# Introduction …

Well during our REC series we’ve talked about apologies: seven A’s of an apology! Let’s rehearse them again … finishing with Ask for forgiveness!! Now what does that look like? That’s what today’s session is on: forgiving someone. It’s a great topic, and a complex and deep one, and a fundamental aspect of following the Lord Jesus.

# Introducing the third G: Get together on lasting solutions …

Our third “G” terms it this way “Get together on lasting solutions”, or, “go and be reconciled”. It is *lasting solutions* because resolving conflict is something that should last, not just a blip in a difficult relationship and then everything returns back to ‘normal’ – a bad conflicted normal!!! And it is important to remember that a lasting solution will always be a combination of two things: a resolution of the issue between us and the reconciliation of our relationship! If you only resolve the issue, the solution won’t last, because our hearts aren’t changed! The only hope for ongoing peace after a conflict is to seek a reconciled relationship, which comes through this incredible act of forgiveness.

# Unpacking forgiveness …

What is forgiveness? Have a look at this clip and see what it says about forgiveness …

*… play “Yeah we’re cool” clip …*

## What forgiveness is not …

Forgiveness is neither a feeling, nor forgetting, nor is it excusing. Exampled by “we’re fine”, “don’t worry about it”. We’re cool. In the video: Did Phil forgive him? Did Phil know whether he forgave him or not? Does he know what forgiveness is?

## What forgiveness is …

Forgiveness is a decision (page 34), a decision modeled after God’s forgiveness of us – a decision ***not*** to hold an offence against the offender. Remember Ephesians 4:32,

*“Be kind to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”*

Forgiveness isn’t a matter of whether we forget, but of how we remember (note on page 34), in other words, the breaking can go, the aching may not.

# Forgiveness defined: a two stage process …

We can see forgiveness in two stages – vertical, or a heart component, and horizontal, or a transactional component. Diagram on page 35 is useful.

## The heart component …

The heart component is releasing the offence to God. It’s between you and God, and so not conditional on the repentance of the other party. It is a disposition: An attitude of the heart. 19th century pastor, Thomas Watson put it this way,

*“When we strive against all thoughts of revenge; when we will not do our enemies mischief, but wish them well, grieve at their calamities, pray for them, seek reconciliation with them, and show ourselves ready on all occasions to relieve them. This is gospel forgiving.”*

Forgiveness is not a bitter pill, unforgiveness is. Indeed unforgiveness is the poison we drink, hoping the other person may die.

## The transactional component …

And they don’t. Indeed the heart of forgiveness is that they don’t die at all at my hand. I want to lift them up, and so we move to the second component of forgiveness on the top of page 36 – the transactional component. This is forgiveness between me and the other party with whom I am in conflict. This **IS** conditional on the other party’s repentance.

If that’s forgiveness, there is a hard question: What if they are not repentant? What if they are dead or unable to communicate with? Do you still need to forgive them? That is where the importance of the heart component of forgiveness comes in. When our heart is at rest in my forgiveness in regard to God, I can be free to release the offence, and in this sense experience forgiveness, even if the other party is not repentant.

## Is heart forgiveness really real? …

Is this heart forgiveness real? When someone does not repent, is the fact that I have come to a place of forgiveness in my heart real? Yes!! It is not partial forgiveness, or lite forgiveness. It is complete for you. Jesus speaks of heart forgiveness in Matt 18:35,

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

Forgiveness is not incomplete, reconciliation is! Forgiveness is not dependent on the other party. Heart forgiveness is God’s remedy for the victim mindset and bitterness that can overwhelm us. There is one danger here though – beware thinking heart forgiveness that is really merely saying “I’ll move on” and in your heart the relationship is still broken.

# What does “I forgive you” really mean?

If forgiveness is up to me, and reconciliation is dependent on both of us, what does forgiveness look like? On the back of your card, and the bottom of page 36 are four promises of forgiveness that outline what I must do, with God’s help, to really forgive from my heart. And you can see how these four promises relate to the heart and transactional components of forgiveness as they have “H” or “T” against it.

## I will not dwell on this …

First, I promise not to dwell on the incident. This relates to the heart component. Underline **DWELL** this doesn’t mean I forget it as we said before. It means I won’t lose sleep over it!! I won’t go over it in my mind. On my birthday this week, the first three things Robyn said to me were “get up”, “get up” … “get up”. Now the morning didn’t go to well as I mused over, dwelt on the hurt, of these words, even as I gave her a hug and said its ok. Stayed with my most of the morning really, it was only when I was working on this paragraph that I stopped and said “Lord, help me forgive”. Later in the day I forgave her again. After I prayed, I felt a lifting of my spirit.

