

# FORGIVENESS

At the moment, I am involved in a very ugly legal battle with a long-estranged brother who is contesting the fact that he was left out of my mother's will. He treated my parents very badly and separated himself from the family in a most unpleasant way and has scarcely spoken to her, or us, in 25 years. There is long and sordid history of very bad behaviour over a long time and it is a rich field for harvesting anger, bewilderment, resentment, depression, hate and every negative human emotion one can think of.

A second brother, neither of them Christian by the way, has been incensed/bewildered/challenged when my Christian sister and I talk about the need to forgive and how, each day, that challenge gets harder as more and more reasons to hate emerge. I blithely said that I already forgave my brother for the hurt he had inflicted on my parents and me and my family, I only wanted the legal stuff to go away. And I honestly believed that I did forgive him... at the time.

But my mind started to niggle. Just what is forgiveness? How do I know I have forgiven? Why should I forgive someone who has caused so much pain? He deserves all he gets.

My "good" brother keeps mentioning this so I told him, half-jokingly, I would write a sermon for him to read about it. Well, Ian, here you are.

## WHAT IS FORGIVENESS?

So where to start? The dictionary of course.

**Forgiveness** is the intentional and voluntary process by which a victim undergoes a change in feelings and attitude regarding an offense; let's go of negative emotions such as vengefulness, with an increased ability to wish the offender well.

Interesting.

"Intentional and voluntary". My decision. Of my own volition.

"Change of feelings". How do I do that? I feel anger. I feel disgust. How can I change that?

“Change of attitude”. Well, I know I can do that. Not easy but I can do it.

“Let’s go of negative emotions”. They start with vengefulness but there is a whole gambit of emotions that can be involved from a desire to commit murder, slowly and painfully to irritation that the event has ruffled the superficial calm of our lives. And why should I let go of negative emotions? He has behaved amazingly badly. I have a right to feel anger, resentment, vengeful.

“Increased ability to wish the offender well”. Is that through gritted teeth clasped tetanoidly on a knife or does it mean a total and complete positive and loving relationship where they come to our place for a barbie every weekend?

But the definition doesn’t say anything about repentance on his part. I am expected to suck up his behaviour, pay the worldly price in all areas, and he gets off scot free and I am supposed to welcome him back like the proverbial long lost brother... if you’ll pardon the Biblical pun?

Oh come on!!!

### HATRED

Yet so much of the world on all levels of human endeavour is embroiled in the turmoil of hatred and animosity and vengefulness. So many families are split, like ours, where the poor, poor parents went to their graves, their son refusing to make his peace with them, or even ever seeing them again. I can think of nothing worse than losing my kids. All because of some perceived wrong, usually financial.

Go to any divorce court and see the utter hatred and conflict happening there, the violence and the vengefulness operating between two people who once loved each other. The damage spreads through generations and affects friendship groups etc etc. All because of some perceived hurt that they probably, now, cannot even remember

What about in business or politics, the sporting field or the playground? Here revenge can destroy careers and even governments and children’s lives due to the psychological damage done. All because of some perceived hurt or harm done to them.

But the most senseless example of the lack of forgiveness is road-rage. Here the perceived hurt does not even involve a relationship. It is simply a stranger who you perceive has hurt you in some irrational way. This desire for vengeance has led to murder on the side of the road.

## VICTIM

In my analysis of the definition of forgiveness, I overlooked one vitally important word. Victim. There must be a victim, or someone who perceives they are a victim, in order for forgiveness to be necessary.

The restoration of the victim or of a relationship or situation to peace and harmony can really only be achieved with one simplistic answer.

Forgiveness!!! All the wonderful human techniques to overcome hurt whether from psychology, medicine or religion end up in this one place.

Forgiveness.

We can move down the path to harmony in so many stages and ways, where the person seeking harmony can achieve different degrees of removal of negativity, but to achieve total personal inner stability, one has to forgive.

## ALEXANDER POPE

Now all this worldly wisdom is wonderful and modern Psychology prides itself, quite justifiably, on the amazing contribution it has made to the mental wellbeing of our society.

But the Bible has been telling us that this aspect of human nature has always been, since the beginning of time.

**Ecc 1:9** That which has been *is* that which shall be; and that which has been done *is* that which shall be done; and *there is* nothing new under the sun.

