



Forgiveness

A Study Guide

John Hendry, Philip Huggins, Hugh Kempster, Felicity McCallum

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Forgiveness: A Study Guide

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For Jack Hendry and Mahrahkah,
whose lives inspire a forgiving culture

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

In the spirit of reconciliation, Felicity, Philip, John and Hugh acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of country and waterways throughout Australia, and the intrinsic connection to land, sea and community that our First Australians have always had; a deep and holistic connection that always will be.

We acknowledge all people, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, who call Australia home, and that all Australians have a relationship with this place. We exist in a community of relationships. We pray and work for reconciliation throughout Australia.

We respect First People's Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.

Bo wiyeka kakilliko Awabakal.

Particularly, I acknowledge the Awabakal ancestors.

Felicity McCallum.



Fig. 1: *Coquon* (Awabakal language for the Hunter River)
Ash Island, Hunter Valley, NSW

INTRODUCTION

Peaceful greetings!

This study guide on forgiveness aims to help individuals and small groups think, feel and pray about forgiveness.

We hope it complements the poignant beauty of “i4giveday” inspired by Danny, Leila, and the Abdallah family’s forgiving response amidst grief and loss (<https://www.i4give.com>).

Personal stories of forgiveness have also been shared with us by the leaders of National Forgiveness Week, Rob Warren, Dr Tim O’Neill, and Sue Tinworth; drawing especially on their work in the Pacific (www.partnersinprayer.org.au/national-forgiveness-week).

Personal stories of courage and faith always lift our hearts. The Holy Spirit has brought us in touch with wonderful people who have been working in the forgiving love of Jesus. They all support the timeliness of these studies now. We recognise together that stories such as these need mindful intention if the inspiration is to become our way of life. In a world full of tears, these studies aim to bring healing and new beginnings, in the grace of Jesus.

Four of us have worked on this study guide. We’ve been helped by those already mentioned and by other good friends, such as Hugh McGinlay and Roland Ashby. In doing this preparation, we have shared deeply and have been changed by each other’s insights and honesty. Our studies, which began as an intuitive response to the Holy Spirit’s promptings, have become both more personal and more global.

Two of us, John Hendry and myself, are over seventy and have no time to waste. We only want to offer, from our varied experiences in education and in the church, what we think will be most helpful to people now. The other two of our team are younger but similarly motivated. Felicity, a First Nation elder, brings this

contribution as well as her deep faith and her PhD studies on the multilayered nature of authentic reconciliation. Hugh Kempster, in recent years both a wonderful Parish Priest and School Chaplain shares from these experiences, as well as his recent work in Positive Psychology, and his background in the reconciliation processes of Aotearoa-New Zealand.

Our format for the studies is simple: silence for meditation and prayer to begin; Biblical passages with more stories and spiritual exercises; discussion questions; concluding prayers and additional resources. We hope the studies are neither too simple nor too complex. We hope everyone can find illumination, comfort and encouragement for the journey we are all sharing.

Forgiveness: A Study Guide is suitable for Lent but for other times too. We hope it is helpful for ecumenical and also interfaith conversations. We imagine this guided study will help young people as they shape the direction of their lives as well as older people who want to let old hurts go and be more peaceful.

We were drawn to our theme by reflection on the prayer Jesus gives us, the Lord's Prayer; and especially "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us" (Luke 11:2-4). We were thus drawn to the Cross and Jesus' words, "Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). Pondering the Cross drew us further into Jesus' teachings on forgiveness, especially that our giving and forgiving should be consistent and continuous: "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times" as Jesus poetically says to Peter when asked how often we should forgive (Matthew 18:21-22).

In essence, we are hoping we can all help our culture become more loving, more understanding of each other, and more forgiving. This would seem to be a movement of renewal, which we are all invited to join. We have learned to look at the world through the eyes of little children. We think all policy, and adult activity, should be shaped by this perspective. Children flourish in an atmosphere that is truly loving, understanding and forgiving.

Children teach us that feeling safe is part of being safe. Children teach us to feel afresh what it is to be loving, understanding, and forgiving.

These studies on forgiveness invite us to feel what it is we seek. We hope it helps us all make and sustain the choice to heal and not to harm; to know better what we are doing and to find healing around what we have done and what has been done to us. That is our hope and prayer, in the giving and forgiving love of Jesus.

Poet and farmer, Wendell Berry, has simple and wise advice for a good life and good community: “Slow down. Pay attention. Do good work. Love your neighbours. Love your place. Stay in your place. Settle for less, enjoy it more” (Berry, 2017). To slow down and be attentive, we provide the opportunity at the start of each session to open with silent meditation. You may wish to use the Jesus Prayer, shortened to “Jesus, have mercy” (see Session Two of these studies) or the ancient Christian prayer-word “Maranatha” used by the World Community of Christian Meditation (see www.wccm.org/meditate/how-to-meditate).

