

Forgiveness is Difficult ... and needs practising

Romans 13:8–end; Matthew 18:15–20

- **Forgiveness is part of everyday Christian life.**
 - We often think of forgiveness only in relation to terrible acts or major betrayals.
 - But the Bible's teaching points to forgiveness as something we need to practise continually.
- **Love and forgiveness are closely connected.**
 - Romans 13 teaches that love fulfils the law and "does no wrong to a neighbour."
 - In the imperfect reality of human relationships, love will often take the practical form of forgiveness.
- **Jesus teaches us how to deal with conflict.**
 - In Matthew 18, Jesus addresses what we should do when another Christian sins against us.
 - His first instruction is to speak to the person privately and seek to put the relationship right.
 - Yet we often find it easier to complain about people or nurse resentment than to take that difficult first step.
- **The church is a "school of forgiveness."**
 - Christians are not perfect, and the church is not a community where nobody ever causes offence.
 - We bring different backgrounds, expectations, experiences, weaknesses and hurts.
 - Inevitably, as we live and work together, we will sometimes disappoint or hurt one another.
- **We need to practise forgiveness in the small things.**
 - Everyday irritations and disappointments provide opportunities to develop a forgiving spirit.
 - Learning to forgive small offences may help prepare us to face the much greater challenges of forgiveness.
- **Forgiveness requires humility and honesty.**
 - We need to recognise our own imperfections and remember that we too need forgiveness.
 - Instead of taking offence too readily, we are called to seek reconciliation wherever possible.
- **Forgiveness is rooted in Christ and the cross.**
 - The crucified Christ is the source of all forgiveness.
 - At the cross, God does not respond to human sin by abandoning us, but absorbs the hurt and reaches out in love.
 - Christ loves both the forgiver and the forgiven and seeks to reconcile all things to himself.
- **The presence of Christ is at the heart of reconciliation.**
 - Jesus promises to be present where his people gather in his name.
 - When Christians seek to repair broken relationships, they do so in the presence and strength of Christ.

The central message

The church is an imperfect community where we will inevitably hurt one another. Rather than avoiding this reality, we are called to practise the art of forgiveness—loving one another, addressing conflict honestly, seeking reconciliation, and looking to Christ and his cross as the source and model of forgiveness

Questions:

1. **Jonathan says that “the shape love takes is often the shape of forgiveness.”**
What do you think this means? How are love and forgiveness connected in Romans 13:8–10?
2. **The church is described as a “school of forgiveness.”**
What does the sermon suggest we can learn by being part of an imperfect Christian community?
3. **Jesus tells us to speak directly to someone who has offended us (Matthew 18:15).**
Why might we find it easier to grumble about someone or nurse a resentment than to speak honestly with them?
4. **Consider the image of ‘people holding a broken bottle in each hand and then being asked to hug one another.’**
What does this image say about the difficulties of Christian community? Does it also suggest something positive about being willing to remain in relationship with one another?
5. **The sermon says that forgiveness needs to be practised in ‘the little things’ so that we may be better prepared for the big things.**
What are some of the everyday situations in which we might need to practise forgiveness?
6. **Jonathan ends by pointing to the cross, saying that Christ “absorbs the hurt” and seeks to reconcile all things to himself.**
How does looking at Christ and the cross change the way we think about forgiving others?

Deeper Discussion Questions with Bible references

1. **Jesus tells us to take the initiative when someone sins against us (Matthew 18:15).**
Why do you think Jesus puts the responsibility on the person who has been hurt to take the first step?
Bible references: Matthew 5:23–24; Matthew 18:15–17; Romans 12:18.
2. **The sermon suggests that we can sometimes become attached to our resentments.**
What does the Bible teach about the effect of holding on to anger and resentment? Is forgiveness primarily something we do for the other person, or does it also set us free?
Bible references: Ephesians 4:26–27, 31–32; Hebrews 12:14–15; Colossians 3:12–13.
3. **Romans 13:8–10 says that “love does no wrong to a neighbour” and that love fulfils the law.**
How might this change the way we respond when another Christian disappoints, annoys or hurts us?
Bible references: Romans 13:8–10; 1 Corinthians 13:4–7; 1 Peter 4:8.
4. **The sermon describes the church as a “school of forgiveness” because Christians are imperfect and come with different backgrounds, expectations and hurts.**
What other qualities does Scripture say are necessary if an imperfect Christian community is to live together well?
Bible references: Philippians 2:1–5; Ephesians 4:1–3, 31–32; Colossians 3:12–15.
5. **The sermon says that the cross shows that God “absorbs the hurt” rather than taking offence.**
How does God's forgiveness of us through Christ provide a model—or motivation—for forgiving others?
Bible references: Luke 23:32–34; Ephesians 1:7; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13.
6. **Jesus says, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Matthew 18:20), immediately after his teaching about dealing with conflict.**
What might this suggest about the presence of Christ in situations where Christians are trying to repair a broken relationship? What difference might it make to approach reconciliation consciously in Christ's presence?
Bible references: Matthew 18:15–20; 2 Corinthians 5:18–20; Colossians 3:15.

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Bible readings: Romans 13:8–end; Matthew 18:15–20

Forgiveness is not only needed for the great hurts and betrayals of life. **It is something we need to practise every day.**

The church is an imperfect community made up of imperfect people. We have different backgrounds, expectations, sensitivities and weaknesses. Inevitably, we will sometimes disappoint, offend or hurt one another.

Rather than expecting the church to be a place where nobody ever causes offence, we can see it as a **“school of forgiveness”** — a place where we learn to love one another by learning to forgive.

Jesus gives practical advice when relationships go wrong: rather than grumbling about someone or nursing resentment, we should have the courage to speak honestly and privately with the person concerned and seek reconciliation.

And at the heart of all this is **Christ and his cross**. Christ does not respond to our sin by abandoning us. In love, he absorbs our hurt and seeks to reconcile us to God and to one another.

For personal reflection

1. Is there someone I am currently holding a grudge against?

Am I nursing resentment rather than seeking reconciliation?

2. Do I sometimes take offence too readily?

Do I expect other Christians to be more perfect, considerate or thoughtful than I am myself?

3. Is there a “small” irritation I need to practise forgiving?

Could letting go of something relatively minor help me develop a more forgiving heart?

4. Is there a relationship where I need to take the first step?

Would a quiet, honest and loving conversation be better than continuing to grumble or complain?

5. How readily do I remember that I too need forgiveness?

How might remembering God's forgiveness of me change the way I respond to the failures of others?

A thought to carry through the week

“The more we practise forgiveness in the little things, the better prepared we may be for the big things.”

When I am hurt, disappointed or offended this week, perhaps I can pause before reacting and ask:

“How would Christ want me to respond?”

A prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
you know how easily we hurt one another
and how difficult forgiveness can be.
Help me not to nurse resentment,
but to seek reconciliation where I can.

Teach me to forgive as I have been forgiven,
and to remember that your cross
is the source of all forgiveness and reconciliation.
Make our church a true school of forgiveness,
where your love is seen in the way we treat one another.

Amen.