Alexander Pope, (1688-1744) worked all this out in his poem [\*An Essay on Criticism\*](#), Part II published in 1711 at the age of 23. There is one memorable line in the whole poem.

**“To err is human; to forgive divine.”**

How often have we heard the first part quoted as an acknowledgement/excuse/reason for human error? Most people forget the second part, as it imposes an obligation on them.

In the fuller excerpt, Pope said

Nor in the Critic let the Man be lost!  
526 Good-nature and good-sense must ever join;  
527 To err is human, to forgive, divine.

528 But if in noble minds some dregs remain,  
529 Not yet purg'd off, of spleen and sour disdain;  
530 Discharge that rage on more provoking crimes,

Even then, Pope knew that if the anger and other negative emotions were not dealt with, then all sorts of issues will develop.

But he also knew that the path of forgiveness was a higher standard or level of behaviour. It is more humane than resentment, hatred etc. He understood that forgiveness was integral to the perfect model we instinctively know as good, and that the model was shown to perfection in Jesus.

### WHY DO WE NEED FORGIVENESS?

God set up all life forms to experience pain when something is wrong. When we cut our finger, it hurts so we pull away from the danger. In the same way, emotional hurt is also a warning that something is wrong.

We only find ourselves in a position where we need to forgive when we have been hurt by some action of another person. We become a victim. This hurt can range from simple hurt feelings to the gut wrenching horror of murder and adultery.

### BOUNDARIES

For someone to hurt us they need to “break a rule” of some sort. Often, we are not even aware that these “rules” exist, as they can be intrinsic in the culture or society or system within which we are operating. Or they can be the Big 10. This breaking of the “rules” can range from the breaking of marriage vows to the disregard of my personal space, committing murder to saying something in anger. It can even be something so innocuous that offends my perception of myself like calling me names. It only needs someone to accidentally veer into my lane on the highway or wait a millisecond longer than I think necessary when the lights change to green, to cause “hurt”.

More times than we realise, hurt arises because someone fails to meet our expectations. These expectations can be simply our perception of the protocols agreed on by all of society to enable the simple management of time and space like the road rules. But they can be much deeper and set in our perception of the traditions of a family. “We don’t do things like that”, “But that is not how it is done” “He knew what was expected of him and he chose not to comply”

### SIN

This simple concept is called sin in the Bible and whether we accept it or not, people only get hurt when sin occurs in some form. It makes no difference if the society says it OK to play around, even applauded in some places, but it hurts to be cheated on. It hurts when someone breaks into your house and steals your mother's silver. Regardless of whether the person needed it for a drug habit or thought he was entitled to it, theft hurts others. And when someone cuts you off in traffic, it hurts.

No amount of political correctness can change that.

## BIG 10

So, when God wrote down the BIG 10 for man to live by, He was setting up boundaries to protect us from hurt. He didn't do to be a mean old man sitting in the sky waiting to zap us. He warns us of these actions to protect us from hurt. These actions are called sins because they hurt us

So, in a broader sense, Sin is any breaking a Law or rule. Boundaries are set to protect people and help a community function, whether a village or corporation or country, and breaking these boundaries hurts someone.

**Lev 5:5** And it shall be when he is guilty in one of these, he shall confess that in which he has sinned.

Sin can only happen when there are boundaries.

**Rom 4:15** because the Law works out wrath, for where no law is, there is no transgression

It is called sin because it breaks accepted boundaries and it hurts.

## BIBLE

And the Bible has had this stitched up since the beginning of time which when it was written.

Whether you have thought of it or not, the whole Bible is full of examples of people living all levels of forgiveness. We see individuals dealing with individual people who had wronged them; in the history of the nation of Israel where God keeps forgiving and, of course, the penultimate example of forgiveness, that of Jesus himself. Indeed, the whole purpose of the Bible and God's interaction with men, is to bring forgiveness so reconciliation can take place to foster love.

Forgiveness is no small stuff. It is the basis of a peaceful life.

## BIG 10

**Heb 8:12** For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities I will remember no more."

Forgiveness is incredibly hard for us humans to do. Sin, on all its levels, hurts. Some hurts are so deep they seldom "go away" completely. Child molestation, murder, adultery, theft of precious things, deliberate attack on parents, in fact all the Big 10 bite deeply and permanently. Ummm, that is why they are in the Big 10.

Exo 20:12 Honour your father and your mother, so that your days may be long upon the land which Jehovah your God gives you.

