, judging, But present and ready. We cannot open that gate ourselves. But at the smallest hint of turning, God runs to us and gives the Holy Spirit to empower our repentance.

Garth Calder once said, *"Working with young people is about waiting patiently at the door."*

Who do you need to wait at the gate for? Who do you need to be ready to run to restore?

3. FORGIVENESS IS ONLY RECEIVED BY THE ONE WHO TURNS FROM SIN.

Luke 15:21. The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

The forgiveness was already granted. But it was not received! Forgiveness was complete, but reconciliation was not. There's granting forgiveness (that's pictures 1 and 2 here). Then there is receiving forgiveness (that's pictures 3 and 4 here). You can grant forgiveness. But it may not be received. That part is not up to you but up to the other person.

Forgiveness is won by God to all, but not all receive it. Because not everyone repents or turns away from their sin. Repentance means admitting your fault and "turning away" from your sin. Notice that the father does not say, "Forget it son, you did nothing wrong." He does not pretend the son did not hurt him. Forgiveness is not allowing someone else to do wrong. Real forgiveness says, "You did wrong – but I let it go – now let's move forward!"

Ted Kober says that in forgiving someone we are making four promises:

- 1. I will not think about this incident*
- 2. I will not bring this up again and use it against you.*
- 3. I will not talk to others about this incident.*
- 4. I will not allow this to stand between us and hinder our relationship.*

- Ted Kober, Confession & Forgiveness, Pg 128.

In many cases you will *never* hear the other person repent. Leave that to God. Forgive and let them go. You can do the first two steps – set a place at the table and wait at the gate.

Who do you need to 'repent' to?

4. FORGIVENESS CELEBRATES WITHOUT HOLDING BACK.

***Luke 15:22-24. And bring the fattened calf for a roast, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.'* And they began to celebrate..**

Luke 15:25-26. Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant.

Luke 15:29. Look [Father], these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends...

Luke 15:32. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.

Forgiveness is generous. It starts the party immediately. Forgiveness welcomes you with the best true deep joy in the universe. This is not the false temporary happiness of a new materialistic toy or a win. It's deeper than that - because in forgiveness you can really be yourself. In forgiveness you get seen with all your faults, and sins, and failures. The real you – the bad side is seen, and you are loved and received as you are! That love of God gives you power to change. And it brings joy, celebration, generosity, the feast!