

## **Forgiveness Series ET Church 16<sup>th</sup> June 2024**

### **TALK 2: Forgiving others**

#### **S1. Forgiving Others: 'Be kind to one another, tender-hearted and forgiving one**

**another, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you,' Ephesians 4 v 32.** This verse is written in the context of the relationships of the body of Christ. A forgiving culture means that we know we are loved and accepted, despite our struggles and weaknesses and that people have our backs. We said last week that forgiveness was about releasing and to grant favour to someone unconditionally or to forgive in the sense of treating the offending party graciously. God wants us released, mainly from sin and its effects and he offers forgiveness and release for this to us, in a world that needs the same.

#### **S2. What is forgiveness?**

##### **Forgiveness towards others is not...**

***Approval of or excusing or justifying what they did; pardoning what they did; reconciliation; denying or being blind to what has happened and pretending we are not hurt.*** When people have hurt us it may take time for us to trust people again and that does not mean we have not forgiven them.

***Forgetting.*** There is a difference between forgiving and forgetting. Just because we remember what has happened to us does not mean we have not forgiven someone. God has chosen not to remember our sins, ***'Even God doesn't literally forget our sins; He chooses to overlook them. He knows full well what we have done and what He has forgiven us of; every sordid detail. But He chooses not to remember, so that He doesn't hold it against us. (R T Kendall) (Hebrews 8 v 12).***

##### **Forgiveness is...**

***Being fully aware of what someone did and still forgive them. There is a difference between forgiveness and feeling the pain of the wrong against us.*** Our reaction may be of deep hurt and that needs to be processed and healed. Our response to this is to choose to keep no record of wrongs (***1 Corinthians 13 v 5***). Unfortunately, we can have the tendency to remind people of their past sins against us, often at a later date.

***Related to binding and releasing (Matthew 16 v 19).*** Forgiveness releases you and releases the person to God so He can do His work. If we do not forgive we bind up both ourselves and the person and this has a knock on effect. Forgiveness and unforgiveness have a cause and effect connection in our lives and history.

***Wanting reconciliation and not revenge.*** If we forgive, we refuse to punish or take revenge or 'get even,' to make them pay in some way. Man's revenge is not God's justice. God is our justifier (***Romans 12 v 19; Hebrews 10 v 30***). Our human revenge is emotionally powered to get even.

***Wanting the other person to be blessed and honoured.*** When you forgive you choose to protect and honour those people who have hurt you. This means we don't spread what they did to other people with the intention of hurting their reputation.

#### **S3. Why should we forgive?**

***1. God has forgiven us and we have freely received his pardon and mercy.*** The more we know his forgiveness in our hearts and our own vulnerability, the more we can forgive others. When we don't forgive it grieves the Holy Spirit, 'slaps him in the face', demonstrates ingratitude as we squander what we've given, like the younger son. It can be seen as an indifference to the greatest thing God has done for us and an interruption of God's purpose in the world to reconcile people to Himself (***2 Corinthians 5 v 17-21***).

***2. Jesus lived and taught forgiveness.*** Jesus teaches we need to put things right with each other before we worship (***Matt 5 vs 21-24***); he won't forgive if we don't forgive (***Matt 6 v 15 & Mark 11 v 26***); Love and pray for our enemies (***Matthew 5 v 43-48***); forgive each other 70x7 or to completion, (***Matthew 18 v 22***).

***3. It's healthy for body, soul and spirit.*** If we don't forgive we face emotional, social and physical problems and our heart becomes hardened to God's Spirit. This can also eventually

lead to psychological or even physical illness. When we feel negatively towards someone, our bodies instinctively prepare to fight that person and impacts our body chemistry and processes. The downward spiral of unforgiveness includes holding a grudge, becoming resentful; this leads to a bitter heart root inside and we can become preoccupied with hate, self-pity and revenge (**Ephesians 4 v 30-32**).

**4. It's not just about us.** Forgiveness allows the Spirit to move through you, through you individually and collectively flowing through the body of Christ. It breaks the chain reaction of sin and shame. If we do not forgive it affects others as we spread the contamination of unforgiveness to others. If we enter worship with others as a congregation holding grudges it causes a barrier to the flow of God's Spirit we meet together (**Matthew 5 vs 21-24**) and enemy wishes to divide and rob us of this; unforgiveness can give him a way in to steal, kill and destroy what we have together (**John 10 v 10**)

**5. We learn and grow through forgiveness.** Forgiveness can be painful and sometimes needs to be a process but through it we have the potential to learn together more about ourselves and each other. Some deep friendships have been formed between people following a wounded situation.

