

A portrait of Bruce Downes, a bald man with a mustache, wearing a dark pinstriped suit jacket over a bright red button-down shirt. He is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. The background is dark and out of focus.

BRUCE DOWNES
The Catholic Guy

Radical Forgiveness

Setting Our Future Free

RADICAL FORGIVENESS

By Bruce Downes

Now, there's a rule about reading this book. The rule is this, and it'll be a bit hard for some of us because most people are not familiar with this language. I don't want you to just read this book by hearing the words of Bruce Downes. I want you to read and be listening to your inner voice at the same time. I've read thousands of books in my lifetime. The truth is, I can't remember most of the books I've read or the person who wrote them. I just don't remember. What I do remember are those times when I felt what I read was something convicting; that sense of God; that sense of this being important and it making sense to me. I remember those times and I've written those things down. But I don't remember who the people were, and the truth is in a few months time, you'll forget me, or you'll forget what you've read. But if God were to speak to you through this book, that would be amazing!

Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.

Proverbs 4: 23.

In the original language, the word heart didn't mean heart as we define it. The word heart referred to the mind. Keep your mind and your thoughts with all vigilance, for from it flows the springs of life. You know how the meaning of words changes over time? I was with a group of young people a little while ago, and something fantastic happened. One of the young people said, "That's really sick!" which meant that was fantastic! But I'm old enough to remember when sick meant unwell. You know how words change?

Keep your heart and keep your mind with all vigilance for from it flows the springs of life. Another translation of this says, "Above all else guard your heart for everything you do flows from it." In other words, as you think, so shall you go.

As we start to talk about forgiveness, there's going to be a point where some of you are going to sit back and say, "Mate, you don't know who I am. You don't know my life, what has happened to me or what I've done." You'll become defensive and build a wall between what you're reading and how you feel. At that point in time, I'm going to challenge you to guard how you think otherwise you'll miss what this is. You'll miss the opportunity for forgiveness of yourself and others if you don't guard your thinking. Because the Scripture tells us; as you think so you go.

NOT SORRY

Once I was in a very large church, and they had excavated underneath the church to build a hall. I remember one morning I had spoken at a session and I went down to the hall underneath to get a cup of coffee. As I walked into the kitchen or servery, I noticed a woman standing on the other side of the room and she was crying. Trust me when I say that I'm not very good with crying women. And this woman was really crying, and I'm really, not good with really crying women. I didn't know what to say

but I knew I should say something so I said the most profound thing I could think of at the time. I said, "You alright?"

She replied, "My husband and I had a really huge argument this morning."

Well, I didn't know what to say to that.

And then she said, "And I know I was wrong, but he was more wrong than me, and I'm not saying sorry until he says sorry first."

And as soon as she said that I knew exactly what to say. It came to me that we're standing at a church event so I thought that gave me permission to be a bit religious.

So, I responded, "do you know that the word sorry is only in the Bible nine times? And on not one occasion is the word sorry used to make up?"

She said, "Well, what's the word for making up in the Bible?"

And I said, "forgiveness."

And she said, "I know about that... "

And I said, "Well...you know, we're only ever in control of ourselves, aren't we? I mean...you can't change anybody else."

Did you ever think you can change someone? I got married, and I thought I could change my wife Rosemary. How many people know that's a stupid idea?

You only can change yourself, can't you? So, I said, "Why don't you go home this evening and why don't you say to your husband, "For my part in that thing this morning I am sorry, please forgive me." You know how it's a thing?"

She said, "No, I couldn't do that." I couldn't ask him to please forgive me.

At just about that point in time, some people came up to me and started talking to me and somehow, I got moved away from the counter. Twenty-four hours went by, and I returned the next day. I did the morning session and headed underneath again for coffee. I walked up to the counter, and there was the lady on the other side again, but this time she's serious. She's not crying, which is an improvement and she says directly to me, "I've got to talk to you."

This time she came out from behind the servery so we could have a conversation. We walked off to the side, and she said to me in a serious tone, "You really bugged me yesterday. You really upset me."

"Uhh. Oh!" I replied.

She said, "You told me to go home and ask my husband for forgiveness. How ridiculous is that?" There was a pause before she continued, "but I couldn't get it out of my mind all day; it just bugged me the entire day."

She said "Later in the day, I just thought to myself, oh what the heck! I'll go home and I'll say, Please, forgive me."

She said, "but here's the thing, I have two kids in high school and two kids in primary school, and I wasn't going to talk to him in front of them. And here's the other thing, he's one of Australia's leading barristers. He's a lawyer, and he argues really well."

Imagine the prospect of having an argument with that.

She continued the story, "So I waited until the kids went to bed. I walked into my husband's study where he was preparing for court the next day, and I said, can I have a chat? And he said, "Sure."

She said "You know that argument, that thing this morning? For my part in that, I am sorry. Please forgive me."

She then broke out into a smile and said, "Bruce, you wouldn't believe it. He was dumbstruck!"

She said, "He's never lost for words."

She went on to say, "Last night we went on to have one of the best nights of conversation we've had in twenty-three years of our marriage."

And she said, "You know what else? We went on to have one of the best nights of intimacy we've ever had in twenty-three years of marriage."

What they experienced that night was forgiveness. Not just any forgiveness, but **RADICAL FORGIVENESS**. The word radical in one of the original languages means wild. We all understand that sense of radical, but in the forgiveness realm, it also has another meaning of going back to the base. It's going back to the beginning place of being able to start again.

YOUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN

In front of you, I want each of you to imagine a bottle filled with water and oil.

There are some things that just don't mix. If I tried to shake this bottle, the water and oil won't mix into one liquid.

It doesn't matter how much I shake it, the water and the oil won't mix.

Do you know that positivity and negativity don't mix?

Do you know that unforgiveness and happiness don't mix?

Do you know that unforgiveness and peacefulness don't mix?

Do you know that unforgiveness and unity don't mix?

The world says to us that time will heal. But if you remember anything from this book I hope you remember this. Time never heals.

The belief that time can heal is a lie. Time never heals. We might forget, but time on its own never heals. A long time ago I fell off a ladder. I walked around saying, "I fell off a ladder; I hit my back." "I fell off a ladder; I hit my back." "I fell off a ladder; I hit my back." And then I just started saying, "I hurt my back."

The truth is that the original injury was still there. Remember, time never heals. The world would want to convince us of that, but it's just not true. God may use the time to heal but time by itself does not heal.

One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him and he went into the Pharisees' house and took his place at the table. And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisees' house put an alabaster jar of ointment; she stood behind him at his feet weeping and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair.

Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is that's touching him. That she's a sinner."

Jesus spoke up and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." "Teacher," he replied, "speak."

A certain creditor had two debtors and one had five hundred dinari. Five hundred dinari was about a year and a half's wage.

And when they could not pay, he cancelled the debts for both of them. Now which of them would love him more?

Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he cancelled the greater debt." And Jesus said to him, "You judged rightly. Then turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house and you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but for the time I came in but she has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she's anointed my feet

with ointment. Therefore, I tell you her sins, which were many, have been forgiven. Hence, she's showing great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.

Then he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." But those who were at the table with him began to say amongst themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins and he said to the woman, your faith has saved you, go in peace?" Luke 7: 36 – 50

This is just a fantastic passage of Scripture, but there's something that's a little odd. Here we find Jesus in the house of a Pharisee, however the Pharisees and Jesus were people who fought and argued on a regular basis. They didn't get along. The Pharisees were the ones who took the religious law and applied it very rigidly whereas Jesus applied the law with love.

A good example of this is that I have four daughters and when they were little, I sometimes ended up at the shops with them, and they would ask me, "Daddy, I've got to go the bathroom." I would usually just take them into the bathroom with me. But then a day came when they began to get a little bit more grown up, and that was not the right thing to do anymore. However, that was a dilemma for me, and I was worried about sending them into the bathroom by themselves? Will they be alright? Will they know what to do?" I would stand at the door and say, "you go in and if you need me, call." I have no idea what I thought I was going to do if they called me. Luckily it never happened.

There's a law that states that men can't go into the women's toilets in public places and women can't go into men's toilets in public places. That's how it is right across the world.

However, if I sent one of my daughters into the bathroom and one of them called out, "Daddy, daddy I'm being attacked!" You'd walk right in, wouldn't you?

There wouldn't be a policeman or a court in the land that would have an issue with that.

The Pharisees applied the law rigidly, but when Jesus applied the law he did it with love. His application was different. In the time of Jesus there were a stack of cultural laws and rules we just don't have in our Western world today.

One of the customs (rules) was that if someone came over to your house, you would wash their feet when they arrived. Aren't you glad we don't have that one now?

Another custom was that you greeted people with a kiss and we still have that one now in most cultures.

When someone visited, you would anoint them with oil because they didn't have deodorant in those days and it was just more pleasant for everybody.

There was another custom in Jesus' day which said that women couldn't talk to religious leaders and more significantly, women couldn't ever touch religious leaders.

An odd custom was that if someone came over to your house, everybody from the neighborhood could come around and they could look in the window, and look in the door. As long as they didn't step inside, it was ok. Listening to the conversation from outside the door and window was perfectly good manners. Aren't you glad we don't have that rule today?

In the story, there is this woman, and there's something clearly broken in her and she's hurting. The first rule was broken; she was inside the house. How did she get in there?

Jesus is also in the house of the Pharisee and the scholars aren't sure why he's there either. Then suddenly, this woman, who is obviously broken, starts touching Jesus. She's anointing him and she's drying his feet with her hair. The second rule is broken; she's touching a religious leader.

Simon, the Pharisee, who is watching (not to be confused with Simon the apostle) doesn't say anything, but he thinks, "If Jesus was really who he's cracked up to be, he'd know what kind of a woman this is." In Luke's version (above) he doesn't mention anything about who this woman is. But in the other Gospels where this story is told, there's a suggestion that she's a prostitute and prostitutes were more common than we think back then.

In those days when marriages were pre-arranged between the Fathers, an older male was normally arranged for the daughter when she was about thirteen to fifteen years old. When the contract was signed, the betrothed man went home and he waited for twelve months. Then he returned for a seven-day wedding celebration before he took his new wife back to his house.

Once this happened, she was immediately cut off from her family, and there was no going home to see Mum and Dad. Because the wife had married into this new family, she was always treated by them as an outsider. If her husband died, which they often did because of the age difference, she would often be thrown out on the street. In most cases, she became a beggar or a prostitute just to survive.

Now we don't know that about this woman, but there's obviously something clearly broken in her and so Simon the Pharisee thinks to himself, "If this guy (Jesus) is really who he says he's cracked up to be, he'd know who this woman is and that she isn't welcome."

Jesus knew what he was thinking and he said, "Hey Simon, there was a creditor, a banker, who has owed money, two men in fact with substantial amount of money. And he called them both in. He said to them, "Don't worry about having to pay." Imagine your bank manager who manages your mortgage, called you in one day and said, "listen, I've decided you don't have to pay the rest of your mortgage." If you've got a bank manager like that, please do tell me.

Jesus said to Simon, "Who would be most grateful?"

Simon responds, "I suppose the one who's forgiven the bigger debt." And Jesus says to him "you've answered right."

"Hey, Simon. I came to your house; you didn't wash my feet. I came to your house and you didn't anoint me with oil. I came to your house and you didn't greet me with a kiss." And in front of everybody what he's saying is this, "Simon you're a rude man. You've insulted me because you know what the customs are. That's what everybody understands you should do. You're a rude man, Simon."

Then he turns to the woman and he says to her, "Woman, your sins are forgiven." What an odd thing to say. "Woman, your sins are forgiven." He doesn't inquire how she is. He doesn't say, "So, what's up? What are you so upset about?"

When I walked underneath the hall and I saw the crying woman, I looked at her and I said, "You alright?" Jesus didn't ask anything at all. He just said, "Your sins are forgiven."

What an odd thing to say! Well just hold that thought in your mind for a second.

In his day, Jesus was enormously popular and the crowd followed him everywhere he went. One day he went into a house which was surrounded by people and there were four guys coming along and they were carrying a crippled person. They wanted Jesus to heal him but they couldn't get in so they decided to get up on the roof and they ripped it back to see Jesus inside. That's a pretty dramatic entrance!

'Then they lowered the crippled man down thinking Jesus would heal him. Jesus looked at the man and he didn't ask what they wanted. He didn't say, "Oh, big entrance!" He just looked at the crippled man and said, "Your sins are forgiven."

What an odd thing to say! "Your sins are forgiven." And we read in the Scriptures repeatedly when people come to Jesus asking for something he says, "Your sins are forgiven."

What a crazy thing to say, "Your sins are forgiven!" When you study it further you understand that this is central to the very mission of Jesus.

The mission of Jesus was to set people free and make it possible for them to have;

- complete and unfettered access to God and thus experience in their daily life the new Kingdom economy,
- the new kingdom culture in their own life where love, joy, peace, happiness and fulfillment reign.

