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A Strategy Toward Healing And Reconciliation Through Forgiveness Training For The Members Of The Maranatha Seventh-Day Adventist Church In Fredericksburg, Virginia

Glenford Baxter

Andrews University

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ABSTRACT

A STRATEGY TOWARD HEALING AND RECONCILIATION THROUGH FORGIVENESS TRAINING FOR THE MEMBERS OF THE MARANATHA SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH IN FREDERICKSBURG, VIRGINIA

by

Glenford Baxter

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ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Project Dissertation

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: A STRATEGY TOWARD HEALING AND RECONCILIATION THROUGH FORGIVENESS TRAINING FOR THE MEMBERS OF THE MARANATHA SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH IN FREDERICKSBURG, VIRGINIA

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Date completed: May 2012

Problem

A focus group at the Maranatha Seventh-day Adventist Church, prior to the onset of this research, identified three key areas of conflict that must be addressed in order to improve its spiritual life and experience growth. One of the identified areas of conflict was the lack of forgiveness and a need for reconciliation among members. Unwillingness on the part of some members to both give and receive forgiveness has led to significant declines in attendance and loss of members over the past ten years.

Method

The project undertakes the development of a four-part biblical sermon series over two month on forgiveness, culminating in a seminar on how to give and receive
forgiveness. The impact of the sermon series and seminar, on promoting forgiveness, changing long held habits, and reducing hostility among church members was evaluated. My focus for this project was through a survey study. A baseline forgiveness assent survey was given at the start to determine the attitudes among members of the church regarding forgiveness. The same survey was given at the end of the sermon series and seminar/workshop, and again after six months to determine the lasting impact of the sermon series and seminar/workshop.

Results

Initially 81%, and in the final survey 69%, had no desire to get even with those who had offended them, which is a change of 12%. Initially, while 81% had no desire to make others pay for their mistakes, attitudes about making others pay had changed to 84%. Only half of the respondents dwell on the offense at the start of the study, by the final survey 77% of participants spent more time thinking about the offense which is a change of 27%. Anger toward others had significantly changed; initially 44% had no anger toward others. There was now a 33% change, 77% had no anger toward those who offended them.

While initially only 50% could see the good points in those who had offended them we see a dramatic improvement of 34% gain. Now 84% of members can point out the good in others. There was also an increase in those who now pray for their opponent by 9% to 84%. Those who were willing to forgive had changed from 81% to now 84%. While initially 62% felt no resentment there was a dramatic change, now 92% had no resentment which is a 32% improvement. There was a 22% change among those who were not at peace. More members were now willing to be associated with each other.
While 44% felt the need to distance themselves from other members, now 69% disagreed with keeping their distance from others that offended them. This particular result provides the basis for further dialogue and reconciliation. The next response is consistent in that while 56% did not agree in treating others as if they do not exist we now have 77% not willing to treat offenders as if they do not exist. That is an improvement of 21%. While only 44% were willing to correct the problem, 69% now felt a need to find solutions. There was also an improvement of 7% to 69% of participants who desired reconciliation, this is quite significant.

The results showed signs of hope for the congregation. Efforts toward promoting understanding and tolerance between members must be promoted and fostered by church leadership in order for healing to take place. It would appear from these encouraging results that an ongoing effort must be made to facilitate forgiveness through sermons and seminar/workshops. Structures should be established where members can bring grievances and concerns to the attention of leadership. The established pattern is, after an altercation, heated words or hurt feelings, members withdraw their presence and financial support. Their absence prevents an opportunity for meaningful dialogue and healing of the real or perceived hurt. Leadership must be proactive in promoting a climate of forgiveness and reconciliation. Because conflicts and misunderstandings are a part of the ongoing challenge of human institutions we must be consistently vigilant in promoting peace, harmony, and tolerance among those we lead.

**Conclusion**

Using a quantitative method to measure attitude toward those we have conflict within the congregation provided an effective and objective tool to access participants
attitude. The hypothesis that when forgiveness training is provided and we are able to
dialogue about problems we have with each other a positive, desired outcome can be
achieved. A majority of the responses to the questions on the survey instrument showed
signs of acceptance and a willingness towards forgiveness and reconciliation over the
eight-month span of the project. Measuring attitude toward those who we have conflict
with and training toward resolution will be beneficial in any circumstance, be it
interpersonal, family, community, or between nations.
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A Project Dissertation
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my wife, Hazel, our children Lavinia, Kean, and Othniel who has encouraged and inspired me to endure the rigors, of coursework, research, writing, and anxiety of the last several years. Without their encouragement and support, college, graduate school, and the challenges of this research project would have been unbearable. This is a testament to their accomplishment as much as it is mine. This project is only possible because of a loving and lovable family who unconditionally forgives, remembering that we often have to forgive each other for the same mistakes repeatedly. The educational journey started at Newbold College, continued through Oakwood University and finally Andrews University. Plans to complete my educational journey were put on hold to take care of my young family and their schooling. Now they are grown, and have accomplished their career goals, it was they who encouraged me to return and complete the journey that has brought me back to where the desire was differed. Thanks to each of you for your love and support

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The turnover in many congregations results from several factors. Members are willing to stay with a congregation through crisis after crisis if they have a support network within the congregation. Even after major conflict they are willing to remain faithful in their attendance and financial support of the congregation if they feel a strong sense of fellowship and community. On the other hand, others leave at the slightest sign of trouble or conflict.

Realizing that people leave churches for a variety of reason, I have chosen to focus on one of the prevalent causes of interpersonal conflicts in congregations, one that sours the relationships of individuals and destroys the life of the congregation. Unforgiveness among individuals in a congregation leads to the ultimate breakdown of relationships and disruption of the health of the congregation. The ability to forgive mistakes and seek to mend fractured and frayed relationships is vital for the survival of any congregation.

The purpose of this project is to develop a healthy, forgiving congregation at the Maranatha Church in Fredericksburg, Virginia, and make it a congregation which freely gives and receives forgiveness among its members. In light of the fact that the potential for conflict is inherent in all human institutions and organization, the purpose of this project is to develop realistic strategies that allow members to work well together. Of
greatest importance is the goal of working well together in a collaborative manner and the
ability to give and receive forgiveness. Lovingly and freely forgiving each other’s slights and missteps is essential for a successful and healthy congregational life.

A relatively young congregation established in 1994, Maranatha Seventh-day Adventist Church moved into its current church home in 2000 after moving numerous times and worshiping in rented facilities. The congregation of Maranatha consists of long-term, recently baptized, and newly committed members. The potential for tension and conflict developed early. This project is designed to examine the pitfalls and minefields the members face and to provide a strategy for building a healthy congregation. The project seeks to encourage the process of building a healthy congregation that forgives freely, placing emphasis on the fact that, in a loving congregation, members will forgive each other many times over in the lifetime of their being at that church. In their weekly interaction with each other in worship and in the conducting of church business, they develop tolerance and forgiveness.

A healthy congregation seeks and emphasizes unity, but not through the suppression of individual creativity. The church has an overarching goal of unity of purpose as it carries out the mission of the congregation. This project is designed to assist the Maranatha congregation of Fredericksburg, Virginia, in particular and all congregations generally to cope with conflicts which results from individuals' not giving forgiveness to, and receiving it from one another. I will explore the importance of forgiveness in the life of the individual and more broadly, at the congregational, societal, national, and international level.
Statement of the Problem

A focus group at the Maranatha Seventh-day Adventist Church prior to the onset of this research identified three critical areas of conflict that the church urgently needed to address in order to enhance its spiritual life and experience growth. One of the identified areas of conflict was forgiveness and reconciliation since some members showed a lack of willingness to both give and receive forgiveness. The consequence of this attitude has been a significant decline in the attendance and loss of members.

Statement of the Task

The task of this project was first to develop and then to preach a four-part sermon series on forgiveness, culminating in a seminar on how to give and receive forgiveness, followed by an evaluation of the impact of the sermon series and seminar on promoting forgiveness among church members.

Justification for the Project

The focus group identified the need for forgiveness and reconciliation, and the problem is evidenced by the conflicts and tension that has existed between individuals over several years. Unresolved conflicts have led to a significant decline in attendance, membership, and financial giving over the last ten years (Conference Quarterly Statistical Report, see Appendix 2 and 3). The intervention of conference administrators that culminated in the change of pastoral leadership after a series of unresolved conflicts brought the congregation to a point of crisis (recorded in church board and business meeting minutes).
Expectations for the Project

This project provides a model for forgiveness training for the members and leaders of the Maranatha Seventh-day Adventist Church. It assisted church members to recognize the benefits of practicing forgiveness and reconciliation and also helped to emphasize the willingness and importance of freely forgiving in all human interaction and institutions. The Maranatha church family showed a great need of practicing healing and reconciliation among its members, a skill needed in order to grow a healthy congregation. This project is potentially a useful model in assisting in the healing process for pastors, lay leaders, and members in conflicted congregations.

Methodology

The design of this research is a quantitative study of the Maranatha Congregation. Interviews of members of the congregation and a reading of the official minutes of church meetings revealed that the leadership of the congregation allowed their actions and decision-making processes to come under question and scrutiny by members. Leadership’s inability to satisfy the questions and suspicions of members led to distrust of the leader’s actions which escalated into hostility and threatened violence.

A quantitative survey instrument that had been validated was used to measure members' attitudes towards each other and their ability to give and receive forgiveness. The instrument had been developed by David E. Mullen, PhD for a longer test created by Susan Wade Brown, PhD, as part of her doctoral dissertation in psychology at Fuller
Theological Seminary, in Pasadena, California. The survey was edited by Robert Enright, PhD, professor of psychology at the University of Washington. A questionnaire was completed to gauge member’s views on conflict as part of this study. A biblically-based sermon series and seminar was developed and presented on forgiveness and reconciliation. Members’ assimilation and understanding of the main issues was evaluated by the results of the survey.

**Delimitations**

This study was an in-depth look at the conflicts that brought the Maranatha congregation to a point of crisis, but the study did not address the personal issues of individual church members. Instead, broad, rather than specific, leadership issues emerged, showing that the leadership had failed adequately to address this issue and to provide a structure for managing conflicts. Working through difficulties and challenges, answering questions raised—such as those related to worship styles, music, and women’s role in leadership in the church—are identified through the work of the focus group.

The congregation established the focus group prior to the onset of this study. However this study does not address these conflicts over women’s ordination, leadership roles, and worship and music styles even though they may have contributed to the problem. These require further in-depth study. While the conflicts that resulted in the crisis that brought the Maranatha congregation to a point of crisis are specific to that congregation, other churches can learn the broader lessons that come from seeing how the
Maranatha congregation and leadership managed their conflicts since the common points of conflict resolution are applicable to other congregations in conflict.

**Limitations**

Recognizing that on a survey instrument as used in this study there are inherent limitations. In a quantitative study even though this instrument was tested and validated, there is that human tendency to provide the expected answers to the questions. While every provision was made by this researcher not to know the identity and preserve the anonymity of the respondents I am aware that subconsciously some participants may have provided the socially acceptable answer and there is a margin of error that must be taken into account.

**Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of this study the following definitions apply:

*Forgiveness*: The ability to forego the punishment deserved for a wrong or harm done to an individual or group. Forgiveness is the legal act of God whereby He removes the charges against the sinner because He made the proper satisfaction or atonement for those sins.

Several Greek words describe forgiveness. One is *charizomai*, which is related to the word *grace* and means “to forgive out of grace.” It is used for cancellation of a debt (Col 2:13). The context emphasizes that our debts were nailed to the cross, with Christ’s atonement freely forgiving the sins that were charged against us. The most common word for forgiveness is *aphiemi*, which means “to let go, release” or “send away.” Forgiveness
is manward; man had sinned and needed to have his sins dealt with and removed (Ennis, 1989, p. 325).

Giving Forgiveness: Offering forgiveness entails someone who has been hurt to foregoing the desire to receive redress or compensation for a wrong that was done.

Receiving Forgiveness: This act involves an individual or group accepting forgiveness from others.

Unforgiving: The state of being unwilling to forgive or excuse people’s faults or wrongdoings. The application of the prefix un to a word denotes the absence of that quality.

Servant Leader: The individual who integrates a healthy balance of competence, character, and a caring servant’s heart while in a leadership role. Servant leadership grows out of being a servant to those individuals under the leader’s care. A servant leader is therefore a servant who happens to be leading. Instead of “leading by serving,” a servant-leader is “serving by leading.” Or to put it a little differently, there are many ways to serve, and leading is one of them (Keith, 2010, p. 2).

Reconciliation: This process involves restoring a disrupted relationship due to conflict and disagreement, living together in harmony where two people’s visions are consistent with each other, and settling a disagreement.

The word reconciliation means to unite two parties who are estranged and denotes that one has given offence and the other has taken umbrage or is displeased by it,
resulting in a breach between them. Instead of friendship, a state of hostility exists, with enmity instead of amity, which results in separation and alienation between the parties involved. This lack of harmony makes manifest the need for the estranged parties to make peace, that the wrong to be righted, the cause of the displeasure be removed, the ill-feeling to cease, the breach to be healed, and reconciliation to be accomplished (Pink, 2006, p. 12).

The word *reconciliation* comes from the Greek word *katalasso*, which means "to effect a change, to reconcile." God is the one who initiated this change or reconciliation; He moved to reconcile sinful humankind to Himself (2 Cor 5:18, 19). On the other hand, humankind is the object of reconciliation. Humans are the party that moved out of fellowship with God; therefore, we needed to be restored. This reconciliation has been provided for the whole world, but it is effective only when individuals receive it by personal faith.

Reconciliation is manward: man was the one that has moved out of fellowship because of sin, and man needs to be reconciled to renew the fellowship (Ennis, 1989, p. 324, 325).

**Description of the Project Process**

The basis for this project is the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White which provide the theological foundation for forgiveness and reconciliation. I have also examined current literature from various authors, being selective in limiting my review mostly to the most recent but with some exceptions to older published works that were available to me.
In addition, the findings of a focus group formed by the congregation prior to the start of this study were invaluable. These findings came from listening to the concerns of the members in order to determine the areas of conflict within the Maranatha congregation. From their findings I determined my focus would be on the need for forgiveness and reconciliation training.

I also compared and evaluated the conference statistics of membership, attendance, and financial trends for the church, noting the decline of all three factors over the past ten years. A baseline forgiveness assessment survey was given to determine the current attitudes among members of the church regarding forgiveness and reconciliation. I then developed and presented four biblically based sermons on the topic of forgiveness, preaching them over a period of two months. The emphasis was on the importance of giving and receiving forgiveness that leads to reconciliation.

Furthermore, the leadership developed a seminar/workshop on how to give and receive forgiveness and presented it at the end of the sermon series. At the conclusion of the seminar the church filled out another survey measuring the attitude of the members on giving and receiving forgiveness that leads to reconciliation. After six months the same survey was administered to determine the lasting impact of the sermon series and seminar.
CHAPTER 2

A THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION FOR GIVING AND RECEIVING FORGIVENESS

Introduction

A theological foundation is essential for giving and receiving forgiveness. Selected biblical narratives and counsels from the writings of Ellen White establish a solid basis for members practicing forgiveness. The Judeo-Christian religion teaches tolerance and forgiveness towards one's enemies. This challenges individuals and nations to forgive as they have experienced devastating conflicts and wars throughout history. Tolerance and forgiveness is vital in our communities and institutions since competing interests mean that people need to find common ground and learn and practice tolerance and forgiveness. Churches, places where one expects to find the greatest level of tolerance and forgiveness, often do not easily practice what they know to be right. Many members have an intellectual understanding of forgiveness, but find that to practice it is challenging. Therefore, they are unable to give forgiveness for an offense committed against them. Some expect to receive forgiveness from others when they are the perpetrators, but are challenged when they have to give forgiveness. However, Scripture contains numerous life lessons that teach tolerance and forgiveness. The writings of Ellen G. White, which are considered authoritative and instructive in the life of Seventh-day Adventist Church, also support my argument for giving and receiving forgiveness.
Forgiveness as a noun is merely the act of forgiving, and the adjective denotes someone's being willing or able to forgive or to allow room for error or weakness. This term in the Old Testament denoted the idea that one would "send away," "cover," "remove," and "wipe away" a transgression (Horn, 1979, p. 388). The Old Testament system of worship provided sacrifices for expiating the guilt of those who have sinned unwittingly or repented of their sins (Lev 4-5), but sacrifice must always be accompanied by a proper disposition (1 Sam 15:22; Hos 6:6). The prophets testify repeatedly that God desires to forgive human sins and asks that humankind repent (Isa 1:18-19; Hos 12:2-3; Joel 2:13) as a prerequisite for a renewed relationship between God and Israel (Achtemeier, 1985, p. 319).

At the beginning of Scripture, we are confronted with the need of forgiveness when the perfect creation and the first couple disobeyed God's injunction. Before sin, disobedience, and rebellion infected our world, Adam and Eve felt no guilt or shame. "And they were both naked; the man and his wife, and were not ashamed" (Gen 2:25). Realizing that they were naked because of disobedience, the first couple blamed their Creator for creating the conditions that led them into sin. And an immediate result of sin was shame, blame, and lack of forgiveness. Thereafter, leaving the idyllic condition behind, humankind undergoes a series of conflicts throughout the Old Testament, first with God but then with each other, with their children, among families, and between
tribes and nations. Since humankind could not rectify this situation, God took responsibility for remedying the problem through forgiveness.
God's Forgiveness

God forgave Adam and Eve without their asking pardon for their disobedience.

Their offspring, Cain, killed his sibling Abel because of resentment and hate. "And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him" (Gen 4:8). When God inquired of the whereabouts of Abel, Cain's attitude was resentful. "And the LORD said unto Cain, 'Where is Abel thy brother?' And he said, 'I know not: Am I my brother's keeper?'" (Gen 4:9). His state of mind is evidenced by his offhanded response. God outlines to Cain the consequences of his actions.

And he said, "What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground. And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand; when thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth." (Gen 4:10-12)

God's question "What hast thou done?" does not require an answer, but is a means of opening up a dialog about Cain's anger. Though God knew the consequences of sin, the results of the parents' disobedience now manifests in their offspring, and the results is shocking and foreign in a world that not long before was a perfect creation. God, attempting to show Cain the error of his response, lists the punishment, which includes the need to struggle to work the ground to provide a living and a warning of future
hardships that would result from a broken relationship with God and Cain's fellowmen.

Being a fugitive running from place to place would be Cain's lot for the rest of his life.

Cain's response to the consequences that he had to face is most remarkable. While showing no remorse and its implications, Cain instead was worried about himself and fretted that he might become a target of revenge by his own relatives. Cain was afraid for his life and complains to God that his "punishment is greater than [he] can bear." He started complaining to God instead of apologizing or seeking forgiveness from God and his parents. He was concerned about preserving his own life. His parents had behaved similarly when they, too, complained to God about their sin and thereby lost sight of the enormity of the choice they had made and the effects on God and all His creation. Their offspring was now infected with a similar disposition to blame and complain.

And Cain said unto the LORD, "My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me." (Gen 4:13-14)

A loving and merciful God listens to the complaint and offers forgiveness and mitigates the punishment by placing a mark on Cain so that no one should slay him. "And the LORD said unto him, 'Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.' And the LORD set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him" (Gen 4:15). The forgiving and loving Creator, in dealing with an unrepentant and
evil murderer, shows unrestrained love and a willingness to forgive the sins of His creatures. The mark placed on Cain was a mark of protection that would single him out for God’s protection, sparing his life. The logical punishment would have been the separation from the presence of God as Cain’s parents were when angels drove them from their garden home, and indeed Cain had to relocate. “And Cain went out from the presence of the LORD and dwelt in the land of Nod on the east of Eden” (Gen 4:16).

Living a life apart from God’s presence perhaps is the greatest punishment for sin, and like Cain we need the full and free forgiveness of our Creator in order to find lasting and meaningful peace. While Cain remained alive, he had the chance to repent and attain reconciliation with God and his family. Had God punished Him by exacting a life for a life, the death penalty, the first two offspring of Adam and Eve would have been dead without hope of Cain’s turning from his rebellious attitude. Forgiveness provides hope for change.

Forgiveness as Manifested by the Ark

The language that God uses to describe mankind before the flood seems strange in the mouth of the Creator of the universe. “And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart” (Gen 6:6). Why would the Creator have such sentiments? In a few hundred years the marvelous world He had created was far from what He had intended, and God, who hates sin and rebellion, was sorry that He had
created our world, humans and animals included. Life on earth had deteriorated to the point of needing a new start. “And the LORD said, 'I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping things, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them'” (Gen 6:7). The Bible elaborates on the condition that caused God to regret making man:

The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth. (Gen 6:11-13)

As angry as God is about the condition of men, He is still a forgiving God and longs to save whoever He can. Knowing this evil would happen, He had provided forgiveness for the first couple and their yet-to-be-born children through a Savior. God's forgiveness and rescue plan for Noah and his family required people to manifest and practice obedience and dedication to God's principles. “But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD” (Gen 6:8). Finding grace, unmerited forgiveness, led God to implement a rescue plan for His sin beleaguered creation. “These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God” (Gen 6:9).

Deciding to save Noah and his family was God's attempt to start over again with sin-contaminated human beings, choosing the single family that still retained a desire to follow God's principles. However, Noah was far from perfect. Even though he walked
with God, his life showed instances of straying from the path of obedience. Yet God is once again willing to reconcile with humankind and give a fresh opportunity through Noah and his preaching as well as making preparation for the ultimate judgment against those who would not heed the warning. God calls man’s attention to His plan for saving as well as destroying the earth. A call to repentance is also presented. He does not give humankind five minutes or even five days to repent. Instead, He offers humankind 120 years to listen to His appeals, but humankind rejects them. After 120 years of preparation, Noah was able to convince only his family. From the original two, and now the surviving eight, God maintained the seed of humankind. The nature of humanity is to sin and do violence to their fellowmen, but each time God offers forgiveness and shows humankind the new way forward from the spirit of forgiveness and a willingness to embrace the reconciliation brings with it.

After the flood, God determined that He needed to shorten humankind’s lifespan on earth from the hundreds of years lived prior to the flood to just 120 years. The reason for the shortened life was that the spirit of man and the spirit of God were not in cooperation. Without God’s protection and forgiveness humans would not survive long.

“And the LORD said, ‘My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years’” (Gen 6:3). In spite of his regret He does not give up because He has a bigger plan to move forward to forgive and eventually to save His creation.
Family Forgiveness: Joseph and His Siblings

One of the most intriguing instances of giving and receiving forgiveness in all of scripture is that of Jacob, Joseph, and his ten siblings. The place to test giving and receiving forgiveness is interactions between members of the family. Proximity provides opportunity for hurt and pain on a scale not experienced in other relationships, so the story of Joseph and his siblings is an excellent example of interpersonal forgiveness. Up to this point in human history, God has left a record of His forgiving humans. The brothers' bad attitude toward their younger sibling, then, did have some validity. Yes, Joseph acted as a spy for their father, but what led them to dislike Joseph even more was the fact that he was their father's favorite child. His siblings viewed him as a spoiled seventeen-year-old, the favorite son who brought negative reports of their actions to their father. Therefore, they could not trust Joseph to be on their side, and his actions set him up for what eventually befell him at their hands, being sold as a slave. Their intention was to do away with this problem brother once and for all (see Gen 37).

Years after the brothers had hidden their actions on that fateful day when they sold their brother as a slave by telling a lie to their father; Joseph has a chance personally to forgive his brothers after he eventually finds himself elevated to a high position as governor in the land of Egypt. Famine in his old home country provided the circumstances that eventually led to an encounter with Joseph and his siblings. The biblical account says,

"And Joseph saw his brethren, and he knew them, but made himself strange unto them, and spake roughly unto them; and he said unto them, 'Whence come ye?' And they
said, 'From the land of Canaan to buy food.' And Joseph knew his brethren, but they
knew not him. And Joseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed of them, and said
unto them, 'Ye are spies; to see the nakedness of the land ye are come'” (Gen 42:7-9).

The perpetrators of the crime had forgotten what their brother looked like since he
had been only a teenager when the Ishmaelite traders had taken him away from his
brothers. The root of their actions was their jealous and hateful hearts, full of
unwillingness to forgive what they perceived as the wrongs Joseph had inflicted on them.
Now, years later after fortune had left Joseph again with the upper hand, this time not as
the favored son but as governor in Egypt with real power over his siblings. He faced a
crossroads in which he needed to decide what attitude towards those who had wronged
him would be. A part of him wanted revenge, so he spoke roughly to them at first, testing
whether or not their attitudes had changed and perhaps leaving his forgiveness
conditional on that change.

The difficulties brought to their minds the consequences of their actions so many
years ago, and they were now filled with remorse and shame for their actions.

And they said one to another,

We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul,
when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us.
And Reuben answered them, saying, "Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against
the child; and ye would not hear? therefore, behold, also his blood is required." (Gen
42:21-22)

Guilt caused Reuben, the oldest sibling of Joseph, to confess from his own lips his
regret at not preventing the act of selling Joseph as a slave. Joseph's siblings found
themselves in a very awkward position at this critical moment. Unwittingly they now needed the goodwill and favor of a sibling they had despised, and they were afraid of what was going to befall them as they were now in a very vulnerable position.

Joseph wanted to test his siblings to see if they truly had repented of their hateful ways and the actions they had perpetuated against him so many years ago. He demanded that they bring the youngest sibling, Benjamin, back with them on their return journey. This would be hard for Jacob to accept because he thought that he had lost his precious Joseph to a wild animal, the tale told by his lying sons. That was the story all ten of his sons had concocted when they returned without Joseph, with his coat of many colors bloodied and torn (Gen 37:31-36). All these years none of them had broken the silence, and now they somehow had to convince their father to let his youngest child, Benjamin, Rachel's only remaining son, go with them to Egypt to satisfy the Governor that they were not spies. Only hunger convinced Jacob to agree (Gen 43:1-14).

And Jacob their father said unto them, "Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me." And Reuben spake unto his father, saying, "Slay my two sons, if I bring him not to thee: deliver him into my hand, and I will bring him to thee again." And he said, "My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he is left alone: if mischief befall him by the way in the which ye go, then shall ye bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave." (Gen 42:36-38)

Unaware of the true story about Joseph's disappearance and knowing only that Simeon was a prisoner in Egypt, held as surety so that the brothers would return with Benjamin, Jacob feared that three of his children would be lost if he allowed Benjamin to go to Egypt, and he felt that he would die if he lost Benjamin as well as Joseph and
Simeon. Jacob’s reluctance to send another son into possible harm’s way was very understandable. Circumstances force him to go against his instinct to keep Benjamin home, however, since the famine continued and the provisions they had brought back began to run low. Inevitably the trip back to Egypt came up for discussion:

And the famine was sore in the land. And it came to pass, when they had eaten up the corn which they had brought out of Egypt, their father said unto them, “Go again, buy us a little food.” And Judah spake unto him, saying, “The man did solemnly protest unto us, saying, ‘Ye shall not see my face, except your brother be with you.’ If thou wilt send our brother with us, we will go down and buy thee food. But if thou wilt not send him, we will not go down: for the man said unto us, “Ye shall not see my face, except your brother be with you.” (Gen 43:1-5)

The family was in a very difficult dilemma. If they kept Benjamin home, they would all starve as well as lose Simeon, but if they went back to Egypt, they risked losing another favorite son, Benjamin, since they had no idea if the Governor would keep his word. This was a difficult choice for Jacob. Judah speaks up as he had done when his brothers had plotted to kill Joseph the first time when he offered an alternative suggestion that they sell Joseph to the Ishmaelite instead of killing him:

And Judah said unto Israel his father, “Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go; that we may live, and not die, both we, and thou, and also our little ones. I will be surety for him; of my hand shalt thou require him: if I bring him not unto thee, and set him before thee, then let me bear the blame for ever.” (Gen 43:8-9)

Judah began the process of allowing forgiveness by being willing to bear the burden and responsibility for taking Benjamin to Egypt, thereby hopefully earning the release of Simeon, and returning with provisions for the family. He had no assurance that his efforts would work, but he was willing to take the risk. He did not take the good move to the next step of confessing even though he knew that he and his brothers had deceived
their father about the fate of Joseph. His justification is that he believed that Joseph was dead and that the knowledge of their sins would only hurt their father further.

With Judah accepting full responsibility for the safety of Benjamin, Jacob relents and agrees to let his youngest child accompany the rest of his children to Egypt, but as he gives permission, his words are tinged with resignation: “Take also your brother, and arise, go again unto the man: And God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may send away your other brother, and Benjamin. If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved” (Gen 43:13-14).

Whatever the outcome, Jacob is now ready to accept God’s will, so he sends his sons to Egypt to their uncertain fate.

When they arrive in Egypt and are brought to Joseph’s home for a feast, their minds begin to go over the events as their worst fears haunt them.

And the men were afraid, because they were brought into Joseph’s house; and they said, “because of the money that was returned in our sacks at the first time are we brought in; that he may seek occasion against us, and fall upon us, and take us for bondmen, and our asses.” (Gen 43:18)

Now they were afraid that they would become slaves themselves because of what they had done to Joseph. Fate has caught up with them, and they see no way to escape it. They give a long and detailed explanation to Joseph’s steward of what had happened with the money, hoping to gain favor with him, but Joseph was about to give them the test of their lives to see whether they have truly repented of the wrong they had done and are
changed men. "And he took and sent messes unto them from before him: but Benjamin's mess was five times so much as any of theirs. And they drank, and were merry with him."

(Gen 43:34). Joseph watched to see what their attitude was toward their youngest brother when he received more food than the older ones. Showing Benjamin favor was a simple test to determine if the brothers' attitude toward their youngest sibling was the same as it had been toward Joseph. The Scripture says that "they drank, and were merry with him."

Their attitude toward Benjamin as they ate was Joseph's signal that they were changed men and could be trusted.

Almost satisfied that his brothers were safe to forgive, Joseph put them to one more test that they would have to endure before he could finally trust them. Having his cup placed in the mouth of Benjamin's sack was the ultimate test because the brothers would have a good reason to abandon Benjamin if they wanted to hurt him as they would have wanted to hurt Joseph.

And Judah said, "What shall we say unto my lord? What shall we speak? Or how shall we clear ourselves? God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants: behold, we are my lord's servants, both we, and he also with whom the cup is found" (Gen 44:16)

Judah is willing to follow through on his promise to his father and take Benjamin's punishment instead.

For thy servant became surety for the lad unto my father, saying, "If I bring him not unto thee, then I shall bear the blame to my father forever. Now therefore, I pray thee,
let thy servant abide instead of the lad a bondman to my lord; and let the lad go up with his brethren.” (Gen 44:32-33)

This statement of Judah convinces Joseph that his brothers have changed. Their repentance and change from the men they were prompts Joseph to forgive them. He is overwhelmed with grief and begins weeping with joy for the change that had come over his brothers. He truly forgives them even though they are afraid that Joseph in his power will actually hurt them. Their willingness to lay down their lives for their brother showed that they have changed their attitudes.

Joseph has seen the hand of God permitting him to be sold into slavery to go ahead of his family to be used of God to preserve so many lives by interpreting the Pharaoh's dream and preparing warehouses to store the grain during the years of plenty in preparation for the seven lean years. Because he sees God's hands in the affair, he can honestly through his words and action confirm his total forgiveness of his brothers.

Then Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him; and he cried, “Cause every man to go out from me.” And there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren. And he wept aloud: and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard. And Joseph said unto his brethren, “I am Joseph; doth my father yet live?” And his brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence. And Joseph said unto his brethren, “Come near to me, I pray you.” And they came near. And he said, “I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life.” (Gen 45:1-5)

If we could see the hand of God in all circumstances and have the mindset that God permits events for our “best good and His glory,” we would be less inclined to overact when adverse circumstances arise. We ought to foster a forgiving attitude such as
the one that we have seen God display toward His wayward creation at the start of the Old Testament narrative of God’s dealing with humankind. Joseph’s interpersonal interaction with his brothers provides an insight in how to live a life built on trust in God even in the face of adverse circumstances. The outcome for Joseph and his family was orchestrated by divine providence in which God’s purpose for their good was fulfilled.