Exo 20:13 You shall not kill.

Exo 20:14 You shall not commit adultery.

Exo 20:15 You shall not steal.

Exo 20:16 You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

Father and mother come first because they gave you life and represent God to you.

Murder, adultery, theft, lies all impact other people deeply and permanently.

Exo 20:17 You shall not covet your neighbour's house. You shall not covet your neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that *is* your neighbour's.

Covertness, which is wanting something that is not yours (Jealousy is when you want something that should be yours). Covertness destroys you and often leads to the sins above it in the list.

You may be wondered why I didn't start at number 1. Well, the last six apply to us getting on with other people but first four apply to our relationship with God.

Exo 20:2 *I am* Jehovah your God, who has brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

**Exo 20:3** You shall have no other gods before Me.

Exo 20:4 You shall not make to yourselves any graven image, or any likeness of *anything* that *is* in the heavens above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth.

Exo 20:5 You shall not bow yourself down to them, nor serve them. For I Jehovah your God *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the sons to the third and fourth *generation* of those that hate me,

Exo 20:6 and showing mercy to thousands of those that love Me and keep My commandments.

Exo 20:7 You shall not take the name of Jehovah your God in vain. For Jehovah will not hold him guiltless that takes His name in vain.

Exo 20:8 Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

Exo 20:9 Six days you shall labour and do all your work.

Exo 20:10 But the seventh day *is* the Sabbath of Jehovah your God. You shall not do any work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger within your gates.

Exo 20:11 For *in* six days Jehovah made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that *is* in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore Jehovah blessed the Sabbath day, and sanctified it.

When we break any if the first four, we hurt Him as much as adultery hurts us..... and there is a deep theological concept around that but you will be pleased to know I am not going there.

### MAN'S SIN.

Obviously the first people to sin were Adam and Eve.

God had created Adam and Eve, to be His mates. He just wanted someone to hang with. They had had a lovely time having wine and nibbles in the garden at the end of the day. We don't know how long they lived this idyll but evil entered and conned Eve. She knew what was expected of her but Satan introduced doubt about God's word and she was sucked in. Adam, however, made the deliberate decision to do what he knew God did not want him to do. God knew what would happen if they stepped over that line and He had warned them of it. Adam knew the consequences but did it anyhow.

The first man chose to link up with God's enemy and wrecked the whole friendship. He, and his wife, separated themselves from God's family. We, each of us, makes equivalent choices very early in our lives, and we go on doing it till we die. We separate ourselves from God and it hurts Him, and us, and we bear the consequences.

### GOD'S LOVE

But God continues to provide for our needs. He provides a beautiful place for us to live. He provides enough for every person on earth to have sufficient for their needs but only if man is not selfish and wasteful and lives simply. As well as this He provides beauty and entertainment and challenges so they can grow and enjoy each other and Him but we just reject and bag Him.

But God still loves and cares and still wants people to want to hang with Him. Like us, it hurts Him, then irritates Him and then makes Him angry when we treat Him badly and eventually He dishes us up in some way.

**Gen 6:5** And Jehovah saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and every imagination of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually.

**Gen 6:6** And Jehovah repented that He had made man on the earth, and He *was* angry to His heart.

But He knew from the beginning, that this could happen and that we could not be mates until reconciliation happened and that reconciliation involves forgiveness. So He provided a way out for us through Jesus Christ, His Son.

### RECONCILIATION VERSUS FORGIVENESS

Without forgiveness, on any of its levels, animosity continues and, will be passed down to future generations to the point that often the people keep on hating and don't know even know why. We saw this in Ireland, in Serbia, in the political systems in our democratic governments. True much of this is based on ideology or religion but the bottom line is that the animosity arises because each party perceives that the other has "hurt" them in some way, ie not paying enough or not working hard enough etc. The hatred in the Middle East between Arab and Jew is the classic example.

But these deep hurts or differences can be resolved if forgiveness or reconciliation occurs. Our generation did it with the hatred between the Catholics and Protestants. The Protestants forgave the Catholics for their stupid ideas and the Catholics gave up. In this case no one really cared and we found out that these evil people were really OK. We chose not to continue in hurt but to move on.

We are seeing the same process with the Aboriginal people in our country now.

But the most important thing is we need to forgive for our own sakes in order to have personal peace about the issue. What the other person does is really up to them.

