



The Shape of The Cross

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What would you say is the central symbol of Easter?

The cross of Jesus

Let's look at the shape of that cross, because it has significance for how we appropriate or claim for ourselves the meaning of the cross. So what do we see when we look at this cross ... or this one? (*Have several crosses of various colours and sizes*) What can we say about its shape? There is one beam going up and down — and one going across. Borrowing the language of mathematics the cross has a **vertical axis** (the up and down beam) and a **horizontal axis** (the one going across).

Vertical axis :The **vertical axis** represents the relationship between God (up) and us (down). We receive God's forgiveness and we give back our worship.

Horizontal axis: The **horizontal axis** represents our relationships with other people. We forgive as God has forgiven us. We receive forgiveness from other people. Here are some Scripture verses that talk about forgiveness (hand them out or lay them out on a table). Give everyone a verse to read out, then pin it on the cross. Where you pin it will depend on what you think the verse is about. If it's about God forgiving us, pin it on the vertical beam of the cross. If it's about us forgiving others, or them forgiving us, pin it on the horizontal beam.

God's forgiveness — vertical axis

Luke 15:18-20 Exodus 34:6b-7a
Psalm 32:5 Psalm 51:1-2



Psalm 51:7 Psalm 51:9
Isaiah 38: 17b

Human forgiveness — horizontal axis

Note to leader: As these verses are read, point out that these verses talk about both horizontal and vertical forgiveness, so they should be pinned at the intersection of the two beams. There is no mention of human forgiveness without God's forgiveness being mentioned as well.

So God says in His word that we are to forgive others as He has forgiven us. He also says that we will be dealt with harshly unless we forgive others. Perhaps we can't really forgive others unless we've known God's forgiveness. It's obviously very important to God that we forgive each other.

Luke 11:4a
Colossians 3: 13



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What does it mean to forgive someone?

Here is one definition: "Forgiveness is freeing up and putting to better use the energy once consumed by holding grudges, harboring resentments, and nursing unhealed wounds ourselves."

Sidney & Suzanne Simon — www.wisdomquotes.com

So how do we go about forgiving someone?

- **Feel the pain** — We need to know what we're forgiving!
- **Decide that it's not going to warp your life** — It's my choice to free my life of the burden of unforgiveness.
- **Ask forgiveness for any fault of yours in what happened** — Most of our problems with other people are two-way, at least to some extent!

- **Give the person a clean slate** — What does that mean? I take it to mean that if we encounter that person again, we treat them as though they did not owe us anything. We give up our right to revenge. We don't see the world as owing us something because we've been hurt. BUT we don't have to put ourselves in the way of more abuse. We keep ourselves and those we love safe, but we live free of the belief that someone has to repay us in some way for what we have suffered.
- **Repay good for evil in the world** — Sometimes it's not wise to try to make the relationship right with the person who has hurt us. Instead of becoming bitter we become better people, and the world is better for our contribution.

Will you decide to forgive the people who have hurt you?

Think about someone you need to forgive. Are you ready to take these five steps toward forgiving them?

- **Feel the pain** — know what you are going to forgive them for; decide that it's time to stop resisting forgiveness; it's time to live free of that burden.
- **Ask God's forgiveness** for any wrongdoing on your part the relationship; decide that from now on you will think of that person as not owing you anything.
- **Work out how you will pay back good** instead of bad into the world. If you feel you can't take all of those steps today, that's perfectly o.k.
- **Keep talking to God** about the people you need to forgive, and ask Him to show you how to do this.
Matthew 18:34-35
Ephesians 4: 32