FREELY GIVEN UNDESERVED

Jesus came to bring a new way of living which is full of love, joy and peace. These things have intense strength, bringing a new kingdom to reign in our lives. Jesus understands early in his life who he is, which became apparent when he is asked to read the Scriptures in the synagogue. They handed him the scroll and Jesus read this passage which some people say is his job description;

“The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he’s anointed me to bring good news to the poor, he sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” Luke 4:18

Jesus isn’t talking here about those who are physically blind or he isn’t talking about the financially poor nor about setting people free from prison nor from those who are oppressed and depressed. Jesus is talking here about setting people free from the ravages of sin because of humankind saying to God, “we think we can do better than you can,” and how that separates us from Him. Jesus came to set us free. That was his purpose, to forgive and to say, “whatever you’ve done, it’s done. You’re forgiven.”

You’re forgiven.

This is done.

You have set us free.

It’s almost inconceivable what God has done.

He’s capable of forgiving anything. His love is so intensely amazing. It’s inconceivable what God is and has done and it’s understandable that sometimes people cannot comprehend it.

It would be a little bit like walking down the main strip in a city where there are lots of cafes and restaurants. Suddenly as you’re walking by you see two people. You walk in and you call the waiter and you say, “See those two people? Can I have their bill?”

The waiter says, “What?!”

“Them, can I just have their bill?”

And the waiter gets the bill, you pay it and then you leave.

Freely given. Undeserved.

I have a friend who's not a Catholic and is a pastor of another Christian Church. He is a tremendously holy man and I have such admiration for him.

If you go out for dinner with him, sometimes when he gets up to pay the bill, he looks around the restaurant and asks the waiter for another table's bill to pay along with his own. You should see the waiter's face every time. He pays it, leaves and never stays to see what their reaction is.

Freely given, undeserved.

What God has done is freely given and undeserved.

Why don't you do it next time you go out? Why don't you walk past a restaurant, find two people and go in ask to pay their bill? Just make sure you don't pick that couple with that thousand-dollar bottle of champagne.

Freely given, undeserved.

This is radical because what God has done is bring us back to the beginning. There's nothing that you can do that God is not capable of forgiving. There's nothing that you can do and it seems that God seems to have two dials. One of them seems to be the love dial pointed towards us that says that it should be turned up all the way to a hundred and permanently stuck at a hundred percent. It seems he has this other dial that's a little different to that.

So, if God loves us 100% and if God is capable of incredible forgiveness, how are we meant to be to each other? If God treats us in that way, how are we meant to be to each other?

In the book of Colossians 3:13. It says,

"Bear with one another and if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive."

In Ephesians 4:31 it says,

"Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander together with all malice. And be kind to one another tender-hearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ has forgiven you."

In Mark 11:25, it says

“Whenever you stand praying, forgive if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.”

Is there a hint in this? God's love and God's forgiveness are different? That His love is turned up all the way, but His forgiveness depends on something different?

Whenever you stand pray and forgive if you have anything against anyone so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. Mark 11:25

Does it sound like we set the level of forgiveness?

We are all familiar with the following Scripture.

“Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.”

So, if we forgive two out of ten, God should only forgive us two out of ten. God's love is set all the way up, but we set the level of forgiveness that God gives us by the way we forgive someone else.

“And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” Matt 6:9-13

From the Gospel of Matthew,

“But if you do not forgive others, neither will your heavenly Father, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”
Matthew 6:15

In other words, I can't receive forgiveness when I've wronged others, and I'm not prepared to forgive other people. I can't receive forgiveness from God if I'm not prepared to forgive those who have hurt me.

To be honest with you, forgiveness is so darn hard if we're truthful. I know we're Christians and if you come to church, everyone says it's all about love and forgiveness, but is it really?

If we're gruesomely honest, forgiveness is hard.

To that woman who came to me from overseas and said to me, “how do I forgive the man who murdered my brother? And then went that same day and murdered his six children? How do I forgive him?”

To the countless number of women who have been to our events and written to me via the television show or website who have been raped? Or who have been abused in some form? How do they forgive the perpetrators? What do you say to them?

Forgiveness can be so terribly difficult if we're honest but if we want the churchy version we insist that people should just “forgive” everything and move on.

But if we're truthful, forgiveness can be so terribly hard.

REPENT

A repentant person lives with a constant awareness we must always be mindful of our need for God in our life because we are grateful for what God has done for us and that we constantly in need of God's grace in our life every day.

To repent means that we are always seeking to be changed by God.

Repent means to change direction. I used to think it meant to feel bad, but it doesn't. It's got nothing to do with feelings and it's meant to change the way you do things.

When I first started doing events some years ago and I went travelling away from home, I found I was looked after and fed fantastically everywhere I went. I've got this problem where I can put weight on easily, but taking weight off is another story and it takes me a long time.

One Saturday I had to fly home to Perth where we were recording for television. My plan was to fly home Saturday, record the show on Sunday morning and return to the eastern states for another event on Sunday afternoon. It was a crazy schedule. I hadn't been home for a while and so I was excited to see Rosemary and she'd come to the airport to pick me up. I came off the plane, and I walked toward Rosemary. I could see her, and we were both smiling, and then her shoulders slumped and she looked at me and said, “You've been eating.”

Can I just say to all the wives, that's not a good way to greet your husbands, OK?

She said to me, “We're going have to go home for a chat.”

You know, the chat!

When we got home, Rosemary said to me, “You know every place you go, people are going to treat you well because people are kind and good. They're going to treat

you well and seriously, if you eat everything they give you, you're going to need your own private jumbo jet just to get around."

Rosemary said, "You're going to have a problem."

The next day Rosemary drove me back to the airport, and as she dropped me off, she said to me, "Bruce repent. You don't have to eat everything they give you." In other words, change. Change. I just want you to know if you saw what we get given for dinner at some events you would understand that it's very hard to change.

Repentance means to change. If you're going to forgive, because you seek to be forgiven completely, you're going to need help. It will mean you need to do it differently.

In the parables, Jesus insists that a person who's following him means having the heart that says, "I'll forgive when you hurt me even before you've hurt me." Jesus teaches that to forgive is a duty and there are no limits. Jesus teaches that forgiveness must be granted without reserve however many times it's needed.

FORGIVE LIKE GOD FORGIVES

So how does forgiveness work in a Christian community? How does it work in a family? Amongst friends? Or in a marriage? In a parish? Or in a group?

The very nature of God is to forgive. And we're not becoming like God if we don't forgive. It's said that we are made in His image and likeness and so we are meant to be like Him. And if He's capable of forgiveness but we can set the dial on how much He forgives by how much we forgive, how do we become as forgiving as He is capable of being?

