# Living Word
## Lutheran Church
### LCMS

**"Have I really forgiven someone if I *say* they are forgiven, but don't *feel* like it?"**

This is a great question - one that I'm sure nearly everyone has struggled with at some time.

It seems that in our society over the past 30 or so years has trained to think that we shouldn't do anything unless we "feel like"it We are trained to think that we can't love someone unless we "feel" in love. We haven't worshiped God unless we "felt" something from the service, etc... The truth is that

Let me answer that question with another question: Do you suppose Jesus "felt like" forgiving us our sins knowing that he would have to die and suffer hell as a way of doing it?

We know from what Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane just before he was arrested (to be put to death the very next day) that he didn't "feel like" doing this. He prayed that there may be some other way.

But even though he didn't feel like dying to forgive us, he did it anyway because he knew it was God the Father's will. It was the only way we could be forgiven. And so Jesus willingly did what he needed to do in order that we might be forgiven - even though he didn't "feel" like it.

Jesus' action in dying on the cross shows us very plainly that forgiveness is a "head thing" not a "heart thing." In other words, forgiving someone is based on *knowing* it is what you must do; it is not based on *feeling like* doing it.

There are certain things in life that, if we waited until we "felt like" doing them, they'd never get done. Going to work, going to school, doing your taxes are just a few.

And after you've gone to work, school or did your taxes, no one can say that you didn't work or didn't learn or didn't get your tax forms filled out just because you never got to the point of "feeling like" doing those things.

The same holds true of forgiveness. When someone hurts us deeply, we may never forgive them if we wait until we "feel like" forgiving.

But when you speak the words "I forgive you," knowing that forgiving is God's will - even if you don't feel like it - you have forgiven. (If you are lying through your teeth, when you say it - well, that's another story).

I think Cori ten Boom (Christian author who survived the Nazi war camps) may have summed up forgiveness best.

After the war she was speaking to groups about needing to forgive the atrocities committed. It was easy to tell others to forgive until after one speech, a former concentration camp guard who she remembered as one of the most brutal came up to her and said that he had become a Christian after the war and had asked God to forgive him. He told her that he also needed to ask her forgiveness.

Cori told how she had remembered this guard (even though he never remembered her specifically). He had been one of the cruelest guards. She told how forgiving him was the last thing she felt like doing at that moment. But she told how she knew that she had to forgive him - for two reasons:

1) Jesus was very clear in stating that God will not forgive us if we do not forgive others. On a spiritual level, she knew forgiveness was necessary.

2) She had started a half-way house for concentration camp survivors after the war. She had witnessed that only those who were able to forgive were able to get out of the home and back into society. Those who kept harboring bitterness were never able to get well and resume normal life. On a purely physical level she knew forgiveness was necessary.

So, she asked God to empower her do what she didn't feel like: extend her hand and pronounce forgiveness.

God answered her prayer and she was able to forgive - not because she "felt like" it, but simply because she knew she had to. It wasn't until after she had forgiven that God brought the "feeling" of forgiving.

You can forgive someone without feeling like doing it. And when you do, you will find the same as Cori ten Boom: God will eventually bring the feeling too.

Thanks for asking,
Pastor David

**Send your questions to pastor@livingwordlutheran.net**