



## THE CREED: FORGIVENESS

*I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy Christian church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.*

### **forgive (definition)**

1. to grant pardon for or remission of (an offense, debt, etc.); absolve.
2. to give up all claim on account of; remit (a debt, obligation, etc.).
3. to grant pardon to (a person).
4. to cease to feel resentment against: to forgive one's enemies.
5. to pardon an offense or an offender.

☞ Which definition(s) is(are) difficult for you to exercise?

☞ Which aspect of forgiveness cost Jesus the most?

☞ For which are you most thankful?

### **A Story of Forgiveness**

John Carter got involved in crime at the age of 12. After eight years in prison he finally got to meet one of his victims. John is now married with two children. He works as a gardener and is taking a degree in English Literature.

I started getting into trouble when I was at school – shoplifting, burglary, that kind of thing. At 14 I was sent to a detention centre for three months, after which I went straight back into petty crime. When I left school I had no qualifications and joined a Hell's Angels motorcycle club. By now I was committing more serious offences, making the lives of my mother and four sisters an absolute misery. But for me it was all just a game of cops and robbers. I was in and out of jail and even committed a serious offence while on the run: that was when I hurled a table into the air in a pub and a young girl had her face badly lacerated.

By 22, as a result of armed robbery, I received an eight-year sentence. I felt no remorse and from day one I rebelled against the prison. I was proud of my crimes – they were me and showed people that I was a nasty, evil bastard who was not to be messed with. At one time I ended up doing solitary at Dartmoor for 18 months because by that point I'd become almost rabid and would attack anyone. It was then that a psychiatrist suggested that I go to the therapeutic prison, Grendon Underwood. At Grendon we worked together in small groups. A lot of soul searching went on. I did exceedingly well in therapy and started helping others. I started getting anxious about being released in case I went back into crime. It was then that my probation officer started telling me about restorative justice. She felt I'd reached a point where I could feel empathy, and suggested that perhaps I should meet one of my victims. The question was, which one? There were literally hundreds. My probation officer asked me which offence stuck in my mind as the most damaging, and I immediately thought about the incident in the pub. The victim was tracked down and amazingly she agreed to meet me.

When I walked into the visiting room, I noticed that the girl had a prominent six-inch scar on the side of her face. I had no idea who she was and yet I felt this deep bond between us because we'd shared something – something that for her was of course entirely negative. We both sat there and looked at each other. I could see that she was full of rage. It was highly traumatic; her father was clenching his fists, her mother looked distraught. I was the first to speak, and for the first time I found I could express how I'd felt at the moment of the offence. It was also the first time I was able to take on board the hurt I'd caused. Then she took me through what had happened to her that night and how it had affected her ever since. We both broke down and cried.

Finally, I told her how remorseful I felt and it was then, after a brief pause, that she said, "I forgive you". I hadn't asked for this and I certainly didn't expect it, but by God those words had a profound effect. They stopped me in my tracks and concentrated my resolve never to repeat anything like this. As for my victim, I think meeting me allowed her to put a face to her fear and reassured her that she would never again be attacked. That was in 1989, and every year that goes by is another year that I haven't re-offended. The only person I have to thank for that is my victim. She gave me this incredible gift.

"The Forgiveness Project" [www.forgivenessproject.com/stories/john-carter](http://www.forgivenessproject.com/stories/john-carter)

- ☞ What is your story of forgiveness?
- ☞ What power does forgiveness have in our lives?
- ☞ Why is the doctrine of forgiveness so critical to our faith?

## 1. We're all accountable to God (...the all-seeing, all-knowing, all-perfect God)

Romans 3:19 – Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.

- ☞ What emotion does this idea of accountability to God stir up in you?
- ☞ Why is this idea a sticking point for our current society?

## 2. We've all messed up (...and desperately need God's forgiveness)

Romans 3:11-12 – “There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.”

- ☞ How can this passage be true in light of all the good that people do?
- ☞ How then can we be righteous?

## 3. God loves us and is eager to forgive (...but forgiveness comes at a price)

Romans 5:8 – But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

- ☞ What was the price for your sin?
- ☞ How should we respond to this “Amazing Love”?

## 4. Forgiveness is a gift we receive (...by faith and by choice)

Romans 6:23 – For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

- ☞ How have you received this gift?
- ☞ Why does God offer to forgive our sins?
- ☞ Why does forgiveness matter this side of heaven?

### Affirmation

“God, I believe that you exist, that you love me, and that you want a relationship with me. I accept that I am accountable to you and need your forgiveness for all my sinful ways. I believe you sent your son Jesus to pay the penalty for my sin. By faith and choice, I now receive your forgiveness and promise to follow after you for the rest of my life.”