How does that happen when the truth is, that forgiveness is so terribly hard?

If you're someone who's been aggrieved and if marriages and relationships that matter to you have been destroyed, it's so hard to forgive.

If your reputation has been damaged, forgiveness is so hard.

If people have taken your possessions and you and your family are living less because of it, it can be so hard to forgive.

If people have done things to your physical bodies and you didn't give them access, forgiveness can be so terribly difficult to do.

God's forgiveness is so immeasurable that it requires us to forgive as well no matter the crime toward us.

You know forgiveness is so difficult.

You look at the inquiries into sexual abuse of children in institutions that is currently happening in many countries. At the end of the day, no matter how many people go to prison, and some should. No matter how many people are given money and restitution and apologies and they should. At the end of the day, the only thing that will heal is forgiveness. It's the only thing that will heal.

The world would stop and say, "I'm sorry." But what does "I'm sorry" really mean? I was in the shops the other day and I bumped into someone and I said, "I'm sorry," but I wasn't really. Have you ever said I'm sorry and you're not? It seems you say it more in a polite sense than in a true sense. Have you ever noticed that?

What does sorry really mean? The world would tell us that time will heal but if you remember anything as I said earlier, time never heals. The internal scar and injuries remain. It's hard to be in a Christian community when you're a family or a group of friends or a parish, if forgiveness is not central to it. Because forgiveness is divine. It's a divine attribute. God's forgiveness is so immeasurable. We are called to be that way and yet somehow, we have the capacity to set the limit on it.

CRIPPLED AND DEFORMED

It's a little bit like carrying around a back-pack all your life, and putting extra things into it as you go. You're fifteen years old and get hurt by someone and don't forgive. And now you're eighty-five years old and you carried it every moment of every day in every circumstance of your life. Bar none.

It doesn't matter where we go or what we do or whether we remember it or not, we carry it with us all the time. Then what happens is we pick up and we carry our backpack everywhere we go. We become deformed emotionally, psychologically, spiritually and in every way. We become crippled, and we become bent out of shape.

The absolute truth is this, that some of you walk every day as though you're crippled. You're deformed and you're bent out of shape because of unforgiveness in your life. You're deformed with the things that have been done to you that were wrong and should never have happened and you didn't deserve them to ever happen to you. You've carried them for so long and you've become bent out of shape. Joy and peace are being robbed from you right now because of unforgiveness.

Now some of you are saying, "but you don't know what's happened to me." I know I don't and what I would say to you now is 'guard your mind,' because if you don't guard your mind now, you'll miss this and for some of you, this is a divine date with your destiny. Long ago, God ordained this meeting and He doesn't waste a moment.

The more you carry unforgiveness, the more deformed you are. The more you lack peace, the more it goes on and on in your life. For many of you, it's the small unforgiveness in your life that have a capacity to break you down and to make you

deformed. They rob you of life and rob your marriages, and rob your friendships and rob your peace, and rob everything that you do.

FORGIVENESS HAS TWO ASPECTS:

1. Giving Forgiveness

I have to forgive those who have wronged me.

2. Being Forgiven Yourself

I have to be forgiven by someone else for something I have done that was wrong and then repent – change my ways.

LET IT GO

If possible, listen to this with your spirit or that part of your heart where Jesus lives. When we do not forgive we're the ones that are injured. When we don't forgive, we're the ones that are crippled. When we don't forgive, it affects the totality of every aspect of every part of every relationship, of every dream, of every hope, of every circumstance in our life. Bar none.

Unforgiveness affects the totality of who we are. I was once in a very large church, and they had individual seats, and every chair had a cushion on it (they were lovely and soft). The culture in this church was that when Mass ended or other activities ended people didn't leave and go out, they just stood in the church and talked. It seemed to be the community centre as much as it was the church. And it was just a place full of love. Early that day I had interviewed the parish priest in this church for a television program we were recording. The media portrays priests in a certain way and in my experience of working in parishes and diocese, the vast majority of priests are very different to what the media portrays. To show priests as they truly are, I interviewed them to air on television. On this particular day, I said to the people "Gee, you've got a great priest! In the interview, I had asked their parish priest, "Tell me, what do you think priesthood is?" And he said to me, "priesthood is about loving God with all your heart and pouring your life out for people until you've got nothing left for yourself." He said, "I think that is what priesthood is. It's about giving your life away so that others would have." And I said to the people, "Gee, you have a good one. You've got a really good guy here."

After one of the event sessions, I noticed a woman waiting around where I had been socialising with a few parishioners. "Are you waiting for me?" I asked. She responded, "Yes, I am," And then she barked at me, "How dare you!"

I said, "How dare me what?" and she said, "How dare you be a Catholic! How dare you be a public Catholic!"

She said, "There you are talking about priests, and who they are and what they've done." And she said, "You have no idea!"

I had no clue what she was going on about, and so I said, "what's up?" And she said, "when my brother younger, he was sexually abused by a priest! It's destroyed his life! It's destroyed him!" And she got into a rage and then she started crying, and she got hysterical. My heart went out to her. You know when you meet people like that they're not angry at you. She didn't know who I was and she was hurting. I remember under my breath saying to God, "God, give me something to say. Just give me something I could say to her." She went on and on and then eventually, she took a longer breath, and there was a brief pause. I said to her, "A member of my family was sexually abused by a priest when they were young." She said, "What?" I said, "A member of my family was sexually abused by a priest when they were young." She said, "You're a bigger hypocrite than I thought you were! You betrayed your family, and you betrayed everybody else!" "and she went on, and on, and I just waited. And then she took a longer breath again and I said, "Oh, no. I'm not a hypocrite. I chose to forgive. You tell me that your brother's life has been destroyed and I understand that. But your life is being destroyed as well because you can't forgive. Look at what it's doing to you."

And immediately when I said that to her, she just calmed down but she kept crying. Then we had a beautiful conversation that went on for a long time. I remember when the conversation had finished, the lady turned around and she walked off into the distance and darkness of the carpark. I remember thinking to myself, forgiveness is so powerful when it's given; unforgiveness is so powerful when it's kept and retained. Forgiveness has a capacity to set free and unforgiveness has a capacity to cripple us.

THREE STAGES OF FORGIVING

When you seek to forgive someone, there are three stages:

1. Rediscover the humanity of the person who hurt you

Often when we get hurt by someone, we look at that person through the lens of our hurt. We shrink them down and we see them as that rather than see them as the whole. "He's nothing but an animal and she's nothing but a cheat!" It is difficult to forgive when we look at someone through the lens of our hurt.