**Giving and Receiving Forgiveness in the New Testament**

God’s emphasis on forgiveness continues in the New Testament where the definition of *forgive* most often means “send away,” and forgiveness is also communicated by words which mean “loose” (Luke 6:37), “be gracious to” (Luke 7:43; 2 Cor 2:7), and “pass over” (Rom 3:25). The Bible records human sinfulness, God’s eagerness to forgive, and frequent calls by the prophets, Jesus, and Jesus’ followers for repentance from sin and return to God. The New Testament continues the tradition of God’s mercy shown in forgiveness of sins. God initiates contact with humans (Gal 1:4; 2 Cor 5:19; Rom 9:23-26) and forgives sins through the death of Jesus (Rom 3:21-26; 4:25; Mark 10:45; Gal 1:4; Acts 13:38). God’s forgiveness is variously described as justification, salvation, and reconciliation. It is associated with the celebration of the Lord’s Supper (Matt 26:28), and in some passages Jesus himself forgives sins (Mark 2:5-6; Acts 5:31). Members of the Christian community also have a role in the forgiveness of
each other’s sins (John 20:23; Jas 5:13-16). Community relations depend on members
forgiving one another (Matt 18:21-35; Luke 17:3). The Lord’s Prayer makes divine
forgiveness dependent on forgiveness of others (Matt 6:12, 14-15; Luke 11:4), and
another Gospel saying instructs early Christians to be reconciled before offering sacrifice
to God (Matt 5:23-24; Mark 11:25; Achtemeier, 1985, p. 319).

Joseph’s Forgiveness of Mary

As the New Testament begins, we are introduced to the controversial birth of the
Son of God, the promised Savior of the world, Jesus the Christ. This was the fulfillment
of forgiveness promised to Adam and Eve. Before the promise could be fulfilled, we are
faced with the need for Joseph to forgive Mary. Joseph finds out that she is pregnant
before they come together as husband and wife. God intended for pregnancy to occur
within the bond of marriage between a man and a woman who are committed to each
other. A violation of this principle, pregnancy without the husband’s involvement is
adultery, or in this case fornication, as Joseph had not completed the process of marrying
her. An angel intervened to encourage Joseph not to be afraid about going forward with
his plans to marry Mary in spite of the pregnancy even though normally her pregnancy
would have called for the public embarrassment of putting Mary away, the clear response
of fornication, adultery, or rape. God’s ideal was that the sexual act be engaged in
between mature and committed adults and only in a committed relationship. This was
definitely violated in this instance. Mary, the espoused wife of Joseph, found herself in a
predicament, and Joseph, a just man, faced a dilemma. His choices were not good either
way, but divine intervention helped to change the heart of Joseph so that instead of putting Mary away, he forgave and kept her as his wife.

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost." (Matt 1:18-20)

Joseph had a heart of compassion and understanding to receive Mary as his wife even when he faced ridicule and embarrassment by doing so. He had to know God’s voice in order to listen to the angel when he had a dream, encouraging him not to be afraid to receive Mary as his wife. Forgiveness was necessary in order for them to move ahead with their lives as husband and wife.

Then Joseph, being raised from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him and took unto him his wife: And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS. (Matt 1:24-25)

Forgiveness wins as God’s plan is not interrupted or derailed but is on track for the ultimate forgiveness, the salvation of the human race, through the birth, life and ministry of Jesus.

Jesus arrived on the scene at the start of His public ministry, preaching and teaching forgiveness, and in the only time recorded in Scripture He teaches His disciples how to pray. The heart of that prayer is giving and receiving forgiveness. As Jesus gathered his twelve disciples, He began to mentor them by His life and teaching. His inaugural sermon was very detailed, known commonly as the Sermon on the Mount. He outlines extensive doctrines to those assembled and to His disciples. He wanted them at
the start to know what His ministry was all about. Neither the people nor the disciples had ever heard such clear and revolutionary teaching. Their comments about what they had just heard from the mouth of Jesus are noteworthy. “And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (Matt 7:28-29). The people were used to the teaching of the scribes, but Jesus’ teaching was a radical departure from what they had heard prior to this.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-7, the central focus is the disciple’s prayer as taught by Jesus. This prayer introduces a relationship between giving and receiving forgiveness:

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen. For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (Matt 6:12-15)

Giving and receiving forgiveness is referred to in the disciples’ prayer as debts owed to someone. An unwillingness to forgive others who owe you a debt will be reason enough to cause your Heavenly Father not to cancel your debt. Because sin is the greatest debt we have, and forgiveness is our greatest need, every human has an undeniable need for the forgiveness of God, who alone can cancel this debt of sin. We receive forgiveness the moment we trust Christ as our Savior from sin in a process called justification. God could not forgive our sins without someone bearing the consequences for our sins, and that is why Christ had to die. By His death all sins, past, present and future are forgiven.
That is the good news of salvation, the parental and judicial forgiveness that God offers to all. Even after we have been justified, we still sin, so God provides his own righteousness to cover us apart from the law that demands our punishment. When we continue sinning, in spite of the provisions of our Heavenly Father our relationship with Him is affected. The intimacy that we ought to have is lost, and by our choice we put distance between God and ourselves.

The Limits of Forgiveness

In response to a question of who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, Jesus launched into a detailed response. He broadened the narrow and selfish motive of the disciples to include another more important lesson, giving and receiving forgiveness. It was this teaching on forgiveness that Jesus wanted to His disciples to learn and practice.

They had been used to “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” (Deut 19:21), but Jesus was about to teach them a new and different way:

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglects to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. (Matt 18:15-17)

Talking directly to someone who has offended you is always the best approach. Sometimes that is successful in settling a dispute. Failing to settle a dispute using this approach may require additional support, by appealing to a third party or an arbitrator. The community of believers is then enlisted to bring the weight of their influence in
resolving any dispute. Jesus’ model of conflict resolution has stood the test of time and is still the best way to deal with interpersonal disputes.

This very clear and direct method of dealing with disputes did not resolve the questions in the disciples’ minds, so they took a more direct route as Peter, the bold disciple, asks Jesus, “Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him, till seven times?” (Matt 18:21). Peter and his fellow disciples were looking for an easy way out, but Jesus’ response complicates the approach they had been used to when dealing with each other. He challenged their inner motives rather than the outward act of forgiveness and the number of times one should forgive. He wanted to change and revolutionize their thinking on giving and receiving forgiveness by presenting the thought that there was no limit to forgiveness. “Jesus saith unto him, ‘I say not unto thee until seven times: but until seventy times seven’” (Matt 18:22).

This response by Jesus about forgiveness being unlimited led the disciples thinking in a new direction. He did not leave them confused and wondering for long. Using parables, as he often did when explaining new truths to his disciples, Jesus provided the clarification that they needed by way of the parable of the unmerciful servant. Having been forgiven a great debt, the unmerciful servant, would not forgive a friend who owed him a smaller debt. Owing 10,000 talents as opposed to being owed 100 pence highlighted the true nature of this man’s unforgiving heart. When the king heard of
his lack of forgiveness, the King called the servant in to explain. The outcome was not pleasant for the unforgiving servant (Matt 18:22-34).

Jesus' teaching about unlimited forgiveness is quite consistent with His actions from the experience in the Garden of Eden and Adam and Eve's fall into sin and continuing throughout history. Jesus goes to the heart of the matter which is our attitude. He tells us why we should forgive each other in the summary of His response to Peter's question on how often we are to forgive. "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not everyone his brother their trespasses" (Matt 18:35). He is basically saying as often as we want God to forgive us, we ought to be willing to forgive anyone who wrongs us.

Foot Washing, Forgiveness, and the Lord's Supper

The need for cleansing is inherent in the communion service. Instituted by Jesus at the last supper, Jesus' act of washing his disciples' feet was much more than an act of humility; it was a practical demonstration of God's forgiveness and cleansing of those who come to Him for forgiveness. The act of justification or judicial forgiveness that was received once and permanently from God at the cross is not repeated daily. However, the practical purification or washing is repeated out of necessity, because we daily fail to reach the mark of perfect holiness that God requires (Matt 5:48).
He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded. Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, "Lord, dost thou wash my feet?" Jesus answered and said unto him, "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter." Peter saith unto him, "Thou shalt never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." Simon Peter saith unto him, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." Jesus saith to him, "He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all." (John 13:4-10)

The statement, "If I wash them not, thou hast no part with me," shows that as eager as God is to forgive sinners, He is even more eager to forgive those who seek Him for forgiveness and reconciliation. Forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God leads to a better relationship with each other. Through the foot washing and the subsequent communion service, individuals have the opportunity to be reconciled through giving and receiving forgiveness. As great as the sin problem, God's capacity to forgive is far greater.

Peter's Denial and Forgiveness

Peter, the talkative disciple, was the one that asked Jesus most of the questions throughout His ministry, often expressing what the others were thinking but lacked his courage to speak openly. Soon after the foot washing lesson on forgiveness and Jesus' prediction that they would not drink and eat together again for some time, Peter's question was, "Lord, where are you going?" His follow-up question showed His
dissatisfaction with Jesus' response: "Peter said unto him, 'Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake.'" Jesus answered him, "Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, the cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice" (John 13:37-38). The ultimate test of forgiveness is being willing to lay down one's life for the sake of another. Jesus knew Peter's heart, so He told Peter exactly what would happen before it took place. The reminder came to Peter after he had denied that he knew Jesus.

But he began to curse and to swear, saying, "I know not this man of whom ye speak." And the second time the cock crew. And Peter called to mind the word that Jesus said unto him, "Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice." And when he thought thereon, he wept. (Mark 14:71-72)

Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, "I know not the man." And immediately the cock crew. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, "Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice." And he went out, and wept bitterly. (Matt 26:74-75)

Peter was willing to repent, as he recalled the prediction of Jesus regarding the betrayal. His repentant heart allowed Jesus' forgiveness of the denial. Total forgiveness is evident after the crucifixion, resurrection, and subsequent meeting with Peter. Jesus did not abandon Peter because of his weakness under test but encouraged him to be faithful. After the resurrection Jesus lovingly reminded him of his life's work to be fishers of men.

Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, "Lovest thou me?" And he said
unto him, “Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.” Jesus saith unto him, “Feed my sheep” (John 21:15-17).

A call to faithful service by Jesus to Peter was a point of reconciliation. As a disciple of Jesus, he was called to care for the sheep entrusted to his care. As He had before His death, and now after His resurrection, we see the heart of Jesus in dealing tenderly with a wayward disciple.

Scripture represents the sinner as a lost sheep, and the Shepherd’s responsibility is to go looking for the lost sheep and bring them back into the fold, reconciliation. God has taken full responsibility for the saving of every individual in this world. Through His act of atonement on the cross, He has redeemed humankind. His statement, while in the process of dying on humans’ behalf, confirms His divine right to forgive individuals of their transgression as an act of grace.

And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. Then said Jesus, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” And they parted his raiment, and cast lots. And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God. (Luke 23:33-35)

Ironically, in the act of saving humankind, Jesus chose not to save Himself from death by crucifixion since, in dying, Jesus gave the gift of forgiveness even before humans understood the meaning of His crucifixion. In spite of people’s ignorance and lack of repentance, God did not withhold forgiveness. From the beginning with Adam and Eve the scripture records the recurring theme of a loving God offering to draw
mankind into an act of repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation to Himself and to one another.

Even in the midst of His own suffering, Christ's mind passed from His pain to the sin of His persecutors and the terrible retribution that would be theirs. Loving them, He called down no curses upon the soldiers who were handling Him so roughly nor did He invoke any vengeance upon the priests and rulers who were gloating over the accomplishment of their purpose. Christ pitied them in their ignorance and guilt. He breathed only a plea for their forgiveness, "for they know not what they do" (White, 1898; 2002, p. 744.2).

**Giving and Receiving Forgiveness in the Writings of Ellen G. White**

The discussion of forgiveness in the writings of Ellen G. White is quite extensive. She has many statements on unconditional forgiveness; however, one of the clearest statements on giving forgiveness without the offender being repentant is found in her comment on the prayer Jesus taught His disciple. We can only request forgiveness from God when we have extended forgiveness first to those who have offended us. "Forgive us our sins; for we also forgive everyone that is indebted to us" (Luke 11:4). Jesus teaches that we can receive forgiveness from God only as we forgive others. "It is the love of God that draws us unto Him, and that love cannot touch our hearts without creating love for our brethren" (White, 1896/2002, p. 113.2).
He who is unforgiving cuts off the very channel through which alone he can receive mercy from God. We should not think that unless those who have injured us confess the wrong we are justified in withholding from them our forgiveness. It is their part, no doubt, to humble their hearts by repentance and confession; but we are to have a spirit of compassion toward those who have trespassed against us, whether or not they confess their faults. However sorely they may have wounded us, we are not to cherish our grievances and sympathize with ourselves over our injuries; but as we hope to be pardoned for our offenses against God we are to pardon all who have done evil to us. (White, 1896/2002, p. 113.3)

This prayer Jesus addressed to the disciples in private, expanding it after He had taught it to the multitude in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus asserts that His followers are responsible to make the first move toward achieving forgiveness when offended. To be the first to say "I am sorry" is hard to do, but without a desire to repair the relationship, the person will carry a burden in their head and heart. Holding a grudge and having bad feelings toward the perpetrator of the offense harms the individual more than the offender. Mrs. White clearly says that we should not think that, unless those who have injured us confess the wrong, we are justified in withholding our forgiveness from them.

The meaning of forgiveness in another of Mrs. White's statements points out that forgiveness is much broader and deeper than we imagine. When God forgives the sinner, it is not just a judicial forgiveness. God desires to transforms the character through this act of forgiveness. He is after a broader change; hence, the statement that we do not think as God thinks.

When God gives the promise that He "will abundantly pardon," He adds, as if the meaning of that promise exceeded all that we could comprehend, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are
higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa 55:7-9). God's forgiveness is not merely a judicial act by which He sets us free from condemnation. It is not only forgiveness for sin, but reclaiming from sin. It is the outflow of redeeming love that transforms the heart. David had the true conception of forgiveness when he prayed, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me" (Ps 51:10). And again he says, "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us" Ps 103:12; (White, 1896; 2002, p. 114.1).

It is evident from this statement that God's desire is to bring about a permanent and lasting change in humankind. A temporary fix that has us repeating the same offense each time we are confronted was never in God's plan of full reconciliation. David's acknowledgment of his problem leads him to request of God a full and complete transformation. He desires renewal from the inside out. The act of true heart surrender and a willingness to repent accomplishes the desired outcome of giving and receiving forgiveness. My willingness to give forgiveness to those that hurt me by word or action starts the process. As the offender receives my forgiveness and responds in kind, our combined actions accomplish restoration of the relationship. Without my giving and the other party receiving and responding with true heart repentance, the process is incomplete. Genuine reconciliation cannot occur until we both give and receive forgiveness.
A vital and often misinterpreted part of the process of giving and receiving forgiveness, one that the writings of Mrs. White clarify, is the process of repentance. Many argue that repentance must precede forgiveness, and that is true. How can one be fully forgiven and reconciliation take place without the sinner acknowledging the sin and repenting of it? The difficulty with this argument is that the sinner would have to overcome something within him or a weakness that caused him or her to sin in the first place in order to receive forgiveness. The inherent problem that created the need for forgiveness cannot be overcome solely by the will of the offender without God, through the Holy Spirit, highlighting the need and aiding in the call to repentance. Otherwise the sinners would have, by their own volition and without the aid of the Holy Spirit, to pull themselves up by their own spiritual boot straps. The question we have to ask ourselves is, “Can I repent without help?”

Many people think that repentance is a work sinners must do for themselves in order that they may come to Christ. The common thought is that sinners must procure for themselves a fitness in order to obtain the blessing of God’s grace. But while it is true that repentance must precede forgiveness—for only the broken and contrite heart is acceptable to God—sinners cannot bring themselves to repentance or prepare themselves to come to Christ. Except sinners repent, they cannot be forgiven, but the question to be decided is as to whether repentance is the work of the sinner or the gift of Christ. Must the sinner wait until he is filled with remorse for his sin before he can come to Christ? The very first step to Christ occurs because of the drawing of the Spirit of God; as people respond to this drawing, they advance toward Christ in order that they may repent. (White, 1896/2002, p. 20.3)

From start to finish, I depend on Christ to awaken in me a desire to repent. He then in turn forgives me as I respond to His drawing, and finally He reconciles me to himself by renewing my heart as the repentance takes hold and I show remorse for my transgression.

Principles of Forgiveness in the writings of E.G. White
1. There is no need for penance in order to obtain forgiveness from God. (White, AA. p.552)

2. Confessing and forsaking sin is all that is required for mercy and forgiveness. (ibid. p. 552)

3. Recognizing one's sinfulness is a prerequisite in order to receive forgiveness and pardon. (White, AY, p. 67)

4. Forgiveness is received as one surrenders the will completely to Christ (ibid. p.67)

5. Not possible to ask for forgiveness mercy and blessings from God while having and indulging in an unforgiving spirit. (White, CSA. p.25.5)

6. Peace and eternal life is available to all, only through God's forgiveness. (ibid, p.37.5)

7. Practice daily repentance and seeking God's forgiveness. We can then know that our sins are forgiven. (White, CG. p.495.3)

8. Interpersonal forgiveness is not limited to three offenses. Never get weary in forgiving. (White, COL. p.243.1)

9. Forgiveness does not lessen our duty to obedience. (ibid, p. 247.2)

10. Forgiveness does not diminish obligation for compensation. (ibid, p.247.2).

11. We are not forgiven because we forgive, but as we forgive. (ibid, p.251.4)

12. Forgiveness is in the unmerited love of God. Our attitude toward others show whether we have made that love our own. (ibid, p.251.4)
The most important result of following the above principles is clearly seen in the interpersonal relationship. When those wounds are healed and reconciliation is achieved rejoicing takes place in heaven. The effect of forgiveness is so succinctly stated in the following:

All heaven is interested in the interview between the one who has been injured and the one who is in error. As the erring one accepts the reproof offered in the love of Christ, and acknowledges his wrong, asking forgiveness from God and from his brother, the sunshine of heaven fills his heart. The controversy is ended; friendship and confidence are restored. The oil of love removes the soreness caused by the wrong. The Spirit of God binds heart to heart, and there is music in heaven over the union brought about. (White, 1896/2002, GW. p.499.4)

The ultimate goal of forgiveness is reconciliation between the offender and the and the offended. When this is achieved among members in the church on earth all heaven is interested. The work of bringing about unity of the body of Christ is one of the most important work that the local congregation can be involved in.

Conclusion

God’s forgiveness is offered as the solution to sin and the resulting guilt. On the authority of scripture, the writings of Ellen G. White, giving and receiving forgiveness with the aim to achieving reconciliation can be taught and practiced. Examples of forgiveness both in the Old and New Testament give the evidence that forgiveness was an integral part of God’s plan for the salvation of humankind.

This recurring theme of forgiveness, even when vengeance is justified, calls Christians to a higher moral standard as they must give forgiveness to those who harm them and receive it from those they harm, even when such forgiveness is undeserved. The benefit of forgiveness is for the offended, not just the offender. The offenders benefit
comes when that forgiveness is received, and true-hearted repentance results in reconciliation. To have a healthy mind and a healthy spiritual life, giving and receiving forgiveness must be a vital part of the Christian's life, just as it was of the life of Jesus.

Forgiveness is a foundational premise of Scripture and of God's plan for the salvation of mankind.

The Old Testament introduces creation, man's fall, the promise of restoration, and the steps to reconciliation, themes which find fulfillment in the New Testament through the birth and death of Jesus. By His birth, life ministry, and death, Jesus symbolized giving and receiving forgiveness for the human race. He came to mentor and model for humans the forgiveness and reconciliation to His father. Jesus died a martyr's death, and His crucifixion was the ultimate act of forgiveness that, if received, leads to reconciliation with God and our fellowman.
CHAPTER 3

A REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present an overview of the relevant literature on forgiveness. This is a limited review of the most recent books and journals available to me, with some exceptions where I will use older published works. Conflicts usually originate in unresolved interpersonal challenges and intolerance among individuals. This chapter will examine, the importance of interpersonal forgiveness, leading toward reconciliation. The successful resolving of conflicts, and promoting peace in our homes, the workplace, churches, synagogues, mosques, and all houses of worship and among nations is essential for our wellbeing.

A Definition of Conflict

The word conflict has several definitions. One definition presented by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) is

the clashing of interests (positional differences) on national values of some duration and magnitude between at least two parties (organized groups, states, groups of states, organizations) that are determined to pursue their interests and win their cases (Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research [HIIK] 2005, p. 2)

Conflict is a social fact no matter what form it takes. To categorize conflicts is extremely complex, says Professor Axt in his paper on Conflict (Axt, 2006, p. 3). In an
attempt to give an acceptable definition of conflict he summarizes Hippler (1999, p. 420) and Wasmuth (1992, p. 7) with their four points:

First, the conflict shall be considered as a social fact, which should not be confused with its form.
Second, no limiting evaluation is allowed by definition, in order not to predetermine the analysis of conflicts.
Third, it is to be warned of unnecessary reduction of conflicts' contextual characteristics, since this would not suit the complexity of its notion.
Fourth, cause and effect should not be compounded or interchanged by defining conflicts. (Axt, 2006, p. 4)

Conflict research is centered on two categories, objectivist and subjectivist approach. The objectivist approach looks for the origin of a particular conflict in the social and political makeup and systems of society. This approach has the goal of compatibility at stake. The subjectivist approach focuses on the perceived incompatibility of goals and differences. As Deutsch (1991) puts it, “It is incompatible differences which give rise to conflict. It is not the objective incompatibility that is crucial but rather the perceived incompatibility” (p. 30). Perceived incompatibility of goals and interests by the parties is the root of disputes and conflicts. The one variable that impacts the conflict most is the level of incompatibility.

Conflicts develop with a dynamic intensity and move from one stage to the next with great speed. Understanding what the developing stages of conflict are as they emerge and what to expect next can aid in conflict management. Using Messmer’s (2003) concept of how conflicts develops, Axt points out that differences between parties and different ways they are explained and perceived can provide standards to distinguish between and aid conflicted parties in conflict management (p. 4).
Axt (2006) states that there are mainly four types of conflict categories which he identifies in this paper. First, conflict episodes develop over isolated incompatibility between individuals or groups. Second, issue conflicts develop over a persistent problem that is not resolved over time. Issue conflicts can develop over persistent unresolved problems. Third, identity conflicts are unambiguous disagreement. The actions of the other side are interpreted on the basis of hostile motives. In power conflicts, the communication of disaccord is no longer demarcation from the other, but subordination and possibly extinction of the other (p. 5).

Pfetsch (1994) builds a model of conflict which looks at five intensity levels: (a) latent conflict, (b) manifested conflict, (c) crisis, (d) severe crisis, and (e) war. The most important difference between the first two is that they are of a nonviolent nature while the crisis, severe crisis, and war include the use of violence during the conflict. Pfetsch further divides these into two main categories violent and nonviolent. Conflicts generally start off as nonviolent and escalate into violent conflict (p. 216). Identifying and managing potential conflict at the personal, level is of vital importance in building peace. If interpersonal conflicts can be managed and resolved escalation is unlikely.

**Impact of Interpersonal Forgiveness**

Forgiveness is a choice we each must make, suggests Dr. Enright. When we are hurt by others and it appears that we can't let go of the hurt he suggests that we consider forgiveness. He provides a step by step process for resolving anger and the restoration of broken relationships. The journey to freedom for many begins when they make the
decision to forgive this is the first step on a journey that will take time and will be ongoing. (Enright, 2001, P.5)

This book was written as a self-help for those caught in a cycle of anger, resentment, and an endless pattern with no way out. Research conducted in the Human Development Study Group at the University of Wisconsin-Madison where they began an intensive investigation into forgiveness. This book is as a result of those interviews. (p.6)

The first step in dealing with forgiveness, suggests Enright, is recognizing that you are angry. This he suggests may be the hardest step for most people. Anger may be justified and at times people feel guilty for their anger. Individuals may be afraid to admit to anger because at some level they feel it is irrational. Coming to grips with the full extent of one's anger is important (p.8).

In conditional forgiveness people will only forgive when the other person will change or repent. In an abusive relationship people are fearful that giving forgiveness will continue the cycle of violence. Upon recognition that forgiveness changes the one doing the forgiving some people may be fearful that by extending the gift of forgiveness they are giving permission for the abuse to continue. They aren't extending trust, or bargaining with the offender and cannot control the other person by offering to forgive. It is a risk one takes as the outcome is uncertain (p.9).

Choosing not to forgive has long term consequences as found by this study. People in nursing homes in their advanced years still suffering from anger over perceived injustices suffered in childhood, they see themselves as victims. Some divorced individuals many decades after the separation, have bitterness and anger toward their
former spouse. The reader is cautioned that forgiveness is not an automatic release from resentment and may last months or even years after forgiveness. Saying the words, “I forgive is not enough.” One has to face a long series of hurts (Enright, 2001, p. 11).

**Benefits of Forgiveness in Interpersonal Relationships**

The benefits of forgiveness can be seen in the reduction or elimination of negative feelings, thoughts, and behaviors’ toward the offender. Positive feelings range from a mild liking or respecting to loving or caring for the individual. Thoughts can range from barely wishing the person well to understanding that respect is due to all just because they are part of the human family. The positive behavior can begin even a simple smile. These actions on the part of the forgiver aids in the lessening of resentment which involves re-feeling the original anger. Changing our feelings about the one who has caused the hurt will in turn change the thoughts which in turn lead to positive behavior toward the perpetrator (Enright, 2001, p.33-34).

In deciding to forgive the individual starts a process though small at first can grow over time. Refraining from disparaging the individual and praying for them gives the offender an unmerited gift. Enright acknowledges that there is a contrary view argued by Dr. McGary, a philosopher at Rutgers. He feels that the intent to abandon resentment is all that is required when forgiving an offender. McGary also espouses that compassion, benevolence, and love should not be directed toward an offending person and is not a part of the forgiving process (Enright, 2001, p. 37)

Enright counters the argument of Dr. McGary stating that,
"If all that is required is the intentional cessation of resentment, then what are we left with when resentment is conquered? Detached indifference? Writing off the offender as morally incompetent? Moving from an attitude of resentment to casual dismissal as not worthy of our time." (p.36)

Forgiveness should be more than just the intention to abandon resentment. If or when resentment is gone it's place must be filled with positive feelings. Full forgiveness is possible. Those who offer limited forgiveness says Enright, end up replacing resentment with alienation. Choosing to work through the process until positive feelings is realized conquers evil with good (Enright, 200, p.37)

Another area of concern in the forgiveness process is whether it is morally inappropriate to forgive in the offender does not apologize. Dr. Haber, argues that one lacks self respect when one forgives unconditionally. He would like us to take the time to be resentful when offended and wait till an offer of apology is given. By waiting we give the offender the opportunity to see the error of his ways. Enright counters this argument by pointing out the offender may be unrepentant. If forgiveness depends on the repentance of the offender the offended may have greater control in keeping one from forgiving. He also notes that one would be giving too much power to the offender. Respect is shown by being honest with the wrongdoer by letting him know the extent of the injury suffered. This frees one up from the burden of anger and resentment and make clear that such behavior will not be tolerated in the future (Enright, 2001, p.38)

Forgiveness a Learnt Behavior

Forgiveness can be learnt through relationship suggests (McCullough, 1997). As we put what we have learnt about forgiveness into practice the three authors of this book seeks to bring about lasting change in the life of the reader. They have recognizing the
importance of forgiveness in the life of the individual. This subject has been ignored and thought of as something that “religious people do.” The authors suggest that this may be due to mutual suspicion between religion and psychology (McCullough, 1997, p.13).

*To forgive is Human: How to Put Your Past in the Past,* will prove to be an important tool for the reader. It provides an understanding from a psychological perspective about how people forgive, how forgiveness can be encouraged and what the effects of forgiveness can be on people’s lives. They highlight how one might become better at forgiving. What forgiveness is, how it fits in our moral and interpersonal lives, how forgiveness might be encouraged and what it might mean for the individual in families, communities and cultural groups (p.12).

Four themes about forgiveness emerge from this book. Forgiveness involves the entire person, empathy is at the heart of forgiveness, forgiveness is for relationships, and forgiveness requires commitment (p.13).

Un-forgiveness creates turbulence that disrupts lives while forgiveness calms the turbulence and maintains harmony in relationships. Our civilization has been learning how to forgive for thousands of years. These Relationships are based on love rather than revenge. Empirical research has revealed some important factors about forgiveness that are worth closer scrutiny (p.16).

One can forgive without compromising one’s integrity. Painful memories of being hurt by others can be changed by empathizing with others. A sincere apology can go a long way to heal the hurt. Caring too much about what others think about you can inhibit you from seeking forgiveness when you hurt others. Resentment and hostility does have
an impact on ones physical and mental health. Readers are encouraged to maintain a forgiving lifestyle (p.18)

There are some hurts that one may have a harder time getting over suggests the authors. Forgiveness is harder to give when betrayed by a close friend. Time and energy invested in the relationship makes it harder to overcome the hurt. Infidelity in a romantic relationship is another difficult forgiveness to give and receive. The employee employer relationship is another difficult area to find forgiveness when there is mistreatment. The termination of a romantic relationship or marriage is difficult to forgive. When a parent neglects a child or insults that child it is or there is rejection by a friend forgiveness become difficult to be achieved. All of these involve close interpersonal relationships and recovering from offense makes it more challenging but not impossible. (p,19).

Empathy can become the plow that breaks up the hard ground of the unforgiving heart. When tenderness and compassion is sown in the hard ground it will bear the fruits of empathy among enemies. As hatred is surrendered the authors suggests that there should be an exchange of stories of the pain one has suffered as a result of conflict. This will become as a first step in healing these wounds. When the aggressor hears the stories and understands and has empathy for the pain endured by the victim two qualities are promoted. A feeling of regret and a desire to provide restitution. Restitution can be realized through shedding of tears, speaking to the victim, a decision to restore the broken relationships, medical aid, financial assistance, educational advantages, and change in policy (p. 224).

Expressing regret says to our new former enemy. I am a human being with the same moral sensitivities as you. Because we both agree that what has happened to you was not the way things should have been,, was morally repugnant and was something that hurt you personally, I hope that we can build a bridge between us.
Regret rehumanizes the offender, just as telling one's own painful story rehumanizes one's enemies. (McCullough, 1997, p. 225)

McCullough (1997) posits that, expressing regret and offering restitution is what the offender must be willing to do in order to heal the wounds of conflict. The injured party must accomplish some tasks for the wounds to heal. They must understand and recognize that the offender has humbled themselves and that the contrition is honest, sincere and heartfelt. The offended must also evaluate whether the offense is likely to reoccur. Will the regret stand the test of time or will it be short lived. There must also be some standard for restitution, what amends must be made. How much is enough and when should it be discontinued. There should come a time when one should cease to judge the offender. There should be an end to enemy status and friendship should take its place. Building trust and good relationships should be ongoing. (p. 226)

Having examined forgiveness and how it fits into morality and rational thought the authors of, (McCullough, 1997), have explained how people can change and become forgiving. It involves the brain, mind and memory in other words our rational thought rather than purely emotional feelings. Empathy is the intrinsic motivator and revised stories help to bring about forgiveness. They also emphasize the importance of confession and seeking forgiveness as a solution to guilt and shame (p. 227)

There are popular but ineffective coping strategies when dealing with interpersonal hurts. Because forgiveness is relational it cannot be done purely for self. When done for the right reason it appears to make people happier and even healthier. When done with a desire for better relationships, though not achievable all the time it sets
up the possibility that one day such reconciliation might be possible. Forgiveness is about relationship. (p. 228).

