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Refresh

Forgiveness

**Winter 2003 ISSUE:
"Forgiveness"**

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COMMENT by *Andrew Dunn*

This issue of Refresh focuses on forgiveness. From the increasing number of websites now featuring forgiveness as well as the number of books on the subject (from many viewpoints and stances, religious, non religious, psychological) it is clear that there is a huge interest in how to keep the wheels of life oiled and the things we do to one another healed, settled, forgiven. Indeed, one website is researching experiences of forgiveness.

This oiling of the wheels of life and relationships can be a constant activity - isn't that what Jesus had in mind in his reply to Peter's question about how many times to forgive. "Not seven times, but seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:21). Doesn't this suggest that forgiveness is not only a central issue in life but something to develop, an art form to major in? Yet so often it's only brought out for the major issues that cause rubbing between us.

Perhaps that's because forgiveness and its travelling companions of repentance and saying sorry have been seen as weakness rather than strength.

Some years ago I was flying between two cities here in New Zealand on one of the local airlines. When the food tray appeared (remember those days?) mine had a cup missing. I rang the bell and a stewardess came, saw the problem and brought me a cup. Then the drinks were served. For some reason I was overlooked and again rang the bell. The same cabin crew member responded and I explained what had happened. She went off and sent another along with the coffee pot. In these exchanges there was not a word of regret or remorse! As we were preparing to land a senior cabin crew came along, leaned over to my window seat holding out a couple of airline pens. "We would like to give you these" she said. Again, no word of regret - just the gesture with the pens. As my hand reached out in acceptance I heard a voice inside me say, "They're buying you off!" and before I could respond to it the pens were in my hand and the stewardess had gone, again without a "Sorry" or "We blew it" or anything verbal. It left me with many feelings, not least a sense that to own to a mistake or an oversight in their corporate world was a sign of weakness not to be indulged. The pens? Yes, well I used them and was often reminded that although the gesture was their way of saying "Sorry" they did not replace the simple acknowledgement of what had happened. It left me feeling we had had a business transaction.

Which leads me to suggest that forgiveness is not about *transaction* but about lively, ongoing acknowledgments of the gifts of forgiveness - whether from God, from Jesus on the cross, in Holy Communion, in baptism, in reconciliation, in worship or in the ongoing relationships of faith and life. It's a gift that is given and received through God's own giftfulness, grace, and of living out of that in a grace-full way. Yes, Jesus has showed us how to forgive, indeed how costly it can be. Yes, the cross and resurrection are at the heart of forgiveness but always as a lively interaction and involvement, not as an impersonal and distant transaction.

So it is with the life of forgivingness and forgiveness!

"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. Therefore be imitators of God ..." (Ephesians 4:32f)

THE WORD ITSELF by *Kenneth Cragg*

"*Forgiveness* is not a proper English word ... you don't add *ness* to a verb to make a noun. Instead, you add it to an adjective to turn it into a noun - like goodness, badness, niceness, rudeness. ... The true word is either *forgiveness* or *forgivingness* ... Perhaps there's a message there ... because only when you have experienced forgiveness can you truly express forgivingness."

Kenneth Cragg. Christian-Islamic scholar - in David Augsburg. *The New Freedom of Forgiveness*. 3rd Edition. Moody 2000. 26.

IN THE LAND OF FORGIVENESS by Clarice Greenslade

The Land of Forgiveness can be entered by either gate - the one marked *Receiving* or the other marked *Giving*.

An odd feature one notices on entering is the people huddling outside but close to the gates, looking rather forlorn. Some walked purposefully in by the Giving gate, and then sidled doubtfully back by the Receiving one. Others confidently came through the Receiving way, but soon stormed out by the Giving one.

An elderly man talked to me about what was happening. "Those are people who don't understand that you can't pick and choose. You can't live in forgiveness for yourself, at the same time as you live outside it when it comes to others. Just as you can't genuinely go on offering mercy to whoever might hurt you, unless you're swimming in the sea of God's mercy yourself. It's all an interconnected system. It all belongs together. When the explorer who discovered the Land said 'If you forgive you'll be forgiven and if you don't you won't', he didn't mean a linear cause and effect relationship. He meant what I've just said. It's sort of wholistic. Otherwise people wouldn't be integrated within themselves."

Further inside the Land, away from the gates, there's a quite different atmosphere. It turns out not to be a place of softness, passivity, and warm fuzzies as one might suspect. Here the people stand tall, and are energetic and purposeful. They look each other in the eye in friendship. After a while there I began to realize what an interesting mixture of qualities was present in their relating - assertiveness, respect, trust and compassion.

It seems that the powerful dynamic of forgiveness is a way the Discoverer taught (and showed) that life could be lived to the full. It's part of a whole central cluster in his thought - creative, active resistance to wrong, without violence or other vengeful retaliation.

I got into conversation about life in the Land with a middle-aged woman and her teenage son.

"It's unexpected," she explained, "I thought forgiveness and all that, might make me a bit of a door-mat, in danger of becoming a perennial victim maybe. But no, not at all... While on the one hand vengeance and holding permanent grudges is out, so on the other hand is passive acquiescence. It's a very different way - creative, and not humiliating anyone. It's integrating and energising. It pulls down barriers to life and community and relationships".

"Yeah", said the boy. "It's not about getting your own back: it's about getting your life back." He grinned and shrugged. "It's cool."

FORGIVENESS - insights from Vincent Taylor by John North

Some theological writings have their day and do not really connect with later generations. But there are others whose insights remain fresh and inspiring. Vincent Taylor is one of these whose careful and thorough exegesis repays our attention. What follows are some of his insights from *Forgiveness and Reconciliation* (1941).

People often talk as if forgiveness and reconciliation are the same thing but Taylor points out some important differences. His definitions are; Forgiveness is the cancelling or removal of barriers to reconciliation. Reconciliation is the restoration of men (and women) from enmity and

estrangement to fellowship with God. The prodigal son and forgiving father story illustrates this distinction. Taylor writes; "Forgiveness is described in this parable ...in the words of Luke 15:20: *But while he was yet afar off, his father saw him, and was moved with compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.*

Here we have a warmer concept of forgiveness than anywhere else in the NT. ...the essential characteristics of forgiveness are here plainly present. The wrong done by the son is cancelled by the father; it no longer stands between them; the son is forgiven.

So now the party, expressing the reconciliation, can begin!

We can find echoes of this theme in many places. For example, the words of Jesus on the cross, *Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.*

Stephen prayed a similar prayer as he died.
Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.

Jesus and Stephen wanted there to be no barriers between God and those who needed to be reconciled with God.

Another insight which Taylor brings to our attention is the connection between the death of Jesus and God's forgiveness. Many Christians believe that Christ died so that we might be forgiven. When one looks more closely, there is surprisingly little explicit connection between the dying of Jesus and God's forgiveness. Instead, the stress is on Christ as the one sent by God with authority to forgive. In Mark ch.2, there is a story about a lame man being healed and also forgiven by Jesus. When people grumbled about this, Jesus claimed that "the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins."

Taylor writes, "Instead of being immediately associated with the death, forgiveness is associated with Christ himself as the risen Lord and Saviour of men."

On the Day of Pentecost, when the crowd asked what they should do, Peter answered, *Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.*

It is worth taking a concordance and checking this out for ourselves.

The Old Testament carries the same message. As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. It is God who clears the barriers away. We need not try, like Martin Luther, to win God's favour. That favour is already being given to us and the response required from us is repentance. It's like the prodigal who said, *Why am I sitting among the pigs? I'm going home!*

WHY SHOULD I FORGIVE YOU? by John McAlpine

I am offended, even repulsed, by the very idea that I should forgive you, the 'jerk', who has hurt me so deeply! My body aches with the pain you have caused me! My mind rejects the possibility that you should 'get away with' such behaviour! Why should you go free while I'm left with the consequences of your 'sin'? The very thought of forgiving sickens me!

There lies a truth! I am 'sick'! The problem with not forgiving you and continuing hating you is that it takes most of my strength. Hating you is robbing me of life; my passion is taken up with making sure that I detest you and I'm exhausted!

So, I'm rethinking my beliefs about forgiving; I'm discovering that forgiving is not:

- *trying to forget you ; pretending it didn't happen; saying 'it doesn't matter'; smothering our conflict*: these actions are just different ways of denying the truth; they drive my pain and anger underground for it to seep out later; I need to remember and learn from the experience; I do not have to forget after I forgive you; I may forget, but my forgiving can be sincere even if I still remember
- *excusing you*: if you are blameless then there is no call for my forgiving you; I do not excuse you by forgiving you; I can both hold you to account and forgive you
- *tolerating*: I do not have to tolerate what you do when I forgive you for the wrong you have done; I may forgive but still refuse to tolerate what you do
- *pardoning*: letting you off the merited consequences of your actions may be an outcome of my forgiving, but I can still genuinely forgive and require you to face the consequences of your actions
- *seeking reconciliation*: being reconciled, or making peace, with you may be an outcome of my forgiving, but I can also still genuinely forgive and not desire to seek a full reconciliation with you.

Also I've been pondering the wisdom of Jesus of Nazareth who likens God to a parent whose arms are permanently outstretched offering forgiving hospitality to all. I'm slowly beginning to understand that Jesus is challenging me to believe and act on the belief that:

- human forgiveness is required both as a preparation for receiving God's forgiveness and as a response to the fact of having been forgiven; to be forgiving of others is an obligation without limitation as to frequency, duration or degree
- to forgive is to release my anger and resentment, which is occasioned by your wrongdoing against me; this in turn involves giving up my claim to the right to judge you
- forgiveness needs to happen 'from my heart'
- my capacity to love others deeply and freely is in itself evidence not only of forgiveness given but also of forgiveness received
- forgiving is beyond the power of my human effort alone
- forgiving you is made possible by my receiving God's forgiveness, and therefore ultimately the work of God in me
- there is a profoundly reciprocal relationship between my forgiving you and God's forgiving of me.

Slowly I'm realising that forgiving:

- is more of a *journey* than a destination
- *takes time* - my festering wound needs to be opened, cleaned out and exposed to fresh air and light
- is *my risking a future* other than the one imposed by the past or by memory
- is *setting a person free* and discovering that person is me.
- is my *decision* not to hurt myself for the real, or imagined, wrongs done by you; it is my decision to cancel all that prevents the flow of love and life through me.

I am left pondering the story of the indigenous American grandfather talking to his grandson about how he felt about a tragedy. He said: *I feel as if I have two wolves fighting in my heart. One wolf is vengeful, angry and violent! The other wolf is loving and compassionate!* His grandson asks: *Which wolf will win the fight in your heart?* The old man responds: *The one I feed will win!*

THE MEANING OF THE CROSS by Gerald Pillay

Deep at the heart of Christian faith is the familiar symbol of the Cross, which some even wear as an ornament. It reminds Christians of the Easter message, of the Christ who was killed because his life and words threatened to undermine the established notions about God.