When you commence with forgiving a person, you must stretch out beyond that experience that hurt you towards something that's broader and see the person as a whole.

Have you ever noticed that sometimes we have one rule for us and another rule for someone else? When we do something wrong we want people to treat us in a certain way. When they do something wrong, we treat them in a different way.

Do you may remember Bill Clinton who was the president of the United States in the nineties? He had a very famous affair with Monica Lewinsky? The US Congress, their form of parliament, wanted to have him impeached or kicked out. I remember reading an article at the time that said many in the US Congress had done something similar themselves, but they were trying to get Clinton and make sure he got punished for his impropriety. Sometimes we seem to have one rule for us and another one for others.

Jesus knew that and he said it this way in;

“How can you say to your brother. Brother let me remove the speck that’s in your eye when you don’t see the plank that’s in your own eye.” Luke 6:42:

If you’re going to forgive you must rediscover the humanity of the person who hurt you. This is much easier said than done.

2. Relinquish your right to get even

Vengeance is the pleasure we get out of seeing someone get punished or being paid back for what they have done.

Lewis B. Smedes wrote a book called *The Art of Forgiving*, and he said, “Forgiving surrenders the right to vengeance; it never surrenders the climb of justice.” The inquiries into the abuse of children in all the different institutions, including the Church are terrible stories. There are people that should go to prison because punishment is required and justice should be paid. Compensation should be paid to victims because justice must be paid. But, forgiveness is still required.

For most of us, getting even never actually happens. Have you ever noticed that? You only ever get even in your mind. You might lie awake at night and think about what you are going do to him or what you going to say to her. You never do it most of the time, do you?

There are two kinds of hurt. There’s the original injury of what was done to us. And then for many of us, the far greater injury is reliving it over and over in our life. It psychologically and emotionally damages us and often the reliving causes far more damage than the original. Like unforgiveness, vengeance only prolongs the pain. Most of the time in my experience, when you do carry out vengeance, it isn’t fulfilling. You don’t feel great at the end of it.

Relinquishing the right to get even is about changing your pattern of thinking.

3. Revise your feelings toward the person you seek to forgive

This is hard to do! In the case of the person who stole my blue pencil case, because they like blue ones instead of pink ones, that was easy forgiven. But the person who came into Rosemary and my world a few years ago and took something that caused my whole family to suffer without the ability to recover and still causes us to live less? That is another whole level of forgiveness, isn't it?

How do you change your feelings? How do you revise your feelings? Here are two thoughts. The first one is that you must change your language towards the person you seek to forgive. Jesus said what comes out of our mouth is an indication of what's in our heart. Our mouth betrays what's inside of us so to change our heart we must go through the process of catching our words. We must be aware of our words to understand what is happening in our heart. As you convert your words, you convert your heart. The Scripture says in James that our words are powerful. They don't just break our bones; they can break our hearts. You know words have such a capacity to hurt and we must catch our words if we want to change our feelings towards a person.

The other way to change your feelings is to change your thought patterns toward the person. If I knew you, I could mention certain people's names that have injured you or hurt you. This would cause some of you right now to become very angry. Some of you would cry and some of you would feel frightened. Some of you would be nervous. Even though some of those people may be dead or in other places and have no capacity to come back, you would feel something because of the way we allow our thinking to go. When you seek to forgive, you've got to change the way you think and again you must catch your words.

We feel a person differently when we see a person differently. Sadly, many of us Christians have some very wrong notions about what forgiveness is.

MISTAKEN NOTIONS OF FORGIVENESS

1. Forgiveness does not mean Re-union.

If you're in a marriage and you've been abused repeatedly and you've gone back, and you think you've done your part, the church would teach us that you are required to forgive. You may not be required to go back into that marriage, but you are required to forgive.

2. Forgiveness does not mean Re-instatement.

If you're in a partnership and your partner does something that's terribly wrong you are required to forgive, but you may not be required to go back into that partnership

3. Forgiveness doesn't mean **Forgetting**.

The sum of everything in our life makes us who we are. Our story is a combination of the good, the bad, the planned and unplanned. In some ways, if we forget things, we show our lack of respect for ourselves because it's part of who we are. Some of the terrible in our lives, become the source of God's wonder in our lives. It says in Romans 8: 28, "*We know that all things work together for good for those who love God and who are called according to his purpose.*" You know that gravest sin you ever committed? That gravest sin? God can use it for good. That unspeakable sadness that happened to you? That terrible event? God can use for good. He can use all things.

Forgiving happens inside the person who forgives.

Now I want you to think of your mums, dads, brothers, sisters, uncles and aunties. I want you to think of all of them at Christmas lunch or family celebrations? We can see a lack of forgiveness in others, can't we? You can just see it. They live publicly in their words, in their actions, in their attitudes and in their language. You can see it by the way they react. Often people who haven't forgiven have a blind spot to it. They can't see it themselves. They say things like, "Look at what they did, I was treated unfairly, I was slated, I was wronged and I'm not fixing it until they do." And then they'll say things like, "I'm not affected." Have you noticed that someone who hasn't forgiven talks about the other person who did the wrong often? Have you noticed a person who has not forgiven either talks about the situation and the other person a lot or they don't talk about them at all?

Forgiving means loving yourself, otherwise you carry it around with you forever. Don't do it to yourself. Let the pain go. Give up the right to vengeance. Stop carrying the pain, the hurt, of what happened. You can't change it. You can't undo it. But it's robbing you of life.

To that person you married, who wronged you, let it go. Forgive them.

To that person who called you names, robbed life from you, let it go. Forgive them.

To that person who took from you what can never be given back, let it go. Forgive them.

To that person who turned friends against you, and you felt lonely and suffered loss because of it, let it go. Forgive them.

To that person who blames you for something you never did, that they now won't give you time to listen to what really happened. Let it go.

To that child you bore, that child you raised, that child you poured your heart, your soul, your life, your money, your resources, your time. The child you gave your life for, who's abandoned you, who's turned against you and said things that are so terribly hurtful to you. Let it go. Forgive them.

To that person who took from you what was rightfully your credit and now they're standing receiving the credit and the benefit for, let it go.

I must be honest, when I got married thirty four years ago, I never knew how much forgiveness would need to be part of our lives. I just never knew. I naively thought that being married meant we would come to agree on everything over time. How stupid is that? On certain subjects, Rosemary and I categorically disagree. We just don't see eye to eye and we never will. And if those subjects came up right now, we'd go back to our corners, the bell would go off and we'd come out swinging. We fundamentally disagree with each other. Why? We have different families, we have different histories, we have different backgrounds and we are different people. If it wasn't for forgiveness, at times there's no way forward. If it wasn't for forgiveness, we could only limp forward. There may be a future, but it's at a lesser level than we are meant to live. Forgiveness is the only thing that accesses the fullness of life. And to be honest with you, it's the reason that Jesus came. Jesus died to forgive humanity and our human capacity to keep saying no to him and living separated from God.