Persistence and commitment is demanded as forgiveness is complex and takes time. We often look for easier ways in dealing with interpersonal hurt and pain. (McCullough, 1997), suggests some of these shortcuts as, forgetting, overlooking, deny, taking revenge, avoid the people who hurt us, avoid those we hurt. When we become smug about having achieved forgiveness we go back into old habits or realize what we thought we had we no longer have. They suggest that by persistence and commitment we can slowly and imperceptible be transformed into people whose lives are characterized by forgiveness. We can learn to forgive (p. 229)

Un-Resolved Religious Conflicts Develop Into Wider Conflicts

Religious wars start out as unresolved interpersonal conflicts that heat up into all-out war. Some people argue that we have been in a religious war since before September 11, 2001, and that it has escalated into an all-out war.

Theoretically our enlightened modern world left behind the religious conflicts of the 15th and 16th centuries, but perhaps not. Unresolved conflict within nation states, congregations, or families over time leads to paralysis and schism. Many countries, congregations, and families have split because of unresolved conflicts. Conflicts have caused the effectiveness of the nation, congregation, and family to be weakened and their influence to be diluted. If the church that teaches repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation, and peace cannot resolve internal conflicts, how can it be a voice of peace, calm, and reason in times of tension among individuals, ethnic groups, and nations?
Understanding the importance of, and teaching, repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation, conflict management, and peace can play a major role in resolving conflicts at the intrapersonal, interpersonal, national, and international level. Encouraging individuals in a congregation to practice repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation, good conflict management skills, can lead churches to impact for good their lives. Individuals in turn impact their communities, communities to impact states, which in turn have an impact on the nation and our world. There is a ripple effect when that goes from the individual to the wider world.

In a sermon presented at Boston University on the fourth anniversary of September 11, 2001, entitled “Tolerance and Forgiveness,” the preacher, Neville R. Cummings, argued that the United States failed the test of tolerance and forgiveness after the attack on Tuesday, September 11, 2001. Instead of being tolerant and forgiving, the U.S. escalated the terroristic act by starting two wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Tolerance, he argued, requires us to disengage ourselves from our own story and see things from the point of others who are involved in a conflict. Whether we are Jew, Gentile, Christian, or another faith, our primary identity is as humans in our relationship to God and to each other. Christian tolerance requires forgiveness as a starting point. Giving and receiving forgiveness from each other is vital to lasting peace. For all of us, forgiveness by the Creator is essential to our survival (Cummings, 2005).

In a special report *Islamic Peacemaking Since 9/11*, given to the United States Institute of Peace, Smock and Huda (2009) outline the extent of the Islamic effort to promote peaceful conflict resolution. The effort is to highlight religion and peacemaking programs, conduct research, identify best practices, and develop peace building tools for
religious leaders and organizations. A series of special reports such as “Applying Islamic
Principles in the Twenty-first Century,” “Jihad,” “Islam and Democracy,” “Islamic
Perspectives on Peace and Violence,” and “The diversity of Muslims in the United States”
have been published.

Since the events of September 11, 2001, Muslim leaders have been under scrutiny
and criticism for not reining in Muslim extremists. Those who are not familiar with Islam
equate mainstream Islam with militant Islam. That, however, is no truer than identifying
Christianity solely by the actions of the Arian Nation or the Ku Klux Klan. The Islamic
peacemaking report seeks to document the extent to which Muslim leaders have spoken
out in condemnation of the violent acts committed by militants in the name of Islam
(Smock and Huda, 2009, p. 2).

According to Smock and Huda (2009), the core Islamic teachings of tolerance,
peace, and pluralism is often ignored and a narrower extremist and religiously motivated
violent Islam is portrayed in the press. The peacemaking and tolerance between
Christians, Muslims, and Jews are often not promoted by followers of these groups. In
response to this lack of focus on peace, Muslim leaders have started a vigorous effort to
educate Muslim youth about the core teachings of Islam. The effort to reeducate the
extremists about the falsity of the doctrines they advocate and to teach them nonviolent
methods to express their frustrations is under way. Promoting peaceful conflict resolution
and forgiveness is the goals of these up-and-coming organizations. Reinforcing pluralism
through grants and gifts to these struggling organizations within Islam will go a long way
to encourage a more diverse worldview that promotes nonviolence and tolerance (Smock and Huda, 2009, p. 7).

A two volume, peace education textbook, provided to the Banda Aceh schools in Indonesia (2001), provides models of peacemaking practices based on local culture, history, and religious traditions and is one of the tools used to promoted tolerance and nonviolence. This joint Sunni-Shiite project to diversify religious education builds on the vast knowledge of Islamic concepts of peace and conflict as well as supports the next generation of religious leaders now in school to become peacemakers (Husin, 2002, Peace Education Curriculum).

Muslim peacemakers are beginning with the children, who are the most vulnerable, educating them to practice peaceful methods in solving conflicts. The core beliefs of Islam have not changed over time. The difference is the articulation of these changeless truths as lived in the light of new generations and new challenges. The future of Islam will be determined by intellectuals who are intelligent, pious, and willing to face the challenges Islam faces in the face of living in the 21st century. The fundamental common ground between Islam, Christianity, and Judaism should be the basis for future dialogue and understanding. We all have in common the love of God for humankind and His command to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

Love is the common bond between individuals of all nations. All religion teaches tolerance and love of mankind as a basic doctrine. Mustafa Cedric, the Grand Mufti of Bosnia (2008), wrote an open letter to the Jewish community stating that "as Muslims and Jews we share core doctrinal beliefs, the most important of which is strict monotheism"
The Grand Mufti wants to build common ground and then work from that common ground to build a bridge over the chasm that separates the great religions. Interfaith dialogue is a necessity at every level: international, regional, and local. Religious people of all faiths must and should denounce the contemporary concept of terrorism that is associated with wrongful practices, whatever its source and form may be (*The Economist*, 2008).

In his paper, "Islam, The West, and Tolerance: Conceiving Coexistence," Tyler (2008) explores the concepts of tolerance and forgiveness and the part religion plays in the Islamic belief system. Tyler’s paper emphasizes the faith-based concept of tolerance in Islam that should inform Muslims as they struggle to live down the stereotype of theirs being a violence-ridden faith. His work seeks to enrich people inside and outside of the faith on Muslim understandings of faithfulness and to encourage inter- and intra-dialogues of mutual understanding and peaceful and loving coexistence.

Tyler identifies two manners of tolerance, one rooted in skepticism, the other in respect for truth and the dignity of others. One is pseudo-tolerance, the other a genuine tolerance, a faith-based idea of tolerance that embraces humankind’s search for truth and mutual co-existence. People can achieve this respect and mutual coexistence only through love and the awareness of human differences and respect for the value and dignity ascribed to each person. Before healing and a peaceful community can develop between religions, tribes, and cultures, the concept of tolerance must take root in the heart of the individual, community, and nation. Societies must allow the reality of human diversity
and the desire for mutual respect, friendship, and hospitality to flourish in the complex and diverse world of the 21st century (Tyler, 2008, pp. 10-12).

A working paper by Basedau and De Juan (2008) posits that most of the 28 violent conflicts in Sub-Sahara African show that religion plays a role in these conflicts much more than people usually assume (p. 6). Traditionally the socioeconomic factors have been emphasized instead of the religious. Interest by scholars has been increasing regarding conflicts in this part of Africa as a result of the civil wars in Sudan, Nigeria, and Northern Uganda. This paper seeks to highlight the role of religion in these conflicts. Religious identities and ideas have a particular impact on these conflicts even though these concepts are secondary to other risk factors. We must take seriously religious factors when analyzing the civil conflicts in Africa.

Basedau and De Juan (2008) find strong support for the idea that various religious dimensions impact the religion in conflicted situations. Conflict is likely when religious and other boundaries run parallel, when religion distinguishes the conflicted parties, when strong connections exist between religious organizations and political leaders. The authors argue for the peaceful use of religion before conflicts escalate. Peace efforts, though, have a limited impact once violence has broken out. From their study Basedau and De Juan conclude that more research needs to be done to look at the impact of religion in African conflicts. These studies will provide clearer insight and knowledge about the role of religion in conflicts. A more careful look at this is very much needed to prevent religions from having an escalating impact on the conflicts. Using the teaching of forgiveness, tolerance, and conflict resolution common to all religious traditions, nations
can make full use of these core values in minimizing and preventing conflicts in the first place (Basedau & De Juam, 2008, p. 22).

**A Woman's Perspective on Forgiveness**

Another aspect of tolerance and forgiveness that is worth examining is that of the perspective of women. In the book *Women's Reflections on the Complexities of Forgiveness*, editors Malcolm, DeCourville, and Belicki (2008) have included the voice of some very thoughtful women. The thirteen well-qualified women contributors to this volume tackle the most challenging topic of the perspective of women on the complexities of forgiveness. The three editors have backgrounds in psychology and have interest that focus on gaining a deeper understanding of forgiveness and in their volume include works that examine the implications of differences between an academic understanding of forgiveness and the way people actually experience forgiveness. Their interest in forgiveness and forgiveness-seeking came from research on the impact of childhood trauma and abuse that impacted the authors' well being when they became adults. Their childhood experiences affected them physically and psychologically later in life. The measurement of forgiveness and its relationship to spirituality, religiosity, and personality traits is interesting.

The book is not about forgiveness in women, but a book by women about forgiveness. The contributors have given much thought to the controversies that surround the topic of forgiveness since it is a complex subject and a woman's perspective is worth consideration. Their focus changed by what Connie Kristiansen (2004) said at a symposium on forgiveness. She asserted that forgiveness is women's work. This
resonated with those at the conference, based on their experiences. Kristiansen observed that women are more likely to volunteer for psychotherapy research and are more likely to go to therapy than men. With that observation the conclusion drawn is that studies are much more likely to be about women's forgiveness efforts than men's. The demographics of most forgiveness studies bear this out (Malcolm et al., 2008, p. xix).

Often studies examine the impact of adult trauma as a result of childhood abuse, particularly sexual abuse, where girls are more likely to be victims as opposed to boys. The ambivalent attitude towards forgiveness among those who are survivors of sexual abuse is worth noting. In *The Courage to Heal: A Guide for Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse*, Bass & Davis (1988) expose the reader to the negative view of forgiveness in survivors of sexual abuse.

Many women have less financial, political, and professional power than men. This puts them in subordinate positions in their personal and professional relationships with men. Forgiveness for the sake of repairing a damaged marriage has great appeal to women because of their status. Going back into a damaged, dysfunctional relationship exposes them to injury and pain all over again. If the partner is inclined to misuse or abuse his power and financial clout, forgiveness is a harder solution to reach. Researchers acknowledge that they need to conduct more studies on power and its impact on forgiveness, which is an important variable in relationships that requires more scrutiny and attention (Bass & Davis, 1988, p. xxiv).

Also noteworthy is the fact that individuals with power act vengeful in complex ways. Aquino, Tripp, and Bies (2001) found that employees of lower status were less forgiving than those of higher status and that people were more vengeful toward
offenders of lower status (Malcolm et al., 2008, p. xxi). One researcher, Trainer (1991), observed that when women are "assigned to passive and relative roles in which they are not expected to act out feelings of anger, hostility, and revenge and are expected to forgive, to be weak and accepting [of] injuries that occur," these women were more likely to engage in giving forgiveness that fell short of self-empowered freedom to respond to hurtfulness. This role-expected forgiveness becomes a weapon in the hands of the powerful to maintain the status quo (pp. 18-19). With men and women having different perspectives on forgiveness, not surprisingly we have the gender divide on the use of force or war to solve problems (Trainer, 1991, pp. 18, 19).

Needless to say, significant contradictions and overlap occur among the authors who contribute to Aquino (2001). These authors share the common perspective of recognizing that forgiveness is a complex issue. The writing of their chapter was an opportunity to reflect on some of the more puzzling aspects of forgiveness, such as an inflated sense of self-entitlement that can serve as an obstacle to forgiveness. However, humility as an antidote for an inflated sense of self-entitlement is likely to serve as a barrier to forgiveness. A just or unjust worldview may affect how forgiving people are.

A consensus that emerges from Aquino (2001) is that when people are hurt, they like to hold someone responsible for hurting their feelings. In traumatic, uncontrollable situations people seek to hold someone responsible for what happened. The need to hold someone responsible for uncontrollable natural disasters, even when this is recognized as an irrational behavior, is nonetheless desirable. No clear and definitive understanding of forgiveness comes from these authors, so readers might find this a little frustrating. This
lack of clarity, however, gives rise to a richer, less simplistic concept of forgiveness and
the process of forgiving than would be possible if the authors reached unanimity.

The essays draw readers' attention to a dilemma that children face as they try to
make sense of their experience in war or political violence. When they lose their parents
or have to witness death and destruction that affects them, they are left without a moral
compass to guide them. Aquino (2001) examines the experiences of refugees from war
zones, looking for a link between forgiveness, resilience, and recovery from war trauma.
A pattern emerges from the studies to support that people's willingness to forgive
increases with age.

In addition Aquino (2001) gives women freedom to present their perspective on
the complexities of forgiveness and draws our attention away from focusing on the
person doing the forgiving to the importance of apology and, more specifically, true
repentance that was important for the victims. Repentance must be included when
seeking to repair the harm one has done as a consequence of acting in a hurtful manner.
This work provides a distinctive voice and enriches our understanding of forgiveness that
affects everyone’s life sooner or later. Aquino invites readers to draw their own
conclusions as to whether the authors have achieved their goal (Malcolm et al., 2008, p.
xxi).

Role of Religion in Conflict

We live in a world that teeters on the brink of violence and war. Nations are
asserting their rights to develop nuclear arms to protect themselves or give themselves
leverage over other nations. We face nonstop conflicts breaking out all over our world on a daily basis. Nations are in a state of high alert as they deal with these conflicts. We are in an ever changing world, so people question whether religion might bring about some level of peace in the face of daily violence and terrorism.

Silberman, Higgins, and Dweck (2005) wrote an article in the *Journal of Social Issues*, tackling the issues of the role religion plays in conflicts. In their article, “Religion and World Change: Violence and Terrorism Versus Peace,” they see religion as a double-edged sword that cuts both ways, on the one hand, encouraging and, on the other, discouraging world change. Religion can provide fodder for both violent and peaceful activism. The authors recommend intensive collaboration between researchers, policy makers, and religious leaders in the contexts of national and international conflicts and religious terrorism. They also point out the paradox that religions support peace and war at the same time. The violent message of the terrorists suggests that they believe that they can achieve a divinely guided world change by religious holy war against the infidels in the Western world, as well as against apostate regimes in the Middle East, and they will stop at nothing to achieve their ends. Their reach is global, meaning that no nation is beyond their reach.

Silberman et al., suggest that all interested parties come together in a collaborative manner to get much-needed cooperation to solve some of the world’s most pressing problems. Most people see religion as historically maintaining traditions and justifying the existence of a social structure. If the role of religion in a changing world is to
maintain established order, no wonder that often considerable friction exists between
religion and social change.

Silberman et al., also points out that some people view religion's relationship to
change as central. Some theologians view the struggle for political and social equality as
a spiritual struggle, an attempt to bring God's kingdom on earth. They call for a spiritual
and ethical revolution. Islam seeks to bring about a moral order in society as one of its
main goals. Judaism seeks to repair the world, and fundamentalist religions are active in
creating the new person in a new society (pp. 761-784).

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1958) said,

Any religion that professes to be concerned with the souls of men and is not
concerned with the slums that damn them, the economic conditions that strangle
them, and the social conditions that cripple them is a dry-as-dust religion. (King,
1958, p. 36)

Religious leaders, including Dr. King, see the role of religion as creating a caring
society to meet the needs of the least of God's children, the lost in the world, and those
left behind in economic empowerment. Religion can facilitate the established order or
advocate radical change, which can be violent or peaceful.

The meaning system approach to change presented by Silberman et al. (2005),
looks at the relationship between religion and four issues: (a) the meaning of world
change and the means to achieve it, (b) inherent differences across religious groups,
(c) the complexity and the malleability of religious meaning systems, and (d) the process
through which religion can facilitate either the status quo or violent and peaceful activism
(Silberman et al., 2005, p. 764). Religious individuals are less likely to accept change in
the tradition and more likely to believe in and encourage radical world change. Islam's goal of a changed world may mean political goals such as social justice and democratic governments but can also lead to more discrimination against religious minorities, dissidents, and women. Muslims, however, interpret Shari'a (Islamic law) in different ways (Silberman et al., 2005, p. 765).

Silberman et al. (2005) goes on to suggest that Muslims who commit suicide bombings and indiscriminate destruction believe that through their actions they are creating a better world. From their perspective they are purifying the world of injustice and cruelty. Terrorism is a form of violent struggle, aimed deliberately against civilians in order to achieve maximum effect and political goals. Discussing world change within Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism sheds light on the complicated relationship among all three faiths. They have different goals, and they differ in the means to achieve those goals. As peacemaking forces, these religions can help only as they work within the doctrinal commonality that they hold. If the major Western faiths believe that they worship the one true God who is the creator of all, then believers have to acknowledge their commonality as brothers and sisters made in the image of our creator. All people, then, have a common ancestry and a common brotherhood in spite of their religious belief system and tradition (Silberman et al., 2005, p. 774).

**Intra- and Inter-personal Forgiveness and Reconciliation**

In order for forgiveness to be truly effective, reconciliation ought to be the ultimate goal in resolving conflicts. In their work Kalayjian and Paloutzian (2009) address the need to move through forgiveness and reconciliation beyond the negative
effects of trauma on individuals, couples, families, and communities. They argue that both human-created trauma and natural causes such as earthquakes and floods that create physical and psychological distress are situations that call forth the need to forgive others, the universe, God, and, at times, oneself (Kalayjian & Paloutzian, 2009, p. v).

For many years those committed to peace viewed violence through the lens of the Cold War, so prevention of a nuclear war was the major concern of those advocating peace. Since then, however, the world has seen a surge in the growth of conventional war and violence in many places including some authoritarian countries like China and most recently violent and peaceful overthrowing of governments in Egypt and armed conflict in Libya. These cycles of violence have challenged us to look again at the causes, consequences, and prevention of violence among individuals and groups. In order for the lessons learned to prevent future episodes of violence, parties must engage in a dialogue that leads to mutual understanding, forgiveness, and reconciliation. This is usually possible during the immediate aftermath of a violence cycle.

However, in violence-ridden societies negotiated settlements are unlikely to sustain peace unless the groups in conflict come into contact and engage in a reconciliation process that acknowledges past pain and begins to envision an interdependent future. Kalayjian and Paloutzian (2009) offer fresh views of forgiveness and reconciliation. Individual and collective traumas and feelings of victimization have laid the groundwork for future episodes of mass violence across generations, fueled and carried forward by collective memories of grievances. The authors point out that people have psychological and behavioral science research on war, aggression, hostility, prejudice, and the effects of all these. Not much research has been done on the topics of
forgiveness and reconciliation since researchers have tended to overlook these topics until the past 25 years, hence the scarcity of current books and articles on the subject of forgiveness and reconciliation. More research is needed if we are to address the most devastating human problems. By applying our knowledge of forgiveness to peace efforts in real world situation, the authors feel an impact can be made.

The body of literature on the effects of forgiveness on peace efforts is quite sparse. The bulk of forgiveness literature focuses on individuals and family on the micro-level. Researchers need to glean lessons gleaned from these smaller scale resolutions and extend and apply them to the macro-level. Several chapters in Kalayjian & Paloutzian's (2009) book are dedicated to the global need as the authors expand the concept principles, experiences, and processes of forgiveness and reconciliation from the micro-level to interethnic, intranational, and international levels. Recurring themes in Kalayjian and Paloutzian's work are basic survival reactions that confront ethical and religious teaching.

The authors note the conflict between feelings of revenge and hostility and the desire to forgive. People's ancestral past helps them to understand why they are not predisposed to forgive. Attacking and defending against predators was essential for survival. The aggressor was rewarded with survival, so such survival responses are biologically wired into the human system. The paradox that persists today is that, while people's initial reaction to an offense may be one of counter aggression, cultural and religious teachings of forgiveness teach the exact opposite. The complexities that emerge
from such opposing tendencies can make forgiveness difficult to define (Kalayjian & Paloutzian, 2009) Grappling with what forgiveness means is another theme with which Kalayjian and Paloutzian deal. Those who promote forgiveness often begin by explaining what it is not. Often they emphasize that forgiveness does not mean people have to like those who have offended them, to deny their feelings, to forget the crime, to excuse the offense, or to refuse compensation. However, stating what forgiveness is not makes the definition of forgiveness somewhat elusive. Kalayjian and Paloutzian argue that to state what forgiveness is not is unsatisfactory because it leaves key distinctions unclear. In order to promote positive peace, we must state what forgiveness is. The authors employ several definitions of forgiveness and reconciliation in their book. They put forward forgiveness as a multidimensional process. Occasionally psychologists suggest that a victim can either accept or reject forgiveness. A more sophisticated understanding of the psychological process of forgiveness falls along a continuum that ranges from high levels of forgiveness to high levels of lack of forgiveness. Because forgiveness is multidimensional, it is more partial than total and is a process rather than an event. This process may include many small steps instead of one large step and may be implemented or received with hesitancy rather than certainty (Kalayjian & Paloutzian, 2009, p. 6).

Kalayjian and Paloutzian also look at forgiveness as feelings, attitudes, and behaviors. Looking at forgiveness as a process is connected to whether people see it as being predominantly attitude or behavior. Attitudes are internal psychological predispositions to think, feel, and act toward someone or an event in a certain way. People cannot directly observe attitude, but they can infer it. In contrast, behavior is publicly observable and concrete. Someone can either do an act of kindness toward a
perpetrator or not do it. The difference between forgiving attitudinally over behaviorally is important. People have to decide what their goals are when confronted with the question of what their response to the perpetrator will be. What is the victim’s goal? Is to think or feel differently toward the perpetrator than before, or act in positive ways toward the perpetrator even though harmed by them or both? (Kalayjian & Paloutzian, 2009, p. 7).

Kalayjian and Paloutzian refer to forgiveness as attitudinal or as behavioral. Because of this, victims may find that the concept of forgiveness has more than one meaning. Although both meanings of forgiveness are relevant for different circumstances, such considerations may seem confusing, especially for individuals who have been recently victimized. Intrapersonal and interpersonal forgiveness occurs when an individual gives up feelings of hatred and revenge toward his or her perpetrators. Instead, they choose to foster feelings of positive emotions even though the wronged individuals may never come to like the perpetrators.

To forgive without ever communicating with the perpetrator or without performing any forgiving act may be possible. This type of forgiveness is preferable if contact or communication with the perpetrator is impossible for any reason. With this type of forgiveness, the process is about one’s own feelings and sense of wellbeing. It has little to do with the perpetrator in the sense of interaction or communication. Forgiveness at the intrapersonal level may leave the door open to self-deception, however, so that a victim can believe that he or she has forgiven, even though he or she has not. The way to determine if a victim has sincerely forgiven is to explore forgiveness at the interpersonal
level. Initiating a meaningful contact with the perpetrator directly or indirectly is a good way to determine forgiveness. Kalayjian and Paloutzian prefer that forgiveness includes communication at a meaningful level with some action. It is harder to forgive when someone still has to engage with the perpetrator (Kalayjian & Paloutzian, 2009, p. 9).

Questions Yet to be Answered About Forgiveness

Some very critical questions need to be considered. Can forgiveness be conditional? Does it make sense to say “I will forgive you if....”? Instead of focusing on internal state of forgiveness, should the victim get involved is deal-making or bargaining? If genuine forgiveness means that it must be given completely and independently of whether the forgiver receives anything in return, can we realistically expect that of people? Research, however, does suggest that some degree of forgiveness may be possible if certain conditions are met.

Is forgiveness realistic across generations? This is another important question as we explore conflicts among individuals and groups. Some require forgiveness of events that occur in the distant past. The initial trauma may have been experienced by individuals who have long left the scene and the trauma has been transmitted through generations to their offspring such as that of the descendants of survivors of the Ottoman Turkish genocide of the Armenians, the Nazi Holocaust of the Jews, the conflict between India and Pakistan in the aftermath of British rule, or the legacy of slavery in the Americas.

These are some of the many examples of the need for forgiveness cited in Kalayjian and Paloutzian as they address the unique issues involved in forgiving those
who have caused the mass traumas of the past. The authors also explore the question of whether forgiveness is culturally and procedurally specific (Kalayjian & Paloutzian, 2009, p. 8).

People must remember that not all cultures view forgiveness and related issues in the same light. In Western countries the emphasis is on the individual victim and those resources that can be mustered to forgive, such as initiating communication with the offender. Other cultures emphasize group processes to promote forgiveness. The African approach occurs within the group or larger social entity which plays a major role in arranging forgiveness procedures. The group—which includes the perpetrator, victim, and other relevant parties such as parents, or authorities—follows a formal procedure that does not leave the question of how to proceed solely up to the victim. The resolution may include carefully controlled public shaming of the offender, suggests Kalayjian (2009, p. 10)

Forgiveness' role in ethnic conflicts involves the ethnic identity of opposing sides. For example, the tribal separation of the Tutsi and Hutu lies at the heart of their genocide. This and the conflicts between Indian and Pakistan, Nazi Germany and the Jews are just a few of the examples explored by Kalayjian and Paloutzian (2009, p. 173). The authors explore the question of whether or not victims or perpetrators are entitled to anything, and conclude that many times reparations are necessary in the context of the ethics of forgiveness. However, who—the perpetrator, the state, or others—should receive to compensation and what sort are difficult questions to resolve fairly.
Promoting and establishing peace is not easy, but proactive peace efforts are worth the cost. To achieve peace, however, people need to expand human consciousness about forgiveness and reconciliation processes. Forgiveness is not an idealized or fantasy state in which all will be well if people just forgive since significant physical, psychological, or social costs are associated with forgiveness, and in some cases they may be too great. Although we are motivated to forgive by our ideals, doing so could cause more internal conflict with ourselves, external conflict with other groups, or physical risk than we can or cannot bear. In an effort to find an alternative path, Kalayjian and Paloutzian point out that, as UNESCO proposes, people need to remember that "wars begin in the minds of men" (author unknown). Forgiveness and peace can also begin in the mind of an individual (Kalayjian & Paloutzian, 2009, p. 11).

Conclusion

The literature reviewed makes evident the fact that the values and ideals taught by the major religions of the world can become the common ground for peace and also the uncommon ground for much of the conflicts. If humans are to live in a peaceful world, they must find the common ground of peace through repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation. The steps that are so familiar to people in resolving interpersonal conflicts need to be applied to group, national, and international conflicts. Institutions dedicated to bringing about peace and understanding between peoples and nations must be established and well funded in order to bridge many of the divides people have in the world. Repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation, and conflict resolution are complicated subjects and should not be trivialized. The future peace and harmony of the world depends on a
good understanding and application of the lessons learned from the many conflicted situations humans have faced and will confront in the near and long term.

As I watched the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to President Barak Obama, I was inspired by the lecture he gave to those assembled dignitaries in the Oslo Town Hall, Norway. I was struck by how elusive peace is to our world in spite the efforts of so many through generations. The pursuit of peace must be renewed with each new generation. President Obama’s lecture seems to highlight the fact that only the Prince of Peace can bring lasting peace since the foundation for lasting peace can be built only on the changed heart of the individual.

Analyzing the words of the leader of the world’s military superpower, I conclude that the efforts of world leaders have not so far brought wars and conflicts to an end. Peace and harmony seems so elusive on all levels, be it individual, family, societal, national, or international. People can make progress toward forgiveness and reconciliation that leads to lasting peace in one instance while war breaks out in another. The capacity for violence, unrestrained evil, and atrocities against each other seems overwhelming. If people would live by the principles that all the major religions teach—love for fellow humans, confession, repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation—and practice good conflict resolution skills, humans could and would have a more peaceful world.
CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY AND IMPLEMENTATION NARRATIVE

Introduction

A conflicted congregation where the energy of its members is diverted cannot effectively fulfill its mission. Tensions exist with one another as petty quarrels, theological arguments, and differences become magnified, which leads to worship services that are strained and joyless. The congregation must address these problems as soon as possible to facilitate finding healing solutions. Members would benefit by going through forgiveness training so that they could better serve the desired purpose of reconciliation in order to ensure the survival of the congregation.

In a letter to the officers and members of the Maranatha Seventh-day Adventist church dated October 27, 2003, the Allegheny East Conference President succinctly outlined the problem the congregation was facing.

After much prayer and meditation concerning the outcome of the church in business session, I am consulting with the administrative ministry group to determine how we can best serve you in light of the many issues that were shared with me. The issue that gave foundation to the reason that has brought the Maranatha Church to a complete halt is a two-year-old rumor that was never buried but kept floating. As the
President of the conference, I have asked, The Director of the Family Life Ministry to intercede to help bring healing in the congregation . . . (Letter from AEC President).

Based on the concerns of the Conference President outlined in his letter and the findings of a focus group consisting of members of the congregation, leadership knew that an appropriate intervention needed to take place. After the congregation heard four sermons and attended a seminar workshop on giving and receiving forgiveness, they took a survey that measured the impact of the sermon series and seminar workshop on the willingness of members to forgive and be reconciled. This chapter will look at the ministry context, the method used in the study, the development and implementation of the focus group’s recommendations, the sermon series, and the seminar workshop.

Profile of the Ministry Context

The leadership challenge to be answered in this ministry context is to take this congregation mired in conflict and help it become a vibrant and viable congregation that attracts members and grows to its full potential. To do that, leadership had to decide what to put in place to build a climate of forgiveness, reconciliation, cohesiveness, and a willingness to work together among the leadership and members. They also had to devise ways to lead members who are aware of their conflicted condition to a place of forgiveness and reconciliation. The urgency of these issues demanded immediate attention.

Members of the church confronted the former pastor on September 27, 2003, about rumors of his personal conduct. At the church board meeting of October 16, 2003, a decision was made to remove two members of the nominating committee that were a
part of a group that confronted the pastor. At a subsequent church business meeting, convened on October 25, 2003, the President of the Allegheny East Conference of Seventh-day Adventists was present and presided as chairman of the meeting. The President’s letter of October 27, 2003, reported on the issue: "The issue that gave foundation to the reason that has brought the Maranatha Church to a complete halt is a two-year-old rumor that was never buried but kept floating" (Letter from AEC President).

An incident occurred at the nominating committee meeting where members who were not on the committee came in to demand a hearing from the pastor and members of the nominating committee. Verbal and threatened violence ensued. The morale of the congregation had deteriorated to the point that the president deemed it necessary to ask the director of the Family Life Ministry department to intercede to help bring healing in the congregation between the members and pastor and members and members.

At a January 5, 2004, business meeting chaired by the conference Family Life director, a new nominating committee was selected. Their work was completed and presented at the February 15, 2004, meeting for approval by the church. Members approved the officers list for 2004 and also agreed to address some issues that overshadowed their meeting and the entire congregation. Those issues were (a) lack of respect for leadership and authority within the congregation, (b) church censorship for those involved in the verbal and threatened violent incident, and (c) an apology to those who were wrongly accused. Some received an apology, but not all. The sentiment was to reconcile and move on in order to accomplish God’s work in the community. Members agreed to keep opinions out of the discussion and use the counsel of the Word of God to
guide them toward forgiveness and reconciliation. The decision of the congregation was to encourage everyone to apologize and be reconciled. Members were to consider the matter resolved and not mention it again. This was to be the final word on the matter.