The society in which Jesus lived had no difficulty with belief in God or with religion, which was part and parcel of its world-view. The problem was that God could identify so wholly with the human condition as Christ proclaimed. The Greeks could even accept, as is reflected in Greek mythology, the idea that the gods could associate with human beings so long as they remained gods. The stumbling - block in Christ's witness is that the identification with the human existence is so total and even God is not exempt from the experience of suffering and death. This was scandalous. It flew in the face of all that people imagined a god should be.

Christ's rejection by the system and the crowd was both drastic and complete, illustrated for example in the nature of his death. Jews stoned their criminals and Romans often slew them with a sword. Crucifixion, a Roman punishment, was as agonising as it was an ignominious form of death, reserved for the worst in society. So the cross is a symbol of alienation, debasement and shame.

As the records show, the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, found no legal fault with Christ. He anticipated that the normal annual granting of amnesty to a prisoner would be a legal device to free him. But the crowd chose Barabbas, a freedom fighter jailed for treason, instead of Jesus. Pilate was thus caught by his own act of expediency into killing an innocent man. So he took cold comfort in washing his hands of the matter in public.

The rationalisation of this death by the religious leaders of the day was more subtle and revealing. It was, they argued, better that one person should die than the whole nation should suffer. This sacrificial explanation was in fact a justification for the murder of an innocent man and remains the main religious way of explaining the death of Christ.

Rene Girard, the renowned French social anthropologist, has over several years undertaken careful study of the incidents of victims such as Jesus, which appear in Greek epics and has compared them with primitive tribal ritual and biblical texts. His findings insightfully show how the death of these victims in every case is a rationalisation of violence. These myths explain why the victim is guilty or how their deaths vicariously bring benefits to the whole tribe or clan or nation. Their rituals and myths mask the violence behind the deaths of sacrificial victims.

What is remarkable about the death of Jesus Christ, Girard points out, is that the victim is innocent. This death, rather than rationalising the violence, unmasks the guilt and self-assurance of those who are party to the killing. The explanation of the Easter message in sacrificial terms can still miss the significance of Christ's death if this unmasking effect is lost within our societies which, on the face of it, cannot conceive that as modern, liberal, secular societies they could be party to violence and oppression. To suggest that they are, is an affront to their sensibilities - now as it was then. That is why Christ had to be crucified.

The contemplation of the Cross, at its deepest level, is the unmasking of the human tendency to justify self-interests, its morbid inclination for power and control, and its discomfort with real encounter with God.

The earliest Christians who knew Jesus began slowly to understand that the death of Christ, rather than signalling an end or defeat, was in fact a new beginning. The encounter they had with Christ's death and what they directly experienced as his resurrection changed them from a distressed and fearful small group into visionaries willing to lay down their own lives to witness their new experience of God. Christians cannot replicate these remarkable events that the texts describe. How can one find analogies for unique and unrepeatable events? All they have are these insightful sacred texts.

Rene Girard's detailed researches and writings are an important corrective to those who may dismiss this event as another ritual or relegate the Easter event to the realm of myths. He is at pains to show why the descriptions of the Christ-event are fundamentally different to other victim myths; how the experience of the unmasking of evil and oppression changed a symbol of

alienation and sham into a symbol of freedom and salvation. It is in this difference that we may discover the uniqueness of these sacred texts and the true meaning on the Cross.

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JESUS AND FORGIVENESS by John Franklin

In *The Hiding Place*, Corrie ten Boom tells the story of meeting the former SS man who had guarded the shower room at the concentration camp where she and her sister had been prisoners. The encounter happened after World War II. She had just spoken on forgiveness, and he thanked her warmly for her message and extended his hand to shake hers. The ignominy of the camp flashed before her. The death of her beloved sister Betsie in the camp was there too. Her hand froze. She prayed, "Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give me your forgiveness."

Paralysed as she was, Corrie ten Boom remembered to pray, and as her hand, powered from another Source reached out to the SS guard, she learned that "...it is not on our forgiveness any more than our goodness that the world's healing hinges, but on His. And when he tells us to love our enemies, he gives, along with the command, the love itself."

To bring yourself to forgive can be a very difficult ask, as Corrie knew. To forgive, Jesus style, does not seem fair. Where is the justice? What about compensation? What about the 'thing or two' the other person needs to learn so that this offence is not perpetuated? And how weak are you going to look when the offender is not worthy of the cost of your forgiveness?

The saints, our mentors, have done it. Corrie forgave. Stephen forgave; "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." Martin Luther King Sr. forgave those responsible for the murder of his wife and his son. And Jesus himself said from the cross, "Father, forgive them; they do not know what they're doing."

Wonderful! But what about me? I can say, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us" with no trouble at all. But what about the person who pushed in front of me in the traffic? What about the one who has said something about me that is not true? What about the one who has treated me with contempt, or betrayed my trust? You can eloquently state your case in mental and verbal conversations. But the Chinese proverb soberly reminds us that the one who pursues revenge should dig two graves.

Before Jesus, the teacher of forgiveness, we might well come clean and take an inventory of forgiveness situations. In some cases the hatchet is well buried. Elsewhere we may be still in process. In other cases we may not even be aware of where we may need to forgive. In all cases I find that the healthful place to begin is with Jesus, not with the hurt, the anger, the grief. "Go to Jesus," the prompting within says. There is found both power and perspective; there is the enabling and there is a bigger context. I am not the only one who has fallen short, and there is a love that is bigger than worst that can be done.

Closer to home, how forgiving am I of myself? Hamlet was so down on himself that he wished that "... this all too sullied flesh would melt, thaw, and resolve itself in to a dew." Sadly, "I'll never forgive myself," can be all too true. There too is a grave. And there too is the invitation to go to Jesus. Why? Because, as the saying goes, "There is nothing I can do that will make Jesus love me more, and there is nothing I can do that will make Jesus love me less."

"Go in peace. Your sins are forgiven." *"There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."* The words are there, and a bible study on forgiveness will always be rewarding, but going to Jesus himself is what empowers us to both give and receive forgiveness. Forgiveness takes courage. It is about relinquishing power because you have to drop your case. Forgiveness is choosing another way, the way of peace, health and eventually, happiness. It may be about letting go of a grudge, or getting another take on a life-maiming hurt, but at the heart of any act

of forgiveness, there is Jesus, himself the teacher, the practitioner and the very embodiment of forgiveness ready to infuse us with courage.

And in Jesus is wisdom. We need wisdom to know what is our stuff. Hurt, anger and shame are real and can be dealt with. Forgiveness is not about denying them. Neither is forgiveness about condoning or excusing the offence. It is about staying free of the contamination of the offence (and possibly being empowered to cope with seventy times seven repeats!). We also need wisdom to know what to say and what not to say. And is forgiveness the same as reconciliation? No. An injured party can forgive an offender without reconciliation. Sometimes the offender is unavailable or even dead! And beyond pardon, a legal matter, Jesus' wisdom enables us to release the offender from the offence and ourselves from the burden of carrying the offender.

Jesus and forgiveness. These words can be an invitation to a rich bible study, but I believe that they are a profound invitation into love. They are an invitation into encounter with Jesus, himself a forgiving, enabling love; a love to be co-operated with and made our ultimate reference in human relations. With Corrie ten Boom, let's be quick to pray, "Jesus, give me your forgiveness," for it is Jesus who asks us to forgive and it is Jesus who makes forgiveness possible.

There are many resources on forgiveness, but note these:

- Christianity Today , January 10, 2000
- Donnelly, Doris. *Putting Forgiveness into Practice*. Argus Communications: Allen, Texas, 1982.
- ten Boom, Corrie. *The Hiding Place*. Fleming H Revell: Old Tappan, N.J.: 1971.
- International Forgiveness Institute: www.Intl-forgive-Inst.org
- The Campaign for Forgiveness Research: www.forgiving.org

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FORGIVENESS by *Marjory Edwards*

To forgive is not to analyse or excuse or try to wipe it from the record. To forgive is far wider and more embracing. It is to arrive at a stage when I choose not to agonise and repeatedly recall the hurt a person has inflicted upon me: when I am willing to relinquish the pain and bitterness into God's hands, then step aside and let him deal with it: to pray that I may see God's creation in the one who has harmed me without taint or blame.

It is a deliberate act on the part of the one who has been wronged. "To err is human, to forgive is divine". It is love and compassion in action.

If we forgive, God forgives us; he frees us. The past is not blotted out but the destructive effect it has on me has been removed - it no longer has power to trouble me. If we refuse to forgive, we ensnare ourselves in a net which becomes more entangled as we struggle within it.

We do not absolve; God absolves, operating through us in his strength. I am given the Lord's peace because I have been released from the burden of the sin I carried. I thus can praise the Lord in the freedom he has bestowed.

TESHUVAH, TURNING A Jewish view of forgiveness by *JoEllen Duckor*

We make mistakes and we hurt others and ourselves. But as human beings we have the ability to take stock of our own behaviour and to change it. We have the ability to recognise what we have done wrong, to resolve not to repeat the wrongdoing and to try to repair the hurt we have caused others. This is called Teshuvah. In Hebrew, Teshuvah means turning. Teshuvah is what Judaism is all about. Judaism recognises the human potential for excellence and goodness and the equally pervasive reality of temptation and weakness. Through Teshuvah, Judaism integrates the insistence on human goodness with the reality of human shortcoming. Teshuvah is

a return to our true selves. The goal of Teshuvah is the renewal of the individual through personal and communal acts of repentance.

Teshuvah involves a series of concrete steps:

- Recognition, regret. We need to recognise that we did something wrong, to regret doing it and to experience remorse. We are genuinely sorry for what we've done. We may feel as though we have abandoned our own inner, true selves.
- Renunciation. We stop doing it. We resolve to change our behavior. We actually do not do the wrongful action and make a firm commitment never to commit the wrongful act again.
- Reconciliation: Regret is an important step but it doesn't help someone who has been hurt, deceived or belittled. Teshuvah must transcend emotion and conversation and be an action. Reconciliation with a person who was wronged begins with an admission of wrongdoing and a sincere apology. It is our duty to apologise to those we have wronged. Ask for forgiveness.
- Restitution: an act of restitution is required. Restitution is the act of making good for any damage.
- Resolve. Don't do it again: All the preceding steps are meaningless unless they result in a commitment not to repeat an offence. Having recognised the wrongfulness of what we have done, having apologised and reimbursed the injured party, we must resolve to be better, to not do the same thing when the opportunity arises again.

Authentic repentance occurs only when the person is faced with the same challenge that led to the earlier failure and does not make the same mistake.

While God can forgive wrongdoing against God, such as breaking the Sabbath, God cannot forgive wrongdoing which we commit against another person. Wrongdoing against another person can only be forgiven by those wronged. While no human being is denied the chance for Teshuvah, not all of us engage in actions that lead to Teshuvah.

Whether we are forgiven or worthy of forgiveness depends entirely on our actions. We are not bound to forgive until the person changes. Forgiveness must be earned.