Forgiveness brings everything back to that beginning place. For forgiveness to really work, it must be accompanied by genuine sorrow. This is the reason sorry doesn't work, because at the end of the day, what does "I'm sorry." really mean? Have you ever noticed yourself saying, "I'm sorry" and then when you do the same thing, and people say, "you always say that?" because you may not have really meant it and they may not have forgiven you?

I shall get up and go to my Father and I shall say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers." So, he got up and went back to his Father. While he was still a long way off, his Father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him. His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son.'

Luke 15:18-21

I am sorry is an important phrase but it is not enough.

THE HOW OF FORGIVENESS IN CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

I know of few ways of behaving that cause families to be unified and strengthened long term, than having common understandings about how to go about giving and receiving forgiveness.

"If your brother sins (against you), go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have won over your brother. If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, so that 'every fact may be established on the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If he refuses to listen to them, tell the church. If he refuses to listen even to

the church, then treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax collector. Mathew 18:15-17

FORGIVENESS A GREAT GIFT TO OUR CHILDREN

Rosemary and I raised five children. You know how sometimes as parents you're just not sure you're doing it the right way? But you're just doing the best way you know how to do?

We gave our children many things, but when we look back, there are probably two things that will be indispensable to their life. One of them was forgiveness. It's better than good food. It's better than the right house. It's better than a good education. It prevents them from being bent out of shape. You could love your children no more than teaching them the power of forgiveness. They're not going to learn it in the world. I know of few ways for families and friends to be able to restore and come back to the place that a common understanding of forgiveness brings.

I'd love to tell you that I've thought about this all by myself but I haven't. I've had excellent mentors in my life that taught me things along the way. When Rosemary and I first met, we heard some very helpful teaching and some good people talk about the subject of forgiveness. I just never knew at the time how powerful it would be for us. And one of the things they've talked about was how do you really know when something's done? When it's really forgiven? When you know that it's not going to come back to bite you. Some people taught us that there was a language to forgiveness. There is a way of saying it so that you know it's dealt with and I'll share it with you.

THE LANGUAGE OF FORGIVENESS

When you ask someone for forgiveness, you say,

"I want to ask your forgiveness.

I did this

Because...

I am sorry.

Would you please forgive me?"

The other person responds, "I forgive you."

For example;

I want to ask your forgiveness.

I stole your blue pencil case because I like blue instead of pink ones.

I am sorry please forgive me.

The other person responds to this by saying, "I forgive you." And when they say, "I forgive you," it can never be spoken of again.

If you can't forgive, don't say, "I forgive you." Sometimes it can take a day, a week, a month, a year or longer. Sometimes it can take a lot longer. If you are a parent, this is a great action to teach your kids. Some of you are saying, "But kids do the same thing repeatedly!" And yes they do! But, what is the function of parenting? We get given this little child and our job as a parent is to build a scaffold-up around them, and then as they progress and mature through life, is to take the scaffolding down so they stand as a mature adult in life. That's what parenting does. When someone is growing in maturity through their life, they do the same things repeatedly, and you've got to revisit the same things as mums and dads repeatedly. Sometimes you've got to talk about the same things that you've forgiven before repeatedly for this reason.

When you say to me, "Bruce, I forgive you," you're mature enough to stop, look me in the face and say, "I forgive you." And it's done. How many of you are married? And you have an argument? Probably none of you argue in your marriages; but in other places, people do. Have you ever had an argument and then it just seems to be able to come up again and then come up again? But what happens if you had a contract that says, "I won't raise the past when forgiveness is given?" Do you think things would be different?

When our children were young, we had a way of disciplining them, and it was just a phase of how we did it. It was not necessarily the correct way to do it but it was just our way of doing it. When one of the kids did something wrong we would send them to their room, and then we would go in afterwards and sit on their beds with them and have a conversation. It would end with, "Daddy I want to ask your forgiveness I did it because... I'm sorry please forgive me." And then we would say, "I forgive you". We would kiss and it was done and we wouldn't talk about it again unless we needed to. If any conversation hadn't taken place that needed to take place here was the opportunity, and they were safe in that we were never going to use it against them.

One day, our daughter, Emma, had done something wrong. I have no idea what it was, I just remember sending her to her room. At that time Rosemary came out of her room and said, "The diamond in my engagement ring is gone!" I went over and had a look at it and all I could see was just the claws. There was nothing in there. At that point in time I froze and looked around. We had grey tiles everywhere and it was at that point I realized how cheap I'd been all those years ago, because it was a really small diamond that I'd bought her, and so hard to find. I couldn't see it anywhere. The whole family were on a hunt for this diamond and we were on our hands and knees looking everywhere.

All the kids were helping and suddenly I realised Emma wasn't with us and I called out, "Emma, where are you?!" She said, "I'm in my room!" We were calling between

the rooms. And I said, "Come out here!" And she said, "I can't!" I said, "Why not?" And she said, "You sent me to my room!" and I said, "Don't worry about it!" And she says, "No!" and then I did that adult thing. "COME!" And she came out.

I remember as we crawled on the floor we met on our hands and knees under the kitchen table. On that day, we had a long white table cloth over the table and I remember we came in from each end and I'm a little higher than her on my hands and knees. We came face to face and she looked at me in the face and said, "Daddy, you didn't come." I said, "Where?" She said, "to my room." And I said, "Ah... don't worry about it." She said, "No, no, no, Dad you've got to come. And I remember she backed out and she walked into her room and I got up from underneath the table. I walked in her room and we sat on the bed and we had this conversation. I don't remember what we talked about but it finished with, "Daddy, I want to ask for your forgiveness. I did... because.. I'm sorry, please forgive me." And I said, "I forgive you." And it was done.

Can I say this to you, the world doesn't teach forgiveness to our children? The world teaches spite and revenge. It teaches independence and the world is becoming more violent. It's teaching our children to build up that defensiveness within them. Human beings were not meant to live in conflict which causes us to survive in a warped manner. The Gospel leads us to freedom. No one is going to teach this to your children but you. If they're young then repeat it fifty million times, because that's what we mums and dads do. If you did this, you'd set your kids free. You'd give your children a gift and a gift that's very powerful. It's never too late, not even for your teenage children.