Strange as it may seem, forgiveness is not based on what the other person is/does/says/ thinks or their honesty or integrity. It is based on what I am. The object is for us to open the door to peace. If we do that we will find inner peace. What happens to them is their problem. We are both facing the choice to live in love and harmony or negativity and stress.

The ultimate goal would be to be friends again and continue a positive relationship of some sort. This is the ideal but often this does happen. Often the best we can hope for is that you can no longer hold negative emotions concerning the person or the issue in question, genuinely wish the other party well, or at least stop “caring” and move on in peace.

This may involve never seeing them again or barbies on the weekend.

### BREAKING THE LAW

The Bible has been telling us this since the beginning of time about sin

Initially sin was breaking of the Law God had given His people

**1Jn 3:4** **Whoever sins is guilty of breaking God's law, because sin is a breaking of the law.**

This concept is not spelled out in the Old Testament but right from the beginning, humans knew instinctively what sin was, what was acceptable behaviour and the people knew that God was setting boundaries when He gave the Big 10, as well as the hundreds of other minor laws to help them run the community.

**Gen 20:9** Then Abimelech called Abraham, and said to him, What have you done to us? In what have I offended you, that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? **You have done deeds to me that ought not to be done.**

**Job 7:20** **I have sinned. What shall I do to You, O Watcher of men? Why have You set me as a target for You, so that I am a burden to myself?**

**Job 7:21** **And why do You not pardon my transgression, and take away my iniquity?** For now I shall sleep in the dust, and You shall seek me in the morning, but I *shall* not be.

**Psa 32:5 I confessed my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, I will confess my transgression to Jehovah; and You forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah.**

So however, you look at it, hurt is sin and sin CAN be forgiven

### SATAN

It also tells us that Satan is waiting to smash us whenever he can.

**Gen 4:7 If you do well, shall you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin crouches at the door; and its desire *is* for you, and you shall rule over it.**

Satan will con you, as he did Eve, with any number of strategies to encourage you to step outside God's boundaries and the worst part is that sin always looks good. This concept is a sermon in itself, but for another day.

### MORE THAN LAWS

But Jesus upped the ante big time when He said.

**Mat 5:27** You have heard that it was said to the ancients, "You shall not commit adultery."

**Mat 5:28** But I say to you that whoever looks on a woman to lust after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

So, we sin when we even have a thought. Why? Because sin affects us even more than it affects others.

Here we go again

**Mat 5:22** But I say to you, anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to punishment. And whoever says to his brother 'Raka!' will be subject to the Council. And whoever says 'You fool!' will be subject to hell fire.

But the main point here is that Jesus strongly recommends we make peace as soon as we possibly can

**Mat 5:23** "So if you are presenting your gift at the altar and remember there that your brother has something against you,

**Mat 5:24** leave your gift there before the altar and first go and be reconciled to your brother. Then come and offer your gift.

Mat 5:25 Come to terms quickly with your opponent while you are on the way to court, or your opponent may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison.

Mat 5:26 I tell you with certainty, you will not get out of there until you pay back the last dollar!"

Why? Well the worldly reason is that the issue will escalate and cost you pain and money in this world. It WILL affect your health but the main reason is that this conflict will affect your relationship with God. God's plan for this world is for us all to be able to hang together in love, and the main player in that scenario is God himself. Unforgiveness, whether it is yours and the other party, destroys this relationship.

I can quote Scripture ad nauseum to substantiate this position.

**Mat 5:9** "How blessed are those who make peace, because it is they who will be called God's children!

Our generation remembers this one as "blessed are the peacemakers"

**Rom 12:16** Live in harmony with each other. Do not be arrogant, but associate with humble people. Do not think that you are wiser than you really are.

**Rom 12:17** Do not pay anyone back evil for evil, but focus your thoughts on what is right in the sight of all people.

**Rom 12:18** If possible, so far as it depends on you, live in peace with all people.

**Rom 12:19** Do not take revenge, dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath. For it is written, "Vengeance belongs to me. I will pay them back, declares the Lord."

**Rom 12:20** But "if your enemy is hungry, feed him. For if he is thirsty, give him a drink. If you do this, you will pile burning coals on his head."

**Rom 12:21** Do not be conquered by evil, but conquer evil with good.

**Rom 15:33** Now may the God who grants peace be with all of you!  
Amen.

Peace occurs 390 times in the Bible.