It is hard to ask forgiveness and hard also to accept it. Both asking and granting of forgiveness demands considerable strength of character.

If I offend someone, it is my responsibility to do whatever it takes to set things right. If someone has offended me, it is my responsibility to allow the offender to do Teshuvah, to correct the wrong done to me. The offended person is not obligated to forgive if the offender is not sincere or concrete steps have not been taken to correct the wrong done.

What is our obligation to forgive? Do we always have to accept someone's apology? What if someone did something to you which you believe you cannot forgive? Must we always forgive? Just because an apology has been offered? If we are obligated to apologise are we obligated to forgive?

Our rabbis taught that we should be slow to anger and easily appeased. When forgiveness is requested we should grant it with a whole heart and a willing spirit. We should not be vengeful or bear grudges, even for a grave injury.

Yet, easy forgiveness does no good. Forgiveness should only be granted if deserved. Without good grounds, the offended person should not easily forgive the offender. Otherwise the offender may never truly change and wrongdoing will be perpetuated. If there are good grounds, if the person has truly changed, the offended person is morally bound to forgive. This created possibility of repentance for every individual.

How do we know repentance is sincere? When the same opportunity arises and you refrain from wrongdoing.

Teshuvah is more than repentance, it is spiritual reawakening, a desire to strengthen the connection between oneself and the sacred.

Forgiveness requires both the injuring party and the injured party to set out on a parallel journey of personal growth.

THE CHALLENGE OF RECEIVING FORGIVENESS *by Anne Hadfield*

Imagine that you have been travelling for days across a barren and dry desert. Your feet are sore and your head is spinning with lack of water. You are very dehydrated. There is no sign of palm trees in the distance promising refreshment at an oasis. The horizon stretches into the distance endlessly. There appears to be no hope of finding water. Then suddenly you hear a voice behind you calling out your name. You turn and find a person holding a water bottle and offering it to you. You are torn in two, wanting to accept and yet unable to receive the gift.

'No' you reply, 'I've chosen this path and now I must pay for my choice. I've got my baggage here and I'll make the journey alone even if I die in the process'.

The scenario sounds crazy, yet that is just what we do if we cannot receive forgiveness from God and our fellow human beings. We dry up! But receiving forgiveness is not easy. Instead it can be quite a challenge.

It is a challenge because the very act of accepting forgiveness makes us vulnerable. It declares first of all that we have something to be forgiven from. There are many ways we can define 'sin'. The law of the country calls a person who breaks that law a 'criminal'. Society can frown on those who do not conform to the norm. Religious groups can judge those who fail to keep their own particular standards. We can define our own wrong doing by 'sins of omission' such as failing to be a perfect parent. Even our conscience can be working overtime laying guilt trips on us over everything from over-eating to a damaged vehicle. Whether we let others tell us what sin is or follow our own conscience, we all fail to keep Jesus' commands to love God, love self and love others.

Acknowledging our position as needing forgiveness means an acceptance of our powerlessness to be the heroes and winners we would like to be. Western society idolizes winners. From politicians to sportspeople to game show contestants to win is to be noticed, to lose is to become invisible and forgotten. What a blow to the ego! Yet instead of winning public acclaim, those who accept forgiveness can grow in hidden qualities of self awareness and a healthy humility. They are no longer afraid to be who they really are. They are set free from the strain of keeping a mask in place.

Perhaps the hardest challenge of accepting forgiveness comes from letting go our state of unforgiveness. For the human psyche has many ways of compensating for guilt. Like Christian in 'Pilgrim's Progress', we can get so used to the burden that we cannot imagine life without it. Our whole body adjusts to the weight. We stoop metaphorically under the guilt of our part in a broken marriage, or a child gone off the rails, or a broken friendship. There is no end to the replay of the incidents in our heads, usually in the middle of the night. We become people who have made mistakes and who have imposed a life sentence of punishment on ourselves. I have even known someone who declared they would never 'get into heaven' because they could never forgive themselves. Others fear the person they have wronged, creating convoluted methods of avoiding them. Some even attempt to erase the wrong by extravagant gifts as if tangible gifts of money will eliminate the necessity of saying a simple 'sorry' from the heart. There is no end to the behaviours we can invent to avoid accepting lasting forgiveness.

The tragedy is that in not receiving forgiveness, we do not discover the wonder of the free gift that is offered to us. We shut down the party (Remember the celebration for the Prodigal). In contrast someone whose sense of gratitude is still wowing pop groups and the general populous is John Newton, the eighteenth century slave ship captain who wrote 'Amazing Grace'. This timeless song is a wonderful expression of gratitude and the sense of liberation which can be experienced when a person forgives themselves and accepts God's forgiveness.

For the nature of God is mercy and receiving forgiveness expands our sense of God's unconditional love and longing for relationship with us (Micah 7: 18-19). It is not God who holds out on us until we have paid the penalty for our wrongdoing. God's grace however is not cheap grace. We need to let go our guilt and self blame and instead mean our 'sorry' with our hearts, even to the point of restitution where this is appropriate. This is important in communities as well as individually. The establishment of the Waitangi Tribunal seeks to restore justice between Maori and Pakeha in Aotearoa New Zealand. It may also mean restoration of ecosystems when we have raped the earth. Accepting forgiveness means taking responsibility both individually and collectively for the future.

The process of accepting forgiveness can be best summarized by 3 rs:

Repentance
Restitution
Responsibility.

Repentance is a whole hearted turning away from wrongdoing. Restitution involves repairing the damage of our wrong doing as much as possible. Responsibility, the last step, is crucial for it removes all temptation to excuse ourselves, or blame ourselves or place blame elsewhere. It signifies our response-ability to live life in a new way because of the gift of forgiveness.

Nevertheless although people have accepted forgiveness, their mind sometimes plays tricks on them and continues to replay the pertinent scenes. Perhaps healing also has to happen. We may be helped by the sacrament of confession or a ritual. Sometimes if the burden of guilt has been carried around for a long time, it is necessary for us to train our minds. One of the best ways to do this is to learn how to pray using the method of single point meditation. This is a type of meditation using a mantra. The most famous Christian version is that using the Jesus prayer, the shortened form of which is just the name of Jesus. As one's mind wanders, gently call it back by using the single word until the mind is trained into the new track by the grace of God.

Receiving forgiveness is a central act of growing in faith. It embodies God's mercy in us and thus enables us to show mercy to others.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

It not only heals us but also creates the opportunity for expanding the reconciling community. It is as if in turning and accepting the gift held out to us, we become free of the guilt and ego goals which drive us. We can then turn to the stranger and say:

'Journey with me!'

Instead of anxiety and guilt we are filled with peace. Instead of punishing ourselves we become gentler and so more compassionate with others. And we discover to our surprise that instead of the gift being finite and something we have to guard and possess, the water bottle is never empty and in turn can be offered to all we meet on the journey. The desert of our life begins to bloom and in time, the world becomes a better place.

We who are disciples of Jesus are urged to forgive as God in Christ has forgiven us (Ephesians 4:32). Jesus teaches us to ask for our own forgiveness as we forgive those who sin against us (Matt. 6:12). The teaching's fine - quite inspiring in fact! But how do you do it? Forgiveness is not natural or easy, especially when the hurt is repeated. Here are a few suggestions that have helped us and many others who work on forgiveness.

Forgiveness starts with a decision

We have to decide to do it, even though it is not our natural inclination. "The choice to forgive is a decision of the heart that has nothing to do with what has been done to us and *everything to do with what we want to become.*" (M. Gustin. *The Journey Inward*)

Forgiveness is a process

In forgiving we are often dealing with a variety of deep reactions which may involve hurt feelings, misunderstandings or broken trust or open wounds and unforgettable memories - or all of these and more. So don't think it's all going to be changed in a moment. Forgiveness is a process to be worked through.

Forgiveness is initiated by the wronged

By me when I'm the one who's been so badly hurt? Yes! Ponder Jesus' example while hanging on the cross. He initiated the process in dying there: "Father, forgive them for they don't know what they are doing!"

Some Guidelines:

- it is not always necessary to tell the person or people concerned if they don't realise the hurt given.
- it's never too late to forgive. We can even forgive dead or distant people.
- forgiveness doesn't minimise or condone the action done to me, to us.
- forgiveness is an active work, not passive, easy or simple.
- forgiveness is not weakness but strength which gives us back control of our lives.
- forgiveness is not forgetting - we can't forget!
- the aim of forgiveness is freedom and growth, not to hurt the other.
- as part of the process we may have to forgive God and ourselves for things that have happened to us and to those we love!
- see the offender in their context, situation, personality and culture as someone God loves and calls to repent.
- be honest about your own fault in the situation.
- you may need assistance from a friend, counsellor, pastor, spiritual director or someone who's been over this route before you.

Steps In the Process

The steps will include some or all of the following, but not necessarily in this order:

1. ASK God to work with you in the process, to accompany you on this journey and give you strength and courage for the task.
2. ACKNOWLEDGE the hurt, admit the pain and write it out in your journal or on paper. Be honest. Don't pretend you are above injury.
3. NAME the pain and so get some control over it.
4. DECIDE to forgive and work at the process as long as it takes.
5. REPENT of your part in letting the hurt grow. Apologise if appropriate.
6. REMEMBER that forgiveness is an act of the will, a change of attitude and a radical reorientation of heart and mind. It may take time for these to occur.
7. CUT the umbilical cord that ties you to the other and feeds off the pain and hurt.
8. TAKE space from the hurt where possible. There has to be a distance from the cause of the pain for the healing scab to form over the wound.
9. GIVE Jesus permission to dig out 'the root of bitterness' that has begun to grow (Cf Hebrews 12:14). We can't dig it out by ourselves.

10. DO a symbolic action to help implement your decision (plant a shrub, light a candle, date a journal entry, write a poem, burn the story of your pain etc). Sometimes it's helpful to vent our anger in some appropriate way (punch a cushion, dig the garden, cut some wood, belt something with a piece of plastic pipe! etc).
11. CELEBRATE when completed so that your work is honoured, God's grace is enjoyed and the new peace recognised.
12. SEEK reconciliation where this is possible and appropriate.
13. BUILD trust again - slowly and carefully.
14. REWORK the memory each time it returns. This will heal the wound more deeply but don't pick off the scab unless more work needs to be done. This is a healing, not a hurting process.
15. PONDER the learnings in this experience and make them part of your expanded understanding of the realities of life and faith.

A Word About Non-forgivingness

Not to forgive can be very destructive and exacts a high price! It hardens the heart, disturbs sleep, creates ulcers, wastes time, emotions and energy. It damages relationships. It twists our judgment. It drives wedges between people. It splits families, friends, colleagues, work-places and congregations. It ignores grace and hardens the arteries of our relationship with God. It produces a judging spirit and a cynical attitude. It can lead to depression. It cannot enjoy the fruits of the Holy Spirit's presence, it ignores the cross and stands against the life of God's kingdom. And it's really not worth any or all of that!