The 2004 officers list excluded no one from holding office. However, by the end of the first quarter the former pastor was gone and a new pastor had come to lead the congregation. Some of the elected officers did not want to serve. From April 2004 to September 2007 congregational life deteriorated so that leadership saw clearly that the original dissatisfaction had not been dealt with to member's satisfaction. Members wanted the new pastor to revisit the September 27, 2003, incident. The intolerable level of dissatisfaction in the congregation plainly showed that something needed to be done. When inquiries were made as to why some members stayed away from church, others refused to hold positions of leadership, and some members were not supporting the church financially, the reason given was that they did not like what came from the pulpit on Sabbath. There appeared to be a masked or hidden agenda in the statements, so with a desire to get to the heart of the true dissatisfaction and address the real concerns, the leadership team proposed to the church board the formation of a focus group.

A focus group was voted in its October 21, 2007, meeting. The purpose was to listen to members’ true concerns and prepare a report with recommendations. The first meeting was held November 4, 2007, from 9 a.m. until noon. Meetings were scheduled by appointment. Since no one had called to schedule a meeting, the focus group took the time to share among themselves what they understood their purpose to be. The focus group developed guidelines for individuals to follow during this process. Those who
came to talk with the focus group were encouraged to say what they knew and felt, not what they had heard someone else say. They were encouraged not to call names or attack anyone's character or person since no one was on trial. The congregation was seeking a better understanding of the reasons that caused the church to come to a standstill, desiring not to repeat past mistakes.

Confidentiality was critical, so participants were encouraged not to repeat or discuss with anyone outside of the committee room anything that was said. Eliminating rumors and gossip was vital for the effective functioning of the focus group. With a desire to heal and assist hurting members, the group solicited recommendations for the healing process to follow, then discussed and adopted a format for implementing that process.

The following week, November 11, 2007, from 9 a.m. to noon, individuals came to talk with the committee. Others who were not able to come to the meetings contacted the pastor and shared their concerns. Several members choose to speak privately with the pastor rather than come to the focus group sessions. Meetings were held December 2 and 9, 2007, and January 6, 2008. The committee held its final listening session on Sunday, January 13, 2008. The committee scheduled a meeting to share their findings and write a report to be presented to the church board during its January 20, 2008, meeting and to the church in business session.

**Description of the Research Methodology**

The focus group was critical to this study in identifying the areas of concern for this congregation. It was comprised of two men and three women, members of the
congregation, and the pastor as facilitator. Their role was to revisit the conflicts that had erupted at the church nominating committee meeting Saturday, September 27, 2003. The continued negative impact of this incident on the interpersonal relationship of members was without resolution, intensifying over the four years since the incident.

A young adult male, one middle-aged male, along with three senior women and the male pastor as facilitator were recommended to the church as individuals who were impartial, independent thinkers, who had not contribute to the current conflict. The church adopted and voted this suggestion October 21, 2007. The parameters were to listen to the concerns of members and bring back a report with recommendations. The stated desire of the congregation was to facilitate forgiveness and reconciliation, thereby moving the church toward healing in 2008. The first meeting took place in the pastor's study at the church, November 4, 2007, at 9 a.m. and lasted three hours. Five meetings were held between November 2007 and January 2009 until all members who wanted to meet with the focus group had done so. The final meeting of the focus group took place on January 13, 2008, when members approved the report. With great anticipation and hope for a changed atmosphere in the congregation, the membership listened to the findings of the focus group.

The findings and recommendations were reported first to the church board, then to the membership at a church business meeting which convened January 20, 2008. The members who participated in the dialogue with the focus group provided a recurring narrative. The verbal and threatened violent confrontation at the church officers' nominating committee meeting, September 27, 2003, had a profound effect on the life of
the congregation. Participants and nonparticipants have all been impacted negatively. Some members are still unable or unwilling to return to worship and fellowship four years after the incident. Participants in the dialogue felt that those responsible for the incident were not adequately disciplined or were unapologetic for their actions. The process of apology, confession, repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation was incomplete.

Problems had been short-circuited, overlooked, and papered over in a desire to affect a desired outcome, put the incident behind, and move forward. Perpetrators felt they had done nothing wrong, and as proof of their innocence, they accepted leadership roles within the congregation, which created further tension at meetings. The decisions made by the congregation to leave the resolution of the issues up to each member to approach one another and resolve the harm done had not to date (four years after the incident) yielded the desired healing. This issue needed to be revisited in a meaningful and comprehensive way if the church was to heal without ugly scars and move forward.

Disagreement over worship and reverence in the sanctuary was also a major issue contributing to the conflict. The leadership decided that this issue should not be addressed in a piecemeal fashion but addressed through prayer, dialogue, a submissive heart, and further education. The role of women in church leadership was also a contributing factor in the tensions and also needed to be addressed. These, among others, were the major themes that heightened the conflict to an intolerable level. Maintaining the spiritual integrity, peace, and harmony among members was of primary importance. The congregation listened attentively to the focus group's findings, accepted the recommendations for change, and voted as a means for moving forward.
Recommendations for Further Intervention by the Focus Group

The members were encouraged to fast and pray for forgiveness and reconciliation among themselves. Estranged members were also encouraged to find healing through the process of forgiveness and return to full fellowship within the congregation. Furthermore, those who had caused the hurt needed to show their sorrow and regret by their actions of confession and repentance. Peace and harmony among members would then be fostered by the process of forgiveness and reconciliation in order to facilitate the desired harmony and growth of the congregation.

The focus group also recommended that the pastor provide counseling to members who are hurting to facilitate reconciliation and forgiveness and that the church put in place a healing committee of three to include the pastor and two other members to facilitate and mediate the current conflict and any that may arise in the future. The group also recommended that the members involved acknowledge and recognize that their actions did cause lasting harm to the wellbeing and health of the body of Christ and that they also utilize the healing process to bring about reconciliation with those estranged members and themselves.

A further recommendation was that the pastor provide forgiveness training for the congregation, as well as worship and music education for the congregation. To monitor the progress toward the goal of reconciliation, the church would use ongoing surveys and feedback interviews in addition to hearing sermons and attending seminars. A progress report would be provided to the church board and church business meeting on a regular basis.
Research Methodology

The research methodology is a quantitative study helped to determine the problem and the desired outcome for the congregants. The focus group narrowed the problems facing the congregation to worship and music, women's role in leadership, and the need to foster understanding, tolerance, forgiveness, and reconciliation. This dramatically pointed to the urgent need in solving the ministry challenge faced by the congregation. The subjective interviews and statements by members along with the survey results that compared members' attitudes over an extended period of time provide a sound basis for further action. The interpretation of the data and the conclusions drawn are also important in interpreting this study.

Members' willingness to tell their story through personal interviews and a focus group initiated before the onset of this research by the congregation were both invaluable. Members were encouraged to share what they had encountered in their own words without bias. Interviews with key members of the congregation and a reading of the official minutes of church meetings and the many corroborating stories showed that the leadership structure of the congregation had allowed their actions and decision-making process to come under scrutiny and raised questions in members' minds. The inability to satisfy the questions and suspicions of members led to distrust of leadership's actions which escalated into hostility and threatened violence.
A validated quantitative survey instrument was used to measure members' attitudes towards each other and their ability to give and receive forgiveness. The instrument had been developed by David E. Mullen, Ph.D., for a longer test that had been created by Susan Wade Brown, Ph.D., as part of her doctoral dissertation in psychology at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. The survey was edited by Robert Enright, Ph.D., professor of psychology at the University of Washington. Members completed a questionnaire to gauge overall member views on conflict. The pastor also developed and presented a biblically-based sermon series and seminar on forgiveness and reconciliation, after which the survey evaluated the members' assimilation and understanding of the main issues.

**Development of the Intervention**

The issues facing the Maranatha congregation has a common thread that runs through all conflicted situations—an unwillingness or inability on the part of those involved to find common ground. As part of my ongoing education, I attended several workshops at the NAD Health Summit between January/February 2005 in Orlando, Florida. One that was relevant to this study was developed by Dr. Dick Tibbits of Florida Hospital, based on his book that was later published in 2006, *Forgive to Live: How Forgiveness Can Save Your Life*. I benefited and was informed by attending the workshop and reading his subsequently published work.

The Maranatha congregation faces strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Without a doubt, the strength of this congregation is that it is early in its
establishment and does not have the many years of conflicts many other churches in the Fredericksburg area, such as the history of Shiloh Baptist. Many of the charter members were still around and could provide inspiration for the new members. Having a smaller membership also allows it to adapt to change. Its size also lends itself to building personal relationship with each other, something that may be difficult in a larger congregation. In turn, though, when the small membership perceives a conflict, they feel it more intensely and personally. Overall it is a warm and friendly congregation, as many visitors attest.

The threats to this congregation probably stem from the way it was established, organized, and administered in its early years. Maranatha was born out of conflict in another congregation, so one member decided to start his own worship service at home. Without adequate oversight and moral and financial support by conference leadership from the start, the church had a go-it-alone, independent spirit. Conflict in another congregation led a group to leave and establish a mission in a nearby town, Culpepper. From that mission joining with the house church in Fredericksburg, a congregation of strong-willed, independent-minded lay leaders and members was established.

Both groups were led by independent and charismatic lay leaders, who had different backgrounds, world views, and expectations, but had a common purpose, to preach Christ. The members represented different strands of Adventism from ultraconservatives to the ultraliberal. Many of the conflicts were internal, but the members had a common enemy, anyone not a part of 'the family'. They felt hostility towards outside interference due to conflicts that had developed over the years, stemming from the unresolved conflicts that had led to splits from their former congregations.
Having fought and solved conflicts through splitting a congregation once, that option seemed easier to do so a second, third, or fourth time. Without clear leadership guidelines for listening to, mediating, compromising, finding common ground, or resolving conflicts peacefully, congregants resort to what has worked in the past. In many instances it involves splitting the congregation, walking away from each other, or staying home. The congregation has split, but only a closer scrutiny of the attendance record, which many congregations no longer take, reveals the true problem. In some instances attendance is one third to one half of the book membership.

This situation provided an opportunity for this congregation to begin to fulfill its mission statement to "teach, nurture and empower disciples by bridging relationships in the church and community" (Church mission statement, Appendix 1). Because members can foster close relationships with their relatives and friends in other congregations, the Maranatha congregation could fulfill the mission and purpose for being by availing itself of this opportunity to learn how to give and receive forgiveness by internalizing and practicing it.

However, the narrative that has come out of the congregation's first and only tent effort to date illustrates how strengths can also morph into weaknesses. Before the meetings began, members warned the conference evangelist holding the first tent meeting in the city not to present the Sabbath in a confrontational way. Many visitors from the neighborhood churches attended the meetings at the start, and everything was fine until the evangelist presented the Sabbath and asked those attending to make a choice between
Saturday and Sunday as a day of worship. Many were already attending church both days.

The meetings came to an abrupt end the next night as attendance dropped because attendees who had been coming faithfully up to that point stayed away. The evangelist blamed the lack of support from members as the reason the meeting was not as successful as it could have been, based on his expectations. But a complex list of reasons explains why events went contrary to expectations. When analyzing the apparent failure of the first tent effort, leaders need to consider these reasons.

One reason for the failures is that several key members worked outside of the community, so their priority was not outreach but preparation for the long commute to their jobs very early in the morning. When they returned home from work, they were not motivated to come out to a meeting in the evening or to participate in door-to-door work. Added to this was the fact that this congregation was a younger group of people which had few retirees who would have had more time to do volunteer work.

The lack of perceived success of this first evangelistic outreach has affected the confidence of the congregation. Whenever the subject of outreach and evangelism comes up, memories go back to the narrative, overemphasizing the failure of the first meeting and immobilizing the minds of the members with unfounded fears, which create anger, tension, and inaction. The church is timid and tentative about venturing out for fear of rejection or failure on their part.

Oddly, the threats that face this congregation stem from its strengths. Leadership should make every effort to include all the thought leaders in decision making. Some members have placed some distance between the 2001 issues surrounding the purchase of
a permanent church home and their current thought patterns, but this disagreement caused some who did not agree with the decision to withdraw their financial support in protest while still attending the church. Others just left. The Fall 2003 incident was over position and power, masked by concerns surrounding the leadership of the congregation.

Introducing new leadership skills offers an opening toward healing the body. If the leaders recognize and understand the complicated issues, the fault lines and minefields that are still present in this congregation, and those who are willing to listen to all sides and find a common ground will thereby allow the congregation to heal and move forward. Teaching the members the importance of giving and receiving forgiveness on a regular basis is also a vital part of the strategy in bringing about the desired outcome.

**Implementation Narrative**

In the fall of 2007 a listening committee was formed to listen to members' concerns which stemmed from the unresolved incident dating back to 2003, which had severely disrupted the moral order of the congregation. The listening committee reported three areas of concern: worship and music, role of women in the church, and healing and forgiveness in the congregation. The congregation addresses these concerns first through prayer and fasting every Tuesday on an ongoing basis.

On April 12, 2009, Dr. Lloyd Mallory Jr., who serves as an Associate Pastor for Music and Worship at the Sligo Church in Takoma Park, Maryland, came to present a workshop on worship and music in the church. At the time, Dr. Mallory was the choral director at Oakwood University and conducted its premier Aeolians Choir. Dr. Mallory holds a Doctor of Music Arts degree from the University of California, Los Angeles and
also holds two Master of Arts degrees from Morgan State University, Baltimore, Maryland, in Choral Conducting (1994) and Voice (2000). His expertise and balanced presentation on music and worship in the church was well received by all present. The opportunity for a question and answer time after his presentation provided clarity for individuals who were conflicted about the styles of worship music that compete for dominance in the church.

The next area of concern was with the role of women in the life of the church. To address this issue, Dr. Olive Hemmings, Professor in the Department of Religion at Washington Adventist University, formerly Columbia Union College, gave a presentation June 14, 2008. Professor Hemmings holds degrees from West Indies University and Andrews University, as well as a PhD from Claremont University. Her presentation was received with mixed results. Those who were in favor of women in leadership found support for what Dr. Hemmings had to share of others who felt that there should be a limited role of women in the church.

The final phase of the plan involves healing and forgiveness, and for that purpose Dr. Alfred R. Jones, a pastor and professional counselor, came to address the concern on June 21, 2008, preaching a sermon and presenting a workshop on healing and forgiveness. Dr. Jones is an ordained minister, a licensed family counselor, and a certified psychotherapist, as well as a commissioned family life educator and an international seminar presenter and conference speaker. Author of the bestselling *Door of Hope for the Wounded Black Family* and three other related books, he is a compassionate father of three adult children. He is a recovering codependent and a wounded healer. Dr. Jones holds degrees from Oakwood University and Andrews University, and a PhD in
Counseling from Howard University. Members received Dr. Jones's workshop presentation favorably, indicative of the volume of questions and positive feedback.

One year after these meetings addressed the church's concerns, attitudes have changed as individuals, and the congregation as a whole has made progress toward working together on these issues, but some areas of concern still remain. Individuals still lag behind in the healing process, and the congregation is not satisfied that they are where they feel God wants them to be.

During the month of May 2009, with the approval of the congregation and the Institutional Review Board of Andrews University in conjunction with the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, members eighteen years old and older took an anonymous survey to gage members' attitudes toward giving and receiving forgiveness. This survey was administered prior to the sermon series and seminar that followed.

With the objective in mind to change people's perceptions of giving and receiving forgiveness, I prepared a sermon series on those topics. The first in the series I presented September 26, 2009, entitled "Forgive Us Our Debt," was based on Matthew 6:5-13. The second sermon in the series, preached October 10, 2009, and entitled "Perfect Forgiveness Part I" was based on Job 1 and dealt with the life of Job and his experience with God, his family, and friends. The third sermon in the series was entitled, "Perfect Forgiveness Part II" and was based on John 1:5-10 and the life of Jesus and His perfect
obedience to God and His flawless relations to others. The life experience of others in scripture also provided examples from which people may learn to interact with others who harm them and need forgiveness.

The final sermon in the series, presented November 14, 2009, "Finally Together Again," was based on Genesis 46:28-31. The sermon examined the story of conflict that developed between Joseph, Jacob, and his siblings. A father’s favoritism of one child over another developed into hatred for the younger sibling. Instead of murdering him, their true intention, the older brothers sold the younger one into slavery. Later, after testing his brothers to see if they had experienced a genuine change in their hearts, Joseph revealed who he was to them. He was able to forgive their evil act of selling him into slavery. His willingness to forgive his siblings ultimately benefitted his family, the nation of Egypt, and himself.

After the final sermon in the series, a workshop/seminar putting into practice the sermon series on giving and receiving forgiveness was conducted in the afternoon of November 14, 2009. Attendees had an opportunity to ask questions and interact with the presenter and each other about the sermon series and information regarding the benefits of forgiveness that were presented at the workshop. This workshop came at the conclusion of the annual week of prayer, so members spent the day in prayer and fasting for the congregation and for the healing of past and present hurts and a complete restoration of relationships between each other.

A PowerPoint presentation shared practical information on how individuals can deal with hurt, resentment, and anger that had led to lack of forgiveness in their
personal relationships. The speaker established ground rules at the outset, encouraging participants to be confidential in not identifying individuals or in describing personal conflict they have or had, past or present. They were to have a nonjudgmental attitude. Participants were encouraged to take notes, and a question-and-answer period at the end provided for a smooth uninterrupted presentation.

With these ground rules clearly understood and participants willing to abide by them, the presentation focused on three areas: (a) Understanding our biological responses to emotions whether positive or negative, (b) reducing the consequences of past anger and hurt, and (c) understanding how grievances form and how to prevent them. Three resources informed this presentation and were recommended reading for further insight into forgiveness. They were Redford and Virginia Williams (1998), *Anger Kills: Seventeen Strategies for Controlling the Hostility That Can Harm Your Health*; Fred Luskin (2002), *Forgive for Good: A Proven Prescription for Health and Happiness*; and Dick Tibbits (2006), *Forgive to Live: How Forgiveness Can Save Your Life*.

The workshop emphasized the benefits of forgiveness to the individual. Those who practice forgiveness reduce anger, depression, and stress and promote the positive emotions of hope, peace of mind, compassion for others, and self-confidence. When individuals are willing to forgive others, they promote healthy relationships, which in turn benefit all involved. The presenter encouraged participants to use their minds to assist their bodies in the healing process. "Sickness of the mind prevails everywhere. Nine tenths of the diseases from which men suffer have their foundation here" (White, 1885/1948, vol. 5, p. 444).
Participants were reminded that all make mistakes and need someone to forgive them at one time or another. The overwhelming majority of people usually ask for forgiveness while a much smaller percentage is willing to forgive. All faith communities teach that forgiveness is essential and leave it at that. Being intentional about teaching the steps to follow in the forgiveness process is essential and was important in equipping these participants to be successful at giving and receiving forgiveness.

Dr. Fred Luskin (2002) in his book *Forgive for Good*, has developed a nine-step process of teaching people how to forgive. These steps were important for participants to follow.

1. Know exactly how you feel about what happened and be able to articulate what about the situation is not OK. Then, tell a trusted couple of people about your experience.
2. Make a commitment to yourself to do what you have to do to feel better. Forgiveness is for you and not for anyone else.
3. Forgiveness does not necessarily mean reconciling with the person that hurt you or condoning of their action. What you are after is to find peace. Forgiveness can be defined as the “peace and understanding that come from blaming that which has hurt you less, taking the life experience less personally, and changing your grievance story.” Get the right perspective on what is happening.
4. Recognize that your primary distress is coming from the hurt feelings, thoughts, and physical upset you are suffering now, not what offended you or hurt you two minutes – or ten years – ago. Forgiveness helps to heal those hurt feelings.
5. At the moment you feel upset, practice a simple stress-management technique to soothe your body’s flight or fight response.
6. Give up expecting things from other people, or your life, that they do not choose to give you. Recognize the “unenforceable rules” you have for your health or how you or other people must behave. Remind yourself that you can hope for health, love, peace, and prosperity and work hard to get them.
7. Put your energy into looking for another way to get your positive goals met than through the experience that has hurt you. Instead of mentally replaying your hurt, seek out new ways to get what you want.
8. Remember that a life well lived is your best revenge. Instead of focusing on your wounded feelings, and thereby giving the person who caused you pain power over
you, learn to look for the love, beauty, and kindness around you. Forgiveness is about personal power.
9. Amend your grievance story to remind you of the heroic choice to forgive. (Luskin, 2002, p. 211)

Participants were reminded that, forgetting, excusing, denying, condoning, pardoning, and reconciling are not what forgiveness is all about. The three types of forgiveness—interpersonal, intrapersonal, and existential—were also distinguished.

People often struggle with forgiving others, ourselves, God, and society when things do not go well for them, so the focus of the workshop was on interpersonal forgiveness, with restitution, reconciliation, and changed behavior as the final desired outcome.

After the presentation, the leader permitted a time for question and answer. Participants wrote their questions so that all had a chance to participate. To conclude the seminar workshop and the question-and-answer period, a designated participant gave the second of three surveys to those in attendance. Members of the congregation who were 18 years or older voluntarily completed the survey. The completed surveys were collected, placed in a sealed envelope, and passed on to the researcher.

Conclusion

Finding solutions to problems is dependent on each member’s participation in arriving at a solution. Each member needs to and can contribute to the solution. A willing attitude to work together will determine the best outcome. Fostering a climate conducive to listening to each other respectfully is vital to the outcome. The examination of the statistics over the past ten to twelve years of the church life revealed clear patterns. The trends in membership and tithe give an indication of stagnation in the growth over the
past six years. While the church has had significant financial growth, it has not seen a corresponding growth in baptisms. Members must examine their strengths and build on them, look at the opportunities, and work to make them reality, knowing and identifying the weaknesses and being willing to work toward making them strengths. Threats are on the horizon that, if unheeded, the congregation will succumb to. With a desire to heal each other, the congregation can begin to listen and look for solutions to the challenges.

The leaders and members working together can bring this church out of its decline into being productive and a growing congregation in the near future. They can find healing as those who are wounded begin to heal their fellow members through actively listening and caring for each other.

They can practice the three healing factors in the life of the congregation and comfort each other by expressions of care, appreciation, and acceptance. Furthermore, they can support each other through clarification of the issues as they examine and sort out the relevant from the irrelevant. Not everything should carry the same emphasis or weight, but members can support each other through constructive criticism. They cannot be afraid to offer critical appraisal on issues that are of concern to the life of the congregation. All are called on to practice love and to speak the truth, but to do so in as kind and compassionate a manner as they can. As members implement and practice these steps each day in the life of the congregation, they can find healing and common ground in solving many challenges they have faced, are facing, and will face together.
CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

The results of the three surveys and the implications for the congregation will be examined. A reduction of tension and the fostering of a climate of cooperation and reconciliation are the congregation's stated desire and goal. Giving and receiving forgiveness calls the members of the Maranatha Seventh-day Adventist Church to reconciliation and harmony in spite of differences. Leaders and members must put in place policies, practices, and procedures that would allow for the smooth running of the congregation while still respecting and valuing individual opinions.

In churches, interpersonal interactions in various meetings, worship service, church board, church business, Sabbath School, and social activities provide opportunities to listen and interact with tolerance and understanding. However, at Maranatha, the meetings had become forums to debate theological differences, argue irrelevant points of disagreement, make inflammatory statements, incite argument, and at times vent frustrations, leading to angry outbursts. Statements were often disguised as questions which lobbed verbal time bombs that ignited tension and anger. To remedy this, leaders and members need to foster a healthy respect for each other and the various positions taken.
The planned intervention was designed to teach and foster forgiveness among members of the congregation. A first step was to present a sermon series based on forgiveness in scripture and a seminar workshop. A survey to measure members' understanding and attitude towards giving and receiving forgiveness before the sermons and seminar, after the sermons and seminar, and six months later. The results of the three surveys and the implications for the congregation show the effects of the intervention.

Outcomes of the Intervention and Results of the Surveys

Pre-Sermon Series and Seminar Survey

In order to ascertain the level of understanding regarding giving and receiving forgiveness, members took a survey before hearing the sermon series and attending the seminar. The results determine participant's level of forgiveness through a fourteen-question survey. Each form included the statement: "I had the informed consent letter read to me and recognize that by completing and returning this survey that I am giving my informed consent to participate. I am a member of Maranatha Seventh-day Adventist Church, and I am over 18 years of age."

This quantitative survey instrument had been validated and was used to measure members' attitudes towards each other and their ability to give and receive forgiveness. The instrument was developed by David E. Mullen, Ph.D., and used by permission.

Participants were asked to fill in the circle to the left of the number that corresponds to their response: zero (0) if they strongly disagreed with the statement and
up to four (4) if they strongly agreed with the statement. They were asked to think about
the specific person in or out of the congregation toward whom they want to measure their
level of forgiveness. They were to rate each statement to the extent that the thoughts,

Table 1

*Base Line Forgiveness Survey Results by Percentages*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Get Even</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>81.25%</td>
<td>6.25%</td>
<td>12.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Make them Pay</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>81.25%</td>
<td>6.25%</td>
<td>12.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Dwell on Offense</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>31.25%</td>
<td>18.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Angry Thoughts</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>43.75%</td>
<td>31.25%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See their point</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>31.25%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>43.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. See Good Points</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Pray for Them</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Forgive them</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>12.50%</td>
<td>6.25%</td>
<td>81.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. No Resentment</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>12.50%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>62.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. At Peace</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>12.50%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>62.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Keep Distance</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>37.50%</td>
<td>18.75%</td>
<td>43.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. They Don’t Exist</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>56.25%</td>
<td>18.75%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Correct Problem</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>6.25%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>43.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Reconciliation</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>6.25%</td>
<td>31.25%</td>
<td>62.50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
feelings, and behavior matched their own. The raw numbers are presented as well as percentages. There are also comparisons in percentages for each of the three surveys.

Percentages are rounded up or down to the nearest whole number throughout although reported to the hundredth in the tables. Of the sixteen respondents in the first survey 12% felt the need to get even with the person who had offended them, the greater portion of the respondents, 81%, had no desire for revenge. Only 12% of respondents wanted to make the offenders pay for their actions. An overwhelming majority of members, 81%, desired no payback. Those who could not stop themselves from replaying the offense in their mind and dwelling on it were 18%.

Those who thought about their offender with anger were 25%. Those seeking to understand where the offender was coming from were almost 44%. Half of participants, 50% had the ability to see the offender's good points. What was even more noteworthy was that 75% prayed for their offenders, asking God to bless them. Forgiveness was on the minds of 81% of the respondents as they told God they forgave those who offended them.

While 62% felt that their resentment was gone, 62% felt peace over the conflict. Perhaps in an effort not to offend or because tensions still exist, almost 44% kept as much distance as possible between themselves and those that offended them. A surprising 25% lived as though the offender did not exist while only 43% of the participants looked for the source of the problem and tried to correct it. A good number of participants, 62% were willing to forgive and took steps toward reconciliation with someone they had a conflict with.
An analysis of the response of the participants reveals the state of morale in the congregation. The congregation is dealing with two realities. While the numbers from the survey show very positive results, the downside is that a high percentage of members, 75%, said that they were praying that God would bless the offenders, that attitude did not translate into healed relationships between members and less hostility. With 62% feeling that their resentment is gone; relationships should have been healed or be healing much faster than they were four years after the injury. The key indicator in knowing that forgiveness has taken root is reconciliation, and with 62% feeling that they had taken steps toward reconciliation with an offender, the church should have experienced greater healing and stronger moves toward reconciliation between members.

If, indeed, only a small percentage, just 12% as the survey indicates, of the congregation has a strong desire to get even with someone who offends them, the congregation should be far along the road toward reconciliation. The puzzle was to find out what accounts for the high level of stress and dysfunction that still stifled the life of the congregation in light of their reported good feelings and attitudes. At the root of the concerns, was the difference between how members feel and what they were willing to admit and practice. Granted, people have been shaped by cultural norms not to say everything that they think and feel. More often we take actions based on what we think and feel rather than on what we are willing to admit. This could account for the contradictions in an individual's stated position, practice, and habits. Results appear inconsistent with behavior so far.
The purpose of the second survey—post sermon and seminar—was to determine if forgiveness training can make a difference in the life of the members of the congregation and to see if healing and reconciliation can be hindered or enhanced as a result of preaching and teaching about forgiveness. The desired outcome was that by conducting a seminar this would give members the tools to cope with conflicts and lead them toward a willingness to give and receive forgiveness. The post-sermon series and seminar results, when compared to the first survey, did show change. Fourteen participants completed this survey, two fewer than had previously participated.

The results of this survey showed that, after forgiveness training, the trend was
### Table 2

*Post Sermon Series and Seminar Results by Percentages*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Get Even</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>92.85%</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Make them Pay</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>78.56%</td>
<td>14.28%</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Dwell on Offense</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>78.56%</td>
<td>14.28%</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Angry Thoughts</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>71.42%</td>
<td>14.28%</td>
<td>14.28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. See their point</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>28.57%</td>
<td>42.85%</td>
<td>28.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. See Good Points</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>14.28%</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td>78.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Pray for Them</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td>92.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Forgave them</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td>21.42%</td>
<td>71.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. No Resentment</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td>21.42%</td>
<td>71.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. At Peace</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td>92.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Keep Distance</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>64.28%</td>
<td>21.42%</td>
<td>14.28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. They Don't Exist</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>78.57%</td>
<td>14.28%</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Correct Problem</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td>21.42%</td>
<td>71.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Reconciliation</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td>14.28%</td>
<td>78.57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

toward a more encouraging direction. Now only 7% of respondents felt a desire to get even, down from the baseline results of almost 13% who felt the desire to get even with those they had conflict with. A lower 7% of respondents felt a desire to make the other person pay. While 7% of respondents replayed the offense over in their mind, dwelling
on it, this was trending down from the initial survey. Those who still have angry thoughts
toward the offender are now 14%, down from the initial survey. The ability to understand
the source of conflict and be able to understand the offender was now at 28%. There is a
high, almost 43% who scored neutral on this question.

While 28% of respondents have a clear ability to see where their offenders were
coming from, almost 93% of respondents said that they prayed for the offender, asking
God to bless them. While 71% of respondents forgave those who had offended them, an
encouraging 71% of respondents felt resentment had gone. A growing number, 93% of
respondents, felt peace. Now only 14% of respondents, kept their distance between
themselves and the offender. Only 7% of respondents live as if the offender doesn't exist.

An encouraging change, 71% of respondents, now looked for the source of the problem
and tried to correct it. Over three quarters, 78% of individuals were willing to seek
reconciliation; they took steps toward reconciliation, writing, calling or showed concern
toward offender.

