FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness is at the heart of the character of God. Throughout the Bible, God is described as slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin (Numbers 14:18). Wow, how good is that.

Jesus was uncompromising in his command to forgive. Forgive, he said, 'seventy times even' (Matthew 18:21). In other words, forgive and keep on forgiving without limit. Where do you need to apply that to your life?

Forgiveness was at the heart of everything he did and is at the heart of the Lord's Prayer. When Jesus declared a person's sins to be forgiven, it often aroused the anger of those who were less willing to forgive than he was and yet a prayer for the forgiveness of his persecutors was on Jesus' lips as he died. Christian preaching has always put forgiveness at the centre.

We forgive because we are forgiven. Paul says: 'Be compassionate and kind to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.' (Ephesians 4:32)

The parable of the Unjust Steward (Read about it in Luke 16 v1-13) tells of a servant who was forgiven his large debt only to be condemned because he refused to forgive a small debt owed to him.

Forgiveness cannot be given or received unless it is asked for, and the asking must be genuine and from the heart. Too often 'sorry' is said very easily, implying: 'All I need to do is say I'm sorry and everything will be OK'. Real repentance demands that we take what we have done wrong with the utmost seriousness and have a deep desire not to do it again.

The whole sacrificial system in the Law of Moses was based on the principle that forgiveness requires sacrifice. Animal sacrifices are no longer offered, but the truth remains that forgiveness is costly to all involved. Once we understand that, forgiveness can be truly liberating both for the person who is forgiven and for the person who forgives.