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FORGIVING MYSELF by Andrew Dunn

Afterwards - that's the problem for so many of us. After the discovery, after the repentance, the cleansing and restoration. After the dust begins to settle comes the really difficult bit - "Can I forgive myself?" It often shifts quickly to "How can I forgive myself?", and then to "Why can't I forgive myself?"

Perhaps it's the dawning realisation that one's ability for self deception, indulgence of fantasy and risk taking only compound the painful discovery that this is serious stuff about our make up and ways of being. Perhaps at its deepest level it's the realisation that we now know and understand what we are capable of! Yet that in itself is a significant acknowledgement and insight that is a major step towards reconciliation with oneself.

Paul Simon gets it right in his new song *QUIET*.

*And when they say
That you're not good enough
Well the answer is, you're not
But who are they or what is it
That eats at what you've got
With hunger and ambitions
For the change inside the purse
They are handcuffs of the soul, my friends
Handcuffs of the soul
And worse.*

The aim for self forgiveness is to break the handcuffs around the soul, often clamped there by our own sense of guilt and failure.

So where to start? Be as honest as you can. "I did that! I broke the rules. I damaged a relationship. I broke a trust, betrayed so many people's trust/expectations/images of me and my

life, my work, my calling, my career, my family's good name, my promise, my vision" ... and so on. That must be done - even in the strongest language one can muster! Why? Because owning it is a major step on the way of healing, of breaking free from the shackles of the soul.

It's only when we can see clearly how big this is, how much we need help that we can call out, "Help me - I can't do this alone".

Help is at hand, but it seems that it can only start its healing work when we turn around and say to someone (and Someone), "I can't do this myself"; "I can't do this alone". Just as the alcoholic has to reach the point of owning inability to change and the need for help from a higher power, so does the sinner. The hymn writer captures it so clearly and simply:

*Nothing in my hand I bring,
 simply to your cross I cling;
 naked, come to you for dress,
 helpless, look to you for grace;
 stained by sin, to you I cry:
 wash me, Saviour, or I die!*

A.M. Toplady 1740-1778

Our cry for help needs to be that grunty, that clear, that honest.

This clarity helps us join the human race, to acknowledge that we, too, are part of the real world of real people who, although made in the image of God, are also sinners! Sinners? Yes, that's a good word for all of us. It's not a negative or down-putting term. Rather, it's a realistic view of how we are - people who miss the mark, fall short of God's goals for us, cross over from the best pathway to another, disobey: all good biblical descriptions of how people are. It's an insightful theological assessment rather than a personal demolition.

And here's the wonder of embracing that title for ourselves - and I mean really embracing it - *Where sin increases grace abounds all the more* (Romans 5:20). No wonder Martin Luther could say so profoundly, "Sin boldly! There's more than enough grace around". And with all that grace around who would want to sin grievously anyway?

Now here's the magic (Aslan-like magic): *I can't forgive myself, not adequately or completely, but with grace burgeoning and bursting forth and dumping itself all over me and around me and within me, especially with me, forgiving-ness works its deep-seated change, it unlocks the shackles of the soul.*

This too is a process, and it takes time, often involving encounter after encounter with deep grace, the healing energy of God's wonderful love, new and fresh every morning. And grace-full time is wonderfully healing for all who will give themselves to it.

Forget? No we can't forget. Our forgetteries are not that good. Moreover they are very deeply tied to conscience which will keep on pricking us and reminding us that we are not as smart as we think we are. They keep us humble, contrite and in balance about the realities of human life.

The real danger comes, not from the pricking of conscience, but from the overly scrupulous heart which buys into relentless self accusation and judgment. In fact, *scruples* can become a spiritual disease that needs special treatment. We'll need extra help when that happens to us.

However, in the normal course of events, seeking help in understanding grace and its appropriation makes good sense. Often a suitable spiritual companion, pastor or priest can take us there. Some may need the aid of a grace-understanding therapist who can take them through a process of entering deeply into God's unconditional love so that the magic of grace can work its miracles at the core of their beings. Access to a good library of grace-centred books and theology is invaluable. So is searching the Scriptures for passages, stories and parables that are grace and forgiveness centred - read them into your soul again and again.

For on-going living it helps to adopt fresh disciplines of devotion where the focus is on God's amazing grace and its possibilities, yes, and its expectations of us, and its invitations. The Ten Commandments provide a simple, clear framework for living, the Sermon on the Mount a longer one. Dust them off and take another look - they are surprisingly fresh for today. A useful image is to think of Jesus himself being our goodness, our holiness and regularly to put him on like a garment so that our own peccadilloes are covered up and forgotten in the beauty of his simplicity, honesty, mercy and love. All this helps us focus on the source of our hope.

And slowly, slowly the time will come when it is possible to say, "Yes, I too can forgive myself".

SEVEN TIMES SEVEN: seven little encouragements for forgiveness liturgies by John C. O'Connor

Christians are people who forgive. The command of Jesus is clear: forgive those who do you wrong. Why then is it that good prayerful people find forgiveness so difficult? We try to let go. We bring our hurt to spiritual direction. We might confess in a sacramental context. At times I will even resort to praying for those who persecute me. So why is the ability to forgive still eluding me?

A healthy Christian community is aware of this reality. Some traditions routinely incorporate a prayer of forgiveness into every liturgy. A community might invite members to gather periodically to reflect honestly on all that hinders their relationships with one another. Word and symbol are used to enable and celebrate the reconciliation that is desired. Even after such experiences I might still carry my hurt. I want to be free, but I just can't. You might find these seven reminders helpful for your personal reflection and in preparing forgiveness liturgies.

1. Forgiveness is God's gift

All other examples of forgiveness reflect the light of this gift. Call to mind heroic examples of forgiveness: the mother who pleads leniency for the drunk-driver who killed her daughter, or Pope John Paul as he embraces the one who attacked him with gunfire in St Peter's Square. Such powerful examples illustrate the transforming power of forgiveness. We too easily forget that my ability to forgive others corresponds directly to the depth to which I have experienced God's forgiveness of me. Without this experience the act of forgiveness makes no sense. I resort to a default setting of anger and revenge. 'They who have been forgiven much are able to love much.'

2. Sin is God's preferred point of entry into my life.

Any move toward increased love of God begins with my own struggling reality. Despite what well-intentioned teachers of religion have passed on to me, God simply needs me to be as I am and where I am. God will do the rest. It is significant that any process of Christian conversion follows the same pattern; at an early stage I need to acknowledge the gravity of my sin (the exact nature of my wrongs in the 12 step process). Ignatius of Loyola speaks of healthy knowledge of my sin "to the point of tears." This awareness is necessary as an articulation of the capacity I have for God in my life.

3. I am a sinner, but I am a forgiven sinner.

Awareness of myself as sinner is not a morbid flagellation exercise. It is a simple and honest statement of reality. The Christian who is growing in intimacy with Jesus will experience a shocking sensitivity to imperfection. S/he becomes aware of the horror in rejecting such an overwhelming gift of unconditional love. A house in darkness may feel clean, but sunlight streaming through the window will highlight any speck of dust in the air. The Christian (in the pattern of St Paul) is able to boast of their sin since it is proof of the power of God in the weak reality of my life. A superficial mantra of my strengths and gifts may serve to light a candle in my darkness. But before too long any deeper struggle with sin will emerge from the

depth of my soul in the stillness of contemplation or through images in sleep. An honest and open acknowledgement of my sin invites and enables God to heal and forgive. I am a forgiven sinner.

4. Forgiveness is not about forgetting.

Forgiveness is primarily about remembering. I recall the harm that was done and the burden that I once carried, and know that God has freed me. I am now able to celebrate my past sin as my personal example of the power of God in my life. Forgetting can be a sign that I have in fact not forgiven. Perhaps I have buried or repressed the pain. As the light of God's love enters every crevice I realise that my sin is much more serious than I could have imagined. I thought I was a sinner . . . I'm much worse! I have turned from God more deeply and more often than I had imagined. The consequence of my 'private' sin is much more far reaching than I had feared. Such profound realisations are to be acknowledged but not dwelt on. An experience of forgiveness shifts my gaze from my sin back onto God's love. I am forgiven and I am empowered to forgive others. I can never forget such transformation. I remember, and I celebrate.

5. A key difference between liturgy and ceremony.

A forgiveness ceremony can be celebrated effectively without acknowledgement of God. Sometimes a workplace or family where belief in God may not (or cannot) be expressed will benefit from a ceremony of forgiveness. This ceremony might reveal the reality and effect of damaged links between people, and strive to restore healthy family and work relationships. A forgiveness liturgy is focussed directly on God. As we celebrate a liturgy we unashamedly remember our dependence on God. In such a liturgy we allow God to reveal our brokenness and forgive our sin. We remember that our relationships with one another are possible only when we are each living in harmony with God. A ceremony that focuses on relationships that we have with one another may well be helpful, but it cannot satisfy the sinner's heart beyond the memory of the ceremony. Liturgy is always the work and action of God who jumps at the invitation to heal and forgive.

6. The proclamation of God's forgiveness

The forgiveness we celebrate is not an easy gift to accept. Part of the consequence of sin is that we resist unearned generosity. We need to be helped to receive the forgiveness God is offering. To hear a voice I respect and believe assuring me that God has forgiven me is the necessary highlight of a forgiveness liturgy. This is an even more profound experience if the proclamation is the response to my personal and individual articulation of my sin and shame. Not only did this person not keel over on hearing the detail of my sin, but they are now assuring me that I am forgiven and loved by God. Wow!

7. Cups of tea and embraces

It may seem odd that these first six little encouragements concern an individual's relationship with God. Isn't this reflection about forgiveness liturgies when a group are gathered? What about our relationships with each other?

Forgiveness is always God's action. It is what God has done for us. My ability to forgive others is the fruit of the awareness that I am loved. While my sin is a difficulty for me it is not an obstacle for God. When I taste this reality I am transformed and have little difficulty embracing my enemy. Like the young person fallen head over heels I want to embrace everyone I see, even my enemy, at every opportunity. Seven times seventy is no longer a challenge and a burden but an empowering permission. I want to embrace everyone in the room. Now we know that we are a community united not by our common aims and goals, but by the fact that we are forgiven sinners and we know it. Get out the teabags. Break open the champagne!

*How happy are the poor in Spirit;
theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

There was a man of wealth who was poor in spirit. He didn't know when the hunger began, nor did he call it poverty. It was simply a great inner restlessness, a desire for something he could not define. Possessions did not fill him; power was an empty promise; frantic activity increased his need. He could not bear the suffering of aloneness and at times he thought life was not worth living. Then, on the third day, or perhaps it was the third year, or the thirtieth year, for the tomb experience has no limits, this man realised that his deficiency was spiritual. In all his gathering, he had neglected his greatest need, the growth of his own soul towards God. He was amazed at the simplicity of his discovery. Why had he not seen this before? The instant he recognised his spiritual poverty the stone at the tomb rolled away and the man walked into the light, carrying in his heart, the kingdom of heaven.