#### **S4. The Story of the two sons: The Older Brother and the Father**

**Two sons.** It seems one son had squandered his Father's wealth and the other had not used it. Notice the father's words, '**All that I have is yours...**' The older brother could have killed a calf anytime to have party with his friends, he owned the estate in effect. As the older son he had rights.

**The older brother's reaction to the Father's forgiveness and generosity reveals what was hidden, for years in his heart, by years of hidden resentment and duty towards his father.** He pours out his pent up resentment from over the years, he uses deliberate phrases to get the point over; '**...all these years I have been serving you... I have never neglected a command of yours...**' I am the good boy, you should be rewarding me with a party; '**... but when THIS son of yours...**' is a very accusatory comment. The Kingdom of God is not about entitlement, duty, how long we've served or performance mentality. This was a message to the religious people of Jesus' day. God is not interested in how many times we get it right; only our faithfulness.

Jesus does not tell us deliberately what the younger son got involved in but the older brother assumed and ran to assumption and judgement, in fact he is quite explicit-'**.. he has devoured your wealth with harlots...**'. We are not told it was this, just 'loose living.'

**The Father listened to his complaint,** he did not react to the subtle attack on him but acknowledged his complaint and his older son's faithfulness and listened. He invites the son to the celebration. The father is responsive rather than reactive. He might have said, '**why didn't you tell me before this is how you feel?**' This would have come from a hurt reaction.

**Unforgiveness spoils celebration.** We do not know what happened to the older brother in the story, we are left wandering, **deliberately**. The son has a choice, he either lets go of his pride, hurt and resentment towards both his Father and his brother and joins the party or he continues to build on his resentment.

#### **S5. Practical Steps to walking into Forgiveness of others**

##### **When we've been hurt by others**

**A Culture of forgiveness means** accepting we are all human, broken people and in process, even in the Church community. We all make mistakes and say harmful things. We are encouraged in scripture to respond with love when people may have said or done something evil (**1 Peter 3v9, Romans 12v 17, Luke 6 v 35, Proverbs 17 v13, 1 Thessalonians 5 v15**). It is a choice to want to walk in forgiveness (a continual verb) and reconciliation at all times (**Ephesians 4 v 32**). The vital thing is what we can potentially learn together if either party have been hurt and they both are looking for reconciliation. It includes believing the good of the other

person, trying to understand their actions and refuse to get into gossip about them. Jesus said, **'... blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy...'** (Matthew 5 vs 1-16)

**Take responsibility for the reaction we feel when we have been hurt. No-one can make us feel anything.** Our response to people's hurt towards us is our responsibility and we have to process and deal with that before God first. The effect another person has on us has nothing to do with them. We have to deal with that first. Remember that sometimes people don't even know they've offended you. One automatic reaction is to go into defensive mode, the father did not do this. There can also be a natural tendency to shy away or pull back when being hurt.

**Aim to put it right to avoid bitterness growing.** If you have been wronged by someone and they do not know and you find forgiving that person hard, part of your responsible process is to go to them direct and talk to them. This prevents a 'root of bitterness, growing up inside you' (Hebrews 12 v 15). Bitterness means 'a resentful spirit that refuses to be reconciled' (Ephesians 4 v31-32). If things are not right between people and hold **grudges**, we **develop suspicions** that **lead to resentment** and this can **grow to bitterness** that can affect all areas of our lives. Not dealt with we become immune to the pain and can't hear God. We harden our hearts and we don't realise we've been caught in a spiritual stronghold.

**Bitterness can eat away at us, sometimes over years, as it did with the older brother.** Eventually when it spills out and past sins are brought up, people can be shocked by this and it can come out in a twisted way, even as slander (Ephesians 4 vs 31-32), meaning to speak against someone in order to defame them often behind people's backs. Splattering our hurt and resentment to other people and on social media is not the Kingdom way of doing things. Our bitterness can also come out in passive-aggressive ways, body language, embarrassing the person as a joke in front of others.

### **When we have hurt others**

**'When we hurt God's people with our words we hurt also the Holy Spirit who lives in them.'** (Alan Hoare Ephesians Vol 2 page 264). We need to take responsibility for our own actions when we have hurt others. **1 John 1 v 9 and James 5 v 16**, asks us to confess our sin to God and each other, to remain right with God and each other. Admit we have hurt someone, even unintentionally. Apologise when we have done wrong. BE HUMBLE; have an intention to put things right.

