



Week 3.

- Was Jesus a forgiving person?
- Read Matthew 6:5-15
- What is the wider context of the Lord's Prayer?
- Read the quote **highlighted** opposite. Does this surprise you?

Cherry looks in detail at the story of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane as he struggles with reconciling the independence of the human will to the will of God - other-centred, forgiving & loving. (p. 118)

- How might Jesus' struggle in the garden help us understand forgiveness?
- Cherry often highlights how 'immensely difficult it is for human beings to achieve true repentance & real forgiveness.' Do you agree with him? Why / why not?
- How can a 'duty to forgive' be dangerous? (see notes opp.) Do you agree?
- Does the idea of a journey towards forgiveness sound more realistic?
- Discuss the 4 qualities that Cherry lists for developing a spirituality of forgiveness.
- How might we support people who are experiencing the agony of the wilderness?
- Close in prayer, using the Lord's Prayer, reflecting on the words as you read them.

Forgiveness As Spirituality

'The standard story about forgiveness is that people are offended or injured, have a justified but negative emotional response and then let go of that response, together with any hostile attitude towards the perpetrator..... There is, however a distinct lack of evidence in the gospels that this process of forgiveness happened in or around Jesus in advance of his crucifixion.' (p.117)

Forgiveness is 'a dynamic flow of grace to others through ourselves & to ourselves through others. Nowhere do we see the giving of forgiveness as the enacting of a kind of power from an authority figure.' (p. 129/131)

A duty to forgive can push us in the direction of being too inclined to tolerate or ignore injustice when we ourselves are the victims.

A pro-forgiveness culture which sees forgiveness as a moral & spiritual duty can have the effect of making people feel that they should eradicate all negative feelings & ill will towards someone who is harming them & others when this is not, in fact, the best thing to do.

People may be made to feel guilty for failing to forgive in situations where forgiveness is inappropriate.

There may be pressure to achieve closure. (p.137ff)

Cherry helpfully suggests that there are no models for forgiveness, but rather a map - a phased venture across a wilderness of hurt to a new country which involves generosity of spirit, trust courage & creativity. (p.186)

Cherry's list of 4 distinctive qualities in developing a forgiving heart :

1. High degree of empathy
2. Orientation towards the future
3. Faith
4. Concern for justice. (p. 200)

[Unless otherwise stated all quotes are from : Stephen Cherry : Healing Agony - Re-Imagining Forgiveness : Continuum : 2012]