And the definitive words.

**Psa 133:1** *A Song of degrees; of David. Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!*

**Joh 14:27** I am leaving you at peace. I am giving you my own peace. I am not giving it to you as the world gives. So don't let your hearts be troubled, and don't be afraid.

## BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF THE HANDLING OF CONFLICT

We hold that the stories told in the Bible about real people dealing with their lives, are given as examples of how to behave and how not to behave so that we can learn to live our lives as positively and as close to God's model as we can. We can do this for theological reasons or simply that we don't want to have to deal with the results of sin. Sin is sin because it inflicts pain and it is a warning that something is wrong. It can teach us what is good and functioning and what is not on all levels of our lives, physical, emotional and spiritual.

If it hurts something is wrong.

And we usually forget that sin hurts God as well. He is not some white being in heaven who loves harp concertos. He is a person, albeit not in a body like us. He feels pain like we do when we sin, partly because we reject him but mainly because He knows it will hurt others and us as well.

The Bible is full of example of relationships that were ruined by the actions of one or both parties and we are given a whole range of outcomes that can occur depending on the attitude of the people involved. People were the same then as they are now.

I am going to summarise these stories but will leave the reading of them to you. We need to remember these are real stories about real people who lived and worked and hurt like us. They are not myths made up, but are chronicled events.

### ADAM AND EVE

Genesis 3 – 4

We have talked of this before.

God gave them the rules. She was conned but still chose. He chose to break them. God was hurt and the whole parameters of the relationship changed. They were not really repentant and so they lost all the benefits of the relationship.

They were expelled from the family home and had to live basically on the streets.

I have a feeling that Adam and Eve didn't reconcile between themselves as there was negativity in their family until one son killed his brother. He, too, was expelled from the family and went on to father many races and tribes who, while talented, on the whole were unforgiving, negative, and aggressive.

Adam and Eve then had another family. I think they reconciled after the horror of the murder and the kids of this second family, on the whole, went on to be peaceful people.

So, the outcomes here were death, expulsion, negativity or relative peace depending on the choices.

### NOAH AND HAM

Genesis 9:18 - 29

Noah's son, Ham, behaved badly and did not respect his father. Noah was so angry that he reacted immediately by cursing Ham and expelled him.

Ham's descendants were negative aggressive people and the animosity between the father and son continued even to today as seen in the nations that developed from Ham.

### ABRAHAM

Genesis 11:26 – 25

The story of Abraham is a long and really important story with several vignettes involving forgiveness.

Abraham treated Sarah really badly in two episodes where he put her at terrible risk to protect his own skin but she behaved well and was able to forgive and kept the peace and they managed a long life together.

Genesis 16

Then, Abraham took a concubine, with Sarah's permission, and a child was born. Now this slave girl, Hagar, behaved badly to Sarah and caused negativity. Sarah was hurt because this baggage had had a child and she had not. She took the girl's behaviour to Abraham and he didn't want to know. Why would he, he was in a pretty good wicket and was pretty happy with the situation. Because he did not mediate to bring about resolution, the animosity continued and became entrenched. It must have been such fun, for them all, having these feuding women in the home.

Genesis 21:1-21

Hagar's bad behaviour continued. Abraham did nothing to bring reconciliation and eventually it blew up completely and Abraham had to expel his concubine and his son and as far as we know, he never saw them again.

This animosity continued throughout the generations and is still playing out in the Middle East today.

So, the outcomes were total negativity, feuding, permanent separation, stoic duty, loneliness.

### ISAAC AND REBEKAH

Genesis 25 – 28:10.

The story of Isaac is filled with animosity. There was the ongoing sibling rivalry between Esau and Jacob. The issue was not resolved and the animosity between the two sides grew. Brother against brother and husband against wife although Rebekah had the backing of a prophesy given by God over the boys.

Then Isaac did exactly what his father had done and put Rebekah's life and honour at risk to protect his own skin. The unresolved behaviour had moved onto the next generation.

The Isaac had trouble with the Philistines who were descendants of Ham.

**Gen 10:6** And the sons of Ham: Cush and Mizraim and Phut and Canaan.

**Gen 10:14** and Pathrusim and Casluhim (from whom came the Philistines) and Caphtorim.

So, the negativity goes on. The old unresolved enmity going back to Noah continued. So many generations of division and conflict.