*Happy are the gentle
They shall have the earth for their heritage.*

She wasn't always gentle. Early in life, this woman needed to fight for survival and she became aggressively competitive to protect herself. It was important, she said, to beat before you were beaten. And yes, she was successful. She rose to the top in her job and defended her position by attacking those around her. Then came a series of crucifixions in her work and her personal life. The people close to her fulfilled her worst suspicions. There were betrayals and hurt. Once more the woman seemed to be fighting for survival but this time the aggression turned inwards and she entered the tomb of clinical depression. The darkness was long. In it, she was stripped of everything that had been important to her, and reduced to the simplicity of emptiness. When she emerged into the light on the third day, she saw that the world too, was very simple. It had been made by love, for love, and because she had room for it, the love filled her to overflowing. The overflowing was manifest as gentleness and in it, she discovered her true strength.

*Happy those who mourn;
they shall be comforted.*

Their crucifixions had been many: a war-torn country; relatives killed; two children dead; hunger; fear; a new country with a language and customs they didn't understand. But this man and woman had faces alive with light as they welcomed guests and shared their meal with them. The guests knew the couple's story and were amazed to the point of discomfort. With such loss, how could these people be so happy? With so little in their world, how could they give? It didn't make sense. The guests didn't realise that the refugees' crucifixions had already brought resurrection. They had not become stuck with bitterness or self-pity but had trusted life to take them through to the third day. Now their pain had turned to wisdom; their loss had become compassion. Their freedom was not social or political but the greater freedom of the risen Christ.

*Happy are those who hunger and thirst for what is right:
they shall be satisfied.*

In her hunger and thirst she prayed to understand the meaning of Easter. She knew the teachings but her heart needed more, an explanation that was as big as the God she knew. Easter was hugely important to her. She had experienced forty eight seasons of Lent, the early ones with her parents, alone as a student, with the man she loved, her children, forty-eight years and each experience was deeper than the one before. Now she cried on Good Friday. She couldn't help it. She was never sure where the grief came from. The world was full of it. It descended on her as real pain in her chest and arms and carried her into a deep sense of loss. But when she woke on Easter morning, she felt radiant with light. That became the pattern. She didn't know why. She didn't know if this was answered prayer. But she did come to understand that the Easter journey

was the reason for existence, not only hers but the entire world's. There could be no growth without resurrection, no resurrection without crucifixion, no crucifixion without discomfort. She didn't understand the mystery of this growth, but resting with that mystery brought satisfaction to her heart.

*Happy are the merciful:
they shall have mercy shown to them.*

The man had a difficult choice. His neighbour had stolen from him and was clearly in the wrong. No court would excuse such theft. Yet the neighbour had a young family and was in a financial mess. The man thought long and hard about justice and as he meditated, justice seemed to be less about his neighbour and more about his own heart. Initially, all he had considered was his own hurt and anger. Then he was able to reflect on possessions, stewardship, his own needs - especially his need to look at himself in the mirror every morning. After days in the tomb of deep thought, he understood that whatever he did to his neighbour, he would do himself. On the third day he went next door and rolled away his neighbour's stone with the simple words, "It's okay." At that moment the man's stone also rolled away and he walked into the light of Christ, knowing that any debt he had incurred in life, was also forgiven.

*Happy are the pure of heart:
they shall see God.*

When she was young, her mother had talked about boys and babies and purity of heart so that for many years, she had left the sixth beatitude in the sex education file along with other well-intended advice. Only when the fullness of life drew her into mystery, only when her heart awakened to the presence of God in everything, only then did she know the meaning of purity of heart. Purity of intent - that's what it was about. Not physical abstinence but spiritual fulfilment, the heart leaning with singular devotion towards its true source. It was a third day discovery that changed her life. When she planted spinach, she saw God. When she stirred the plum jam, she saw God. She saw God in her husband and family, God in her neighbours, God in the world's pain. Eventually, she saw God in everything, and she realised with great celebration, there was nothing that was not God.

*Happy are the peacemakers:
they shall be called children of God.*

Making peace was part of his vocation. He was sympathetic to the struggles of his parishioners, although there were times when he wanted to bang heads together, and he had a reputation for being a good mediator. A bit of common sense, a bit of the old blarney, a bit of genuine respect, it had always worked, thank God. Not with himself, though. He'd frozen burning memories so that they'd become an ice cube in a remote corner of his life, but now the ice had surfaced. He was aware of its coldness and hardness. His brother. A man he hadn't seen in twenty-three years. The back-stabbing Cain wanted to visit him, and he didn't know how to say no. The peacemaker in him panicked. It tried to find middle ground. Forgive but don't forget, it said, but that didn't help. Prayer didn't help. In the end he had to go, sick in the stomach, dry of mouth, to meet the train. But the grey-headed man who stumbled across the platform was not Cain. He had a smiling mouth, nervous eyes and was as familiar as boiled eggs and toast. When he put down his bag and stretched out his arms, the third day just happened. No mediation, no act of forgiveness, not even a melting of the ice cube. It was instant resurrection and they stood there hugging each other, children of God.

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION AS THE MODEL FOR PASTORAL MINISTRY - Listening for the Soul¹ by Brian Hamilton

Recently I went to a retirement home and was asked by the supervisor to visit a troubled man nearing his death. As I entered his room the man barked a sharp question at me: "Where am I going?" I was taken aback and a little confused. Was he asking a question about his eternal destiny, or was there something else on his mind? A little more conversation determined that he was indeed concerned about his eternal destiny. Thus we began a conversation about his relationship with God. We talked about how he experienced God. If spiritual direction is defined as "an act of giving attention to what God is doing in the person who happens to be before me at any given moment,"² then I was beginning to engage in spiritual direction.

It is not too difficult to become involved in such a spiritual discussion if the topic is raised by the person with whom one is speaking. But like many other pastors, I have often left the spiritual dimension out of my discussion with a person in distress. I believe this is because I have succumbed to the turmoil and confusion that exists in the practise of ministry in the church today.

The twentieth century has seen the rise of several different models of ministry, and pastors have subscribed to one or another of these, with little critical help from their seminary or the church hierarchy. I am advocating a return to an earlier model of ministry which saw ministry to the whole person, body, mind and soul, as practised by such people as Richard Baxter, an English nonconforming clergyman of the 17th century. He wrote: "we too, must give an account of our watch over the souls of all who are bound to obey us (Heb 13:7)"³ In his writing, Baxter showed a concern for individuals as whole people, for the unconverted, the spiritually weak, the morally handicapped, the tempted, the disconsolate and the strong.

Models of ministry

The interventionist/crisis model of ministry is one followed by many pastors who have been trained in clinical pastoral education, following the work of Dr Frank Lake⁴, and these pastors have learned various counselling skills. Under this model, the pastor attends the sick bed, the dying, listens to those with marital or other problems, and seeks to allay the symptoms of confusion, pain, grief and so on. The goal of ministry is to *help* the sufferer to regain the state of equilibrium they had before the crisis. In seeking to alleviate the grief or the suffering, the pastor may not think to help the sufferer question where God might be in the suffering. The person grieving is therefore not helped to find meaning in the grief.

This model might also be called the professional model. Pastors who follow this model tend to see ministry in professional terms using medical and legal professions as the model. They are lured by the "...technical specificity of content and the glowing status connoted by the word 'professional.'"⁵ The pastor who follows this model sees people as 'cases' who are ministered to in a clinical fashion, much as the general practitioner attends to a patient, or as the lawyer works with a client.

Another very popular model current in churches today is the management model.

Leech says, "... much in our training and thought patterns is based on an organisational and managerial view of ministry. The pastor is a churchkeeper, a functionary who runs a show in competition with other shows."⁶

Leech is concerned that pastors be concerned essentially with God and with helping human beings find union with God. The problem he points out is that, "The care of Souls is one thing. Making a parish a howling success is another."⁷

One more model of ministry is described by Leech as the social work model. The church is understood to be concerned primarily for social welfare, caring for the underprivileged. In this model the church is seen as "...distributing services rather than enhancing vision."⁸

It is my contention that we "...must recover a view of ministry that stresses the sacramental, charismatic, theological and prophetic roles more than the professional, managerial, and organisational ones".⁹ I am not arguing that we should abandon the good to be found in any of the models mentioned, but that we need a change of focus. It is not so much that we should be doing things differently, but that we should be exercising ministry with a different mind-set. We do this by listening for the soul¹⁰ as we do our pastoral care. As we engage in pastoral ministry we seek, not so much to alleviate the pain, but to be asking where God is in the pain. As we acknowledge the difficulty we give it significance. We help the people we meet with to find meaning in a world that increasingly cannot make sense of life. People exhibit anxiety because of a sense of meaninglessness. They are desperate for answers to the ultimate questions. "Our society hungers for spiritual connection."¹¹ Meanwhile a pastor may be busy setting up a new programme, and bypassing as unimportant, the needs of those seeking meaning. The strange thing is that the *unimportant* parts of our ministry might turn out to be the most important.

It was Eugene Peterson who first alerted me to my need to change focus in my ministry. In a chapter entitled, "Curing Souls: The forgotten art",¹² he points out that, "...one by one, pastors are rejecting the job description that has been handed to them and are taking on this new one or, as it turns out, the old one that has been in use for most of the Christian centuries."¹³ When using the term 'cure of souls' Peterson understands "The primary sense of *cura* in Latin as "care", with undertones of "cure."¹⁴

The change of focus in pastoral ministry to that of spiritual director means that whenever I am with people in a variety of ministry situations, I am constantly asking myself: "How can I foster this person's, or this group's relationship with God? Are there signs of God's voice or activity in this person's life? Can I help this person become aware of such activity?" When I do this I realise that, "...being a spiritual director doesn't mean introducing a new rule or adding another item to [my] ever-extended job descriptions, but simply rearranging [my] perspective: seeing certain acts as eternal and not ephemeral, as essential and not accidental."¹⁵ I'm not actually doing very much. I simply call attention to what is already happening.

In 1977 when I became Vicar of a parish for the first time, I received from the bishop a licence that gave me "...*authority to officiate and have the cure of souls in the Parish of...*" It is a sign of the times that the wording on current licences has been changed by the removal of the words, "cure of souls". The phrase sounds antique but I believe that it is not obsolete. It describes a way of ministry which puts the whole person in focus. "For centuries it was the pastor's defined task to "prepare people for a good death,"¹⁶ and to live a full life. He was making sense of their lives.

So how will the focus of my ministry change if I begin to listen for the soul?

Visiting the grieving

In the therapeutic model the pastor finds ways to alleviate the grief of the sufferer. Modern Western society finds grief difficult to handle. The funeral director (formerly "undertaker") in some parts of New Zealand has replaced soil with clean sand for sprinkling in the grave, and plastic grass to hide the bare earth. The grieving are not uncommonly offered a drug to help them through their initial grief. Yet anyone familiar with Maori culture (or the Psalms) will know that the time-honoured way of supporting the grieving is simply to be with a person, to cry together and not to "fix".