We are grateful to dear Rev’d Canon Glenn Loughrey for our wonderful cover painting. Glenn is a Wiradjuri man from New South Wales, and lives now on the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri people in Melbourne. When Glenn was commissioned to his current parish, the text he chose was the Lord’s Prayer, and the theme was forgiveness.

May I personally also thank the Staff and Board of both the National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA) and the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture (ACC&C). The idea of these studies evolved during my time as President of the NCCA and as Director of the Centre for Ecumenical Studies at the ACC&C.

In addition to the hard-copy book format, these studies are available on-line through the ACC&C website: www.acc-c.org.au. The E-book of *Forgiveness: A Study Guide* (in PDF format) is free of

charge, and is designed as a supplement for those who may wish to dig deeper, outside of the group sessions. Our electronic copy of the study guide contains an additional section at the end of each session entitled: “See, Hear, Feel.” It contains images, on-line resources, and further meditations and journaling exercises that may be useful for study group leaders, teachers, and individuals wishing to reflect further on the themes we explore in each session. Also published free of charge on the ACC&C website are audio files of the authors reading sections of the text, for use in study groups or by individuals.

While this Study Guide invites us into a deeply personal pilgrimage as regards forgiveness, this is related to the pilgrimage of our whole global family.

We pray that you will find it helpful.

Bishop Philip Huggins.

SESSION ONE:

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES AND PRAY FOR THOSE WHO PERSECUTE YOU



In this session we will reflect on *Lex talionis*, the law of retaliation that is innate to the human condition, individually and culturally. In contrast to this, the teachings of Jesus present us with an alternative way forward, also innate: the way of love and forgiveness, even for our enemies.