Then there was the classic event where Jacob and Rebekah totally and deliberately deceived Jacob into giving the birthright to Jacob and not Esau.

Because Isaac did not resolve this issue at the beginning, he lost both sons and probably his wife

Jacob had to flee and he never saw his parents again.

Outcomes here were open hostility and hatred, separation and loss.

## ESAU AND JACOB

Genesis 25:19 – 36:8

The animosity between Esau and Jacob is legendary. Some say Jacob duded Esau and others say Esau duded himself with a short-term decision. As with most conflicts, there was wrong on both sides and different perspectives.

So, the brothers split. Jacob effectively spent 20 years, really on the streets or in the wilderness. Here he was duded by his uncle big time, about money and his first wife.

The Jacob managed to dud Laban but they managed to maintain a wary relationship

Then came the crunch. The two brothers had to meet up. This may have been because Isaac was dying but we are not told that.

Jacob made enormous overtures to make his peace with Esau with gifts and excuses. Then when Esau approached Jacob bowed down to the ground seven times. Some say this was an apology. Others say he was just appeasing Esau. We will never know but Esau ran to embrace him.

They had an uneasy time together but then, let bygones be bygones but they separated and never had a relationship again.

## JOSEPH .

Genesis 37 -50

This is an amazingly long and quite exciting story and well worth just reading. The long story shorter is that Jacob had two wives (Leah and Rachel) and two concubines. He loved Rachel and favoured her kids over all the others big time. It was really bad. They were younger than his other ten sons.

The brothers were jealous of Joseph and tried to kill him but God intervened and Joseph ended up a being sold in Egypt as a slave. He ended up 2IC to Pharaoh. Great story!!!!

Back home his father thinks he is dead. A famine comes to the land and they are starving so Jacob sends them to Egypt to get grain. They ended up coming face to face with Joseph!! Now he knew who they were but naturally, they didn't have a clue who he was.

Well, Joseph played them for a while, and waited until he really knew that his brothers were repentant. Judah confessed their guilt and Joseph could see that they were truly sorry and so he revealed himself and totally forgave them.

The relationship was re-established and they all lived happily ever after.

## DAVID AND SAUL

Samuel 17 -31

Here we see the amazing story of the relationship between David and Saul. Saul was king but David was God's chosen one. We all know how David killed Goliath and then moved into Saul's court, mainly as a musician and warrior.

Saul became insanely jealous of David for several reasons and flew into fits of rage and tried to kill David to the point where David had to leave court. He ended up with a big force of people Saul had duded and there was open hostilities for some time. David always behaved well and refused to engage Saul out of respect of his position as king.

But the incident in 1 Samuel 24 is so poignant and telling. David and his men were hiding in the cave at Wild Goat's Rock when Saul came in to relieve himself, alone. What a perfect opportunity to take him out and solve all of David's problems.

But David, respecting his position as king before God, simply cut a piece of his robe off and went away. Later when Saul left the cave, David called out to him and showed him the piece of fabric and sought reconciliation by asking Saul what he, David, had done to offend him. Saul responded with respect but didn't change his behaviour and pursued David till the bitter end.

David behaved well in the whole incident. Saul did not. The outcome is obvious. David was successful and went on to a positive life while Saul just went down into the pit.

## OTHER STORIES

There are many more stories involving forgiveness in the Bible. David and his son Absalom, Hosea and his cheating wife.

Jesus and Judas, of course is the most obvious one. Judas did repent

Mat 27:3 Then he who had betrayed Him, seeing that He was condemned, sorrowing, Judas returned the thirty pieces of silver again to the chief priests and elders,

Mat 27:4 saying, I have sinned, betraying innocent blood. And they said, *What is that to us? You see to that.*

Mat 27:5 And he threw the pieces of silver down in the temple and departed. And he went and hanged himself.

But long before that, just before He died, Jesus asked His father to forgive all who had done this to Him.

Luk 23:33 And when they came to the place which is called Calvary, they crucified Him and the criminals there, one on *the* right, and one on *the* left.

**Luk 23:34** And Jesus said, Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do. And parting His clothing, they cast lots.

This included Judas.

### CONCLUSION

So we can see that in the Bible, and of course real life, there can be many outcomes to resolution of conflict. There is no right and wrong answer but the ideal situation is a positive peaceful relationship. This may just amount to agreeing to disagree and not see the person again, or it could be barbies each weekend.