Instead of trying to help people minimise or even avoid their grief, I will be trying to help them enter the depth of their crisis, and find spiritual meaning there. "... the pastor will have the

strength to *do* far less in relation to suffering, and *be* far more. Pastors will not give in to the temptation to fix the sufferer and will engage in a ministry that honours the sufferer."¹⁷

Visitor of the hale and hearty

As a new, young Anglican curate I was asked by my Vicar to visit several parish homes each week. What was the Vicar's expectation? Obviously the first object is to get to know the family, to show interest in their life, and begin to forge a relationship. Exactly what else I was expected to do was not clear. By the time a second visit to the same household came around, I was struggling to find the purpose of the visit and not finding a clear answer. But as a pastor with knowledge of spiritual direction I can "...pay attention to the ways God is at work in their lives, individually and corporately."¹⁸ This is not taxing. "...I am not so much wondering what I am going to do or say that will be pastoral as I am alert and observant for what the risen Christ has been doing or saying..."¹⁹

Preacher

This is a less obvious spiritual direction task (at first sight) because the preacher is by definition, doing all the talking, which is the opposite to the normal practice of a spiritual director. But as a preacher I am going to be working alongside people during the week, listening to problems, sharing in joys, wrestling with issues, and supporting them in crisis. I will come in contact with the issues of life, and I will be able to put these in a theological context on Sunday. I will be constantly asking myself the question, "how can I help these people deepen their relationship with God?" As a result I will be helping people pay attention to the ways God is at work in their lives, individually and corporately. There is always a two-way relationship between preacher and the worshipper. "The pastor's responsibility is to keep the [*worshipping*] community attentive to God".²⁰

The casual encounter

Every pastor has had the experience of chance meetings with a parishioner in a public place, such as the supermarket. In the conversation that ensues, it is very easy for the pastor to raise spiritual questions, or a person may raise one.

"In every visit, every meeting I attend, every appointment I keep, I have been anticipated. The risen Christ got there ahead of me. The risen Christ is in that room [place] already. What is he doing? What is he saying? What is going on?"²¹

Management

The life of every congregation finds expression through worship and in meetings. There are times when every pastor functions as an administrator of the church as an institution. Meetings are important and necessary for the growth and well being of the community. "Every meeting should be an opportunity for the spiritual growth of those present and, through them, for the whole congregation."²² This can happen when members of a group understand the group's role as a facilitator of spiritual growth, and when members are encouraged to share something of what is going on in their souls. In a vestry or church board meeting a pastor may foster a change of focus from agenda to discerning God's work in the group. Rice suggests that one way to introduce change into a church board meeting is to meet on alternate months for business. In the intervening months the pastor can shape the meeting around personal concerns, sharing of ideas and telling faith stories.

Social Change

Poverty, racism, prejudice, underemployment, homelessness, and lack of equal opportunities are all present in New Zealand society. I can act as a spiritual guide when presenting and addressing society's needs. "Helping people encounter the risen Christ in the faces of the poor is as much an act of spiritual guidance as teaching them to pray."²³

Why have I chosen this topic?

For many years in my ministry as a pastor, I was unaware of the possibility of spiritual direction as the model for pastoral ministry. I wish someone had alerted me earlier to the significance of spiritual direction in the pastor's everyday work. I am now slowly coming to terms with all the possibilities inherent in this way of understanding ministry. I may be able to alert others to come to terms with spiritual direction in their parish ministries. Many pastors have an understanding of what spiritual direction is. However less have received spiritual direction, and even fewer give spiritual direction.²⁴ Spiritual direction was not something that was given much attention in New Zealand Protestant theological institutions in the 1970's when I was in training. I echo the cry of Peterson when he wrote: "Why had no professor so much as mentioned the subject of spiritual direction? And why did no one tell me that the essential work in which I would be occupied as a pastor had this rich tradition of practice and learning, and that I must be acquainted with it?"²⁵

Strangely enough I think that lay people will understand immediately the significance of this topic. I think many people in parishes want the growth of their soul. They readily accept crisis-focussed pastoral care and grief counselling, but I suspect they have a feeling that something is missing.

"Ironically, this [spiritual direction] is the work that many people assume that pastors do all the time: teaching people to pray, helping parishioners discern the presence of grace in events and feelings, affirming the presence of God at the very heart of life, sharing a search for light through a dark passage in the pilgrimage, guiding the formation of a self-understanding that is biblically spiritual instead of merely psychological or sociological. But pastors don't do it all the time or nearly enough of the time... Whenever it is done, though, there is an instinctive recognition that this work is at the very centre of the pastoral vocation."²⁶

I understand that the authors quoted in this paper have been speaking out of an experience of the small parish (50-150 worshippers on a Sunday). Can spiritual direction be offered as a model of pastoral care in the larger parish of 300+ worshippers on a Sunday? Such a parish has been described as a programme parish, which has grown to such a size that the pastor cannot know each person individually in a way that the pastor of a small parish can.

Rice may offer us a way forward. He differentiates between spiritual guidance and spiritual direction. "The relationship of spiritual guidance to spiritual direction is the same as that of pastoral care to therapy."²⁷ By this I understand him to mean that any person can offer spiritual guidance to another using insights and skills of spiritual direction, but will use trained spiritual directors for referral. Spiritual guidance is something that should be encouraged in every parish, and be the prevailing atmosphere within a parish. No one any longer expects the pastor to be the sole minister. The church is beginning to recover the New Testament emphasis on every-member ministry. Each person, and certainly all lay leaders, may aim to offer spiritual guidance to those around them, helping another foster his/her relationship with God. In a large parish as well as small, the senior pastor may aim to be the role model for spiritual guidance. As Peterson says, "The paradigm shift that I am after is from pastor as program director to pastor as spiritual director."²⁸ The senior pastor will train others to offer the ministry of spiritual guidance and spiritual direction.

Those of us in pastoral ministry seek to model our lives on the life and ministry of Christ. What I notice Jesus doing is listening to the souls of those he met. In his conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well, with Nicodemus, and with the centurion who came seeking healing for his daughter, he is caring for the soul. When the cure of souls becomes the centre of what we are about, rather than techniques in ministry, I am sure we will see new life begin to flourish in individuals and in the local church.

¹ Title of book by Stairs, Jean. Listening for the Soul. Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2000.

² Peterson H. Eugene. Working the Angles. Eerdmans: Michigan 1987. pp. 3-4

³ Baxter, Richard. The Reformed Pastor. ed. James M. Houston. Multnomah Press: Portland, Oregon. 1982. p. 72.

⁴ Lake, Frank. Clinical Theology. Darton, Longman & Todd: London, 1966

⁵ Leech, Kenneth. Spirituality and Pastoral Care. Sheldon Press: London, 1986. p. 1976

⁶ *ibid.* p. 75

⁷ *ibid.* p. 77

⁸ *ibid.* p. 77

⁹ Leech, Kenneth. *op.cit.* p. 79

¹⁰ Stairs, Jean. Stairs defines *soul* as "... the spiritual essence of one's existence expressed through body, mind, or any other facet of one's being." *op.cit.* p. 10

¹¹ Rice, Howard. *The Pastor as Spiritual Guide*. Upper Room Books: Nashville, 1998. p. 38

¹² Peterson H. Eugene. *The Contemplative Pastor*. Eerdmans: Michigan, 1993

¹³ *ibid.* p. 56

¹⁴ *ibid.* p. 57

¹⁵ Peterson H. Eugene. *Working the Angles*. Eerdmans: Michigan, 1987. p. 153

¹⁶ Peterson H. Eugene. *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work*. Eerdmans: Michigan, 1980 p. 110

¹⁶ Peterson H. Eugene. *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work*. Eerdmans: Michigan, 1980 p. 110

¹⁷ Peterson, *ibid.* p. 141

¹⁸ Rice, *op.cit.* p. 62

¹⁹ Peterson H. Eugene. *Under the Unpredictable Plant*. Eerdmans: Michigan, 1992, p. 128

²⁰ Peterson, *Working the Angles*. p. 2

²¹ Peterson H. Eugene. *Under the Unpredictable Plant*. p. 127

²² Rice, *op. cit.* p. 140

²³ Rice, *op.cit.* p. 138

²⁴ A short questionnaire of mine to a sample of 25 Anglican priests in New Zealand resulted in 15 respondents. The following 4 questions were asked:

- Have you had a spiritual director at any time in your life? (10/15 responded "yes")

- Have you event directed anyone? (4/15 responded "yes")

- Did anyone explain spiritual direction to you at Theological College? (3/15 responded "yes")

- Have you ever undertaken any reading/study on the subject? (10/15 responded "yes")

²⁵ Peterson H. Eugene. *Working the Angles*. p. 159

²⁶ *ibid.* p. 151

²⁷ Rice, *op.cit.* p.61

²⁸ Peterson H. Eugene. *Under the Unpredictable Plant*. p.175

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THIRTY DAY RETREAT *by Margaret Smith*

Bellbird Heights, the retreat centre of Living Springs Christian Camp in the Port Hills near Christchurch was the venue for an awesome and God-graced month - the thirty-day Ignatian retreat based on the "exercises" of the 16th century Saint Ignatius of Loyola. The retreat ran from Easter Monday this year. Our four spiritual directors were Fr George Drury from the US, Sr Mary Gleeson from Rosary House, Rev. Pamela Warnes from Christchurch and Fr Mark Chamberlain from Mosgiel. As the word "exercises" implies, we worked hard, the twelve of us in silence at Bellbird Heights. We came mainly from the Christchurch area with one from Auckland another from Wellington. Eucharist was celebrated daily.

During the first section, we focussed on the love of God and the destructive consequences and alienation of sin. We moved on to experience and appreciate the Love-story of Jesus - His birth, early life, call, teaching and mission, praying for grace to "know him more intimately, love him more intensely and so follow Him more closely." The five or so hours daily of prayer led us to the passion of Holy week and Good Friday ... and grace to "feel sorrow, for Christ in sorrow; to be anguished with Christ's anguish", longing to be present with Him in His suffering, and to the joy, the inexpressible joy of Easter Day. Different ways of praying were woven through the day along with journalling. Oh, how I scribbled, praying with a pencil on paper ... and prayed with tramping boots on farm tracks down to the bay and round the shore-line, climbing up tracks to the crater rim and views of the harbour and the city of Christchurch and mountains against the horizon.

And now ... how can I ever quantify the effects, the value of such a retreat? How to show my gratitude as I offer my life afresh to the One who whispered one day, "I want you to know that I, your Creator, love you, my creature. There is an emptiness in my heart that can be filled only by you... when we are together you and I can be complete"? That's the ongoing invitation from a profound month's retreat.

For details of the next Thirty Day Retreat contact Pamela Warnes,
03 981-8187.

