

# Devotional Blog

## Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> September

Several years ago, a popular car rear windscreen sticker had this slogan “If you can read this – thank a teacher”

It was a crisp and clever message about the debt we owe to those who have taught us.

The fact is we owe so much to so many, especially to those who brought us up and to those who nurture us in old age. Although it is great to say thanks, we rarely are able to repay that debt.

Jesus told a quite sharp story about how you should handle debt (Matthew 18:21-35). Peter had asked him how many times he should forgive someone. The Rabbinic approach suggested three times, so Peter was hoping that twice that plus one would find favour with Jesus. It didn't. Jesus tells him to stop counting. Forgiveness to Jesus is a lifestyle not an equation.

The story Jesus used to follow up his advice on forgiveness involves an almost absurd contrast between two debts. One is the equivalent of the GDP of a small country while the other is a few pounds.

Perhaps we need a car sticker that reminds all of us just how much we owe God. He created the universe and each of us, he showers us with blessings, and he has sacrificed himself so that we can live in love with him eternally.

Can we pay him back? No! Just like the first debtor in Jesus' story, the one with the massive debt, we are not charged to repay. The scale of generosity and the extent of forgiveness of us is colossal. As we live our lives basking in that generosity, we try to reflect it in our

dealings with others, just as we share out the love that has been poured on us.

Now there are plenty of marvellous books about forgiveness. This might be because even the most mature Christians do not always find forgiveness easy! Sometimes even in one's own family, let alone our church family, we struggle to forgive, to let someone off for doing or saying something that has hurt us.

So, when we find forgiveness tough, here's a simple thought. Start with the big one. Start by reflecting on the fact that God has forgiven you. Yes, he's forgiven everything. Why? Because he loves you and wants you to be with him forever. And then, perhaps you need to forgive yourself, to see past your mistakes and failings. It sounds simple and easy, but we are often our own greatest critic. It's as if we act to ourselves like the first debtor in Jesus' story. He was hugely forgiven but remained unforgiving to a colleague.

It's so easy to keep picking over the bones of our mistakes, to keep looking in the rear-view mirror of life at where we went wrong. Let's follow up God's forgiveness by accepting it and owing it. This will help us to be the person Jesus wants us to be, to look forward with forgiveness and thanksgiving in our heart.

Jesus' advice sets in train a lifestyle of forgiveness of others. Of course, sometimes other folk won't want your forgiveness, will refuse to settle with you. Fine, you do your bit and leave the situation to the Holy Spirit, whilst recalling that you have forgiven yourself in the light of immense forgiveness that has been showered on you through God's Grace. Amazing, isn't it?

Mark Gilks

Hampton Mission Partnership