IT'S NOT ABOUT PERFECTION

My dad died a few years ago. In his early career years, he was in the Merchant Navy working in the engine rooms and was a chief engineer. He often worked in places where the pipes were covered with asbestos and it was raw asbestos. He would breathe in some of the asbestos fibers infecting his lungs every day. Thirty years later the poison went off like a bomb in his chest when he was seventy-three years old. I remember how he lived and died a terrible death over three months as his lungs completely closed. About three days before he died, I wanted to go and say to him, "Dad, please forgive me for something."

I remember coming out on the fifth floor of the hospital lift on that day. As soon the lift door opened, and even though his room was somewhere down the ward, you could hear the oxygen blowing into his lungs. They were doing everything they could to keep him alive. He would lie still in those last few days because any movement used oxygen up and would cause him to lose breath and that's a terrible feeling. I sat beside his bed and took his frail hand. He was such a hero and a vital man in my life. I held his hand and I looked up in his face and he had this mask on and his big

brown eyes just peering over the top. I looked at him and I said, "Dad, I want to ask your forgiveness. He'd never heard this but I had. And I said, "Dad, I want to ask your forgiveness and I still remember looking at those eyes and they were kind of semi-filled with tears. And I said what I had to say. And then amidst the pain, he got himself up on his elbows and it was so terribly uncomfortable for him. He looked at me and four times he said to me, "Son, son, son, son, there is nothing to forgive," and it was done.

There are some of you who need to go and buy a plane ticket and you need to fly somewhere to ask someone to forgive you for something. You need to go and face someone and you need to forgive. You were hurt and you didn't deserve it and it's robbing you of life.

Some of you need to go and sit on your bed tonight with your husband or your wife and you need to talk. Some of you need to go to see your children, your brothers, your sisters, your uncles, your aunties, best friends and you need to talk.

You need to forgive because it will set you free. It's about you. It's not about the other person. It's about you. Give forgiveness.

Radical forgiveness gives us the chance to start again. Otherwise we live less.

THREE AREAS OF FORGIVENESS

1. FORGIVE OTHERS

For some of us, forgiving others is important.

What happens if you go to someone and you say, "Will you please forgive me" and they say, "No, I can't." Sometimes we can be so hurt that we can't forgive. Just look at the Institutionalised sexual abuse cases that have come to light recently. There are some people who were hurt forty years ago, and they can't even talk about it. If you go to someone and say, "Will you please forgive me?" And they say, "No, I can't," the very fact that you went and asked for forgiveness, even if they can't forgive you, means you're good. You've done what you need to do. You're good. God's good with that. In the same way, if someone comes to you and says will you please forgive me and you say, "No I can't," because you're so terribly hurt by what occurred," God is also good with that.

A while ago I gave a talk on forgiveness, and afterwards, a man around sixty-five years old came over to the resource area and he had tears in his eyes. He said to me, "Mate, I can't forgive my wife. You don't know what she did to me." I looked at him and I said, "no, I don't", and then he paused and he said, "I know what I have to do, but I can't do it." As soon as he said, "I know what I must do," I knew it was ok.

You see the very fact that we can't do some things, God's good with that. It's not about perfection. We are not capable of perfection, we're not God. As soon as he said I know what I must do, it was done. It's our intention that God judges. It's the fact that we want to and yet maybe we can't because we're all frail and weak, aren't we?

I went to Reconciliation once and confessed something to the priest. Then I went out and about an hour later I did the same thing. So, I thought, "maybe the priest is still going," so I went back. I said, "Father, bless me for I have sinned; it's been one hour." And he said, "that's a world record." I said the same thing and then I went out again and did the same thing an hour later. Is it that because I am I a bad person? Or is it that I'm frail? I know the right thing to do and I can't do it. Have you ever wanted to do the best thing and just fail falling over the line? Have you ever wanted to love those people more in your life? We're weak. We're frail. All God wants to know is that we want to and try to do the best thing. Sometimes because we're hurt, we just can't do the right thing even though we need to.

I remember some months later I went back to that same city. I was at an event and a man came up afterwards and he said to me, "Mate, do you remember me?" I didn't remember him, unfortunately because I just meet so many people. I felt terrible. "I talked to you about my wife. And how in fact I couldn't forgive her that day." I said, "Oh, I remember now." He said to me, "I have forgiven her now," and then he smiled and he said, "And I'm free. I'm free."

Forgiveness is about you. If you go to someone and say, "Please forgive me and they say, "No I can't." That's all you can do and you're good. God's good with that. If someone comes to you and says, "Please forgive me" and you say, "No, I can't but I know what I need to do," God is good with that.

What happens if there are people and they've died or they lived in another place and you can't go to them? You can go to God and say, "God, this is the situation. I would do this. Forgive me," It is done and you are all good.

What happens if there's someone that's done something wrong and you know if you go and see them that they don't have your values. What if seeing that person you know would cause a raging argument and would be a dangerous place to be. Sometimes you can't go to the person but you can still go to God and talk to God about it and ask His forgiveness and then you are good. It's done.

2. FORGIVE YOURSELF

When you leave forgiveness unattended or unfinished, you carry it and it weighs you down and it cripples you. It cripples us in every aspect of our lives. For some of us, we do need to forgive others but the truth is, for some of us, we need to forgive ourselves.

We made some decisions and now we're wrong and we know it. It has robbed us of where we could be, the person we could be, and how we could be.

We made some decisions and it's affected the people we love in our life. We know we shouldn't have and we're so full of regret, but we find it hard to let go because of the things we've done to ourselves and to others.

We've made an investment and we knew it was a poor investment at the time it went pear-shaped and we and our families are suffering.

We thought that when our children were young that having the best job we could do was to work as hard as we could to supply the best house we could, the best education we could, the best things we could, the best toys and gadgets we could, the best holidays we could and so we worked long hours and we went home late every night. We weren't there for them and we can't change it.

Sometimes we just must forgive ourselves.

3. FORGIVE GOD

Some of us who need to forgive God.

We prayed to Him that a person wouldn't die and they did.

We prayed to Him that our business wouldn't go pear shaped and it did.

We prayed to Him that our children would come back to us and they haven't.

We prayed to God that so many things would happen and they just didn't and we ask seriously and it didn't happen.

And really, that's not about forgiving God. It is about us needing to accept God's will. What we're talking about is something almost impossible. If we're truthful this is terribly hard to do.

There you have it - I've written a book for you about something that's terribly hard to do. The church and its wisdom doesn't leave us alone in this. The church understands that we can't do it all ourselves and it gives us the gift called the sacrament of Reconciliation. The truth in the world today is that reconciliation is a bit out of fashion.