Email khotso@paradise.net.nz

BOOK REVIEWS

THE LOST ART OF FORGIVING

by Johann Christoph Arnold
The Plough Publishing House, 1998
Reviewed by Sheila Pritchard

The subtitle of this book is: "Stories of Healing from the Cancer of Bitterness" and that sums up the power of this book. Every chapter contains actual stories of people who have grappled with the process of forgiveness. It is not a book of intellectual or theoretical explanations, although plenty of good Biblical and psychological material is interwoven. The strength of this book is that it is *real*. It does not avoid the hard questions like how to forgive when the offender shows no remorse, or how to forgive when there is no possibility of reconciliation.

Nowhere in this book will you find pat answers or simplistic injunctions to "pray a prayer of forgiveness and it will be all over". What you will find are people from all walks of life who are

sensitively met by the author who is a skilled pastoral counsellor. Arnold has the gift of combining compassionate understanding with a clear sighted conviction that forgiveness is the only way to true freedom. He uses the personal stories to communicate that forgiveness takes many twists and turns and is usually a process, not a quick fix. Through the courage of those whose stories are told and Arnold's commentary on them we learn that forgiveness is possible - and healing - in even the most extreme cases. The stories include people devastated by war crimes, murder, abuse, serious injury... as well as more common (but no less hurtful) situations of marriage breakup or other interpersonal difficulties.

Chapter headings include: "Forgiving ourselves" "Forgiving God" "Bless those who persecute you". In these chapters Arnold gives very helpful material on some of the most vexed subsidiary questions.

This is the best book on forgiveness I have ever read (and I've read quite a few!) Arnold is a member of the Bruderhof community which is "an international movement dedicated to a life of simplicity, community and non-violence". Plough Publishing House is a ministry of the Bruderhof community and publishes an excellent range of books in line with their values.

DON'T FORGIVE TOO SOON - Extending the two hands that heal
 by Dennis Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn, and Matthew Linn.
 Published by Paulist Press, 1997, 129pp. Illustrated larger format edition.
Reviewed by Sue Pickering

The Linns introduce the topic of forgiveness by investigating the meaning that key Scriptures such as 'turning the other cheek' and 'going the second mile' would have had in Jesus' time. Whereas a contemporary understanding of such concepts would seem to promote passivity, the Linns uncover actions which, in Jesus' day, would have enabled people to regain their power, maintaining their dignity in the face of potential abuse without resorting to violence. By using a range of modern examples ranging from childcare to international relations, the Linns reinforce Christ's example of non-violent engagement and demonstrate how creative solutions can enable forgiveness.

The middle section of this book, interestingly, takes Elizabeth Kübler-Ross's familiar model of grieving in the dying, and applies it to the process of forgiveness. We know from experience that human beings do not necessarily follow an orderly path through grief, forgiveness or any other significant transition in their lives, nevertheless, by describing the process of forgiveness in terms of denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance, the Linns reinforce their key principle - don't forgive too soon - and provide us with a recognisable pathway towards healing. While affirming that emotional wounds 'can heal in a sudden and miraculous way in which we are given an immediate free gift of forgiveness,' (p29) the authors believe that recovery from such hurts normally takes some considerable time.

In describing the five stages of forgiveness (including sections on symptoms, how others can help , and things individuals can do to help themselves), the Linns often use material from their own lives. Consequently they are able to stress the need for those who have been wronged to be honest about their responses, rather than trying to adopt a false generosity of spirit, or discount their feelings in an attempt to 'be a good Christian' .

The Linns close with an intriguing application of the book's principles to two situations : the first is a contemporary account from their own lives in which Focusing Prayer was used to help them move through the stages of forgiveness and find an imaginative response; the second is the road to Emmaus story in which the authors demonstrate how Jesus walked the disciples through the five stages, and offered a creative solution in which His power and grace were suddenly recognised.

This book should both challenge and inform any reader who is intentional about engaging with forgiveness in practice rather than in theory!

THE LOST ART OF MEDITATION: Deepening your prayer life

by Sheila Pritchard

Published by Scripture Union, 2003, 120pp.

Reviewed by Sue Pickering

A 'user-friendly' book on Christian Meditation, is long overdue and we can be thankful that Sheila Pritchard has written this little gem. Her relaxed, conversational style engages the reader from the opening lines:

'Many of us don't like to admit that prayer sometimes feels like a duty,' to the closing reminder : 'Keep your eyes on Jesus who beckons you to fullness of life and truth, and who accompanies you on the way.'

Sheila Pritchard writes with refreshing and challenging honesty, sharing some of her story, reconnecting us with the treasures of Christian Meditation, reassuring those fearful of straying from orthodoxy, and encouraging all who long for a new vibrancy in their prayer and relationship with God.

By entering deeply into the Word of God and the character of Jesus, we are invited to explore new ways of praying. With heartening simplicity, and fresh expressions of ancient Christian truth, Sheila recovers for us

- the ancient practice of *lectio divina* (holy reading),
- the gift of the Ignatian exercises and the importance of the imagination
- 'meditation on the move' as we prayerfully pay attention to God's character shown in creation
- practising the presence of God as we learn to pray without ceasing
- non-verbal ways of praying when words just aren't appropriate - including praying with our bodies, and using symbols in our communication with God
- the value of silence and the prayer of the heart

All are brought together in the final chapter, 'A rainbow-coloured relationship' which makes accessible the key aspects of the MBTI, while emphasising God's plea not to let ourselves be limited by labels, but to imitate Christ who holds all aspects of personality in gracious harmony.

'This is a book for people who are bored with prayer...' and for that reason it will appeal to the experienced and inexperienced pray-er alike. While a valuable addition to the library of anyone who accompanies others on their journey of faith, it will also be a welcome revelation to those who want more of God, to those who have 'enough holy daring to experiment' and try for themselves some of the ancient riches of the Christian tradition of meditation.

Copies are now available and can be purchased from Sheila Pritchard, 42A Toroa St, Torbay, North Shore City, for \$22.00 (Incl. Postage) or ordered through a Christian bookshop.

FOUND THROUGH LOSS

Healing Stories from Scripture and Everyday Sacredness

Nancy Reeves PhD

Reviewed by Faye Rive

Nancy is a clinical psychologist who focuses on trauma, grief and loss as well as being a spiritual director (further details at www.nancyreeves.com).

When Nancy came from Canada to visit NZ in May 2003 she also had two other books for sale:

A Path Through Loss, A Guide to Writing Your Healing and Growth and ***I'd Say Yes God, If I Knew What You Wanted*** (about discernment). Enquiries about shops that stock these books can be made to Nationwide Books 0800 990 123.

Nancy's thirty short stories in *Found through Loss* is each sub-titled to give an idea of the underlying theme of the story. This is not a textbook but a book of true incidents that covers the widest range of grief and loss for individuals, families and groups. Each story is easy reading, with a memorable point to be made. The book is helpfully divided into five parts: Grief - The Healing Process, Grief and Spirituality, Trauma and Complicated Grief, Children Grieve Too and Healing Tools.

The book is enhanced by the inclusion of 2 compact disks which benefits those who have print disability (e.g. blind, paralysed) or those who want to increase the value of their walking or driving time. The cds omit a few stories printed in the book also the "Suggestions for Healing" at the end of each story.

Some of my gains from the book include the idea of a ritual to mark a time of transition after a loss and what elements such a ritual may comprise. Also the three-step process Nancy has developed to work with guilt associated with grief. I found the book useful personally and in working with others.

SGM NEWS from Andrew Pritchard (SGM Convenor)

Feedback from people who have attended SGM events in various parts of the country continues to be encouraging. Opportunity for learning and listening to God in the company of others is valued be it in the form of a seven day wilderness retreat in the deep south, the annual four day retreat in Nelson, the four consecutive Thursday evenings of the Journey of Prayer in Wellington or in the creative diversity of other events throughout the country.

People - listening to, learning from, loving and living for God is what SGM is about: programmes and events are a means to that end.

Speaking of people, many of you will know that Sister Mary Concannon, founder of the Spiritual Director's Formation Programme, long-serving and current member of Workgroup, is in Auckland awaiting a liver transplant. Mary faces this challenge with courage and conviction and really values your supportive prayer in the difficult task of waiting.

Some twenty participants in the Spiritual Directors' Formation Programme gather at Waikanae in July for the annual year one residential event. This is a significant part of the formation programme. A week together provides opportunity for intensive practice, stimulating discussion and the asking and answering of questions. With knowledge, skills and personal growth all being extended it is an exhilarating and challenging week!

With mixed feelings we accept that this will be the final year of Andrew and Margaret Dunn's involvement on the team that facilitates this first year event. Andrew and Margaret have travelled to Waikanae each year and been a major part of the facilitating team. It is good to see Andrew and Margaret freed up for other things and to see others joining the team and building well on the foundation they have laid.

David Crawley has done a great job of creating and maintaining SGM's web site. We continue to encounter people in a variety of contexts who have discovered SGM through the web site and been impressed both by the site and by what SGM offers. In our last two Workgroup meetings we have been discussing ways in which we can make SGM's work more widely known and accessible

to more people. This includes more use of the internet and looking for opportunities to engage with younger people in their spiritual journeys.

Thank-you to all who support this ministry, through involvement in events, both attending and presenting, through publicising our activities and encouraging others to participate, through prayer and through financial support. SGM is about people and we value the involvement and contribution of each one.

Our story, *Uncharted Tracks* written by Anne Hadfield, is now available and we are delighted with this concrete way of celebrating the first 21 years of SGM's contribution of spirituality in New Zealand. (Email our [Administrator](#) for details of how to obtain a copy). Please publicise this book in Church Bulletins and in other ways.

Finally, two requests:

1. the closing date for applicants for the Spiritual Directors' Formation Programme is August 22nd - is this something for you? - is there someone you want to encourage to apply?
2. please consider contributing to our Friends of SGM Appeal.

FOR REFLECTION

"Its not so much that we're afraid of change, or so in love with the old ways, but it's the place in between we fear ... it's like being in between trapezes !

Anon

PURGED AND PRECIOUS

*Where is the god who can compare with you -
wiping the slate clean of guilt, turning a blind eye, a deaf ear,
to the past sins of your purged and precious people?
You don't nurse your anger and don't stay angry long,
for mercy is your speciality. That's what you love most.
And compassion is on its way to us.
You'll stamp out our wrongdoing.
You'll sink our sins to the bottom of the ocean.
You'll stay true to your word to Father Jacob
and continue the compassion you showed
Grandfather Abraham -
Everything you promised our ancestors from a long time ago.*

Micah 7:18-20 - *The Message* NavPress 2002

STARK LIFE by

*Trees;
bare stripped branches,
pregnant buds,
aspiring skywards
empty vibrancy,
connected to roots,
life giving sap
flowing unseen*

*Branched on to God's Tree,
 Birthing Spirit, "Jesus",
 everflowing sap,
 nourishing: Life, Hope, buds,
 unseen, unfelt,
 filling barren heart's emptiness.
 Fruition's assurance*

FORGIVENESS by

*Forgiveness is a Fruju ad -
 The shock of water, icy cold
 On time-warmed bodies;
 Soon changing into the brightness
 of an ice-cube
 Melting considerately in my drink.*

*Forgiveness is a marketplace -
 Begins with hard bargains
 Bartered to the last cent;
 Becoming a visa card largesse
 With free credit guaranteed by God.*

*Forgiveness is a southerly gale -
 Leaning over the ferry, letting go
 Of all that makes food pleasant ;
 But the swoop and wave is a
 valkyrie horse,
 Passionately running the sky with joy.*

LOVE by

Love bade me welcome;
 yet my soul drew back,
 Guilty of dust and sin.
 But quick-eyed Love,
 observing me grow slack
 From my first entrance in,
 Drew nearer to me,
 sweetly questioning
 If I lacked anything.

