

WHY FORGIVE?

#3 SERIES "PRAYER"

Introduction:

"Most Christians repent enough to receive forgiveness, but not enough to see the Kingdom". (Bill Johnson)

- In the kingdom we must learn to receive forgiveness, and to give it.
- This raises a couple of questions:
 - Can ANYONE, no matter what they have done, receive forgiveness from God?
 - How is that forgiveness worked out in everyday life?

ILLUSTRATION: "General Butt Naked"

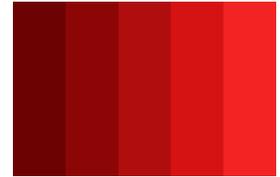
- 2012 film *"The Redemption of Butt Naked"*
 - Notorious Liberian warlord who had killed thousands and was now walking the streets preaching truth and reconciliation.
 - QUOTE: *"It is only Christianity that can help this nation, because Christianity is the only belief, the only faith, that tells you to love your enemies; that tells you to accept and forgive the one who hurt you."*
- About "General Butt Naked":
 - Given name: Joshua Milton Blahyi
 - In 1996, Bishop KunKun a pastor called the churches of Liberia to pray and fast for 54 days for Joshua's deliverance.
 - Blahyi had sacrificed children to his demon gods, and had guards around him at all times.
 - After the fast, Bishop KunKun was selected to go to General Butt Naked.
 - Miraculously, he was allowed in to see the warlord
 - He shared the simple gospel based on John 3:16



- He prayed for the warlord with no obvious result (except a stare) and the shooting of the guard for allowing him in.
- Bishop Kunkun returned a second time and prayed for the general.
- Shortly after, Blahyi claimed he had a vision in which Jesus Christ appeared to him as a blinding light, spoke to him as a son, and told him he would die unless he repented for his sins.
 - He did repent – but how would he know for sure he was forgiven?

1. God's Forgiveness

Isaiah 1:18 *"Come now, let us reason together," says the Lord. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool."*



- It doesn't matter whether your past life was in everyone's face or more background – you are now CLEAN!

Hebrews 10:17-18 *Then he adds: "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more." And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin.*

- God chooses not to remember sins He has forgiven.
 - True forgiveness is letting go.

2 Corinthians 5:17 *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*

- New character has come; old character has gone.

2. Power to Forgive

- The new life gives us the power to forgive.

ILLUSTRATION: Jonathan Stock story for ABC¹

- Journalist Johnathan Stock did a story on Joshua Milton Blahyi (better known as “General Butt Naked”) for ABC in 2013
 - Stock was skeptical of the warlord’s change and thought he was a fraud
 - Stock set out to prove that Blahyi was a fraud.
 - Stock spent time at Joshua’s church, saw his ministry of rehabilitation of child soldiers from a life of violence & drug addiction
 - He was now training them in farming and construction.
 - Stock also went with the General as he sought out relatives of people he had killed, to ask their forgiveness and to see if he could help in any way.
 - He saw the General many times kneel in front of a mother, daughter or son, asking for forgiveness
 - Many time he did NOT receive it.



Here are the journalist’s conclusions:

- (a) His lifestyle does not match the fraud label, as he does not have to live in fear of going to jail because he has received a government pardon.
- (b) He HAS changed
- (c) Stock wrote: *“Joshua thinks he has changed; everyone else thinks he’s changed. If Joshua wears a mask every Sunday, then the skin has now conformed to the mask.”*²

¹ Johnathan Stock Story for ABC in 2013 [The Penitent Warlord: Atoning for 20,000 War Crimes - ABC News \(go.com\)](https://www.abcnews.com/news/2013/04/02/2020)
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² ibid

3. Why Forgive?

(a) Jesus Instructed us to:

Luke 17: 3-4 *So watch yourselves. If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, "I repent," forgive him.*

- If people ask for forgiveness

Ephesians 4:32 *Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

Matthew 5:23-24 *Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.*

- Jesus tells us to take the initiative.

(b) It is good for your health:

- Unforgiveness is toxic

ILLUSTRATION: University Study³

“For thousands of years, the world’s religions have been preaching – if not always practicing – forgiveness. Now the medical community is finding that there are more benefits to letting things go that just better relationships and peace of mind.... Truly forgiving those who have wronged us is good for our health – it lowers blood pressure, improves sleep, and increases life span.”

Studies have shown:

- (i) Forgiving someone will make you sleep better at night, but holding on to resentment is likely to lead to insomnia.
- (ii) It lowers blood pressure and heart rate

³ <https://www.good.is/articles/forgive-to-live-new-research-shows-forgiveness-is-good-for-the-heart#> 04022022

- Scientific studies showed that both those with generally forgiving personalities and those who had truly forgiven their betrayer had lower blood pressure and lower heart rates than their more agitated colleagues.
 - Those who were neither forgiving by nature, nor had “let go” of the particular betrayal in question, exhibited “acute, stress induced, cardiovascular reactivity” including spikes in blood pressure and heart rate. They also had a more difficult time recovering, physically, for the stress of retelling the story of wrong done to them. In other words, holding a grudge can make you physically sick.
- Another study suggested forgiveness could lower reactivity to stressful events, and even offer sustained protection from their physical effects.
 - Higher levels of forgiveness were associated with lower levels of anxiety, depression and perceived stress, as well as lower levels of both LDL (“good”) and HDL (“bad”) cholesterols.
- Many doctors relate stories of patients who let go of resentment and get off medications.
 - One such story: *“A woman went through a rough divorce, and it took her years to get over it. She was on antidepressants, blood pressure meds, and sleeping pills for years. When she finally forgave him and forgot about the marriage, she was able to go off all of them.”*⁴
 - *“From studies of adolescents starting to show symptoms of schizophrenia, it appears the areas [of the brain] are overactive first from toxic stress reactions, and then become damaged and hypoactive.”*⁵ (Dr Carolyn Leaf)

⁴ ibid

⁵ Dr Caroline Leaf “Switch on Your Brain” (Baker Books Publisher 2013) Page 89

(c) Ask Jesus to help you to forgive yourself and others:

1 John 5:13-15 *I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life. This is the confidence we have in approaching god: that if we ask anything according to His will, He will hear us. And if we know that He hears us – whatever we ask – we know that we have what we asked of Him.*