WE HAVE GRACE

When I lived in Perth, my parish priest was Vietnamese and he had a very, strong accent. You mostly could understand him, and he was aware of the barrier so he would kindly put his sermon up on the screen and read it each Sunday. During Easter one year he gave a sermon on the sacrament of Reconciliation and it was so

full of wisdom that I asked him for a copy of it. He was so generous that he gave me the full sermon straight from the podium.

“During Lent we say those words, “I’ve sinned.” We say them in our morning prayer and in the evening when we looked back over the day. At mass we admit, “I’ve sinned greatly in my thoughts and in my words and in what I’ve done and in what I have failed to do.” This is not Catholic guilt. It is simply facing the facts and it has a positive side. Admitting sin means recognizing one’s enormous potential.”

Isn’t it a great line? “Admitting sin means recognising ones’ enormous potential.”

“When I looked back over a day I do recognise moments of light. When with God’s help I’ve done something good. That same light also causes me to see shadows, moments when I’ve gone my own way and separated myself from the loving Father. I’ve sinned. In making a fresh start, we Catholics have a particular gift in the Sacrament of Confession. It’s not a counseling session although sometimes a person would ask for advice. The priest sometimes has a wise word. The priest does not represent Sigmund Freud or Dr. Phil. He represents Jesus. You might be thinking well I haven’t done something so terrible. I don’t have many sins to confess. A confession might involve seemingly small sins. I lost patience three times, I used a foul word once, I dote on an indecent image. I gave in to laziness twice. It may happen that one may recall a past sin. For example, all the talk about bullying can make a person remember how he made fun of someone in high school. Going to confession he might say, “Father I’ve hurt someone in the past I don’t know what damage I did but I desire forgiveness. I’ve sinned.”

When I was younger I used to think that the sacrament of confession was about the list. I did this three times and that four times and this twice and this five times. After I studied and reflected on it more I really came to understand what this sacrament is really about. It’s about saying to God, “I need your grace.”

What is grace? Grace is divine help to be more than you can be by yourself. If we’re truthful there is not one of us who doesn’t need grace. Who doesn’t need help to be more? Are you fully satisfied with your life? Is the man or the woman that you are right now a hundred percent perfect. Are you? Or are you like me, thanking God saying, “if it’s not for your grace, if it’s not for your ability, I can’t do this. I need you.”

I was in Mackay recently and I talked on grace and a woman came out, who was crying. I looked at her and she said to me, “I have just been to confession. It’s the first time I’ve ever been in my life.” I said, “That’s good,” and she said, “I’m not even a Catholic.” As it turned out, the priest was marvelous to her.

Maybe you haven’t been to the sacrament of Reconciliation for a long time? Let me encourage you. Maybe you’ve forgotten what to say. You can just walk in there and say, “Father I haven’t got a clue.” I’ve never met a priest who can’t get you to the

end. Even if you don't understand, the priest does. You go for you. You go for that power that you can receive from coming before God and asking for forgiveness.

"Forgiveness is a beautiful idea – until you have something to forgive." (C.S.Lewis)

To forgive is difficult therefore we must be kind to ourselves and to others along the way. To forgive takes more than our human effort, it takes divine help. It takes God's grace.

Maybe you've heard of Corrie Ten Boom, who grew up in Holland before WWII. Her family had a hiding place for Jews in their home, and one day they were discovered and taken to Ravensbruck, a German concentration camp for women. Her sister and her Father died there, but due to a "clerical error," Corrie herself was released.

Rather than holding a grudge, she spent the rest of her life preaching about God's mercy and the importance of forgiveness.

In 1947, Corrie was in Germany, talking about that very thing. She looked up and saw a man coming forward: one of the guards, a particularly cruel man from Ravensbruck. Everything flooded back and she was filled with hatred. But he came up to her, smiling, saying that he had found Jesus and was a changed man. "Isn't it wonderful! You are so right, he casts our sins to the bottom of the sea. But I have wanted to be forgiven by someone who was there." He put out his hand: "Will you forgive me, Fraulein?"

Corrie stood there, frozen. She could not forgive him. How could she? Her sister had died in that place! So many had died. But she had to forgive. She remembered Jesus saying, "if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will I forgive you." Then she thought about Jesus dying on the cross, asking the Father to forgive those who condemned him. "Jesus, help me!" She summoned up all her willpower and extended her hand, asking God to supply what she could not find within herself. A wave of warmth rushed down her arm and she was able to say, with what she knew was God's love, "I forgive you!"

That is grace. We cannot do such things without God's help. we need God's grace daily to live our life his way. And we need to pray for that, as Corrie did. Just as Christ, by grace, forgave us, so we with his grace can forgive others.

Forgiveness is hard work. And while we need to seek it and give it, we need God's grace to realize we are nothing without Jesus and we'll fail without his help. We can get so lost in ourselves and we're so helpless in ourselves. We hold on to anger and resentment. We allow brokenness to get worse and worse. Only Jesus can forgive us. And only he can give us the grace we need to forgive as we have been forgiven.

Prayer of Response

Gracious God in heaven, all we can say is “thank you!” We thank you for your amazing grace, your amazing love, your persistent work in drawing us to yourself despite our rebellious hearts. We pray that you will keep us humble and totally in love with you because of your love shown first to us. We pray to be able to forgive ourselves as well as those in our lives who have hurt us so that we may be free and live life to the full as you have designed us.

We ask this in name of Jesus.

Amen.



About Bruce Downes

Bruce Downes is known around the world as The Catholic Guy which is the title of the daily television program he presents. Starting in 1990 he worked as the Director of Evangelisation and then Director for the Catholic Youth and Young Adult Ministry for the Archdiocese of Perth, Western Australia.

In 1998 Bruce launched an exploratory work as the Director and Senior Pastoral Leader of Impact Catholic Ministry, an organisation that reached out to people of all ages, seeking to find ways to introduce people to a relationship with God and connection to a local Catholic Community.

This led to invitations to present Parish Mission/Events that have been powerful occasions of conversion and transformation for tens of thousands of people. The ministry has expanded to create what will be known as The Catholic Guy Impact Centres to reach disconnected people from Church from their base in Sydney, Australia.

His presentations are inspiring, practical, funny, warm and engaging. His eye-opening messages stimulate minds and stir souls. His seasonal prayer and inspirational series are seen and listened to daily in over 90 countries.

Bruce has been married to Rosemary, his best friend, supporter and encourager for thirty-four years. They have five children and six grandchildren.