Taking into account the limitations of this study there was an overall
improvement in the percentages immediately after members had participated in the
seminar and listened to the biblical based sermons on forgiveness. Having an opportunity
to interact, express their thoughts, listen to others expressing their thoughts helped to
change attitudes and humanize those they thought were their opponent. The seminar work
shop provided a teaching and learning opportunity regarding conflict resolution,
forgiveness training and reconciliation.
Table 3

*Forgiveness Survey Results After Six Months by Percentage*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Get Even</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>69.23%</td>
<td>7.69%</td>
<td>23.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Make them Pay</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>84.61%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>15.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Dwell on Offense</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>76.92%</td>
<td>7.69%</td>
<td>7.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Angry Thoughts</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>76.92%</td>
<td>15.38%</td>
<td>7.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. See their point</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>46.15%</td>
<td>15.38%</td>
<td>38.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. See Good Points</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>7.69%</td>
<td>7.69%</td>
<td>84.61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Pray for Them</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>7.69%</td>
<td>7.69%</td>
<td>84.61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Forgave them</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>7.69%</td>
<td>7.69%</td>
<td>84.61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. No Resentment</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7.69%</td>
<td>92.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. At Peace</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>15.38%</td>
<td>84.61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Keep Distance</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>69.23%</td>
<td>7.69%</td>
<td>23.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. They Don't Exist</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>76.92%</td>
<td>15.38%</td>
<td>7.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Correct Problem</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>15.38%</td>
<td>15.38%</td>
<td>69.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Reconciliation</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>15.38%</td>
<td>15.38%</td>
<td>69.23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In order to determine whether the changes were consistent and lasting, members took a third survey six months after the second survey. Thirteen participants filled out this the last survey, one fewer than in the second survey and three fewer participants than in the first survey. This final survey again measured the change in members' attitudes toward forgiveness and the desire for reconciliation. The number of those who wanted to get even with someone that offended them was 23% with a majority 69% not having a desire to get even with those who had hurt them. Participants' attitude regarding making those who offended them making the offender pay had changed, with 84% having no desire for payback. Those dwelling on the offense were now 7%. Participants having angry thoughts about those who offended them had also declined to 7%. Those who could see the offender's point of view was at 46%.
The most significant change after the sermon series and seminar was as respondents saw the good in others, as demonstrated by their responses to the questions concerning continued prayer for others, now 84%. There was an improved desire to forgive offense 84%, loss of resentment 92%, and peace with themselves and others now at 84%. An encouraging indicator was that after six months 92% of respondents had grown to the point of feeling no resentment toward others. Those still keeping their distance were 23%, and 7% treated the offenders as if they don't exist. While a majority, 69%, had a desire to fix the problem the same number desired reconciliation, the survey showed that more work needs to be done in this area to bring desire in line with reality and actual practice.
Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Baseline</th>
<th>Sermons/Seminar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Get Even</td>
<td>12.50%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Make them Pay</td>
<td>12.50%</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Dwell on Offense</td>
<td>18.75%</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Angry Thoughts</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>14.28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. See their point</td>
<td>38.46%</td>
<td>28.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. See Good Points</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>78.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Pray for Them</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>92.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Forgive them</td>
<td>81.25%</td>
<td>71.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. No Resentment</td>
<td>62.50%</td>
<td>71.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. At Peace</td>
<td>62.50%</td>
<td>92.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Keep Distance</td>
<td>43.75%</td>
<td>14.28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. They Don't Exist</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Correct Problem</td>
<td>43.75%</td>
<td>71.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Reconciliation</td>
<td>62.50%</td>
<td>78.57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Comparison of Responses Baseline and After Sermons/Seminar*
Comparison of the numbers shows that forgiveness training did have an impact on participant's attitude. While 12% initially felt the need to get even with those they had a conflict with that had fallen to 0% immediately after the workshop. The numbers trended down for all the negative categories such as, making them pay, dwelling on the offense, having angry thoughts. There was a 10% change in those who could see their opponents point. In the baseline survey it was 38%, after the training it was 28%. There was improvement in seeing the other person’s good points from 50% to 78%. More participants were desirous of praying for the other person, up from 75% to almost 93%.

There was a decline in those willing to forgive from 81% to 71%. This may account for a better understanding of what forgiveness is and is not. Having less resentment and a high of almost 93% feeling peace showed a 30% change from the initial survey. Initially participants kept their distance by almost 44%, now those willing to keep their distance had fallen to 14%. They were more willing to stay engaged shown by the decline to 7% of those who treat their opponent as if they do not exist. Many more
participants were willing to do what it takes to correct the problem with a high of 78% willing to give reconciliation a chance.

**Comparison of Results After Sermon/Seminar and After Six Months**

Comparing the long standing impact of the forgiveness training on participants was important to know. When looking at the response participants gave immediately after the training, with those after time and memory had changed perspectives over a six month time lapse, it was quite interesting. While there were improvement on some of the questions, there was a negative change in attitude about getting even after six months. For example right after the sermon series and seminar there was a 0% desire among respondents to get even while after six months that number changed to 23% who felt the need to get even. There was a change for the better about member's attitude on the question of resentment. Overall though there was improvement in participants attitudes toward those they had conflict with.

In the category of getting even by making them pay, the numbers changed for the negative. Those who dwelt on the offense remained the same. Those with angry thoughts declined to 7% after six months. Right after the sermon series and seminar it was 14%. 
Table 5

*Comparison after Sermon/Seminar and after Six Months*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Sermons/Seminar</th>
<th>After Six-Months</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Get Even</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>23.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Make them Pay</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td>15.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Dwell on Offense</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td>7.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Angry Thoughts</td>
<td>14.28%</td>
<td>7.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. See their point</td>
<td>28.57%</td>
<td>38.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. See Good Points</td>
<td>78.57%</td>
<td>84.61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Pray for Them</td>
<td>92.85%</td>
<td>84.61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Forgave them</td>
<td>71.42%</td>
<td>84.61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. No Resentment</td>
<td>71.42%</td>
<td>92.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. At Peace</td>
<td>92.85%</td>
<td>84.61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Keep Distance</td>
<td>14.28%</td>
<td>23.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. They Don't Exist</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td>7.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Correct Problem</td>
<td>71.42%</td>
<td>69.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Reconciliation</td>
<td>78.57%</td>
<td>69.23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participants who could see the other persons point whom they were having the conflict with improved; they could also see the good points in the person. There was a decline to 84% those who were now praying for the person with whom they were having the conflict. The most significant point was that after six months those who were willing to forgive had improved to 84%. Along with the desire to forgive their resentment level had gone down; now 92% of participants had no feelings of resentment. There was a change to 84% who were now at peace. The troubling thing was that more individuals felt the need to keep their distance from those they had a conflict with. Those who treated them as if they did not exist remained the same at 7%, while those who tried to correct the problem and sought reconciliation settled at 69%. Over a period of six months habits and attitudes usually harden and settle. Comparing the before and after is another key area to examine I will do so in the next set of results.
Table 6

Comparison of Responses Baseline Survey and After Six Months

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Baseline</th>
<th>After Six-Months</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Get Even</td>
<td>12.50%</td>
<td>23.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Make them Pay</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Reconciliation</td>
<td>62.50%</td>
<td>69.23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
An examination of the baseline survey, and the survey given after six months, reveals some interesting comparisons. Notable was a change in attitude in wanting to get even with offenders since initially only 12% wanted to get even, now 23% felt the need to get even after six months. Immediately after training the number was 0%. This result shows there needs to be ongoing monitoring of attitudes. Further workshops and sermons are needed to remind participants of the need to continue to forgive as it is a work in progress.

Those who felt the need to make offenders pay showed a slight increase while those who dwelt on the offense declined, along with those who had angry thoughts. Those who could see the other person's good points as well as praying for and forgiving them all increased to 84%. It was also significant that attitudes toward forgiveness had changed along with those who had decreased resentment and feelings of peace with those
who they had conflict with. More participants felt able to associate with those whom they had issues with.

Being more comfortable to associate is consistent with observations of participation at church functions and activities. While 44% initially felt the need to distance themselves from other members, now only 23% felt that need to keep a distance between those that had offended them. This particular result provides the basis and rationale for further dialogue which can lead some to accept the need for reconciliation. This improvement in acceptance of and desire for reconciliation is evidenced by the fact that over time the desire for reconciliation has improved. Careful analysis of the numbers reveals improvement in attitudes after training and an opportunity to implement what is learned.

**Implication: What Does This Mean for the Congregation?**

The results show signs of hope for the congregation if church leadership encourages and fosters efforts toward promoting understanding and tolerance between members so that healing can take place. These encouraging results show that the church needs to make an ongoing effort to facilitate forgiveness through sermons and seminar/workshops as well as through the establishment of procedures whereby members can bring grievances and concerns to the attention of leadership. The current, established pattern after an altercation, heated words, or hurt feelings is that members withdraw their presence and financial support. Their absence prevents meaningful dialogue and healing of the real or perceived hurt. Leadership must be proactive in promoting a climate of forgiveness and reconciliation. Because conflicts and misunderstandings are a part of the
ongoing challenge of human institutions, leaders must be consistently vigilant in promoting peace, harmony, and tolerance among those they lead.

Summary/Conclusion

Using a quantitative method to measure participants' willingness to give and receive forgiveness provided an effective and objective tool to access participants' attitude. The hypothesis was that when provided forgiveness training, people are able to have open and respectful dialogue about issues they encounter with each other and can achieve the desired harmony and reconciliation. A majority of the response to the questions on the survey instrument showed signs of acceptance and a willingness to move toward forgiveness and reconciliation over the eight-month span of the project. Changing attitudes of those who have conflict with others and including a willingness to work toward resolution will be beneficial in any circumstance, be it between people, family members, communities, or nations.

Some of the hardest hurts to heal are ones that members inflict on each other in the church. Most people who have been hurt in church conflicts have great difficulty finding healing and reconciliation. Whether the injury occurred in congregational life, family life, or in interpersonal relationships, when people replay the incident over and over, their thoughts renew the injury each time they rehash it. Individuals who walk away from a relationship tend to focus on the wounds rather than finding healing. People usually tend to physical wounds quickly, by cleaning the wound and bandaging and keeping it clean and dry. Emotional wounds inflicted in the church, family or in interpersonal relationships require the same urgent care. Hurtful behavior such as
gossiping and saying hurtful things to one another are usually not tended to as quickly. The results are crippling to both the victim and perpetrator.

In interpersonal relationships, without meaningful and early confrontation, avoidance develops. Estrangement is the long-term result of practiced avoidance or of treating the other person as if he or she did not exist. Too often people repeat the tale of the infraction to as many other people as will listen, seeking sympathy and a listening ear, but in reality only reliving the hurt. Each repetition of the problem deepens the hurt until it is indelible imprinted on the individual's psyche.

In Psalm 147:2-3 David reminds people: “The Lord builds up Jerusalem; He gathers together the outcasts of Israel. He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.” We are called as members of the body of Christ to do three things as we seek to heal wounded Christians: (a) gather the outcasts, those who have left the fellowship, (b) heal the broken hearted, those who remain but have been traumatized by a conflict, and (c) bind up their wounds, encourage reconciliation among all members.

In a church, members need to focus on the solutions and not on the problem. Doing this would preclude the possibility of sustaining a wound in a relationship, family, or church. However, we live in a sinful world, and the responsibility of servant leaders and church members is to provide the necessary care to bring the wounded to full recovery and minimize the possibility of their being wounded again. We can never eliminate the possibility of the same person being injured by another person's actions or
inaction, but we can address the concerns of wounding each other and the consequences of such actions.

Church wounds are often spiritual, and the symptoms of spiritual wounds are often pain and anger which masks the real hurt. People withdraw or lash out when their anger is not appropriately channeled. The Maranatha congregation has members that have acted out their anger by not returning to church. Some are not worshipping in any church. Others have isolated themselves from people they were close to in the church. The road to recovery is often long and unpredictable. Being able to get to the source of the wound, making sure it is not tied to some other hurt in the past, is important to discover.

Unhealed wounds can act as a trigger for present problems. To bring about healing, wounded members need to follow the following steps. They are simply to (a) believe that God loves them and wants the best for each person involved, (b) seek out someone to whom to talk about problems, (c) forgive themselves by allowing God to forgive them, (d) forgive the person who wounded them, (e) find the way back to their church home or another place of worship where they can engage others, and (f) allow time to complete the healing in their souls. When people carefully follow these steps, they can expect a full and complete recovery. Forgiveness and reconciliation are possible for those wounded in church, in families, and in any other interpersonal conflicts.

Recommendations

Any congregation dealing with short- or long-term conflict can duplicate this project. The Holy Scriptures contains nearly 100 references on forgiveness, so people have ample teaching resources on the importance of forgiveness. Tested survey instruments are available to assess the effectiveness of respondents' attitudes toward
giving and receiving forgiveness. My recommendation to pastors coming into a new assignment is to engage their congregation in identifying the problem areas. Each congregation has unresolved issues that needs attention. A strategy for dealing with these problem areas is: Firstly begin the process by seeking God’s guidance through prayer and fasten. Secondarily, Select a focus group, chair the meetings. Thirdly, listen to the members concern and make notes. Fourthly, choose the most pressing need and focus on that through a sermon series and a seminar workshop. Fifthly, be sure to measure the effectiveness of the intervention with a series of survey that will gauge member’s response before and after the intervention. Sixthly, share the results with the congregation. Finally, Repeating the survey annually and preaching a series of sermons on the need for change, be it on forgiveness or another problem. This strategy will move the congregation gradually and gently in the right direction.

Leading a two-church district prevented the preaching of the sermon series in one month, which would have been the ideal. Also, due to absences, not all members heard all four sermons over the two months needed for me to preach the series. This was a disadvantage in that participants did not have the full benefit of hearing all the topics covered. Development of a sermon series was advantageous, though, because I could better deal with the topic in depth over a period of time.

The seminar workshop provided a less formal teaching opportunity than preaching from the pulpit. Unlike in a formal sermon delivery setting, people can gain instant feedback and ask questions in a seminar setting in which interruptions are acceptable. Having two-part seminar would be advantageous since the information that
people need to learn is often too much for one session. Participants could then assimilate more information without time constraints and enjoy being exposed to less information at one time and have more time for practical participation and role play, which I believe is much more effective and desirable for long-term learning.

Expectations for change should be realistic. Getting the congregation to move in the right direction toward forgiveness and reconciliation is the goal. Small steps in the right direction complete the journey. Leaders need to plan for reverses and not get discouraged, but press ahead with the goal of achieving reconciliation. The statement “I love humanity; it’s just people I can’t stand,” should help us to focus on one individual at a time to share forgiveness and be reconciled. These individuals make up humanity, and all of us humans are called to love each other as God has showed His love to us.
APPENDIX 1

CORE VALUES OF MARANATHA SDA CHURCH

The mission of Maranatha is to change people into devoted followers of Christ who change their community and their world by love - Changing Lives to Change Our World.

Maranatha is committed to:

A Life of Worship – Worshipping God in all areas of our lives

The Bible’s Authority – Living our lives according to God’s Word.

The Richness of Community – Growing together in Christ in the fellowship and sisterhood of the Seventh-day Adventist Churches.

Joyful Witness – Sharing and living the Good News

Compassionate Service to those in need

Training, preparing, and releasing members for effective, and meaningful ministry in their community.

Persistent Praying for the Holy Spirit in our Lives
## APPENDIX 2

### ANNUAL TITHE INCOME ($)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>($) Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
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</tr>
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<td>1998</td>
<td>$32,745</td>
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![Bar chart showing annual tithes income](chart.png)
### APPENDIX 3

**MEMBERSHIP STATISTIC**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Baptisms</th>
<th>Prof. of Faith</th>
<th>Ending Members</th>
<th>% Growth</th>
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<td>0</td>
<td>76</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>32</td>
<td>0.00</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### APPENDIX 4

**HISTORY OF MARANATHA SDA CHURCH**
The following documentation of Maranatha S.D.A Church History is provided by a charter member, I have omitted the names in the article.

In 1992 the Lord placed a vision on the heart of the local Pastor to organize an African American Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Fredericksburg, VA area. After much prayer, in late May 1992, He along with his wife and two of their children, began worshipping in their home on 303 Mine Road Fredericksburg, VA. In early June, six others who lived in the area began worshipping with the family. It didn't take long for the good news to spread throughout the community and the group of worshippers began to grow. By the end of June the group doubled in size and outgrew the home in which they worshipped. The group of worshippers moved to 5702 Daffodil Drive, Fredericksburg, VA the home of two members of the group.

In July 1992, the local Pastor contacted another Elder, a fellow minister and laborer for Christ, and told him about the work that was being done in the Fredericksburg area. Without hesitation the Elder and his congregation closed their Truth on the March Gospel Mission in Culpeper, VA and began worshipping with the Fredericksburg group. With the two combined congregations the group more than doubled in size.

Under the prompting of the Holy Spirit, in early August of 1992 the group met in the home of a member and organized a mission. The Lord directed the group of worshippers to name the mission the Maranatha Seventh-day Adventist Outreach Mission.

During the first few weeks of organization, the congregation's membership continued to grow and they soon outgrew their place of worship on Daffodil Drive. The local Pastor and the Outreach Mission members began to pray without ceasing for a larger place to worship. In early September of 1992 the Mission Outreach membership had grown to almost 30 members.

In 1993, the Maranatha congregation was busy laboring in the community spreading the wonderful gospel of Jesus, and in early March at the Mount Zion Baptist Church in Spotsylvania, VA six precious souls were baptized. This was the first baptism of the Maranatha Seventh-day Adventist Outreach Mission.

By 1994 the Outreach mission was in full operation. Maranatha had another baptism in early '94 and 5 more laborers for Christ was added to the congregation. The Outreach Mission was very active and well known in the community with Prison Ministry under the Leadership of the local Pastor and Community Services under the direction of one of the Sister's in the congregation. The auxiliaries of AYS and Family Life soon followed with youthful and spirited programs.

At the beginning of 1995 the congregation desired to have a more "structured" style of worship, and began to seek the Lord in prayer for guidance. After much prayer the Lord led the congregation to contact the Allegheny East Conference of Seventh day Adventists. Early in that same year the conference accepted the Mission Outreach into its sisterhood of churches and the Maranatha Seventh-day Adventist Mission Outreach was renamed the Maranatha Seventh-day Adventist Company.

In early 1996 the church was continuing to grow, and the Allegheny East Conference recognized the hard work of the local Pastor and the church members and decided to
send a conference appointed Pastor to serve as District Pastor. The Conference
appointed Pastor worked and served until 1997. In late 1997 the conference sent a new
Pastor to serve as District Pastor. He is currently serving as District Pastor.
The Maranatha Seventh-day Adventist Company continued to grow and flourish in the
years of 1997 and 1998. In the winter of 1998 a baptism was held at the First Baptist
Church of Love and four more wonderful souls were added to the church's roll.
In the fall of 1999, the church congregation was forced to move from the 321 Wallace
Street location. The Lord led the local Pastor to a fellow minister from the Tower of
Deliverance Church in Fredericksburg, VA. He contacted a friend and arranged for the
Maranatha Company to worship at the Rehabilitation Association Center on 411
Progress Street. The members of Maranatha were grateful for the Lord's blessings, but
longed for a church of their own.
In March of 2000 the Lord led the local Pastor to 321 Wallace Lane in Fredericksburg,
VA. The Maranatha Company began worshipping at the Wallace Lane location in late
March of 2000. Then God in His infinite wisdom told His children to come out of the
wilderness. After nearly 10 years and almost 100 members later, the Lord reigned down
His showers of blessings, and the Maranatha Seventh-day Adventist Church on 321
Wallace Lane was purchased on December 6, 2001. To God be the Glory Great things
He has done!!

APPENDIX 5
SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Think about the specific person you want to measure your forgiveness toward. Rate each
item to the extent that the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors match your own.

0 = Strongly disagree | 1 = Disagree | 2 = Neutral | 3 = Agree | 4 = Strongly agree

1. I'm going to get even.
2. I'll make them pay.

3. I replay the offense in my mind, dwelling on it.

4. I think about them with anger.

5. I can understand where they are coming from.

6. I have a clear ability to see their good points.

7. I prayed for them, asking God to bless them.

8. I told God I forgive them.

9. My resentment is gone.

10. I feel peace.

11. I keep as much distance between us as possible.

12. I live as if they don't exist, or never existed.

13. I looked for the source of the problem and tried to correct it.
14. I took steps toward reconciliation: wrote them, called them, showed concern.

Strongly disagree 0 1 2 3 4 Strongly agree

APPENDIX 6

SERMONS AND SEMINAR OUTLINES
"ON GIVING AND RECEIVING FORGIVENESS"

SERMON 1

"Forgive Us Our Debts"
Matthew 6:9-13

When you pray, pray something like this: “Our Father in heaven, may your name be glorified. May we extend your kingdom? May we also do your will on earth, as it is done in heaven? Please take care of us today. And forgive us as we have forgiven others. Do not leave us alone when our loyalty to you is tested. Help us overcome every temptation which the evil one brings against us. For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours forever. Amen.” Mt. 6:9-13
Illustrations

There is an unusual epitaph on a large headstone in a cemetery outside of New York City. The name of the person in the grave is not on the headstone. There is no mention of when the person was born or when he or she died. Nor does it indicate anything about the person’s being a beloved mother, father, husband, wife, brother, sister, son, or daughter. Just one word stretches across the headstone: Forgiven. Clearly the most significant fact of this individual’s life was the peace he or she knew as a result of God’s forgiveness.

Henry Ward Beecher, a popular nineteenth-century American preacher, said, Let me saw off a branch from one of the trees that is now budding in my garden, and all summer long there will be an ugly scar where the gash has been made; but by next autumn it will be perfectly covered over by the growing; and by the following autumn it will be hidden out of sight; and in four or five years there will be but a slight scar to show where it has been; and in ten or twenty years you would never suspect that there had been an amputation. Trees know how to overgrow their injuries, and hide them: and love does not wait so long as trees do (Cited in Encyclopedia of 2585 Illustrations [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.], 260).

The Apostle Peter said that love covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8), and one of the most important ways it does that is by forgiveness. The most essential, blessed, and yet most costly thing God ever did was to provide man the forgiveness of sin. It is most essential because it keeps us from hell and gives us joy in this life. It is most blessed because it introduces us into an eternal fellowship with God. And it is most costly because the Son of God gave up His life so that we might live.

John R.W. Stott, in his book Confess Your Sins, quotes the head of a large British mental home: “I could dismiss half my patients tomorrow if they could be assured of forgiveness” ([Waco, Texas: Word, 1974], 73). Deliverance from guilt by real forgiveness is man’s deepest spiritual need. Apart from it, he can’t enter into a relationship with God that produces peace and hope. He is holy and His “eyes are too pure to approve evil, and [He] canst not look on wickedness with favor” (Hab. 1:13).

“Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts,” says Isaiah (6:3). A Holy God cannot possibly entertain a relationship with unholy men and women unless there is forgiveness of sin. That’s why our Lord makes it the next topic in His pattern for prayer: “Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Matt. 6:12). Verses 14–15 serve as a footnote: “For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.”
Forgiveness of sin is the greatest need of the human heart because sin has a twofold effect: it promises to condemn us forever while at the same time robbing us of the fullness of life by burdening our conscience with unrelenting guilt. Ultimately sin separates us from God, thus it is unquestionably the principal enemy and greatest problem we have.

The Apostle Paul captured the impact of sin when he quoted several Old Testament passages in his letter to Christians in Rome: “There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one” (Rom. 3:10–12; cf. Ps. 14:1–3; 53:1–4). He then concludes, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).

The Work of Sin

Sin is the moral and spiritual disease for which man has no cure. “Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then you also can do good who are accustomed to do evil” (Jer. 13:23).

- **Sin dominates the mind.** Romans 1:21 indicates that men have a reprobate mind given over to evil and lust.
- **Sin dominates the will.** According to Jeremiah 44:15–17, men desire to do evil because their will is controlled by sin.
- **Sin dominates the emotions and the affections.** The natural man does not want his sin cured because he loves darkness rather than light (John 3:19).
- **Sin brings men under the control of Satan.** Ephesians 2:2 teaches that men are guided by “the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.”
- **Sin brings people under divine wrath.** According to Ephesians 2:3, unsaved people are “children of wrath.”
• *Sin subjects men to misery.* Job said, "Man is born for trouble, as sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7). "There is no peace for the wicked," says the Lord" (Isa. 48:22).

**The Forms of Sin**

Five Greek words are typically used by the New Testament writers to refer to some aspect of sin.

*Hamartia* ἁμαρτία is the most common and carries the root idea of missing the mark. Sin misses the mark of God's standard of righteousness. The term can simply be seen as a character's flaw or error. The word hamartia is rooted in the notion of missing the mark (hamartanein) and covers a broad spectrum that includes accident and mistake, as well as wrongdoing, error, or sin.

*Paraptoma,* παράπτωμα often rendered "trespass," is the sin of slipping or falling, and results more from carelessness than from intentional disobedience.

*Parabasis* παράβασις refers to stepping across the line, going beyond the limits prescribed by God. It is often translated "transgression." This sin is more conscious and intentional.

*Anomia* ἀνομία an-om-ee'-ah means "lawlessness," and is an even more intentional and flagrant sin. It describes direct and open rebellion against God and His will.

*Opheilema* ὀφείλειμα of-i'-lay-mah is the word used in Matthew 6:12. The verb form is used most often to refer to moral or spiritual debts. Sin is a moral or spiritual debt to God that must be paid. In his account of this prayer, Luke uses *hamartia* ("sins"; Luke 11:4), clearly indicating that the reference is to sin, not to financial debt. Matthew probably used *opheilema* because it corresponded to the most common Aramaic term for sin used by Jews of that day, a term that also represented moral or spiritual debt to God.

Those who trust in Christ have received God's pardon for sin and are saved from eternal hell. Since this prayer is a model for believers to use, the debts referred to here are those incurred by Christians when they sin. Immeasurably more important than our need for daily bread is our need for continual forgiveness of sin. Arthur Pink writes,

As it is contrary to the holiness of God, sin is defilement, a dishonor, and a reproach to us as it is a violation of His law. It is a crime, and as to the guilt which we contact thereby, it is a debt. As creatures we owe a debt of obedience unto our maker and governor, and through failure to render the same on account of our rank disobedience, we have incurred a debt of punishment; and it is for this that we implore a divine pardon (*An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974 reprint], 163–64).

As a result of our unrelenting sin, we owe a massive debt to God that we could not even begin to pay, much like the debt owed by the unfaithful servant (Matt. 18). Anyone who desires to come to God must do so recognizing the severity of his sin and the magnitude of his debt.

**FORGIVENESS IS THE SOLUTION**
Since man's severest problem is sin, his greatest need is forgiveness—and that is exactly what God provides. Though we have been forgiven the ultimate penalty of sin through salvation in Christ, we need to experience God's regular forgiveness for the sins we continue to commit. The importance of this distinction will become clearer as we look at the two kinds of forgiveness that we may label judicial and parental.

Judicial Forgiveness

Believers receive God's judicial forgiveness the moment they trust Christ as their Savior from sin. Such forgiveness is comprehensive in the reality of justification, by which God declares us righteous in His Son. As a result, we are no longer under judgment, condemned to die, nor any longer destined for hell. Paul says, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). The eternal Judge has declared us pardoned, justified, and righteous. No one, human or satanic, can condemn us or permanently lay any charge against us (vv. 33–34).

The extent of this forgiveness is literally mind-boggling. God says, "Their sin I will remember no more" (Jer. 31:34). David wrote, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us" (Ps. 103:12). And Isaiah gives the reason: "The Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him [Christ]" (Isa. 53:6; cf. 1 Peter 2:24).

God could not pass by our sin unless He placed the punishment for it on someone else, and that is why Christ died. God has forgiven us (in essence eliminated) our sins based on that one-time sacrifice of Christ on the cross. It was there that He bore our punishment, took our guilt, and paid the penalty for our sin. The moment you place your faith in Christ, your sin is put on Him and His righteousness is put on you, and God judicially declares you justified (Rom. 3:24–26; 2 Cor. 5:21). By that act of judicial forgiveness, all our sins—past, present, and future—is completely forgiven.

Parental Forgiveness

Unfortunately we still fall into sins in our behavior because we have not yet been made perfect. In Philippians 3, Paul revealed this distinction when he wrote that through faith in Christ he had received the righteousness of God apart from the Law; yet, he added that he had not yet attained a perfect standard of holiness practically (vv. 7–14). So we constantly require forgiveness—the kind that is graciously offered by our Heavenly Father. The Apostle John warns us, "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving
ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8–9).

So sin, while it is forgiven judicially, is still a reality in a Christian's life. A decreasing frequency of sin, along with an increasing sensitivity to it, should characterize every Christian's walk. And while our sins today and in the future don't change our standing before God, they do affect the intimacy and joy in our relationship with Him.

For example, if one of your children sinned by disobeying you, that wouldn't change your relationship—you are still his father or mother, ready to forgive instantly. But until he comes to you to confess his disobedience, the prior intimacy will not be restored.

During the Last Supper, Jesus began washing the disciples' feet as a demonstration of the humble, serving spirit that should characterize any of His servants. At first Peter refused, but when Jesus said, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with me," Peter went to the other extreme and wanted a complete bath. Jesus replied, "He who has bathed needs only to wash His feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean" (John 13:5–10).

Jesus' act of foot washing was more than an example of humility; it was also a picture of the forgiveness God gives in His repeated cleansing of those who are already saved. Dirt on the feet symbolizes the daily surface contamination from sin that we experience as we walk through life. Sin does not, and cannot, make us entirely dirty, because we have been permanently cleansed. The judicial purging that occurs at regeneration needs no repetition, but the practical purification is necessary every day because daily we fall short of God's perfect holiness.

As Judge, God is eager to forgive sinners, and as Father He is even more eager to keep on forgiving His children. Hundreds of years before Christ, Nehemiah wrote, "Thou art a God of forgiveness, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in loving-kindness” (Neh. 9:17). As vast and pervasive as the sin of man is, the magnitude of God's forgiveness is far greater. Where sin abounds, God's grace abounds even more.

Somewhere in our prayers, after we have asked for His name to be hallowed, His kingdom to come, and His will to be done—and after we have acknowledged that God is the source of our physical and daily sustenance—we need to face the fact that our feet are dirty. As long as we have unconfessed sins in our lives, we will lose fullness of joy and intimacy in our communion with God. Thus the petition, “Forgive us our debts” is simply our pleading to God to cleanse us moment by moment when we confess our sins to Him.

Donald Grey Barnhouse, in a conversation with a college professor, told this story that illustrates the magnitude of loving forgiveness:

A man had lived a life of great sin but had been converted, and eventually had come to marry a fine Christian woman. He had confided to her the nature of his past life in a few words. As he had told her these things, the wife had taken his head in her hands and
had drawn him to her shoulder and had kissed him, saying, “John, I want you to understand something very plainly. I know my Bible well, and therefore I know the subtlety of sin and the devices of sin working in the human heart. I know you are a thoroughly converted man, John, but I know that you still have an old nature, and that you are not yet as fully instructed in the ways of God as you soon will be. The Devil will do all he can to wreck your Christian life, and he will see to it that temptations of every kind will be put in your way. The day might come—please God that it never shall—when you will succumb to temptation and fall into sin. Immediately the devil will tell you that it is no use trying, that you might as well continue on in the way of sin, and that above all you are not to tell me because it will hurt me. But John, I want you to know that here in my arms is your home. When I married you I married your old nature as well as your new nature, and I want you to know there is full pardon and forgiveness in advance for any evil that may ever come into your life.”

Dr. Barnhouse said that when he finished the story, the college professor lifted up his eyes reverently and said, “My God! If anything would ever keep a man straight that [kind of forgiving love] would be it!” (God’s Methods for Holy Living [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951], 72–74)

CONFESSION IS GOOD FOR THE SOUL

Asking forgiveness implies confession. Feet that are not presented to Christ cannot be washed by Him. Sin that is not confessed cannot be forgiven: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). To confess means basically to agree with, and when we confess our sins we agree with God that they are wicked, evil, defiling, and have no part in those who belong to Him.

It is difficult to confess sins. It’s especially hard to get a child to admit he did something wrong.

The visiting Evangelist’s son I was a little boy, another boy and he vandalized a school in an Indiana town where his father was holding a revival meeting. In an attempt to discover who the culprits were, some people went from house to house, seeking information about the perpetrators. When they came to the house where his family was staying, his father and the owner of the house (the other boy’s father) answered the door. One of the visitors asked them if the boys knew anything about the vandalism. He held His father’s hand and put on his most angelic face, doing everything He could to show that He was as spiritual as his evangelist father. Both fathers’s assured the inquirers that they both were wonderful boys and would not have been involved in such activity. It took ten years before He built up enough courage to tell His father what had really happened.
Both Satan and our prideful nature fight against any kind of admission to wrongdoing. But confession is the only way to a free and joyful life. Proverbs 28:13 says, "He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion." John Stott says, "One of the surest antidotes to this process of moral hardening is the disciplined practice of uncovering our sins of thought and outlook, as well as word and deed, and the repentant forsaking of them" (*Confess Your Sins* [Waco, Texas: Word, 1974], 19).