## I will not use it against you …

Second, I promise I will not bring this incident up, and here’s the important part, *and use it against you.* This is part of transactional forgiveness. Once again it’s not so much that the offence is completely forgotten never to be raised. Consequences, as we see in a minute, may require discussing the issue. This promise is about *not using it against you.* Its saying “I won’t store this away in my weaponry for later!! Now there is a maturity needed in this, and it comes from the first two G’s. If it may be necessary to raise the matter again in discussing consequences, how can we make sure I don’t feel like it’s a weapon? If we both own our logs in our eyes, our contribution from our heart, then we are far more open to hearing from each other. A defensive spirit comes from a hard heart that has not been willing to own it idols and logs. I can’t emphasize that enough. Will I talk about the get up comments on my birthday again? Perhaps, we will joke about it in years to come, but I promise with God’s help, I won’t use it against Robyn.

## I promise not to talk to others …

The third promise of forgiveness is “I promise I will not talk to others about this incident.” Once again this is part of transactional forgiveness – it’s about people. And its commitment not to gossip (preaching isn’t gossiping, although I did speak with Robyn about using the “get up” comments!). In our video we saw the reality of the lack of forgiveness by how Phil spoke about the incident on the phone, and over the water cooler. One of the best demonstrations that you are not holding on to an incident, and have truly forgiven, is how you don’t talk about it with others. Check your conversations!

## I will not allow this to hinder our relationship …

The final promise of forgiveness is “I promise I will not allow this incident to stand between us or hinder our personal relationship. This is transactional, but I think there is some heart here too. I sat with someone this week and apologized about some stuff, and including asking forgiveness. We talked around the matters I raised, but there was no forgiveness granted to me. Hmmmmmm, now I’ve got to consider do I raise this with the other party? Or do I overlook it. And if I overlook it, that includes me forgiving them, and not holding it against them in our relationship. To do that I need God’s strength to maintain a healthy and honouring relationship with them.

What if you do speak to one another and forgive one another? Do things have to go back to what they were as if nothing happened? No. That is not what forgiveness means, and nor is it what this promise means. The relationship may have to change from the incident, however, *I will not let it hinder the relationship!* That is the heart of the promise.

These four promises are a great way to sum up forgiveness. Have you forgiven someone? Check your heart, and your relationship with the person, against these four promises.

## What about consequences …

But what about consequences? How does that work? If things can’t “stay the same”, how can they be different without the relationship being hindered? Our hearts are important in this: maintaining the right attitude to the relationship, and the consequences: seeing those consequences not as punishment or a hard heart from the other person, but as matters that will help strengthen my relationship with them.

You see true heart forgiveness doesn’t mean we are free from practical consequences. If a tree on my property falls and breaks the fence of my neighbour, they may forgive me, but that won’t mean I don’t pay for the fence! Forgiveness is not about excusing or letting off. Sometimes it is best to show mercy, sometimes it is best to allow someone to experience consequences to learn to turn around bad behaviour. I feel like I’m talking about being a parent!! How do I work out which one works when? It takes wisdom and insight, perhaps gleaned from talking it over with someone, and fundamentally the question is what will most effectively serve the other person and glorify God!

The key issue is consequences are about the issue not the relationship. That is the essence of the fourth promise – I won’t let it hinder the relationship, for one party the offence, for the perpetrator, I won’t let the consequences hinder the relationship! If the relationship is reconciled, then there is a far greater chance the consequences will have a good impact on changing behaviour from the heart!!

# Forgiveness is hard (it costs) …

## Jesus and our forgiveness …

Is this easy? You bet its not!! There is always a cost with forgiveness. We need look no further than the example of Ephesians 4:32, *“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”* How did God in Christ forgive us? At the cost of His son’s death: separation from the second member of a Trinity that had never experienced separation. Costly? You bet. So, forgive each other with kindness and compassion like that: forgiveness that costs.

# Conclusion …

Some people describe forgiveness as “the ‘f’ word” because its so difficult and hard to do – or perhaps because we avoid saying it!! But perhaps the best way to understand forgiveness is to through the human stories of forgiveness. You can read one from Corrie Ten Boom on page 38. But today, watch this …

*… play “the ‘f’ word” clip from the forgiveness project …*