**Forgiven by Jesus**

*“The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead—whom you killed by hanging him on a cross.****31****God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Saviour that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins.****32****We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”* **Acts 5:30-32**

 *“Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”*  **Colossians 3:13**

Forgiveness is at the heart of the gospel story. Right at the beginning of the Bible, God creates a world and declares it good. Yet by chapter 3 things are starting to go wrong – humans begin to follow their own path and wander further from God.

Much of the rest of the biblical narrative is the story of how God tries to mend the gap between us – through covenant promises, chosen people and acts of love. However, these never fully heal the gap because humans keep choosing their own path and wandering further from God.

Then we hit the gospels and God takes drastic action, stepping into creation as a human being, healing the gap from among us. How does God do this?

As a human, Jesus shows us who God is and what a real relationship with God is like. Jesus teaches us to forgive each other, but also to change our behaviour (also called repentance) and seek forgiveness from God. Our God is holy, just and righteous – sin is the opposite of all these and is incompatible with God’s nature. Jesus freely gave up his life to heal the gap between us and God, by willingly taking the consequences of sin upon himself. His death cleaned the slate and enabled us to be in true relationship with God once more.

However, we still have a choice – we can choose to accept the gift of God and begin our relationship with God – or we can walk away from the gift. Jesus and later the apostles reminds us that we should forgive others because we have been forgiven by God. In Matthew’s gospel we read this story:

*“Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?”*

***22****Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.[*[*g*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=MATTHEW+18&version=NIV#fen-NIV-23750g)*]*

***23****“Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants.****24****As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him.****25****Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.*

***26****“At this the servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’****27****The servant’s master took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go.*

***28****“But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins.[[i](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=MATTHEW+18&version=NIV" \l "fen-NIV-23756i" \o "See footnote i)] He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded.*

***29****“His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.’*

***30****“But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.****31****When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.*

***32****“Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to.****33****Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’****34****In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.*

***35****“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”*

**Matthew 18:21-35**

In this parable, God is the king who forgives the huge debt of the servant – a debt he could never repay. Although the servant accepts the gift from the king, when he is confronted by someone who owes him a smaller debt, he refuses to forgive. This leads to the first servant being punished.

Q – Do you feel forgiven by God?

Q – Have you ever struggled to forgive someone else?

Q - Do you find it difficult to forgive yourself?

Q – Is there anything you need to turn away from and seek God’s forgiveness for?

God forgives us of everything we have ever done, regardless of how big or small. We are asked to forgive others in the same way. When we are angry and hurt this is extremely challenging, yet it is what God asks of us.

It is also very difficult at times to feel forgiven. We often feel guilty and we need to learn to forgive ourselves as God has forgiven us. To know you are forgiven by God is a freeing experience.

Perhaps after reflecting on forgiveness of yourself and others, take time to think over the words of the Lord’s Prayer:

Our Father in heaven

Hallowed be your name

Your kingdom come,

Your will be done

On earth as in heaven

Give us today our daily bread

Forgive us our sins

As we forgive those who sin against us

Save us from the time of trial

Deliver us from evil

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours

Now and forever

Amen