**Our culture tells us we do not have to apologise if we choose not to.** The fact we do not apologise when we have genuinely hurt someone can often be related to our pride and the shame we feel. Jesus wants us to be brave here and lay aside our excuses which are often the shield for the shame we feel.

**We only know what we know, until we are told differently.** None of us are mind readers. If you know someone has something against you, you need to go to that person (Matthew 5 vs 21-24). However, if you do not know you cannot do anything with this. Sometimes we don't know that we have caused offence.

### **S6. Struggling with forgiving**

**Accept forgiveness is a process in some situations.** Admit you cannot forgive but have the intention of wanting to do so. Of ourselves we cannot truly forgive. Jesus said it is easy to love those who we find lovely, it is a challenge and a process to walk in love towards people who have hurt us. We can allow God to love them through us and see them as He sees them.

**Jesus was asked a question about how many times should we forgive**, his answer was seventy times seven, meaning forever and ever, until completion (Matthew 18 vs 15-35). We need to go back to God time and time again asking Him to forgive us of our unforgiveness; the more we do this the more God can be given room to work and change us. **If we are easily offended by things it might be helpful to explore what this might be about. Sometimes other's actions can remind us of the way others have treated us in the past, especially if we have a trauma history and we need help with untangling this. You may have to explore**

**specialist help with these things through Christian counselling and ‘healing of memories’ prayer ministry.**

**Ask for others to help you and pray with you; do not be a ‘resentful island.’** Choose wisely people to confide in and get them to pray and support you, or even advocate for you if the person will not listen to you (**Matthew 18**). However, make sure they are there to help you find forgiveness and not to be drawn into your resentment, bitterness and revenge and can keep your confidence. **It is a huge privilege and honour when others confide in you and ask you to pray.**

**However, we need to be wise with people who have hurt us.** Ideally we should be able to communicate that to the person who has hurt us so they can realise how it has impacted us and in turn, has the potential to grow and change the other person. Sometimes this is not possible, due to death or lack of safety around that person. Putting a space between you and the other person for a time, does not necessarily mean that you have not forgiven them as trust takes time (**1 Corinthians 5 v 11**).

### **S7. Jesus and His life of forgiveness**

**JESUS FORGAVE:** Jesus said, **‘Father forgive them for they know not what they do.’** (**Luke 23 v 24**).

**Jesus therefore knows what it is like to be REJECTED, WRONGLY ACCUSED, REJECTED BY HIS RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY, ASSUMED HE WAS MAD BY HIS FAMILY, BEING DESERTED, BEING LET DOWN BY HIS FRIENDS AT THE TIME HE NEEDED THEM THE MOST, BEING BEATEN, BULLIED, HARRASSED, HAVING HIS WORDS CHALLENGED, NOT BEING HEARD OR LISTENED TO, NOT BEEN TAKEN SERIOUSLY, BEING SIDELINED, BEING CURSED. But in all this He did not sin or seek revenge.**

### **S8. Take home summary...**

1. God loves us and freely forgives us as we come to Him
2. Walk in His forgiveness by keeping short accounts with sin and others
3. If you are hurt by others choose to deal with your reaction first, forgive and understand.
4. If you struggle, accept forgiveness is a process. Tell God and ask him to enable you to forgive. Have a heart intention to want to forgive. Choose wisely people to confide in and get them to pray and support you, making sure they are there to help you find forgiveness and not to be drawn into you resentment, bitterness and revenge.
5. Unforgiveness brings misery, illness and discord and prevents us living the life Jesus said we could live in all its fulness (**John 10 v 10**).

**Final words- ‘God is not out to get at us or catch us out. God is out to love us back to life and change us to be the people we were born to be.’**

**Prayer:** Lord, reveal to us afresh today that we will truly know in our hearts and walk with you that we are forgiven, loved and accepted by you as your beloved children and that we would live in transparent, open relationships with each other. Help us always look for the good in each other, to encourage each other to grow and learn together about ourselves, each other and you. As a result of this may the Spirit of God flow freely through and between us to a lost world that is crying out for the same.

### **Useful Books**

Total Forgiveness by R.T Kendall

Radical Forgiveness by Brian Zahnd

The Return of the Prodigal by Henri Nowen