If you don't confess your sins, you will become hardened. We've seen Christians—judicially forgiven and eternally secure—who are hardened, impenitent, and insensitive to sin. Consequently, they are also without joy because they don't have a loving, intimate fellowship with God. They have blocked out joy and fellowship with the barricade of their unconfused sin.

The true Christian does not see God's promise of forgiveness as a license to sin, a way to abuse His love and presume on His grace. Rather, he sees God's gracious forgiveness as the means to spiritual growth and sanctification. He continually thanks God for His great love and willingness to forgive.

Confession of sin is also crucial because it gives God glory when He chastens the disobedient Christian. Such a positive response to His discipline removes any potential complaint of unfairness because the sinner is admitting that he deserves what God gives.

**FORGIVING OTHERS IS THE ULTIMATE TEST**

Jesus gives us the prerequisite for forgiving others in the words "as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matt. 6:12). The principle is simple but sobering: if we have forgiven, we will be forgiven; if we have not forgiven, we will not be forgiven.

**Reasons for Forgiving Others**

We should forgive one another for several reasons.

*A Characteristic of the Saints*

As citizens of God's kingdom we are blessed and receive mercy because we ourselves are merciful (Matt. 5:7). We are to love even our enemies because we have the nature of our Heavenly Father residing in us. Just before giving this model prayer, Jesus instructed His audience, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, 'love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven' " (Matt. 5:43–45). Blessing those who persecute you is tantamount to forgiveness. By loving your enemies, you manifest that you are a child of God.
Forgiveness is the mark of a truly regenerate heart. When a Christian fails to forgive someone else, he sets himself up as a higher judge than God and even calls into question the reality of his faith.

Christ's Example

The Apostle Paul instructs us to "be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you" (Eph. 4:32). John tells us, "The one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked" (1 John 2:6). Jesus Himself is our pattern for forgiveness. On behalf of those who drove the nails through His hands, spit in His face, mocked Him, and crushed a crown of thorns onto His head, Jesus said, "Father, forgive them" (Luke 23:34). He is our role model. The severity of any offense toward us cannot match what Christ endured. The writer of Hebrews said, "You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin" (12:4).

Expresses the Highest Virtue of Man

A man displays the majesty of his creation in the image of God when he forgives. Proverbs 19:11 says, "A man's discretion makes him slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook a transgression."

Frees the Conscience of Guilt

Un-forgiveness not only stands as a barrier to God's forgiveness but also interferes with peace of mind, happiness, satisfaction, and even the proper functioning of the body. According to 2 Corinthians 2:10-11, when we have an unforgiving heart, we give Satan an advantage over us.

Benefits the Body of Believers

Probably few things have so short-circuited the power of the church as unresolved conflicts among its members. The psalmist warns, "If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear" (Ps. 66:18). The Holy Spirit cannot work freely among those who carry grudges and harbor resentment (Matt. 5:23-24).

Delivers from God's Discipline

Where there is an unforgiving spirit, there is sin; and where there is sin, there will be chastening. Hebrews 12:6 says, "Those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom he receives." Unrepentant sin in the church at Corinth caused many believers to be weak, sick, and even to die (1 Cor. 11:30).

Activates God's Forgiveness

The activation of God's forgiveness is probably the most important reason we must forgive others. This reason is so vital that Jesus reinforces it at the close of His pattern for prayer (vv. 14-15). Nothing in the Christian life is more important than forgiveness—our
forgiveness of others and God's forgiveness of us. Because God deals with us just as we deal with others, we are to forgive others as freely and graciously as God forgives us.

The Proof of a Forgiving Spirit

As a kind of postscript to the Disciples' Prayer, Matthew 6:14-15 is our Savior's own commentary on the petition of verse 12—the only petition He provides additional insight to. Obviously the truths here are vitally important: "For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions."

The first part of the principle is positive: "If you forgive men for their transgressions." Believers should forgive as those who have received judicial forgiveness from God. When your heart is filled with such a forgiving spirit, "your Heavenly Father will also forgive you." Believers cannot know the parental forgiveness of God, which keeps fellowship with the Lord rich and blessings from Him profuse, apart from forgiving others in heart and word.

The verb translated "forgive" ("aphiemi") means literally "to hurl away." Paul had that in mind when he wrote, "I found mercy, in order that in me as the foremost [of sinners], Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience" (1 Tim. 1:16; cf. Matt. 7:11). An unforgiving spirit not only is inconsistent for one who has been totally forgiven by God, but also bears the chastening of God rather than His mercy.

Our Lord illustrates the unmerciful response in the parable of the man forgiven a massive debt (Matt. 18:21-35). "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a certain king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. And when he had begun to settle them, there was brought to him one who owed him ten thousand talents" (v. 23-24). One talent was equal to six thousand denarius, and laborers earned one denarius each working day. This slave would have had to work six days a week for one thousand weeks (slightly more than nineteen years) to earn just one talent.

You can well imagine that "he did not have the means to repay, [so] his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. The slave therefore falling down, prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will repay you everything' " (v. 25-26). His debt was massive and would have been impossible for him to repay. Yet "the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt" (v. 27). In the symbolism of the parable, the man is forgiven of his un-payable debt, which represents sin, and he finds mercy from the king, which represents salvation. Yet the man abuses this wondrous gift:
That slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarius; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, "Pay back what you owe." So his fellow slave fell down and began to entreat him, saying, "Have patience with me and I will repay you." He was unwilling however, but went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed (vv. 28–30).

This debt, while a significant sum (three months' wage), could have been repaid, but it was a trifling amount compared to what the other slave owed. The Lord describes what happened next:

When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. Then summoning him, his lord said to him, "You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?" And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. So shall My Heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart (vv. 31–35).

That is a picture of someone who eagerly receives God's forgiveness but is not willing to forgive others. I hope you're not holding any grudges, and that you have not forgotten the great mercy you received from God.

Matthew 6:15 captures the essence of this parable and its meaning for believers: "If you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions." The sin of an unforgiving heart and a bitter spirit (Heb. 12:15) forfeits blessing and invites chastening.

Every believer must seek to manifest the forgiving spirit of Joseph (Gen. 50:19–21) and of Stephen (Acts 7:60) as often as needed. To receive pardon from the perfectly holy God and then refuse to pardon others when we are sinful people is the epitome in abuse of mercy. And "judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment" (James 2:13).

What have we learned? We have an ongoing problem: sin. It interrupts our fellowship and usefulness to Him. God's provision for that sin is continual forgiveness. We receive it by confessing our sin. And the prerequisite is that we forgive others. An unforgiving Christian is a proud, selfish person who has forgotten that his sins have been washed away. Learn to confess, and before you confess, learn to forgive. Then we can confidently seek God in the solitude of our hearts and ask Him to forgive us each day.

While a man was polishing his new car, his 4 yr old son picked up stone and scratched lines on the side of the car.

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In anger, the man took the child's hand and hit it many times; not realizing he was using a wrench. *At the hospital, the child lost all his fingers due to multiple fractures.*

When the child saw his father, with painful eyes he asked, *'Dad when will my fingers grow back?'* The man was so hurt and speechless; he went back to his car and kicked it a lot of times. Devastated by his own actions sitting in front of that car he looked at the scratches; the child had written *'LOVE YOU DAD'*.

The next day that man committed suicide...

Anger and Love have no limits; choose the latter to have a beautiful, lovely life...... Things are to be used and people are to be loved, but the problem in today's world is that, People are used and things are loved. Let's be careful to keep this thought in mind: Things are to be used, but People are to be loved ...

Watch your thoughts; they become words. Watch your words; they become actions. Watch your actions; they become habits. Watch your habits they become character;

Watch your character; it becomes your destiny. ²

**SERMON 1**

**Part I**

**The Fundamentals of Forgiveness**

**Genesis 45:1-28**

**Introduction**

Near a town in the state of Washington, millions of gallons of radioactive atomic wastes are being stored in huge underground tanks. The tanks have a life expectancy of 20 or 30 years. The wastes within them will remain deadly for about 600 years.²

We live in a society which, like those tanks in Washington, is trying to store up anger that sooner or later is going to break forth, causing pain and misery for many. You may be familiar with the bumper sticker in Dallas which reads, “I’m Mad Too, Eddie.” There is one that says, “I’m Mad At Eddie.” Basically, there are far too many hostile people going around looking for some way to unload their anger. Anger takes a tremendous toll on those about us:

Eighty percent of all murders are committed by people who have some relationship with the victim. Somebody gets angry, there’s a gun or knife handy, and tragedy results. According to hospital records, innumerable parents have inflicted serious injuries upon their small children in fits of temper. One authority estimates that 60,000 children a year in America are beaten to death, that more children under five years of age are killed by their parents than die of disease.²


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Besides hurting others, anger is killing us. Suppressed anger and bitterness are eating away at our health and peace of mind:

Research indicates that unprocessed anger can produce all sorts of physical disorders. Dr. Leo Madow in his book, *Anger*, suggests that these physical problems range all the way from arthritis to asthma, from urinary disorders to the common cold. And we have known for a long time that anger can cause serious emotional disorders when it is not handled effectively.\(^4\)

All of this should compel us to conclude that anger is one of the great problems of our time.

Dr. Leon Saul, psychiatrist and author, writes, "I believe man's hostility to man is the central problem in human affairs ... that it is a disease to be cured and prevented like cancer, TB, or smallpox, and that its cure will result in healthier, better living—not only for society in general but for each individual in particular."\(^3\)

While it is not the solution to every instance of anger,\(^4\) forgiveness is the answer to much, if not most, of the anger we experience in life. Unresolved anger leads to bitterness, hostility, and revenge. Forgiveness leads to freedom and reconciliation. No character in the drama of the book of Genesis better illustrates the fundamentals of forgiveness than Joseph, and no chapter more clearly defines and describes the essentials of forgiveness than chapter 45 of Genesis.

Those years which Joseph spent in slavery and prison could have been the occasion for a slow burn that might have ignited into an explosion of anger at the sight of his brothers. How angry Joseph could have been with God for getting him into such a situation. But Joseph recognized that God was with him in his sufferings and that these were from the loving hand of a sovereign God. Most of all, Joseph could have been angry with his brothers, who had callously sold him into slavery.

The high point of Joseph's relationship with his brothers comes in chapter 45, for it is here that there is a reconciliation brought about between them. This was made possible on the brothers' part by their genuine repentance, regretting their sin with regard to Joseph, and reversing their actions when a similar situation was presented with regard to Benjamin. But on Joseph's part, reconciliation was achieved through his sincere and total forgiveness of his brothers for the evil they had committed against him.

Forgiveness is a vital part of the Christian experience. It is necessary in terms of our relationship with God:

For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions (Matthew 6:14-15).

Forgiveness is also an essential part of our responsibility toward others, both friends and enemies:
Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you (Ephesians 4:31-32).

You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you; in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous (Matthew 5:43-45).

Let us, then, seek to learn the lessons on forgiveness which this chapter offers us.

A Speech to the Speechless
(45:1-15)

Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried, “Have everyone go out from me.” So there was no man with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard of it (Genesis 45:1-2).

It may appear at first glance that Joseph simply was overcome by his emotions so that he was compelled to disclose his identity. I have already suggested that this was not the case. Even when his emotions did involuntarily emerge, Joseph simply left the presence of his brothers, wept, and returned (cf. 43:30-31). Joseph revealed himself to his brothers because they had evidenced real repentance, which made reconciliation possible.

Now that it was time to reveal himself, Joseph wished this to be done alone. I find several possible reasons for Joseph expelling the Egyptians from his presence before he made himself known to his brothers. First, this was a family matter. It was to be an intimate time, and outsiders would not add anything to that moment. Perhaps also Joseph felt that the full release of his emotions, held in check for years, would cost him the esteem of his servants. Mainly, however, I believe that it was for another reason that Joseph commanded everyone to leave except his brothers: it was in order to deal with the matter of the sin of his brothers in strictest privacy. If Joseph intended for no one but his brothers to observe the outpouring of his emotions, it didn’t work, for “the Egyptians heard it” (verse 2), and this report even reached Pharaoh’s ears (verses 2, 16).

Previously, I have tended to read verses 3-15 from Joseph’s perspective without much attention to how his brothers must have responded, but Moses carefully describes the emotional trauma they underwent:

Then Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?” But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence. Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Please come closer to me.” And they come closer. And he said, “I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. And God sent me before you to preserve for
you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt. Hurry and go up to my father, and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, "God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. And you shall live in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children’s children and your flocks and your herds and all that you have. There I will also provide for you, for there are still five years of famine to come, lest you and your household and all that you have be impoverished."

And behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see, that it is my mouth which is speaking to you. Now you must tell my father of all my splendor in Egypt, and all that you have seen; and you must hurry and bring my father down here.” Then he fell on his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept; and Benjamin wept on his neck. And he kissed all his brothers and wept on them, and afterward his brothers talked with him (Genesis 45:3-15).

Put yourselves in the sandals of these brothers for a moment. They had been treated graciously by Joseph, given the hospitality of his home and his table and bountiful provisions for their families back in Canaan (cf. 43:32-44:1). Then they were stopped and searched, each of them being found with their money in their sack and Benjamin with Joseph’s cup in his possession (44:6-13). Their guilt was acknowledged and all were willing to remain as Joseph’s slaves, but Joseph refused to detain any except Benjamin, the “guilty” party (44:14-17). Judah then made an impassioned appeal for mercy on his aged father, offering himself in place of Benjamin (44:18-34).

It is at this point that chapter 45 begins. Judah and his brothers anxiously await a verdict from Joseph, one that will affect the course of their lives. Without knowing who Joseph is or what he intended to do, the brothers saw this potentate send everyone out of the room. They could perhaps see the tears flowing down his cheeks and his chest heaving with emotion. But what was the source of this great emotion? Was it anger, which would lead to further trouble? How could it be otherwise?

If they thought the worst had come, it had not, at least in their minds, for now this Egyptian blurted out in their own tongue, “I am Joseph!” That was the worst news they could ever have hoped to hear. It brought them no relief, but only new avenues of anxiety. It was bad enough to stand before a powerful Egyptian governor who was angered at the theft of a cup, but to realize that he was their brother whom they had sold into slavery—that was too much! Before, they at least had a hope that this judge would be impartial and that mercy might motivate him to accept their appeal. But now their judge must surely be their enemy, whom they had unjustly condemned. How could they hope for better treatment from him? No wonder they were petrified (cf. verses 3ff.).

Fear and guilt were written on their ashen faces, and their silence confirmed this to Joseph. They had nothing more to say, no more appeals left, no hope for mercy. Every word recorded in the first 15 verses of chapter 45 is spoken by Joseph because his
brothers were speechless (verse 3). Not until Joseph had demonstrated that he had
given them and loved them did they speak (verse 15).

Joseph’s first words declared his identity, followed quickly by an indication of concern
about his father (verse 3). He, like Judah and the others, cared greatly for his elderly
father. The thought of Jacob’s grief was unbearable to Joseph as well as to the rest. But he
also cared for his brothers. They must have shrunk back from him in horror, but Joseph
asked them to draw near (verse 4).

Nowhere in this chapter is the sin of his brothers minimized. At the very outset Joseph
identified the treatment they had given him as sinful. Forgiveness, you see, does not seek
to minimize sin, but to neutralize it. We must remember, though, that they have already
come to the point of recognizing their actions as sin (cf. 42:21) and of repenting of it
(chapter 44). Since they have come to recognize the magnitude of their sin, Joseph need
not belabor that point. The stress, instead, falls upon the totality of the forgiveness he has
given them or, as the song writer has described it, "grace greater than all my sins."

Joseph’s words are filled with hope and encouragement. Verses 5-8 assure these men that
their sin had not thwarted the purposes of God. “You sold me,” Joseph said, "but God sent
me” (verse 5). Their purpose was to destroy, but God’s was to save. Men may sin by
attempting to do what is unacceptable to God, while at the same time they are
accomplishing what God has purposed.

... this Man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you
nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death (Acts 2:23).
The doctrine of the sovereignty of God assures us that while men may do the wrong thing
for the wrong reasons, God can cause that “evil” to accomplish His good and perfect
purposes.

We know that the righteous God hates all sin with a perfect and irreconcilable hatred; but
it is his prerogative to bring good out of evil, and no sin can be committed without his
knowledge, or in opposition to his holy counsels. Sinners are as really the ministers of his
providence as saints, and he glorifies himself by the wickedness which he hates and
punishes, as well as by that holiness which he loves and rewards.86

In the words of sacred Scripture, “For the wrath of man shall praise Thee; …” (Psalm
76:10).

Salvation, not destruction, was the purpose of God in what had happened. How, then,
could Joseph even consider doing to his brothers what they feared? The famine, now two
years long, had five years remaining before it had run its appointed course. Jacob and his
sons must come to Egypt where Joseph could provide for them, thus sparing the nation.
While God did not sanction their means or their motives, Joseph was destined to go to
Egypt where he would be the instrument by which Israel would be spared as a remnant
and which would later be kept alive by a "great deliverance" (literally, an "escaped company," verse 7, margin, NASV).

This prophecy goes beyond the previous revelation given to Abram concerning Israel's sojourn in Egypt:

And God said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve; and afterward they will come out with many possessions" (Genesis 15:13-14).

Abram was not told that the "land that is not theirs" would be Egypt, nor was he told how Israel would come to live there. Neither is it mentioned that their "exodus" would be some kind of escape. The point of all this is that even if Joseph was aware of God's words to Abram, he could not have known all that he spoke here to his brothers. There may well be, then, an element of prophecy here. God may have revealed to Joseph at some time (such as when he was in prison?) His purposes in allowing him to suffer rejection and persecution.

In the final analysis, it was not his brothers who were responsible for sending Joseph to Egypt, but God, for the purpose of bringing about their salvation. And in the process Joseph was elevated to his position of power and prominence, advisor to Pharaoh and ruler over all of Egypt. We have a saying, "All's well that ends well," which finds a measure of truth in these words of Joseph. Joseph's explanation of all that had happened and God's reason for it is followed by an exhortation to return quickly to the land of Canaan, get their father, their families, and their flocks and return to Egypt (verses 9-13).

Approximately a year had passed since Joseph's brothers had first arrived in Egypt, but this delay was not due to any apathy or aloofness on Joseph's part—he simply had to wait patiently until his brothers had evidenced a change of heart and mind (repentance). Now Joseph urges his brothers to quickly bring their father down to Egypt (verse 9) where they would live near him in the land of Goshen. Here, it would seem, his family would be able to pasture their flocks, be relatively close to him, and yet remain somewhat distant from the urban populace of Egypt, who disliked Hebrews (cf. 46:34).

In these verses there is a noticeable emphasis upon the glory and splendor which Joseph has attained in Egypt. For some this appears to be out of character for Joseph, who has previously been marked by modesty and humility. Why would he now flaunt his position before his brothers? There are several explanations, one or more of which may satisfy our concerns.

First, the glory which Joseph now possesses would serve to encourage his brothers, who are guilt-ridden for the wicked deed they committed against him by selling him as a slave. Joseph would thus be reminding them that his humiliation and suffering were the...
means to his promotion and exaltation. Look what their sin had brought about in Joseph’s life!

Second, it would comfort Jacob and assure him of Joseph’s ability to provide for the entire family during the famine.

Finally, it was a glory which Joseph desired to share unselfishly with his brothers. His motive would thus be Christ-like:

These things Jesus spoke; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify Thy Son, that the Son may glorify Thee, even as Thou gavest Him authority over all mankind, that to all whom Thou hast given Him, He may give eternal life. And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent. I glorified Thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which Thou hast given Me to do. And now, glorify Thou Me together with Thyself, Father, with the glory which I ever had with Thee before the world was, ... And the glory which Thou hast given Me I have given to them; that they may be one, just as We are one; ...” (John 17:1-5, 22).

With this, Joseph fell upon the neck of his closest brother, Benjamin, and wept. Benjamin likewise wept on his neck. Finally, Joseph wept on the rest of his brothers, who, in the end, were relieved sufficiently to begin conversing with him. It would be a long time before these men could fully grasp the grace of forgiveness which was granted by Joseph.

Pharaoh Is Pleased
(45:16-20)

It is incredible that Joseph’s desire was to save his family rather than to seek revenge. He virtually insisted that his brothers leave quickly and bring down their entire family as soon as possible. But the icing on the cake was the confirmation of Joseph’s hospitality by none other than Pharaoh himself.

Now when the news was heard in Pharaoh’s house that Joseph’s brothers had come, it pleased Pharaoh and his servants. Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Say to your brothers, ‘Do this: load your beasts and go to the land of Canaan, and take your father and your households and come to me, and I will give you the best of the land of Egypt and you shall eat the fat of the land.’ Now you are ordered, ‘Do this: take wagons from the land of Egypt for your little ones and for your wives, and bring your father and come. And do not concern yourselves with your goods, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours’” (Genesis 45:16-20).

Pharaoh had received the report (if indeed he had not heard Joseph weeping loudly himself, cf. verse 2) that there was a reunion between Joseph and his brothers. We almost expect Pharaoh to be pleased, but such a response would have to be unusual. We know that Hebrews were not well thought of by Egyptians (43:32; 46:34). If Pharaoh knew the
specifics of how Joseph had come to Egypt, he would certainly not have any warm feelings toward his brothers.

I can think of only two reasons why Pharaoh should be so pleased to hear of the arrival of Joseph's brothers. The first reason is obvious: Pharaoh had the greatest respect for Joseph. Joseph had virtually saved his kingdom and would greatly enhance his position in Egypt (cf. 47:13-26). Anything that pleased Joseph would make Pharaoh happy.

There is yet another explanation for the joy of Pharaoh which I believe to be very instructive. It also helps us to better understand why Joseph sent out his Egyptian servants when he revealed his identity to his brothers. It would seem that Joseph never informed Pharaoh of the injustice done to him by his brothers. Joseph did insist to the butler and the baker of the Pharaoh that he was innocent, yet he did not reveal the guilt of his brothers:

Only keep me in mind when it goes well with you, and please do me a kindness by mentioning me to Pharaoh, and get me out of this house. For I was in fact kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing that they should have put me into the dungeon (Genesis 40:14-15).

While Joseph maintained his own innocence, he never exposed the guilt of his brothers or of Potiphar's wife. As a result, Pharaoh did not have to overcome any feelings of anger toward Joseph's brothers and thus could warmly welcome them as long-lost relatives who had finally found their way to their brother. Silence about the sins of others makes their restoration a much easier process.

Joseph was a very capable administrator, as we have already seen (chapter 41). While it is not stated, Joseph surely had spoken with Pharaoh about his brothers before he asked them to come to Egypt and promised them the land of Goshen (verse 10). It was no coincidence, then, when Pharaoh confirmed Joseph's offer, extending the offer of Egypt's finest and commanding them to take wagons on which to bring Jacob and the women and children (verses 17-20). His generosity extended even beyond that which Joseph had indicated. The goodwill of both Joseph and Pharaoh were confirmed. The sooner they returned to Canaan for their families and flocks, the better.

**Joseph's Journey Instructions**

(45:21-24)

Before their departure to Canaan, Joseph gave his brothers provisions for their journey, as commanded by Pharaoh, as well as some last minute instructions.

Then the sons of Israel did so; and Joseph gave them wagons according to the command of Pharaoh, and gave them provisions for the journey. To each of them he gave changes of garments, but to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver and five changes of garments. And to his father he sent as follows: ten donkeys loaded with the best things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain and bread and sustenance for his father on the journey. So he sent his brothers away, and as they departed, he said to them, "Do not quarrel on the journey" (Genesis 45:21-24).
Provisions for the journey would probably have been as before (42:25), including grain, bread to eat, something to drink, and fodder for their animals. Also, each of the brothers was given a change of clothing. This should come as no surprise, for when the silver cup was discovered in Benjamin’s sack, all of the brothers tore their garments as a sign of mourning (44:13).

Benjamin was given five changes of garments and 300 pieces of silver. We have seen partiality before. Isaac preferred Esau above Jacob. Jacob favored Rachel above Leah. In every instance, partiality had disastrous effects. Why, then, did Joseph also show partiality to Benjamin? Of course, Benjamin was the only other son of his mother. And Benjamin did not have a part in the sale of Joseph either. But was this partiality toward him wise?

I believe that Joseph’s actions were deliberate and with good intention. Partiality was one of the factors in Joseph’s rejection by his brethren (cf. 37:3-4). Joseph had shown partiality toward Benjamin just as his father had persistently done, but now his brothers had chosen not to sacrifice him for their own gain. Joseph, I believe, did not avoid showing partiality toward Benjamin because that is the way life is. Some people are better looking than others. Some are good athletes, while others are not. Some are smarter than others. Life is full of distinctions. Joseph did not stop making distinctions because they would always exist, and his brothers would have to learn to live with them. Our Lord seemed to place Peter, James, and John in a privileged position, and John was called “the one whom Jesus loved.” Repentance and conversion do not make our problems go away, but they do give us the strength to deal with our problems.

Joseph sent his father ten donkeys loaded with the best that Egypt had to offer, the “first fruits” of what lie ahead (cf. verse 18). I would imagine that this gift far outclassed the “best of the land” which Jacob had sent by his sons (cf. 43:11). As they parted Joseph gave his brothers one last word of instruction, “Do not quarrel on the journey” (verse 24).

Joseph knew his brothers well. I imagine that quarreling was a part of the bad report that he had given his father many years before (37:2). Being sons of four mothers, such rivalry would not be uncommon. Probably the only thing they ever agreed upon completely was doing away with Joseph. They, like the many rival groups in Jesus’ day, could unite when it came to rejecting one who threatened them all.

Joseph had good reason for supposing that his brothers might quarrel on the journey home. Not long before this he had overheard a conversation which they did not think he could understand:

Then they said to one another, “Truly we are guilty concerning our brother, because we saw the distress of his soul when he pleaded with us, yet we would not listen; therefore this distress has come upon us.” And Reuben answered them, saying, “Did I not tell you,
‘Do not sin against the boy’; and you would not listen? Now comes the reckoning for his blood” (Genesis 42:21-22).

Although they were forgiven, they would face a great temptation to try to assess the precise measure of guilt of each person. The buck would be passed, and a heated argument would no doubt ensue. All of this was profitless since all had been forgiven. Their trip would be a happier one if they focused upon grace and not guilt.

**Jacob Rejuvenated**
*(45:25-28)*

I can visualize what the return of Jacob’s sons must have been like. Jacob, like the father of the prodigal son, must have anxiously waited for any sign of his returning sons. Since Benjamin was among them, his interest was intense. Every passer-by was carefully scrutinized to see if he were one of his sons. Jacob’s fears probably intensified as the days passed. Every conceivable mishap would be considered. Finally the silhouette of the sons appeared on the horizon. Meticulously, each head was counted, and to his great relief, all were present, especially Benjamin. But what of all those extra persons and the carts which accompanied his sons? What did this mean?

Then they went up from Egypt, and come to the land of Canaan to their father Jacob. And they told him, saying, “Joseph is still alive, and indeed he is ruler over all the land of Egypt.” But he was stunned, for he did not believe them. When they told him all the words of Joseph that he had spoken to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. Then Israel said, “It is enough; my son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die” (Genesis 45:25-28).

The words “Joseph is alive” were impossible to believe. How could this be true? Hadn’t his sons assured him that Joseph had died? Wasn’t the evidence compelling? Now Jacob may have been old, but he was far from senile. Things just did not add up. There had to be some explaining by his sons. Painful though it was, I believe that the whole sordid story was spelled out. I am persuaded that confession was made because it was necessary in order to convince Jacob that Joseph was alive. It also seems to underlie the prophecy Jacob made concerning Joseph:

Joseph is a fruitful bough, A fruitful bough by a spring; Its branches run over a wall. The archers bitterly attacked him, And shot at him and harassed him; But his bow remained firm, And his arms were agile, From the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob (From there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel)” (Genesis 49:22-24)

Isn’t it interesting that Joseph is never said to command his brothers to confess to their father, nor is their confession reported by Moses. But why should it be made public? This was a family matter that was dealt with in private. Just as Joseph had asked the Egyptians to leave his presence when he dealt with matters between himself and his brothers, so we
are not present for their confession to Jacob. Moses wrote these things for our instruction (I Corinthians 10:11), not to satisfy our curiosity.

All of the evidence led to the conclusion that Joseph was indeed alive. The broken spirit of Jacob was immediately revived. He now yearned to see his son before his death. And lest we think that Jacob was on the verge of death, let us recall that he had yet seventeen years to spend with his son in Egypt (47:28). All that Jacob had feared was going against him suddenly appeared in its true light. It was the hand of God in his life, sparing him from the physical and spiritual death of Canaan by preparing a place for him in Egypt.

Conclusion

If the key word for chapter 44 is repentance, then the key to chapter 45 is forgiveness. These two elements are essential for any genuine and lasting reconciliation: repentance and forgiveness. Let us give careful attention to this matter of forgiveness as it is illustrated in the life of Joseph.

Part II A Definition of Forgiveness

If we are to be a forgiving community, we must first of all know what forgiveness is. While several Greek and Hebrew words are employed to convey forgiveness, essentially forgiveness means to release or set free. It is used of the cancellation of a debt, of release from a legal obligation, and of the termination of marriage by divorce (which frees the divorced party to re-marry, cf. Deuteronomy 24:1-4). In general, we can say that forgiveness is a conscious decision on the part of the offended party to release the offender from the penalty and guilt of the offense committed. This release not only frees the offender from guilt and punishment, but it also frees the forgiver of anger and bitterness.

Forgiveness is not leniency or overlooking sin. Only once in the New Testament do we find reference to sin being “passed over”:

... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed, ...

(Romans 3:23-25).

Here, God “passed over” man’s sins not because He took them lightly, but because He took them so seriously that He shed the blood of His only Son. He “passed over” the sins of the past, knowing that the price would be paid when Christ appeared and was rejected of men and put to death on the cross of Calvary. When we pass over sins, it is because we do not wish to deal with them—ever, now or later.

Forgiveness is not free. Sin must always have a price that is paid. But forgiveness is the decision on the part of the offended to suffer the penalty due the offender. If a banker pardons a loan, it means that the borrower does not have to repay his debt, but it also means that the lender suffers the loss of the money loaned and not repaid. If society
pardons a criminal, it means that society suffers the consequences of the criminal’s act, not the criminal. If I go to your house and break a vase and you forgive me for my error, you suffer the loss of the vase, not I.

This definition of forgiveness perfectly describes the pardon which God offers to men through the cross of Jesus Christ. All men have sinned against God and deserve the penalty of eternal destruction (Romans 3:23; 6:23). But God loved us and sent His Son to die for our sins so that we might have eternal life (John 3:16). God did not overlook our sins, but He bore the penalty for them. That is genuine forgiveness. And all who place their trust in Jesus Christ as the One who died for their sins will experience this forgiveness. It is this forgiveness which all men must either accept (resulting in salvation) or reject (resulting in damnation):

He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God (John 3:18).

Finally, our definition of forgiveness must include the fact that true forgiveness is not earned. If a man commits a crime and he serves out his prison sentence, he is not forgiven; he has simply paid his debt to society. If a man cannot pay back a loan within the time allotted but is forced to pay it out over some more extended period of time, his debt has not been forgiven. If our forgiveness is the kind that demands that the person “pay for it” before we will forgive, then we are not giving forgiveness. That may be justice, but it is not mercy. It may be law, but not grace. Just as we can in no way contribute to the forgiveness and salvation which Christ has accomplished on the cross of Calvary, so no one we forgive can be forgiven and yet forced to pay for their offense against us.

Principles of Forgiveness

Having defined biblical forgiveness, let us seek to lay down some principles of forgiveness which we learn from the example of Joseph in Genesis 45.

(1) Biblical forgiveness should be granted quickly. Joseph could hardly have granted forgiveness to his brothers here in chapter 45. The forgiveness that was expressed for the first time here by Joseph was first experienced here by his brothers, but long before this, Joseph had forgiven these men in his heart. How else could he have walked so closely to his Lord and so cheerfully and faithfully served, regardless of his circumstances? Joseph had experienced the freedom of forgiveness long before his brothers.