OPENING MEDITATION AND PRAYER

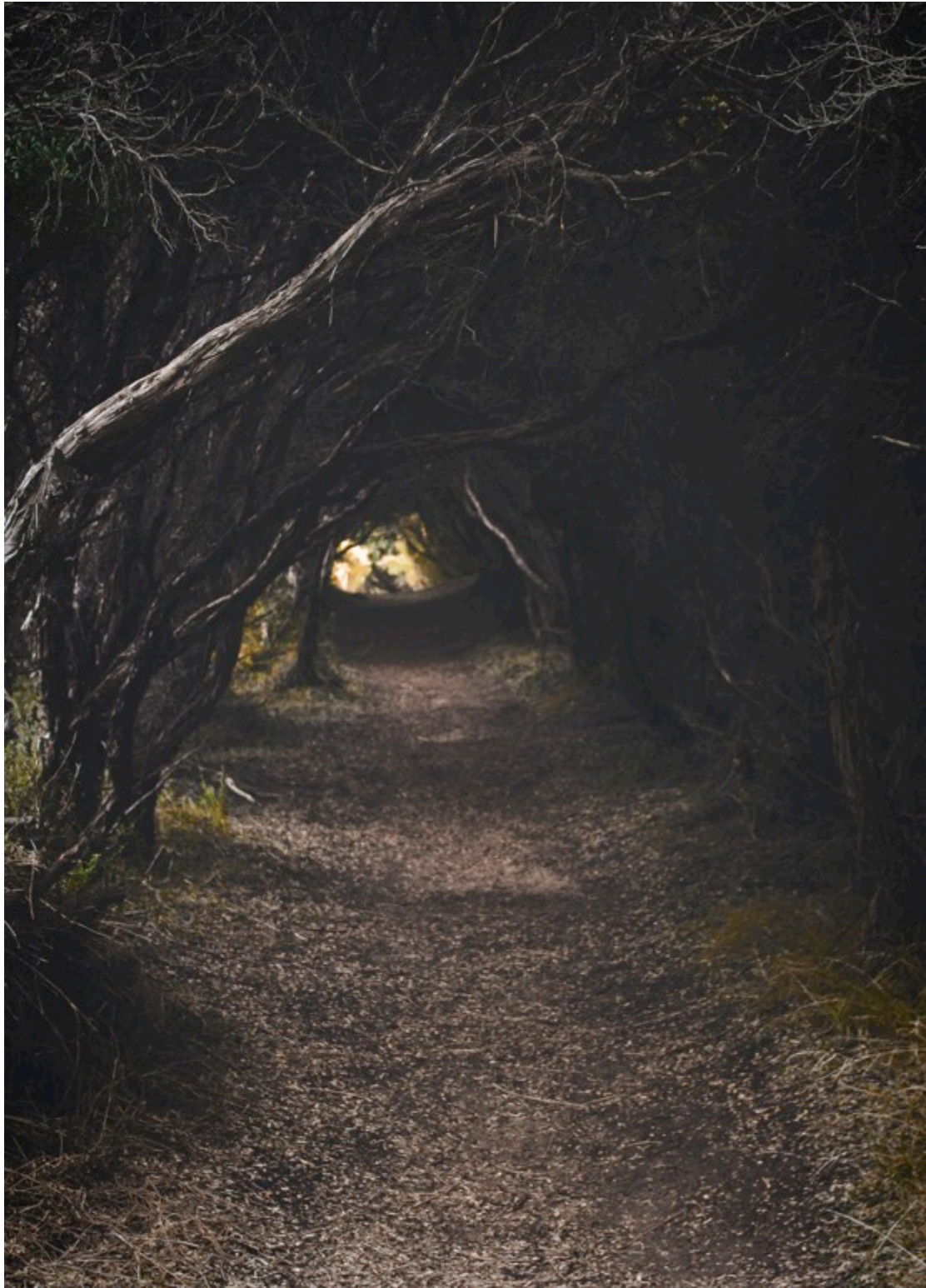


Fig 2: Bush Track - Victoria

First, we enter into a time of silence.

Sit still with your back straight. Close your eyes lightly. Then interiorly, silently, begin to recite a prayer word or short phrase. This could be the Jesus Prayer “Jesus, have mercy”; or the ancient Christian prayer word “Maranatha.”

Breathe normally and give your full attention to your prayer word. Say it, silently, gently, faithfully and – above all – simply.

Silence

Now, when you are ready, open your eyes. Take a moment to look at the photograph above.

Consider the way that the track pushes through the dense bush towards a clearing.

Bring to mind a time you have been in such a place, physically or metaphorically.

Sit for a moment with the discomfort of a dark, fearful, sad or threatening place.

Now focus on the distant clearing.

Recall an experience of hope and resolution.

Settle into a sense of safety. Rest here for a few, quiet moments.

Connect with your breath, be generous with yourself and thankful for the others with whom you gather today.

We pray:

Lord of the journey,
may we be aware in these moments together,
of the great company,
past, present, and to come,
with whom we join to worship you.
And with your Spirit among us
may we look for a time
and work for the day
when there will be joy at sunrise
and peace at sunset,
and all will be free as Christ is free. Amen.

REFLECTING ON SCRIPTURE

READING

³⁸Jesus said, ‘You have heard that it was said, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” ³⁹But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; ⁴⁰and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; ⁴¹and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. ⁴²Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.

⁴³‘You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.” ⁴⁴But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. ⁴⁶For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax-collectors do the same? ⁴⁷And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

MATTHEW 5:38-48

- One member of the group reads the passage aloud slowly.
- Keep a few moments' silence following the first reading.
- Another member of the group then reads the passage through a second time.
- Invite everyone to say aloud a single word, or short phrase from the passage that strikes them or they resonate with.
- A third person reads the passage a final time.
- Share with the group why you chose that word or phrase.

REFLECTION

HUGH KEMPSTER

Jesus' teaching is counter-intuitive on a basic human level. If someone harms me, or those I love, it is a very natural human response to seek retribution. "You don't know what you have unleashed" my gut may scream in response to injustice. *Lex talionis* or the law of retaliation has long been the way of the world.

The ancient Hebrew people knew this, and so we read in the Book of Exodus, for example, in the chapter following the Ten Commandments: "If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe" (Ex 21:23-4). One of the oldest writings in the world is the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi from around 1750 BC consisting of 282 laws. One of these is very similar to Exodus: "If a man put out the eye of another man, his eye shall be put out." In New Zealand Maori culture there is a similar law called *utu* which has to do with restoring justice and balance, and "payback" has been a component of Aboriginal law for millennia. *Lex talionis* is evident in every culture, from the "War Against Terror" in response to the bombing of the twin towers, to the gangland killings in Melbourne between 1998 and 2010.

Jesus' response in Matthew's gospel, to this underbelly of the human condition, is a teaching found in most of the world religions. Buddhist scripture, for example, states something very similar: "Hatreds never cease through hatred in this world;

through love alone they cease. This is an eternal law” (*Dhammapada* 3-5). The Islamic faith also holds this as true: “It may be that God will ordain love between you and those whom you hold as enemies. For God has power over all things; and God is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful” (*Qur’an* 60:7). Jewish rabbinic literature also balances Exodus 21 with such teaching as: “Aid an enemy before you aid a friend, to subdue hatred” (*Tosefta, Baba Metzia* 2:26). Hindu sacred writings similarly exhort the devotee: “[Do] not render evil for evil; this is a maxim one should observe ... a noble soul will ever exercise compassion even towards those who enjoy injuring others or those of cruel deeds when they are actually committing them – for who is without fault?” (*Ramayana, Yuddha Kanda* 115).