"A guest," I answered,
 "worthy to be here."
 Love said,
 "You shall be he."
 "I the unkind,
 the ungrateful?
 Ah, my dear,
 I cannot look on Thee."
 Love took my hand,
 and smiling did reply,

"Who made the eyes but I?"

"Truth, Lord,
but I have marred them:
let my shame go
where it doth deserve."

"And know you not",
said Love,
"who bore the blame?"
"My dear, then I will serve."
"You must sit down," said Love,
"and taste my meat."
So I did sit and eat.

*In addition to removing
the label "unclean"
placed on things that were clean,
Jesus made clean things
out of truly unclean things.
People indwelt by unclean spirits ...
People who like most of us, are bent on
losing their own souls in order to gain
a bit of the world ...
- such people were forgiven and transformed.
The mission of making impure people
into pure people aimed at
tearing down the barriers created by
wrongdoing in the name of God,
the redeemer and restorer of life,
whose love knows no boundaries.*

Miroslav Volf

"Have mercy on me ..."

The Jesus Prayer's second clause
directs this power (agape) inward,
towards the fallible Human
her/himself.

"Have mercy on me" not
because I am evil
but because I, befuddled
biped straddling
the worlds of Ape and Angel, really don't
ultimately know what
my heart and soul
needs to know, and can
only grope about
with the Way flashing
distorted before
me like a lightning-lit landscape.
It is the cry of all human
want and hurt. It

is the plea that makes
 brothers of St John
 of the Cross and an Iggy Pop.
 It is the hunger of flesh
 and spirit shared
 by a St Teresa and Patti Smith. And *please*, it seems to
 echo as an afterthought,
 let me find the strength
 to have mercy
 on my fellow *Homo Sapiens*
 caught in the same bind:
 a tiny strand of an
 immense Web of Life,
 yet the only
 one we can really
 know and live.

Michael Marinacci

PSALM 51 A Psalm of David confessing his affair with Bathsheba

Generous in love - God, give grace!
 Huge in mercy - wipe out my bad record.
 Scrub away my guilt,
 soak out my sins in your laundry.
 I know how bad I've been;
 my sins are staring me down.

You're the One I've violated,
 and you've seen
 it all, seen the full extent of my evil.
 You have all the facts before you;
 whatever you decide about me is fair.
 I've been out of step with you
 for a long time,
 in the wrong since before I was born.
 What you're after is truth from
 the inside out.
 Enter me, then; conceive a new, true life.

Soak me in your laundry and
 I'll come out clean,
 scrub me and I'll have a snow-white life.
 Tune me in to foot-tapping songs,
 set these once-broken bones to dancing.
 Don't look too close for blemishes,
 give me a clean bill of health.
 God, make a fresh start in me,
 shape a Genesis week from the
 chaos of my life.
 Don't throw me out with the trash,
 or fail to breathe holiness in me.
 Bring me back from gray exile,
 put a fresh wind in my sails!

Give me a job teaching rebels your ways
 so the lost can find their way home.
 Commute my death sentence, God, my salvation God,
 and I'll sing anthems to your
 life-giving ways.
 Unbutton my lips, dear God;
 I'll let loose with your praise.

Going through the motions
 doesn't please you,
 a flawless performance is nothing to you.
 I learned God-worship
 when my pride was shattered.
 Heart-shattered lives ready for love
 don't for a moment escape God's notice.

The Message. Eugene Peterson. 2002. Navpress.

*When you are in the right,
 You can afford to keep
 your temper;
 When you are in the wrong,
 You cannot afford to lose it.*

Mohandas Gandhi

**POETRY
 ISN'T IN MY WORDS
 IT'S IN THE DIRECTION
 I'M POINTING
 IF YOU CAN'T
 UNDERSTAND THAT
 AND IF YOU'RE APPALLED
 AT THE JOURNEY
 STICK TO THE
 GUIDED TOURS**

**THEY ISSUE
 RETURN
 TICKETS**

From Colin McCahon's painting
 Of Peter Hooper's words 1969

*We pray with God's courtship of us, constantly attracting us through acts of gentle yet
 persistent love.*

Brother Leo.

Uncle Frank,
Sin is everything that separates us from God.

Colin McCahon,

Sin is anything that separates us from reality ... whether it is the reality that is called God or the reality called Man (who created God in his image) or the reality of the world about us.

A Question of Faith. Marja Bloeme and Martin Browne.

Craig Potton Publishing 2002. P41.

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 1:8-9.

*Silence is the haunting voice of knowing
That eternity exists within the heart of man
Silence is the breath from heavens throne
That caresses my heart with grace*

Anon

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Jiries and Marcelle are Christians from Palestine and operate their workshop and sales outlet from home. They welcome visitors at any time but a phone call would ensure someone was home. Jiries loves to see his work used by people who pray.

BOOKS AND WEBSITES

David Augsburg.

Freedom of Forgiveness. Moody Press. 3rd Edition 2000. pp150. \$31.95

David Torkington.

How to Pray.

This book distills his earlier three books on prayer into one small book. 96pp. \$22.50

Francis Bridger.

A Charmed Life - the spirituality of the Potterworld.

164pp. \$27.50

Walter Brueggemann.

Awed to Heaven, Rooted in Earth. Prayers of Walter Brueggemann. Fortress Press. Pp174.

\$56.95

J. Philip Newall.

Sounds of the Eternal -

A Celtic Psalter

Eerdmans 2003. Hardcover. 96 pp. \$36.00

Present On The Earth.

Wild Goose Worship Group.

Wild Goose Pub. \$59.95. Third in the series including *Cloth for the Cradle* and *Stages on the Way*.

Gordon Oliver.

Living Forgiveness

- Hospitality and Reconciliation. Grove Books 82. 2000. pp 24. \$11.95

Nancy Reeves.

A Path Through Loss - a guide to writing your healing and growth. Northstone. pp192. \$49.95**Silence and Solitude** - orientations of the heart. Oasis Brochure No.11. 15pp. \$5.00 available from Oasis, Box 300-277, Albany 1330. A compilation of articles, verse and Scripture verses on silence and solitude.Forgiveness Homepage: www.ts.co.nz/~gpettitt/International Forgiveness Research: www.Intl-forgive-Inst.orgCampaign for Forgiveness Research: www.forgiving.orgForgiveness Forum: www.vsg.cape.com/~dougshow/**COMING RETREATS**

- Sept 11-14 **Ohope Beach Retreat - Christian Camp, Ohope.**
 A Pathways to Prayer 3 day retreat, in rustic conditions - fully catered.
 Thursday 7pm - Sunday 4pm. Registration \$15 + \$195.
 Closes Aug. 21.
- Sept 26 - Oct 3 **Oamaru - St Kevin's College**
 A seven day silent directed retreat.
 Friday 7pm - Friday 1pm.
 Fully catered. Registration \$25 + Cost \$496.
 Closes Sept. 6th.
- Oct 10-17 **Muriwai Wilderness Retreat**
 - **Houghtons Bush Camp. Auckland.**
 A silent 7 day directed self-catering retreat.
 Friday 5pm - Friday 1.00pm.
 Registration \$25 + Cost \$295.
 BYO food, utensils and bedding. Closes 21 Sept.
- Jan 4-11 2004 **Albany - Oasis Retreat and Study Centre**
 A seven day silent directed fully catered retreat.
 Sunday 7pm - Sunday 1pm.
 Registration \$25 + Cost \$464. Closes Dec. 14th

See our Website www.sgm.org.nz for regional retreats of varying lengths.**CONTRIBUTORS**

Joy Cowley is a New Zealand writer and retreat leader and lives in the Marlborough Sounds.

JoEllen Duckor is associated with the Progressive Jewish Community in Wellington and in education as principal of the Religious School at Temple Sinai.

Andrew Dunn lives and works at Oasis Retreat and Study Centre, Albany Heights. He helps edit SGM publications.

Margaret Dunn lives and works at the Oasis Retreat and Study Centre at Albany on Auckland's North Shore.

Marjory Edwards, a long time painter, now finds expression in writing. She fellowships at Nelson Baptist Church.

John Franklin, is a spiritual director and ministry supervisor. He teaches spiritual formation, preaching and communication. He also teaches English as a second language and has a pastoral/advocacy ministry with Asians.

Clarice Greenslade works as a Canon at Christchurch Cathedral and as a spiritual director and lives at Governor's Bay.

Anne Hadfield works at SoulScape, Wellington, and offers services in life coaching, workplace reflection and spiritual mentoring.

Brian Hamilton is vicar of Holy Trinity Anglican Church, Tauranga. This Research Project was submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Spiritual Directors' Training Programme of Spiritual Growth Ministries.

John McAlpine is an Anglican priest, a psychotherapist and supervisor working in Auckland.

John North of Manurewa is married to Liselotte and is a mostly retired Baptist minister and spiritual director. John writes a monthly spiritual comment column for the NZ Baptist.

John O'Connor is a Catholic priest of the diocese of Christchurch. While serving in Our Lady of Victories Parish Sockburn he also offers spiritual direction, retreats and seminars in spiritual formation. For ten weeks each year John is on the faculty for a Masters Degree programme in prayer and spiritual formation at the Institute for Priestly Formation, Omaha, USA.

Robyn Parkin n/tssf lives in Lower Hutt and is married to Chris. She works for the Salvation Army, is a novice in the Third order of the Society of St Francis, and is currently applying for ordination in the Anglican Church.

Sue Pickering is a spiritual director and Co-ordinator of the Spiritual Director's Formation Programme for Spiritual Growth Ministries, and lives in New Plymouth.

Gerald Pillay is Professor of Theology at Otago University.

Elizabeth Rhodes is a retired Registered Nurse now assisting with elderly people in St Chad's Anglican parish, Meadowbank, Auckland, where she attends worship.

Faye Rive is a Salvation Army Officer, a chaplain for an Auckland resthome, spiritual director and supervisor.

Margaret Smith is a spiritual director and recently retired Anglican vicar who lives at Hororata in Canterbury and is developing a place of retreat on a portion of their farm.

Jo O'Hara has been interested in various forms of art all her life, teaching and doing, and has worked for the Christchurch Cathedral. Now retired she lives in Christchurch and has a growing interest in contemplative prayer.

Drawings are by Jo O'Hara of Christchurch and photographs were taken by Andrew Dunn.

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