### REPENTANCE

Now many say that forgiveness is dependent solely on repentance, and, in a perfect world this is so. I mean, if someone has stuffed up and caused you grief and they are in the wrong, of course they should repent or at least apologise.

But, as with everything in this world, it is not as simple as that.

### CASCADE OF REPENTANCE

Repentance is just the deepest state of a process of setting a wrong right.

This is worthy of a whole sermon in itself but just quickly there are three layers that can occur within a person as they come to understand that they have hurt another person.

### REGRET

The first stage is a state of regret. We feel bad about what has happened largely because the deed has had an adverse effect on us. We are sorry that the person is upset with us, shouted at us, hit us, not talking to us, is suing us etc.....

There are a hundred reasons why you did what you did and the other person is quite unreasonable, but if we are to keep going you will have to give in and apologise or something because of what the situation is costing you.

The level of integrity in this action ranges from total deception to deep sincerity but it really is all about me.

### REMORSE

Remorse is when we are sorry for our actions because we can see that we have hurt others. We can see the effect on them and are sorry but it still not my fault. There are thousands of excuses we can use. These can range from a “I hear what you are saying but really, if you hadn’t said/done/ acted/breathed.....” to “I am really sorry I have upset you but.....”

There is always the “but”.

### REPENTANCE

Repentance is when we acknowledge that what we did was intrinsically wrong or inappropriate or hurtful or dishonest or thoughtless. No excuses. I stuffed up and I am sorry. OK there may have been extenuating circumstances, you may have pressed my buttons but what I... I... Me... did was wrong. I am responsible for my actions and you for yours. We need to learn to be able to handle the conflict, to live, to interact without inflicting pain. I choose to deal with my contribution to the problem

Obviously, this is not always possible but that can be our goal and there are countless strategies to learn to do this and to deal with the inevitable stuff ups.

### ANOTHER WAY OF LOOKING AT THIS

There is another way of looking at looking at forgiveness which need not be based on repentance. We call these exoneration, forbearance and release.

### EXONERATION

This is the closest to what we usually call forgiveness. It is wiping the slate clean of any hurt and restores the full state of innocence of the relationship had before the harmful actions took place

Three common situations.

- Genuine accident where no fault can be assigned.

- Offender is a child or someone who simply didn't understand the hurt they were inflicting and towards whom you have un-loving feelings
- The person is truly sorry, takes full responsibility without excuses, asks forgiveness and gives you confidence that they will not knowingly repeat the bad action.

In all such situations, if an apology is offered, it is essential to accept their apology and offer them forgiveness in the complete spirit of exoneration.

We all stuff up and who knows if the next time it will be me in the proverbial.

If you can exonerate the person, you will feel better and so will the person. It can draw you closer together. In fact, not to offer complete forgiveness in these circumstances could be harmful to your own wellbeing. It might even suggest that you have more to deal with within yourself than with the person who has caused you pain and this needs to be dealt with. In any case, this is an issue that is robbing you of your peace of mind and probably causing you harm, not only physically but socially, mentally and spiritually. By carrying a grudge, you suffer while the other person may not even know or care. They certainly can't do any more to help you. It then becomes your problem alone.

Jesus showed this to the ultimate as He was dying in the cross,

**Luk 23:34** And Jesus said, Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.

meaning all those who were persecuting Him.

### FORBEARANCE

Forbearance is the quality of being patient and being able to forgive someone or control yourself in a difficult situation. The word is a mixture of forgive and bearing. In other words, you sort of forgive; you suck it up. The situation is not perfect but you can live with it.

This can result of people just showing regret or remorse and won't take responsibility for their actions. While we should always reflect on whether there was a provocation on our part, you should or must exercise forbearance if the relationship is important to us.

This can amount to "forgive but not forget". We can maintain ties to people who, while far from being from perfect are still important to us. But we are wary and hold back in the relationship through lack of trust. The relationship

continues but is of lesser quality than before the damage was done. Sometimes, after a time, this may rise to exoneration and full forgiveness. At other times, a slow brooding time-bomb of hurt and mistrust can fester and blow later.

### RELEASE

But what do you do when the person involved does not even acknowledge that they have done anything wrong whatsoever? These are the cases where forgiveness is the most challenging. These include survivors of child abuse, business people who have been cheated by their partners, or friends or relatives who have betrayed one another.