In the New Testament, anger is always to be dealt with quickly:

Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity (Ephesians 4:26-27).

The sooner forgiveness is granted and reconciliation is achieved, the better it is for all involved:

Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way; in order that your opponent may not deliver you to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison (Matthew 5:25).
(2) Biblical forgiveness should be granted privately. I see a great deal of wisdom in Joseph requiring his servants to leave the room while he dealt with the sins of his brothers. It made matters much easier for Pharaoh and the Egyptians to be ignorant of all the injustices these brothers had committed against Joseph. This, too, is according to biblical instruction:

Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all transgressions (Proverbs 10:12).

A fool’s vexation is known at once, but a prudent man conceals dishonor (Proverbs 12:16).

He who covers a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates intimate friends (Proverbs 17:9).

And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother (Matthew 18:15).

We should always seek restoration and reconciliation on the lowest, most private level so that the fewer there are who are aware of the sin, the easier the offender can be forgiven and forgotten.

(3) Biblical forgiveness must be given freely and unconditionally. Forgiveness is free in that the forgiver willingly accepts the loss or pain personally. In brief, forgiveness is a matter of grace, not works, and grace does not make demands upon the one who receives it. Joseph must have forgiven his brothers long before they had come to repentance. He did not wait to see the anguish of their souls until he forgave them, but he did so freely and without requirement. This suggests also that forgiveness may be refused. As He was dying upon the cross, our Lord said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

That forgiveness accomplished by His death on the cross is rejected by many. Those who perish do not do so because there is no forgiveness, but because they have rejected God’s forgiveness.

(4) Forgiveness that is biblical must be granted sacrificially. The price of Joseph’s forgiveness was more than twenty years of separation from his father, slavery, and even a sentence in prison. Forgiveness does not come without sacrifice. Because of this, forgiveness is better shown than said. Joseph never actually used the word “forgive,” but his words and actions conveyed it. Just as it is too easy to say, “I’m sorry,” so it is possible to glibly say, “I forgive you.” Genuine forgiveness has a price tag, and few are those who are willing to pay it.

(5) Biblical forgiveness is not provisional, but permanent. Just as conditions cannot be demanded before forgiveness is granted, neither can they be laid down for forgiveness to remain in force. Seventeen years after Joseph assured his brothers they were forgiven, they feared that this grace had terminated at the death of their father (50:15-21). While we will hardly “forget” the transgressions of others against us, we can certainly refuse to call them to remembrance or to dredge them up in the future.
For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more (Jeremiah 31:34).

(6) Biblical forgiveness seeks the correction and restoration of the offender. I fear that what has been said might lead to the conclusion that once forgiveness is granted, all need for correction is gone. Not so! I believe that Joseph forgave his brothers years before he saw them, but remember that it was a year or so until he disclosed his identity to them. This was because he needed to be assured that they had changed their attitude toward their sin (repented).

When our children sin we may very well need to spank them as well as to forgive them. We may forgive the thief for stealing our money, which we may never see again, but the law still exacts a punishment for theft. A forgiving spirit dissolves our anger and animosity toward the offender, and it commits our vengeance to God, since He alone knows the extent of the sin (cf. Romans 12:11-21; 1 Peter 2:21-25).

Forgiveness, as I understand it, deals first of all with our personal animosity and violated rights in such a way that we can deal with sin impartially and lovingly, or we can commit the matter entirely to God where we cannot or should not take matters into our own hands. Forgiveness, like one facet of love, seeks the best interest of another, even at our own expense. But since we do seek the good of the other party, correction may be required (cf. Matthew 18:15ff; Galatians 6:1).

Perhaps the best analogy comes from the dealing of God in the life of the disobedient saint. Since all the sins of the Christian, past, present, and future, are forgiven at Calvary, God will not punish the saint who is forgiven once for all. But there is still the need for discipline and correction. The forgiveness of our sins assures us that God is rightly related to us, but discipline causes us to draw more closely to him.

"My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, Nor faint when you are reproved by Him; For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, And He scourges every son whom He receives." It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness (Hebrews 12:5-11).

The Basis of Forgiveness

All of us should realize that forgiveness is a mark of godly character and conduct. Our problem is not knowing we should do it, but the doing of it. How can we forgive those who have hurt us so deeply? Let me make several suggestions.

(1) Seriously consider the Scriptures which command us to forgive (cf. Ephesians 4:25-32; Colossians 3:12-17, etc.). Recognize that forgiveness is not an option, but a command.
(2) Consider your own sinfulness and the forgiveness which God has freely given you.

And Jesus answered and said to him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” And he replied, “Say it, Teacher.” “A certain money-lender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarius, and the other fifty. When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. Which of them therefore will love him more?” Simon answered and said, “I suppose the one whom he forgave more. And He said to him, “You have judged correctly.” And turning toward the woman, He said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has wet My feet with her tears, and wiped them with her hair. You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume. For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much, but he who is forgiven little, loves little.” And He said to her, “Your sins have been forgiven” (Luke 7:40-48).

The more we are aware of our own sinfulness and the forgiveness we have received, the easier it is to forgive others.

(3) Meditate upon the sovereignty of God in the offense committed against you. Can you say, like Joseph, “And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good …” (Genesis 50:20)? The doctrine of the sovereignty of God means that whatever evil is committed against us has been designed by God to come into our lives for a purpose that is good (Romans 8:28). Job’s suffering at Satan’s hand (and by God’s permission—Job 1, 2) resulted in praise to God, instruction for Satan, and a lesson for Job. In the final analysis, Job was blessed far more than he had been before his trials began (cf. Job 42:10-17). When a messenger of Satan buffeted Paul, it was to produce humility and to teach him that God’s strength comes in our weakness (II Corinthians 12:7-9). Behind our enemy is a loving God, who brings affliction and suffering into our lives for our good and His glory.

(4) Give careful consideration to the matter of servant hood. Usually we find that when others mistreat us we battle with our offended pride, and we struggle because our rights have been violated. Forgiveness originates from a servant-like attitude.

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2:3-8).
The supreme example of humility is our Lord Himself. He set aside His rights and prerogatives in order to be rejected of men and hanged (innocently) upon a cruel cross. Servant hood for our Lord spelled out suffering and shame for the good of others. Forgiveness is not so difficult for the humble as it is for the haughty. If our sinless Savior was willing to die on the cross for sinners, is it such a great thing for Him to ask us to sacrifice our own interests for those of others?

Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a man bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls (I Peter 2:18-25).

(5) Meditate on the characteristics of biblical love. It is not an emotional feeling, but a decision of the will. Its earmarks are described by Paul for us to contemplate:

Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things (I Corinthians 13:4-7).

Have you found the forgiveness of your sins in the work of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary? Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God, came to earth and took upon Himself the reproaches of men and the rejection of God. He became sin for us (II Corinthians 5:21) and suffered its painful consequences. You may find forgiveness from your sins by trusting that Jesus Christ died in your place and bore your sins on the cross.

My Christian friend, are you harboring anger and bitterness because of the sins others have committed against you? I pray that you will find the freedom of forgiveness that Joseph experienced which enabled him to be reconciled to his brothers and to minister to them for his own good, the good of his brothers, and the glory of God.

Now is the time for God’s people to take up the duties that lie next them. Be faithful in the little things; for on the right performance of these hang great results. Do not leave the work which needs to be done, because it appears to your judgment to be small and inconsiderable. Make up every waste place, repair the breaches as fast as they occur. Let no differences or dissensions exist in the church. Let all go to work to help someone who needs help. There is a cause for the great weakness in our churches, and that cause is hard to remove. It is self. Men have none too much will, but they must have it wholly sanctified to God. They need to fall on the Rock and be broken. Self must be crucified in every one who shall enter the gates of the city of God. The fierce spirit which rises up in
the hearts of some in the church when anything does not please them, is the spirit of Satan, and not the spirit of Christ. Is it not fully time that we return to our first love, and be at peace among ourselves? We must show ourselves to be not only Bible readers, but Bible believers. If we are united to Christ, we shall be united to one another. "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye love one another." "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written. The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me. For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded one toward another according to Christ Jesus." {SpTA01b 11.1}³

SERMON 2

How To be Kind Tender Hearted and Forgiving.

Ephesians 4:32
Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

While a man was polishing his new car, his 4 yr old son picked up stone and scratched lines on the side of the car.

In anger, the man took the child's hand and hit it many times; not realizing he was using a wrench. At the hospital, the child lost all his fingers due to multiple fractures.

When the child saw his father, with painful eyes he asked, 'Dad when will my fingers grow back?' The man was so hurt and speechless; he went back to his car and kicked it a lot of times. Devastated by his own actions sitting in front of that car he looked at the scratches; the child had written 'LOVE YOU DAD'. The next day that man committed suicide...

Anger and Love have no limits; choose the latter to have a beautiful, lovely life......
Things are to be used and people are to be loved, but the problem in today's world is that, People are used and things are loved...

Let's be careful to keep this thought in mind:

³An Appeal to Our Ministers and Conference Committees. 2002 (11).
Things are to be used, but People are to be loved ...

Watch your thoughts; they become words.

Watch your words; they become actions.

Watch your actions; they become habits.

Watch your habits they become character;

Watch your character; it becomes your destiny.  

32. Kind. Gr. chrēstoi, "gentle," "gracious." Simple kindness or gentleness (chrēstotēs) is one of the profoundest recommendations of the Christian, and is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). It is the opposite of the malice of Eph. 4:31. By a spiritual alchemy, conversion changes malice into kindness.

Tenderhearted. Gr. eusplagchnos, "compassionate," "tenderhearted." The word is translated "pitiful" in Peter 3:8. Compare the expression "bowels of mercies" (Col. 3:12), which implies a tender regard for the weaknesses and needs of others. A callous indifference to suffering is wholly incompatible with the Christian spirit (cf. Luke 6:36; Phil. 2:4; 1 Peter 3:8).

Forgiving. Kindness and tenderheartedness profit little unless they are given expression in the forgiving spirit. Kindness may be merely a kind of courtesy or politeness if it is not willing to take the step of forgiveness. The forgiving spirit is more than an ideal or even a virtue; it is a certain attitude of heart and soul.

The Lord Himself is the only model we should attempt to follow (Matt. 6:12; Luke 6:36). Forgiveness for men was purchased at infinite cost, whereas it costs men nothing, except the sacrifice of some personal pride, to forgive others. Our forgiveness is to be measured against the divine forgiveness (cf. Matt. 18:32, 33), a fact that becomes the more startling the more it is pondered.

For Christ's sake. Literally, "in Christ," the key phrase in the epistle (see on ch. 1:1). There is no basis for the translation, "for Christ's sake." Such a reading gives support to the unfortunate concept that the Father had to be persuaded by Christ to give up His harsh intentions toward the sinner before forgiveness could be exercised (see 2 Cor. 5:19; see on Rom. 5:10).

After completing the Lord's Prayer, Jesus added: "If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

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He who is unforgiving cuts off the very channel through which alone he can receive mercy from God. We should not think that unless those who have injured us confess the wrong we are justified in withholding from them our forgiveness. It is their part, no doubt, to humble their hearts by repentance and confession; but we are to have a spirit of compassion toward those who have trespassed against us, whether or not they confess their faults.

However sorely they may have wounded us, we are not to cherish our grievances and sympathize with ourselves over our injuries; but as we hope to be pardoned for our offenses against God we are to pardon all who have done evil to us. {MB 113.3}

But forgiveness has a broader meaning than many suppose. When God gives the promise that He "will abundantly pardon," He adds, as if the meaning of that promise exceeded all that we could comprehend: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." Isaiah 55:7-9.

God's forgiveness is not merely a judicial act by which He sets us free from condemnation. It is not only forgiveness for sin, but reclaiming from sin. It is the outflow of redeeming love that transforms the heart. David had the true conception of forgiveness when he prayed, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me." Psalm 51:10. And again he says, "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us." Psalm 103:12. {MB 114.1}

God in Christ gave Himself for our sins. He suffered the cruel death of the cross, bore for us the burden of guilt, "the just for the unjust," that He might reveal to us His love and draw us to Himself. And He says, "Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, even as God also in Christ forgave you." Ephesians 4:32, R.V. Let Christ, the divine Life, dwell in you and through you reveal the heaven-born love that will inspire hope in the hopeless and bring heaven's peace to the sin-stricken heart.

As we come to God, this is the condition which meets us at the threshold, that, receiving mercy from Him, we yield ourselves to reveal His grace to others. {MB 114.2}

The one thing essential for us in order that we may receive and impart the forgiving love of God is to know and believe the love that He has to us. 1 John 4:16. Satan is working by every deception he can command, in order that we may not discern that love. He will lead us to think that our mistakes and transgressions have been so grievous that the Lord will not have respect unto our prayers and will not bless and save us. In ourselves we can see nothing but weakness, nothing to recommend us to God, and Satan tells us that it is of no use; we cannot remedy our defects of character. When we try to come to God, the enemy will whisper, It is of no use for you to pray; did not you do that evil thing? Have you not sinned against God and violated your own conscience? But we may tell the enemy that "the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." 1 John 1:7. When we feel that we have sinned and cannot pray, it is then the time to pray. Ashamed we may be and deeply humbled, but we must pray and believe. "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." 1 Timothy 1:15. Forgiveness, reconciliation with God, comes to us, not as a reward for our works, it is not bestowed because of
the merit of sinful men, but it is a gift unto us, having in the spotless righteousness of
Christ its foundation for bestowal. {MB 115.1}

We should not try to lessen our guilt by excusing sin. We must accept God's estimate
of sin, and that is heavy indeed. Calvary alone can reveal the terrible enormity of sin. If
we had to bear our own guilt, it would crush us. But the sinless One has taken our place;
though undeserving, He has borne our iniquity. "If we confess our sins," God "is faithful
and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9.
Glorious truth!--just to His own law, and yet the Justifier of all that believe in Jesus.
"Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression
of the remnant of His heritage? He retaineth not His anger forever, because He delighteth
in mercy." Micah 7:18. {MB 116.1}

"Bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." Matthew 6:13, R.V. .
Temptation is enticement to sin, and this does not proceed from God, but from Satan and
from the evil of our own hearts. "God cannot be tempted with evil, and He Himself
tempteth no man." James 1:13, R.V. {MB 116.2}

Satan seeks to bring us into temptation, that the evil of our characters may be revealed
before men and angels, that he may claim us as his own. In the symbolic prophecy of
Zechariah, Satan is seen standing [BEGIN P.117] at the right hand of the Angel of the
Lord, accusing Joshua, the high priest, who is clothed in filthy garments, and resisting the
work that the Angel desires to do for him. This represents the attitude of Satan toward
every soul whom Christ is seeking to draw unto Himself. The enemy leads us into sin,
and then he accuses us before the heavenly universe as unworthy of the love of God. But
"the Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen
Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" And unto Joshua He
said, "Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with
change of raiment." Zechariah 3:1-4. {MB 116.3}

God in His great love is seeking to develop in us the precious graces of His Spirit. He
permits us to encounter obstacles, persecution, and hardships, not as a curse, but as the
greatest blessing of our lives. Every temptation resisted, every trial bravely borne, gives
us a new experience and advances us in the work of character building. The soul that
through divine power resists temptation reveals to the world and to the heavenly universe
the efficiency of the grace of Christ. {MB 117.1}

But while we are not to be dismayed by trial, bitter though it be, we should pray that
God will not permit us to be brought where we shall be drawn away by the desires of our
own evil hearts. In offering the prayer that Christ has given, we surrender ourselves to the
guidance of God, asking Him to lead us in safe paths. We cannot offer this prayer in
sincerity, and yet decide to walk in any way of our own [BEGIN P.118] choosing. We
shall wait for His hand to lead us; we shall listen to His voice, saying, "This is the way,
walk ye in it." Isaiah 30:21. {MB 117.2}

It is not safe for us to linger to contemplate the advantages to be reaped through
yielding to Satan's suggestions. Sin means dishonor and disaster to every soul that
indulges in it; but it is blinding and deceiving in its nature, and it will entice us with
flattering presentations. If we venture on Satan's ground we have no assurance of
protection from his power. So far as in us lies, we should close every avenue by which
the tempter may find access to us. {MB 118.1}
The prayer, "Bring us not into temptation," is itself a promise. If we commit ourselves to God we have the assurance, He "will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." 1 Corinthians 10:13. {MB 118.2}

The only safeguard against evil is the indwelling of Christ in the heart through faith in His righteousness. It is because selfishness exists in our hearts that temptation has power over us. But when we behold the great love of God, selfishness appears to us in its hideous and repulsive character, and we desire to have it expelled from the soul. As the Holy Spirit glorifies Christ, our hearts are softened and subdued, the temptation loses its power, and the grace of Christ transforms the character. {MB 118.3}

Christ will never abandon the soul for whom He has died. The soul may leave Him and be overwhelmed with temptation, but Christ can never turn from one for whom He has paid the ransom of His own life. Could our spiritual vision be quickened, we should see souls bowed under oppression and burdened with grief, pressed as a cart beneath sheaves and ready to die in discouragement. We should see angels flying swiftly to aid these tempted ones, who are standing as on the brink of a precipice. The angels from heaven force back the hosts of evil that encompass these souls, and guide them to plant their feet on the sure foundation. The battles waging between the two armies are as real as those fought by the armies of this world, and on the issue of the spiritual conflict eternal destinies depend. {MB 118.4}

To us, as to Peter, the word is spoken, "Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." Luke 22:31, 32. Thank God, we are not left alone. He who "so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16), will not desert us in the battle with the adversary of God and man. "Behold," He says, "I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you." Luke 10:19. {MB 119.1}

Live in contact with the living Christ, and He will hold you firmly by a hand that will never let go. Know and believe the love that God has to us, and you are secure; that love is a fortress impregnable to all the delusions and assaults of Satan. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe." Proverbs 18:10. {BEGIN P.120} {MB 119.2}

Be Kind and Tenderhearted

*Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.* Eph. 4:32 {ML 235.1}

Let the tenderness and mercy that Jesus has revealed in His own precious life be an example to us of the manner in which we should treat our fellow beings.... Many have fainted and become discouraged in the great struggle of life, whom one word of kindly cheer and courage would have strengthened to overcome.... We cannot tell how far reaching may be our tender words of kindness, our Christ-like efforts to lighten some

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burden. The erring can be restored in no other way than in the spirit of meekness, gentleness, and tender love. {ML 235.2}

In all your transactions with your fellow men never forget that you are dealing with God’s property. Be kind; be pitiful; be courteous. Respect God’s purchased possession. Treat one another with tenderness and courtesy. {ML 235.3}

If you have enmity, suspicion, envy, and jealousy in your hearts, you have a work to do to make these things right. Confess your sins; come into harmony with your brethren. Speak well of them. Throw out no unfavorable hints, no suggestions that will awaken distrust in the minds of others. Guard their reputation as sacrely as you would have them guard yours; love them as you would be loved of Jesus. {ML 235.4}

The grace of God leads men to place themselves in all their business transactions in the place of those with whom they are dealing. It leads men to look not only on their own things but also on the things of others. It leads them to reveal tenderness, sympathy, and kindness. Cherishing a right spirit, living a holy life--this is what being Christ like means. . . . {ML 235.5}

Let your life be controlled by the wide, generous principles of the Bible, the principles of good will, kindness, and courtesy. [BEGIN P.236] {ML 235.6}

Have an Understanding Heart

I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart. 1 Kings 3:12 {ML 236.1}

Solomon in his youth made David’s choice his own. Above every earthly good he asked of God a wise and understanding heart. . . . The power of his understanding, the extent of his knowledge, the glory of his reign, became the wonder of the world. {ML 236.2}

The name of Jehovah was greatly honored during the first part of Solomon’s reign. The wisdom and righteousness revealed by the king bore witness to all nations of the excellency of the attributes of the God whom he served. For a time Israel was as the light of the world, showing forth the greatness of Jehovah. Not in the surpassing wisdom, the fabulous riches, the far-reaching power and fame that were his, lay the real glory of Solomon’s early reign; but in the honor that he brought to the name of the God of Israel through a wise use of the gifts of Heaven. {ML 236.3}

As the years went by and Solomon’s fame increased, he sought to honor God by adding to his mental and spiritual strength and by continuing to impart to others the blessings he received. None understood better than he that it was through the favor of Jehovah that he had come into possession of power and wisdom and understanding, and that these gifts were bestowed that he might give to the world a knowledge of the King of kings. {ML 236.4}

As the man is converted by the truth, the work of transformation of character goes on. He has an increased measure of understanding, in becoming a man of obedience to God. The mind and will of God become His will, and by constantly looking to God for counsel, he becomes a man of increased understanding. There is a general development of the mind that is unreservedly placed under the guidance of the Spirit of God. [BEGIN P.237] {ML 236.5}

Be Full of Compassion
Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness: he is gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous. Ps. 112:4 {ML 237.1}

Wherever there is an impulse of love and sympathy, wherever the heart reaches out to bless and uplift others, there is revealed the working of God’s Holy Spirit. In the depths of heathenism men who have had no knowledge of the written law of God, who have never even heard the name of Christ, have been kind to His servants, protecting them at the risk of their own lives. Their acts show the working of a divine power. The Holy Spirit has implanted the grace of Christ in the heart of the savage, quickening his sympathies contrary to his nature, contrary to his education. . . . {ML 237.2}

Christ is seeking to uplift all who will be lifted to companionship with Himself, that we may be one with Him as He is one with the Father. He permits us to come in contact with suffering and calamity in order to call us out of our selfishness; He seeks to develop in us the attributes of His character—compassion, tenderness, and love. By accepting this work of ministry we place ourselves in His school, to be fitted for the courts of God. . . . {ML 237.3}

By cooperating with heavenly beings in their work on earth, we are preparing for their companionship in heaven. "Ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation," angels in heaven will welcome those who on earth have lived "not to be ministered unto, but to minister." In this blessed companionship we shall learn, to our eternal joy, all that is wrapped up in the question, "Who is my neighbor?" {ML 237.4}

Every act of love, every word of kindness, every prayer in behalf of the suffering and oppressed, is reported before the eternal throne and placed on heaven’s imperishable record: [BEGIN P.238] {ML 237.5}

SERMON 3

Perfect Forgiveness

Scripture Reading Job 1:1,24,56

There are two words that we struggle with as Seventh-day Adventist Christians and they are Perfection and Forgiveness. When we offend each other or break one of God’s commands we excuse ourselves by saying nobody is perfect and I am not perfect either. When the offense is against us we develop an attitude real quick and want to dish out punishment for the infraction rather than displaying a spirit of restraint and forgiveness. Most recently we have come to know Congressman Joe Wilson Republican from South Carolina. Not for his legislative skills but for his inability to restrain himself. In the middle of a speech to a joint session of the House and Senate Members of the United States Congress President Obama said something that Congressman Wilson disagreed with and without regard to decorum blurted out “You Lie” for all who were in the chamber to hear including the millions of people around the country and world watching and listening through the news media. The President turned to look, momentarily breaking his stride, but without reaction continued with his speech. I am sure he was quite used to speaking in public and being interrupted. He said as much on the David Letterman Show a few days later that when
you take on this job you sign up for people yelling at you. It comes with the territory. To be interrupted in this manner and in this setting, by a mature and respected member of Congress was unexpected. We as humans do unexpected things. Urged by the leadership of the Republican Party Congressman Wilson telephoned the White House to offer an apology. An apology that he refused to repeat on the floor of the House of Representatives. He was admonished by His colleagues in a censure motion the following week. He had committed a public breach of decorum but only willing to give a private apology. We all prefer private confessions to our public indiscretions.

A wealthy English merchant who lived on the European continent was satisfied with nothing but the best. This attitude extended even as far as the cars he owned. His pride and joy was a Rolls-Royce coupe that he had owned for years and that had given great service all that time. One day, while driving down a bumpy road, his car hit a deep pothole, resulting in a broken rear axle.

The owner had the car shipped back to the Rolls plant in England and was surprised by the quick repair that was performed. He received no bill for the work and, knowing his warranty had run out, he had expected one. He waited for months and still no bill came. So he finally communicated with the company about the bill for his car repairs. Again the response from the factory was immediate. The reply said, "We have thoroughly searched our files and find no record of a Rolls-Royce axle ever breaking."

This is a case where the integrity and excellence of that company would not permit a flaw in workmanship or materials to be made known. The excellence of Christ does not permit our flaws to be made known to the Father. He accomplishes our forgiveness. This is what perfect Forgiveness, Results in

We all have seen and used those little electronic calculators. What happens if you get your information confused or make an error? You press the "clear" button and automatically all of the information is eliminated from the calculator. Then you begin again, without trying to sort out the previous mistake. In fact, there is no record of your mistake! It is lost forever! That's what happens to our sins when God forgives us. The consequences may remain, but the guilt—the legal condemnation for the offense—is gone.

Karl Menninger, the famous psychiatrist, says that if he could convince the patients in his psychiatric hospitals that their sins are forgiven, 75 percent of them could walk out the next day. So often we do not take God at His word! You can only sin as a man, but God can forgive as a God. You sin as a finite creature, but the Lord forgives as the infinite Creator.— an example of perfect forgiveness.

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There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright one that feared God, and eschewed evil. And there were born unto him seven sons and three daughters. And his sons went and feasted in their houses, everyone his day; and sent and called for their three sisters to eat and to drink with them.

His substance also was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she asses, and a very great household; so that this man was the greatest of all the men of the east. And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually.

In Rock Creek Cemetery in Washington, D.C., is the famous statue of grief by Augustus Saint-Gaudens. It is intended to be an embodiment of all human grief. Regarding it a French critic said, “I know of no work so profound in sentiment, so exalted in its art, and executed by methods so simple and broad.” The Bible has its “embodiment of grief” in the person of Job. Paraphrasing the art critic, there is nothing more profound in sentiment or more exalted in its art than this book.

Job was considered by God to be Perfect. Heb. tam. This word does not necessarily imply absolute sinlessness. It signifies, rather, completeness, integrity, sincerity, but in a relative sense. The man who is “perfect” in the sight of God is the man who has reached the degree of development that Heaven expects of him at any given time. The Hebrew term tam is equivalent to the Greek teleios, which is often translated “perfect” in the NT but which is better translated “full grown” or “mature” (see 1 Cor. 14:20, where teleioi is translated “men” in contrast with “children”). It is difficult to find one word that is adequate as a translation of tam. Some translators, have used the word “blameless.” This does not seem sufficient to imply the positive connotation of wholeness and entirety present in tam.

Job was also considered by God to be Upright. Heb. yashar, “straight,” “level,” “just,” “right.”

Job also Feared God. A common Biblical expression denoting loyalty and devotion to God. Here a contrast is intended between Job, who was true to God, and those who were worshipers of other deities.

Job also Eschewed Evil. Literally, “turned aside.” The idea is that of avoiding evil, turning away from it as from the presence of danger. The four ideas included in this verse are not mere repetitions to impress upon the reader that Job was a good man. Rather, they complement one another in forming a total picture of an outstanding character. Job appeared as one who never needs to seek forgiveness because he was already mature perfect and yet he felt the need to offer sacrifice and sought God’s forgiveness continually for his sins and those of his children.
We are admonished by the Psalmist to “Serve the Lord with gladness; come before his presence with singing” Ps. 100:2

God wants our life to be a beautiful song. He has written the music for us in His Word and in the duties that come to us in our places and relations in life. The things we ought to do are the notes set upon the staff. To make our life beautiful music we must be obedient and submissive. Any disobedience is the singing of a false note, and yields discord. In our personal lives, at home, on the job, in our church and in our nation. We have been singing some very discordant notes and we need to know that in a very clear way so we can make the necessary changes before it is too late. One of the most important changes we need to make is having a submissive heart. We often hold to our own opinion of how we think things ought to be disregarding the opinions of others to our own hurt and destruction. Learning how to be submissive and developing a forgiving heart is a prerequisite to being a mature Christian. In other words a perfect Christian. The word perfect is defined as: 

Perfect, Perfection. [Heb. generally tam or tamîm,
“complete,” “right,” “peaceful,” “sound,” “wholesome,” “blameless”; Gr. generally teleios,
“complete,” “perfect,” “full grown,” “mature,” “fully developed,” “having attained its purpose.”]

In the OT tam signifies completeness, integrity, and sincerity, but always in a relative sense when used of man. A person with a “perfect heart” was a man whose life was completely devoted to the Lord (1 Ki 8:61; 1 Chr 12:38; Is 38:3; KJV).
Let your heart therefore be perfect with the LORD our God, to walk in his statutes, and to keep his commandments, as at this day. 11 May your hearts always be in tune with His. May you always love the Lord your God with all your hearts. May you always be as committed to obeying Him and keeping His commandments as you are today. Clear Word.”
8 All these men of war, that could keep rank, came with a perfect heart to Hebron, to make David king over all Israel: and all the rest also of Israel were of one heart to make David king. 12

1 In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came unto him, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Set thine house in order: for

thou shalt die, and not live. Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed unto the LORD, And said, Remember now, O LORD, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore. Then came the word of the LORD to Isaiah, saying, Go, and say to Hezekiah, Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years. And I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria: and I will defend this city.

Thus Job was designated as “perfect” (Job 1:1, 8, KJV) despite weakness revealed later by adversity (see chs 40:2–5; 42:2–6), “I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”

showing that his perfection was relative rather than absolute. Similarly, Noah was said to be “perfect” (Gen 6:9, KJV)

These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God. “Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God.” though later he succumbed to the weakness of the flesh (ch 9:21). He drank of the wine and became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent. Perfection was the ideal God set before Abraham (ch 17:1). And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect. When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless.

The RSV generally translates tam, “blameless.”

In extra-Biblical Greek literature teleioi, “perfect ones” or “mature ones,” is used of flawless sacrificial victims, of mature animals, of adult human beings, and of trained, fully qualified professional men. In the NT “perfection” consists essentially in maturity as

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distinguished from immaturity, as adults differ from children and youth. A mature person is one who has attained the normal limits of stature, strength, and mental power. This concept of maturity is clearly evident in such passages as 1 Cor 2:6; 14:20; Eph 4:13-14; Php 3:15; Heb 5:14. Paul speaks of *himself and his fellow Christians as already perfect* (1 Cor 2:6; KJV), but in almost the same breath makes it evident that there is a sense in which perfection is a goal yet to be attained (Php 3:12). Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.  

**Blameless.** That is, in the eyes of his coreligionists, as a result of rigid observance of the law. Paul neglected no duty that he believed the law enjoined. He led a strictly upright life, and no one had occasion to accuse him of being a violator of the law. It appears that before his conversion Paul was a young man of exemplary deportment, free from the vicious indulgences into which young men often fall. True, he mentions himself as "chief" of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15), and as being unworthy "to be called an apostle" (1 Cor. 15:9), but he never gives the least intimation that his early life was stained with gross sins. Then he met Christ, and learned the futility of his own efforts to earn salvation.

20 Phil.3:12 Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. 13 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this* one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, 14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

The Christian is to be "perfect" in his finite sphere as God is "perfect" in His infinite completeness (Mt 5:48). Thus a man may be "perfect" before the Lord, but there are ever new heights to which he may aspire. In this life he never attains to ultimate perfection. A person whose heart and life are wholly devoted to the worship and service of God, that is, to the goal of constant growth in grace and in the knowledge and practice of spiritual truth and, who has gained a measure of experience in cooperating with the Holy Spirit, has attained to Christian perfection (Col 4:12; always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God

Jas 3:2 2 For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. 24). He is no longer a "babe" in

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Christ, occupied with the rudimentary facts and practices of religion (see Heb 5:12 to 6:2). For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.

A perfect man in God’s sight is thus one who has reached the degree of development expected of him at any given time. He is a mature Christian fully dedicated to the Lord, and who, though he still has weaknesses to overcome, presses onward toward the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Php 3:12-15). Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.