The third type of forgiveness is release. Release does not exonerate the offender, nor does it require forbearance. It doesn't even require that you continue the relationship but it does ask that instead of continuing to define your life in terms of the hurt, you choose to release the person, the bad feeling and the preoccupation with the negative things that happened to you.

I see this as practicing forgiveness.

Release does something that is critically important to you. It has absolutely no effect on the other person. It allows you to let go of the burden, the silent tax that is weighing you down and eating away at your chance for happiness and consequently your body as well. Release liberates you from the tyranny of living in the traumatic past, even when the other forms of forgiveness are not possible.

In an unfaithful marriage or court case, a break-in where the family treasures were stolen, legal conviction of something you didn't do, there is precious little you can do, only wait for God's vindication.

Jesus showed this example when He went back to His home town and preached in the synagogue. One would assume that they would welcome this home-town boy made good, but instead they tried to kill Him.

**Luk 4:29** And they rose up and thrust Him outside the city, and led Him up to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, in order to throw Him down.

He knew He couldn't change their thinking so

**Luk 4:30** But passing through the midst of them, He went away.

As far as we know, He never went back.

## CONCLUSION

Jesus Christ was sent/came to earth for several reasons.

He came to

- reveal His Father, the Eternal to us as a loving person, not a dictator in the sky waiting to zap us.
- To show us how much like God we are, well can be.
- To give us a living example of how humans CAN live in love and righteousness
- And most importantly, He died to pay the price for all the hurt and “sin”, not just the Big 10, but all the petty ones we ALL have inflicted on others, too. This is a major theological concept that we won't go into now.

He gave us an example of what forgiveness could be. He didn't put up with unacceptable behaviour and called it what it was, even to the point of taking a whip to people profaning His Father's temple but He showed forgiveness and exonerations to all who would accept it.

## SIN

Sin is not just breaking the Big 10. Sin, in its broader sense is inflicting hurt on another person however that happens. This causes hurt which must be dealt with in order for good relationships to continue.

Our relationship with God must come first otherwise all else is based on less than the truth.

## BOUNDARIES

Human society cannot exist without “rules” which are really just boundaries set up to protect as many people as possible. These include road rules, Codes of Practice, policy statements, table manners, teenage curfews, World Rugby Rule Book, Geneva Conventions.

“Punishments” are inflicted in an attempt to “encourage” people not to sin and these range from a yellow card to execution.

Apart from the Big 10, there are countless boundaries set up which warn of sins and offer ways to manage them.

## BIBLICAL EXAMPLES

The Bible is written as a human book. It is about people and they all sinned and were sinned against. The great stories show the different ways that ordinary

people dealt with the hurts from sin. We saw so clearly that some ways worked and others didn't. It is the same for us which is one of the great things about the Bible in that it is as relevant to us today as it was to Moses.

### REPENTANCE

We saw that forgiveness is hard without repentance on the part of the person sinning and that true repentance is the highest form of a cascade of actions.

Regret occurs when we are upset because a sin on our part has affected us badly and we need to suck it up in order to keep going.

Remorse is when we are sorry that we have hurt someone else but still don't accept our contribution **but** we make excuses.

True repentance is when we acknowledge our sin and try to make amends.

Regret and remorse are better than nothing but true repentance opens the door to reconciliation.

### RELEASE

If the other person chooses not to repent, then we do have tools to help us deal with the issue. Continuing negativity about the other person's sin only affects us and our health and OUR life will suffer. We can choose to move on and let the other person go.

We can do this through exoneration where we choose to no longer be bound by the hurt. Exoneration usually occurs when there is a valid reason why the sin has occurred or full repentance takes place.

Forbearance is when you suck it up but do so in a negative way so that, superficially, all seems well.

Release is where you choose to walk away, either physically or emotionally. Obviously, the relationship is never the same but you can work with them and keep the peace.

### LAST WORD

To quote Pope (not The Pope) to err is human. We all sin all the time, often unintentionally, but we do. We hurt others in the wider sense of the word.

But to forgive is divine. God forgave and forgave His people over and over. Jesus came to earth to make this possible if we choose to accept His sacrifice.

But more than dying for us on the Cross, He gave us an example to show that man can act in a divine way and forgive.

We can follow HIM and do it, if we choose.