Armed with a proper understanding of how a perfectly mature Christian ought to behave toward his or her fellow human we can better deal with offences when they arise in our relationships. There will be occasions when we are hurt by someone’s act, attitude or word. We will have occasions when we must seek to give or receive forgiveness. Understanding this most important subject is vital to our spiritual growth and wellbeing. Let me then lay the foundation for our understanding of forgiveness by defining it.

**Forgive, Forgiveness.** The translation of various Hebrew and Greek words have in common the idea of releasing an offender from guilt and of restoring the personal relationship that existed prior to the offense.

Forgiveness lays the foundation for a restored relationship after an offense has been committed.

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The 2 most common Hebrew words so translated mean (nāṣa), “to take away [guilt],” literally, “to lift up,” and (salach), “to pardon,” “to forgive.” The more common Greek terms charizomai, “to remit,” “to forgive,” “to pardon,” literally, “to give graciously [as a favor],” and aphiēmi, “to cancel,” “to remit,” “to pardon,” literally, “to let go,” “to send away.” Forgiveness always implies an offense committed against the person extending forgiveness, and should be preceded by the offender’s repentance.

All men have sinned against God (Rom 3:23) and stand before Him condemned to death (ch 6:23) unless they repent of their sins (Lk 13:3, 5; Acts 3:19) and thereby obtain forgiveness (1 Jn 1:9), so being restored to a right relationship with Him (Rom 5:1). God is not obliged to forgive the guilty sinner, but His gracious character impels Him to do so whenever forgiveness is desired and requested (Ex 34:6, 7; Lam 3:22). The request, however, must be made in all sincerity and with the intent not to take advantage of the grace so freely bestowed. When God forgives He does so completely and without reserve, restoring the sinner to the same state of favor he formerly enjoyed and removing all estrangement and alienation. In Scripture various expressions are used in the endeavor to convey to human minds the completeness with which God forgives. He casts men’s sins, as it were, into the depths of the sea (Mic 7:19); He removes them as far from them and Him as “the east is from the west” (Ps 103:12); He casts them behind His back (Is 38:17); He promises to blot them out and forget them (Is 43:25; Jer 31:34). God’s forgiveness is perfect, even as God Himself is perfect without flaw.

Only a flawless God can flawlessly forgive flawed humans for their flawed ways of following His flawless law.

In so far as our finite limitations permit, the Christian will emulate the perfect and complete manner of God’s forgiveness whenever someone offends him. The spirit of forgiveness accompanies the external act of forgiveness. Furthermore, the fact that the Christian has been the recipient of a full measure of divine forgiveness places him under the most strict obligation to forgive his fellow men when occasion arises to do so—to the same extent that he has been forgiven. In fact, the Christian who declines to forgive others thereby forfeits the forgiveness of God for himself. (Mt 6:12–15) A unforgiving spirit is a most heinous sin before God. The utter abhorrence with which God looks upon an unforgiving spirit Jesus illustrated by the parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Mt. 18:23–35). He who refuses to forgive cannot, by the very nature of things, be forgiven so long as he harbors an unforgiving spirit. As Christ explained to Peter, there are no limits on the extent to which, or the number of times, the Christian is obliged to forgive one who comes to him for forgiveness (vs 21, 22). The Christian must ever entertain the spirit of forgiveness, even before he is given the opportunity to forgive. Not only so, but he will take the initiative in making every reasonable effort to win the wrongdoer and to make it easy for him to ask forgiveness (vs 15–17).
There are some things that we must put out of our lives completely if we are going to achieve Perfect Forgiveness. Stop setting ourselves up for failure.
1. Quit arguing with people about the same old foolishness! Respect their position and keep it moving!
2. Quit telling people your secrets when you know they are not going to keep them! And if you keep telling them, then quit getting mad when they tell your secrets!
3. Quit trying to pull people on your journey who don't want to travel with you. Either they believe in you and value you...or they don't!
4. Quit complaining about things you can't and won't change!
5. Quit gossiping about other people! Minding our own business should be a full time job!
6. Quit blaming each other for things that in the big picture aren't going to matter three weeks from now! Talk solutions...and then implement them!
7. Quit eating things you know are not good for you! If you can't quit...eat smaller portions!
8. Quit buying things when you know you can't afford them! If you don't have self control, then quit going to the stores! Quit charging things, especially when you don't NEED them!
9. Quit staying in unhealthy relationships! It is not okay for people to verbally or physically abuse you! So quit lying to yourself! It is not okay to stay in an abusive relationship for the children! Ask them and they will tell you that they really would prefer to see you happy and that the misery you and your spouse/partner are living with is affecting them!
10. Quit letting family members rope you into the drama! -Start telling them you don't want to hear it! Quit spreading the drama! Quit calling other relatives and telling them about your cousin or aunt! Go back to #5 minding your own business should be enough to keep you busy!
11. Quit trying to change people! IT DOESN'T WORK! Quit cussing people out when you know that they are just being the miserable and jealous people that they are!
12. Quit the job you hate! Start pursuing your passion. Find the job that fuels your passion before you quit!
13. Quit volunteering for things that you aren't getting any personal fulfillment from anymore! Quit volunteering for things and then failing to follow through with your commitment!
14. Quit listening to the naysayers! Quit watching the depressing news if you are going to live in the doom and gloom of it all!
15. Quit making excuses about why you are where you are or why you can't do what you want to do!
16. Quit waiting on others to give you the answers...and start finding the answers for yourself in the word of God! If what you are doing isn't working for you...then quit it!
17. Quit settling and start making your dreams a reality! - Quit being afraid and START LIVING THE LIFE GOD WANT'S FOR YOU!! If you want something different than what you have had in the past...you must quit doing what you have done before and DO...
something different! JUST QUIT IT ..... and START DOING something to create the experience God wants for you and that you want!

He who is unforgiving cuts off the very channel through which alone he can receive mercy from God. We should not think that unless those who have injured us confess the wrong we are justified in withholding from them our forgiveness. It is their part, no doubt, to humble their hearts by repentance and confession; but we are to have a spirit of compassion toward those who have trespassed against us, whether or not they confess their faults. However sorely they may have wounded us, we are not to cherish our grievances and sympathize with ourselves over our injuries; but as we hope to be pardoned for our offenses against God we are to pardon all who have done evil to us. {MB 113.3}

Perfect Forgiveness is only possible by a perfect creator.

Forgiveness has a broader meaning than many suppose. When God gives the promise that He "will abundantly pardon," He adds, as if the meaning of that promise exceeded all that we could comprehend: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." Isaiah 55:7-9.

God's forgiveness is not merely a judicial act by which He sets us free from condemnation. It is not only forgiveness for sin, but reclaiming from sin. It is the outflow of redeeming love that transforms the heart. David had the true conception of forgiveness when he prayed, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me." Psalm 51:10. And again he says, "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us." Psalm 103:12. {MB 114.1}

1. He giveth more grace as our burdens grow greater,
   He sendeth more strength as our labors increase;
   To added afflictions He addeth His mercy,
   To multiplied trials He multiplies peace.

2. When we have exhausted our store of endurance,
   When our strength has failed ere the day is half done,
   When we reach the end of our hoarded resources
   Our Father's full giving is only begun.

3. Fear not that thy need shall exceed His provision,
   Our God ever yearns His resources to share;
   Lean hard on the arm everlasting, availing;
   The Father both thee and thy load will upbear.

4. His love has no limits, His grace has no measure,
   His power no boundary known unto men;
   For out of His infinite riches in Jesus
   He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again.

Sermon 4
The Whole Family Is Finally Together Again

Scripture Reading Genesis 46:28-31

28. Jacob sent Judah ahead to tell Joseph that they were coming and that they were going directly to Goshen.

29. Then Joseph ordered his chariot to be made ready and rode north as quickly as he could to meet his father, Israel, in Goshen. When they met, Joseph threw his arms around his father’s neck, and they both cried for a very long time.

30. Finally, Israel said to Joseph, “Let me look at you, son.” And when he had filled his eyes with Joseph, he said, “Now I can die in peace because after fifteen long years, I have seen you again, and you are still alive.”

31. Then Joseph said to his brothers and to his father, “Let me go back to Pharaoh and tell him that my brothers and my father are here. They have arrived in Goshen and the whole family is finally together again.

Forgiveness is based on repentance, recognizing that one has offended God and turning from that sin. The very fact that blood sacrifices continued on a daily basis and by the high priest for the sins of all the people once a year, proves that those sacrifices were imperfect and insufficient. Moreover, since repentance was seldom a part of Israel’s sacrifice, and even though the sacrifices continued, God judged the nation’s sins by sending the people into captivity.

Near a town in the state of Washington, millions of gallons of radioactive atomic wastes are being stored in huge underground tanks. The tanks have a life expectancy of 20 or 30 years. The wastes within them will remain deadly for about 600 years. We live in a society which, like those tanks in Washington, is trying to store up anger that sooner or later is going to break forth, causing pain and misery for many. Basically, there are far too many hostile people going around looking for some way to unload their anger. Anger takes a tremendous toll on those about us:

Eighty percent of all murders are committed by people who have some relationship with the victim. Somebody gets angry, there’s a gun or knife handy, and tragedy results.

According to hospital records, innumerable parents have inflicted serious injuries upon their small children in fits of temper. One authority estimates that 60,000 children a year in America are beaten to death, that more children under five years of age are killed by their parents than die of disease. Besides hurting others, anger is killing us. Suppressed anger and bitterness are eating away at our health and peace of mind:

Research indicates that unprocessed anger can produce all sorts of physical disorders. Dr. Leo Madow in his book, *Anger*, suggests that these physical problems range all the way from arthritis to asthma, from urinary disorders to the common cold. And we have known for a long time that anger can cause serious emotional disorders when it is not handled effectively.
All of this should compel us to conclude that anger is one of the great problems of our time.

Dr. Leon Saul, psychiatrist and author, writes, "I believe man's hostility to man is the central problem in human affairs ... that it is a disease to be cured and prevented like cancer, TB, or smallpox, and that its cure will result in healthier, better living—not only for society in general but for each individual in particular." While it is not the solution to every instance of anger, forgiveness is the answer to much, if not most, of the anger we experience in life. Unresolved anger leads to bitterness, hostility, and revenge.

Forgiveness leads to freedom and reconciliation.

No character in the drama of the book of Genesis better illustrates the fundamentals of forgiveness than Joseph, and no chapter more clearly defines and describes the essentials of repentance as chapter 44. No chapter more clearly defines forgiveness as chapter 45.

Those years which Joseph spent in slavery and prison could have been the occasion for a slow burn that might have ignited into an explosion of anger at the sight of his brothers. How angry Joseph could have been with God for getting him into such a situation. But Joseph recognized that God was with him in his sufferings and that these were from the loving hand of a sovereign God. Most of all, Joseph could have been angry with his brothers, who had callously sold him into slavery because of their jealousy of Him.

The high point of Joseph's relationship with his brothers comes in chapter 45, for it is here that there is a reconciliation brought about between them based on the brothers' repentance. This was made possible on the brothers' part by their genuine repentance, regretting their sin with regard to Joseph, and reversing their actions when a similar situation was presented with regard to Benjamin. But on Joseph's part, reconciliation was achieved through his sincere and total forgiveness of his brothers for the evil they had committed against him. "The whole family was finally together again"

Forgiveness is a vital part of the Christian experience. It is necessary in terms of our relationship with God:

For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions (Matthew 6:14-15).

Forgiveness is also an essential part of our responsibility toward others, both friends and enemies:

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you (Ephesians 4:31-32).

You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy." But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you; in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the
evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous (Matthew 5:43-45).

Let's go back to the beginning to see the root cause of the problem that caused the family to be separated and for Joseph to make the statement that “The Family was Finally together again.”

Jacob had more than his share of wives. He favored one wife over the others and hence the two children she bore him. It was plain and simple favoritism by a father to a child that led to sibling jealousy which led to anger which led to Joseph’s sale as a slave to avoid killing him.

When you do right don’t expect to be liked. Let’s look at Genesis 37:1ff. Joseph was a young man seventeen years old. He watched over the herds with some of his brothers, sons of Bilhah an Zilpah. When He came home, he told his father some of the evil things his brothers had been doing. Israel listened to Joseph and believed him. He loved him more than any of his other sons because Joseph was tenderhearted and honest, and he was Rachel’s firstborn. Israel made Joseph a long robe with long sleeves and very colorful, the kind worn by persons of distinction. But none of his other sons had such a robe. When they noticed this preferential treatment, they hated Joseph and never spoke kindly to him, even though he was their brother. The dreams Joseph had when related to the brothers made them hate him even more. Verse 8 Then his brothers said, “Do you think we’re ever going to bow down to you and let you rule over us? Are you planning to make a little kingdom for yourself and have us be your servants?” After he told his dream, they hated him still more. Verse 11 Joseph’s brothers were jealous of him because of the relationship he had with his father. Verse 13 So Israel said to Joseph, “Come, I want you to go up to Shechem to find your brothers and bring me a report of what’s going on.”

Being an obedient child his response to his Father was “Certainly Father, I’ll be happy to go.” When he finally located where his brothers were and they saw him their response was Verse 18 “Hey, look who’s coming! The dreamer!” And they agreed to kill him as soon as he came into camp. They sneered, “That dreamer is coming to spy on us, then he’ll go and tell father how bad we’ve been. So let’s kill him and throw his body into a dried-up well and we’ll say that a wild animal killed him, then we’ll see what happens to his dreams.” Verse 23 As Joseph neared the camp, they waved at him, but when he got there, instead of hugging him, they grabbed him, ripped off his robe, dragged him over to a nearby dry well and dropped him into it. V 26 Judah said to his brothers, “If we let our brother starve to death in this well, we’re actually killing him, even if we say otherwise. Joseph was sold for twenty pieces of silver to Ishmaelite traders.
Verse 31 The Cover Up. After a discussion, they all agreed to take Joseph's robe, kill a goat, dip the robe in it and take it to their father as evidence that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal.

Chapter 39:2 Joseph determined to be faithful to the Lord no matter what, and the Lord was with him. Soon Potiphar learned that Joseph could be trusted, and allowed him to live with him in his house. The Lord blessed His Egyptian master so that he prospered both in his domestic affairs as well as in his increase in herds and flocks. He paid no attention to anything, except when he came home to eat. He trusts me completely. I have as much authority as he has, and he has not kept anything from me except you. And I promised my God that I would not disappoint my master. How then can I go to bed with you, even though I am your slave? I would be sinning against God.”

Verse 20 Joseph had not run away. That was evidence to Potiphar of Joseph's innocence. In prison, Joseph was just as faithful to God as he had been before. The warden didn't check on anything that Joseph did because he trusted him. He knew that Joseph's God was with him because he was so faithful to Him.

Because of Joseph's faithfulness the tide began to turn while He was in prison for attempted rape. He interpreted the dreams of the Baker and Butler who were fellow inmates. Two years later Pharaoh had a dream that needed interpretation. Joseph was called on to do the honors. The question from the Pharaoh to Joseph after he had interpreted the dream of seven years of plenty and seven year of famine was

"Where can we find a man like this through whom the Spirit of the God of heaven works?" “We should put him in charge of the project don't you think?” Gen. 41:38. That was exactly what He did making Joseph second in command in Egypt. He soon forgave and forgot all the past struggles with his brothers and his stint in prison. He was able to move on because he had a forgiving heart. He named his first born child Manasseh, for he said, "God has made me forget all my sufferings, including what happened to me in my father's house." Gen. 41:51. His second son was Ephraim for God had given me a lovely family in a land away from home.

Nowhere in this chapter is the sin of his brothers minimized. At the very outset Joseph identified the treatment they had given him as sinful. Forgiveness, does not seek to minimize sin, but to neutralize it. We must remember, though, that they have already come to the point of recognizing their actions as sin (cf. 42:21) and of repenting of it (chapter 44). Since they have come to recognize the magnitude of their sin, Joseph need not belabor that point. The stress, instead, falls upon the totality of the forgiveness he has given them or, as the song writer has described it, "grace greater than all my sins."

Marvelous grace of our loving Lord,
Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt!
Yonder on Calvary's mount outpoured,
There where the blood of the Lamb was spilled.

Refrain

Grace, grace, God's grace,
Grace that will pardon and cleanse within;
Grace, grace, God's grace,
Grace that is greater than all our sin.

Sin and despair, like the sea waves cold,
Threaten the soul with infinite loss;
Grace that is greater, yes, grace untold,
Points to the refuge, the mighty cross.

Refrain

Dark is the stain that we cannot hide.
What can avail to wash it away?
Look! There is flowing a crimson tide,
Brighter than snow you may be today.

Refrain

Marvelous, infinite, matchless grace,
Freely bestowed on all who believe!
You that are longing to see His face,
Will you this moment His grace receive?

Joseph's words are filled with hope and encouragement. Verses 5-8 assure these men that their sin had not thwarted the purposes of God. "You sold me," Joseph said, "but God sent me" (verse 5). Their purpose was to destroy, but God's was to save. Men may sin by attempting to do what is unacceptable to God, while at the same time they are accomplishing what God has purposed.

... this Man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death (Acts 2:23)
The doctrine of the sovereignty of God assures us that while men may do the wrong thing for the wrong reasons, God can cause that "evil" to accomplish His good and perfect purposes.

We know that the righteous God hates all sin with a perfect and irreconcilable hatred; but it is his prerogative to bring good out of evil, and no sin can be committed without his knowledge, or in opposition to his holy counsels. Sinners are as really the ministers of his providence as saints, and he glorifies himself by the wickedness which he hates and punishes, as well as by that holiness which he loves and rewards.
In the words of sacred Scripture, "For the wrath of man shall praise Thee; ..." Ps. 76:10.
"Even man's rage brought glory to you, and those who survived your displeasure are restrained from doing more evil."

Salvation, not destruction, was the purpose of God in what had happened. How, then, could Joseph even consider doing to his brothers what they feared? The famine, now two years long, had five years remaining before it had run its appointed course. Jacob and his sons must come to Egypt where Joseph could provide for them, thus sparing the nation. While God did not sanction their means or their motives, Joseph was destined to go to Egypt where he would be the instrument by which Israel would be spared as a remnant and which would later be kept alive by a "great deliverance" (literally, an "escaped company," verse 7,).

This prophecy goes beyond the previous revelation given to Abram concerning Israel's sojourn in Egypt:

And God said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve; and afterward they will come out with many possessions" Gen. 15:13ff.

Abram was not told that the "land that is not theirs" would be Egypt, nor was he told how Israel would come to live there. Neither is it mentioned that their "exodus" would be some kind of escape. The point of all this is that even if Joseph was aware of God's words to Abram, he could not have known all that he spoke here to his brothers. There may well be, then, an element of prophecy here. God may have revealed to Joseph at some time (such as when he was in prison?) His purposes in allowing him to suffer rejection and persecution.

In the final analysis, it was not his brothers who were responsible for sending Joseph to Egypt, but God, for the purpose of bringing about their salvation. And in the process Joseph was elevated to his position of power and prominence, advisor to Pharaoh and ruler over all of Egypt. We have a saying, "All's well that ends well," which finds a measure of truth in these words of Joseph. Joseph's explanation of all that had happened and God's reason for it is followed by an exhortation to return quickly to the land of Canaan, get their father, their families, and their flocks and return to Egypt (verses 9-13).

With this, Joseph fell upon the neck of his closest brother, Benjamin, and wept. Benjamin likewise wept on his neck. Finally, Joseph wept on the rest of his brothers, who, in the end, were relieved sufficiently to begin conversing with him. It would be a long time before these men could fully grasp the grace of forgiveness which was granted by Joseph.
It is incredible that Joseph’s desire was to save his family rather than to seek revenge. He virtually insisted that his brothers leave quickly and bring down their entire family as soon as possible. But the icing on the cake was the confirmation of Joseph’s hospitality by none other than Pharaoh himself.

I can think of only two reasons why Pharaoh should be so pleased to hear of the arrival of Joseph’s brothers. The first reason is obvious: Pharaoh had the greatest respect for Joseph. Joseph had virtually saved his kingdom and would greatly enhance his position in Egypt (cf. 47:13-26). Anything that pleased Joseph would make Pharaoh happy.

There is yet another explanation for the joy of Pharaoh which I believe to be very instructive. It also helps us to better understand why Joseph sent out his Egyptian servants when he revealed his identity to his brothers. It would seem that Joseph never informed Pharaoh of the injustice done to him by his brothers. Joseph did insist to the butler and the baker of the Pharaoh that he was innocent, yet he did not reveal the guilt of his brothers:

Only keep me in mind when it goes well with you, and please do me a kindness by mentioning me to Pharaoh, and get me out of this house. For I was in fact kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing that they should have put me into the dungeon (Gen 40:14ff).

While Joseph maintained his own innocence, he never exposed the guilt of his brothers or of Potiphar’s wife. As a result, Pharaoh did not have to overcome any feelings of anger toward Joseph’s brothers and thus could warmly welcome them as long-lost relatives who had finally found their way to their brother. Silence about the sins of others makes their restoration a much easier process. Don’t run around spreading gossip it is harder to clean up after Repentance and Forgiveness.

Before their departure to Canaan, Joseph gave his brothers provisions for their journey, as commanded by Pharaoh, as well as some last minute instructions.

Then the sons of Israel did so; and Joseph gave them wagons according to the command of Pharaoh, and gave them provisions for the journey. To each of them he gave changes of garments, but to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver and five changes of garments. And to his father he sent as follows: ten donkeys loaded with the best things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain and bread and sustenance for his father on the journey. So he sent his brothers away, and as they departed, he said to them, "Do not quarrel on the journey” Gen. 45:22ff. Provisions for the journey would probably have been as before (42:25), including grain, bread to eat, something to drink, and fodder for their animals. Also, each of the brothers was given a change of clothing This should come as no surprise, for when the silver cup was discovered in Benjamin’s sack, all of the brothers tore their garments as a sign of mourning (44:13).

Benjamin was given five changes of garments and 300 pieces of silver. We have seen partiality before. Isaac preferred Esau above Jacob. Jacob favored Rachel above Leah. In
every instance, partiality had disastrous effects. Why, then, did Joseph also show partiality to Benjamin? Of course, Benjamin was the only other son of his mother. And Benjamin did not have a part in the sale of Joseph either. But was this partiality toward him wise?

I believe that Joseph’s actions were deliberate and with good intention. Partiality was one of the factors in Joseph’s rejection by his brethren (cf. 37:3-4). Joseph had shown partiality toward Benjamin just as his father had persistently done, but now his brothers had chosen not to sacrifice him for their own gain. Joseph, I believe, did not avoid showing partiality toward Benjamin because that is the way life is. Some people are better looking than others. Some are good athletes, while others are not. Some are smarter than others. Life is full of distinctions. Joseph did not stop making distinctions because they would always exist, and his brothers would have to learn to live with them. Our Lord seemed to place Peter, James, and John in a privileged position, and John was called “the one whom Jesus loved.” Repentance and conversion do not make our problems go away, but they do give us the strength to deal with our problems.

Joseph sent his father ten donkeys loaded with the best that Egypt had to offer, the “first fruits” of what lie ahead (cf. verse 18). I would imagine that this gift far outclassed the “best of the land” which Jacob had sent by his sons (cf. 43:11). As they parted Joseph gave his brothers one last word of instruction, “Do not quarrel on the journey” (verse 24). Joseph knew his brothers well. I imagine that quarreling was a part of the bad report that he had given his father many years before (37:2). Being sons of four mothers, such rivalry would not be uncommon. Probably the only thing they ever agreed upon completely was doing away with Joseph. They, like the many rival groups in Jesus’ day, could unite when it came to rejecting one who threatened them all.

Joseph had good reason for supposing that his brothers might quarrel on the journey home. Not long before this he had overheard a conversation which they did not think he could understand:

Then they said to one another, “Truly we are guilty concerning our brother, because we saw the distress of his soul when he pleaded with us, yet we would not listen; therefore this distress has come upon us.” And Reuben answered them, saying, “Did I not tell you, ‘Do not sin against the boy’; and you would not listen? Now comes the reckoning for his blood” Genesis 42: 21, 22).

Although they were forgiven, they would face a great temptation to try to assess the precise measure of guilt of each person. The buck would be passed, and a heated argument would no doubt ensue. All of this was profitless since all had been forgiven. Their trip would be a happier one if they focused upon grace and not guilt.
Then they went up from Egypt, and come to the land of Canaan to their father Jacob. And they told him, saying, "Joseph is still alive, and indeed he is ruler over all the land of Egypt." But he was stunned, for he did not believe them. When they told him all the words of Joseph that he had spoken to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. Then Israel said, "It is enough; my son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die". Gen. 45:21

The words “Joseph is alive” were impossible to believe. How could this be true? Hadn’t his sons assured him that Joseph had died? Wasn’t the evidence compelling? Now Jacob may have been old, but he was far from senile. Things just did not add up. There had to be some explaining by his sons. Painful though it was, I believe that the whole sordid story was spelled out. I am persuaded that confession was made because it was necessary in order to convince Jacob that Joseph was alive. It also seems to underlie the prophecy Jacob made concerning Joseph:

Isn’t it interesting that Joseph is never said to command his brothers to confess to their father, nor is their confession reported by Moses. But why should it be made public? This was a family matter that was dealt with in private. Just as Joseph had asked the Egyptians to leave his presence when he dealt with matters between himself and his brothers, so we are not present for their confession to Jacob. Moses wrote these things for our instruction not to satisfy our curiosity.

All of the evidence led to the conclusion that Joseph was indeed alive. The broken spirit of Jacob was immediately revived. He now yearned to see his son before his death. And lest we think that Jacob was on the verge of death, let us recall that he had yet seventeen years to spend with his son in Egypt (47:28). All that Jacob had feared was going against him suddenly appeared in its true light. It was the hand of God in his life, sparing him from the physical and spiritual death of Canaan by preparing a place for him in Egypt.

If the key word for chapter 44 is repentance, then the key to chapter 45 is forgiveness. These two elements are essential for any genuine and lasting reconciliation: repentance and forgiveness. Let us give careful attention to this matter of forgiveness as it is illustrated in the life of Joseph.

Marvelous grace of our loving Lord, Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt! Yonder on Calvary’s mount outpoured, There where the blood of the Lamb was spilled.

*Grace, grace, God’s grace, Grace that will pardon and cleanse within;*

*Grace, grace, God’s grace, Grace that is greater than all our sin.*

Sin and despair, like the sea waves cold, Threaten the soul with infinite loss; Grace that is greater, yes, grace untold, Points to the refuge, the mighty cross.

Dark is the stain that we cannot hide. What can avail to wash it away? Look! There is flowing a crimson tide, Brighter than snow you may be today.
Marvelous, infinite, matchless grace, Freely bestowed on all who believe! You that are longing to see His face, Will you this moment His grace receive?

Seminar on Giving and Receiving Forgiveness
Understanding Forgiveness

Ground Rules
CONFIDENTIALITY NON-JUDGMENTAL ATTITUDE ANY QUESTION IS LEGITIMATE NO ONE PERSON MONOPOLIZING CONVERSATION SHOW RESPECT FOR ALL P

Introduction
FORGIVENESS INVOLVES THE WHOLE PERSON. There is Mind and Body Connection. The mind's perception is the body's reality. MIND & BODY WORK TOGETHER. Our perceptions become our body's reality:

When you dream you are being chased, your heart rate increases just as if you were really being chased. Death rates drop dramatically one day a year. Heart attacks are highest one day a week. Why it is that one person recovers more quickly than another when medical conditions are alike? "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine."Proverbs 17:22  Roller Coaster Experience The mind and body connection.

Wired to Respond
Sympathetic
Heart Rate linked to Blood Pressure
Digestion and Cholesterol
Adrenaline and Thyroid Hormones
Immune System and Thoughts

Wired to Respond
Sympathetic
How do you activate the Sympathetic?
Place yourself in a stressful situation
Think of a hurtful experience involving an individual toward whom you have a grudge.
Wired to Respond
Parasympathetic
(Opposite of Sympathetic)
Heart Rate and Blood Pressure
Digestion and Cholesterol
Adrenaline and Thyroid Hormones
Immune System and Thoughts

Objectives
During Our Time Together we will learn how to use our mind to assist our body in healing it is not all in your head - but neither is it all in your body
Personal Discoveries:
You can change your life script that is causing you hurt, resentment, and anger.
"Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good report, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things." Philippians 4:8

FORGIVENESS is a learned skill
All the religions of the world teach us that we should forgive: None teach how to forgive

FORGETTING: I only forget what is not important.
EXCUSING: You do not have permission to do it again.
DENYING: I am unwilling to face the pain of an injustice done
CONDONING: There is no excuse for your bad behavior.
PARDONING: There are consequences to your actions.
RECONCILING: It takes two people to make it work.

There are three kinds of forgiveness:

Interpersonal Forgiveness
It takes one person to forgive
It takes two people to be forgiven
Reconciliation is the restoration of trust in a relationship which trust has been violated.

Existential Forgiveness
Addresses blame toward God or Society
Seeks resolution when bad things happen to good people
This workshop focuses on Intrapersonal Forgiveness which seeks personal release from the ongoing turmoil of a painful event from the past

Forgiveness is: “The process of reframing one’s anger and resentments from the past with the goal of recovering one’s contentment in the present and revitalizing one’s purpose for the future.”
Forgiveness is: Reframing the past Bringing peace to the present Discovering purpose for the future.

Four Preconditions for Forgiveness

1) Don’t forgive what you have not expressed
2) Know how you feel
3) Articulate what you did not like
4) Make the choice to forgive

Forgiveness is a multi-staged process Along the journey there are: advances -- retreats -- diversions in which you measure progress by degrees: all -- much -- some -- nothing
Barriers to Forgiveness

- Fear transgression will be repeated
- Fear of appearing weak
- Fear there will be no justice or fairness

Loss of benefits derived from being a victim. Forgiveness is difficult because: we want to believe that life is fair - to let the other off the hook seems unfair.

When one does harm to another, a debt is created. Most “getting even” only happens in our private fantasies. One retaliatory act of revenge spurs a reciprocal response until reactions spin out of control.

Insight

Vengeance - hurts you more than the other person
Forgiveness - helps you more than the other person

Forgiveness must heal MY pain before it can heal OUR pain.

FORGIVENESS IS A CHOICE

- Choose to forgive for you may not feel like forgiving
- Don’t give up your choice and become a victim
- Stay in control and become a victor
- The only human freedom that cannot be taken away is the freedom of choice

FORGIVENESS IS TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR MY LIFE

Responsibility: is my ability to choose my response.

10 Practical Points of Forgiveness

1) Forgiveness must involve two people, you do not forgive objects.
2) Forgiveness means that a situation occurred that you wish had not.
3) You fully acknowledge that this situation exists and that it hurts.
4) You understand that you may have been powerless to stop the act when it occurred.
5) You recognize you have choices, you are not controlled by the other’s actions.

10 Practical Points of Forgiveness

6) You recognize that you alone are responsible for how you feel.
7) You intentionally move from discontent toward contentment.
8) You understand forgiveness will take time and that it cannot be rushed.
9) You place yourself in charge by focusing on your desired life for the future.
10) You seek forgiveness in order to be forgiving.

FORGIVENESS INVOLVES THE WHOLE PERSON

Cognitive reframing the debt while recalling one’s own debts
Affective letting the feeling inform and not overwhelm
Behavioral aligning your actions with your goal rather than reacting to the other

Spiritual let go and let God

"And forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors." Mathew 6:12

"For if you do not forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will not forgive you." Mathew 6:15

"Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to Peter, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven." Matthew 18:21-22

"The Lord is slow to anger...forgiving iniquity and transgression, but by no means clearing the guilty." Numbers 14:18
REFERENCE LIST


Good Friday Agreement or Belfast Agreement was reached in Belfast on Friday, April 10, 1998.


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