While revenge is deeply ingrained into our primal human psyche, so too are kindness, forgiveness, compassion and mercy. It is important to distinguish forgiveness and mercy, however, from denial, condoning or forgetting. “Forgive and forget” is not a particularly helpful aphorism. Jesus doesn’t say, “love your enemies and forget about what they have done to you.” He says, “Love your enemies and *pray* for those who persecute you.” Empathy is a key factor in forgiving our enemies. Psychologist Chris Peterson puts it like this: “People who experience empathetic affect for their transgressors ... tend to forgive ... more readily than do people who do not experience empathy or engage in perspective taking” (Peterson and Seligman, p. 455).

Prayer is one of the most proven and effective ways of building empathy and perspective. If you have hurt me and I genuinely pray for you, pray for your wellbeing, pray that God will bless you, I am less likely to ruminate on the wrong you have done to me, and less likely to hold a grudge against you. I can forgive; even my enemies.

The Book of Joy records a delightful conversation between the Dalai Lama and Bishop Desmond Tutu. Reflecting on the pain and anger of being exiled from his homeland, the Dalai Lama notes: “Many of us have become refugees ... and there are lots of difficulties in my own country. When I look only at that ... then I

worry ... But when I look at the world, there are a lot of problems ... when we see these things, we realise that not only do we suffer, but so do many of our human brothers and sisters. So when we look at the same event from a wider perspective, we will reduce the worrying and our own suffering” (pp. 36-7).

The Dalai Lama’s prayer for his enemies, and for the world, is far from “don’t worry, be happy” which is more about a denial and avoidance, that results in passive aggression rather than genuine peace and forgiveness. True prayer for others, even our enemies, releases empathy, which in turn releases us from the suffering of the unending suffering of the revenge cycle that perpetuates the hurt of wrongdoing rather than healing it. As Gandhi is purported to have said: “an eye for an eye makes the whole world blind.”

TELLING OUR STORIES

Tell your story, if you feel comfortable doing so, and listen actively to the stories of others in the group. The following questions may be helpful as you explore this session’s forgiveness theme:

- Recall a time when you held a grudge, sought revenge, or when another person was vengeful towards you? What did you or they do, and not do?
- What does it mean practically to “love your enemy”? Tell a forgiveness story from your own experience.
- Do you think that some hurts are unforgiveable, or is it possible to find hope and forgiveness in every situation?
- How does Jesus’ teaching apply in situations of war, extreme violence, or political conflict?
- Can you recall a time when you prayed for your enemy? Describe the experience.

CLOSING PRAYER

Say together this prayer in closing:

Our God, humble child, creative ever-encouraging Spirit,
we confess our need for forgiveness,
our need for the ability to let go of the hurts of the past,
the fears of the future.

We confess our need for community, our need for solitude,
our need for family, our need for individuality.

Ever-present Spirit, reminder of grace,
hear our prayer. Amen.

THE WEEK AHEAD: SEE, HEAR, FEEL

These additional resources and activities may be helpful for digging deeper, as you explore further the issues raised in this session and your response to Jesus' teaching. All on-line links below were successfully accessed on 29th November 2021, but over time some may cease to connect if updated or removed by the website owners.

SEE

Sarah Montana, "The Real Risk of Forgiveness – And Why It's Worth It" – TEDxLincolnSquare

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mEK2pIiZ2I0>

HEAR

Forgiveness: Christian Meditation Music

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=coJJPFcuGeg>

FEEL

Carrying the stone. Select a palm-sized stone. For the space of a morning (approximately six hours) hold the stone continuously in your non-dominant hand. Do not set the stone down for any reason during this period. At the end of six hours, write about the experience in a journal, or speak to someone you trust about it.

Some journal questions to get you started:

- What did you notice about carrying the stone?
- When did you notice it the most?
- Was it ever useful?
- In what ways was carrying the stone like carrying an unforgiven hurt?
- Name the person or people you need to forgive in your life.
- Name also those you would like to have forgive you.

SESSION TWO:

FORGIVE US OUR SINS, AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO SIN AGAINST US



In this session we will reflect on forgiveness teachings in Colossians, that God is “pleased to reconcile to himself all things”; and from Matthew’s gospel, that Jesus encourages us to forgive “seventy-seven times.” We will reflect on the Jesus Prayer – the Prayer of the Heart – as a technique for forgiving others; and the Lord’s Prayer: “forgive our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.”

OPENING MEDITATION AND PRAYER



Fig 3: Planet Earth

First, we enter into a time of silence.

Sit still with your back straight. Close your eyes lightly. Then interiorly, silently, begin to recite a prayer word or short phrase. This could be the Jesus Prayer “Jesus, have mercy”; or the ancient Christian prayer word “Maranatha.”

Breathe normally and give your full attention to your prayer word. Say it, silently, gently, faithfully and – above all – simply.

Silence

Now, when you are ready, open your eyes. Take a moment to look at the photograph above.

We look at our beautiful common home, planet earth, as it spins in the vastness of space.

Touch your forehead and feel your pulse. We are gifted with life through creative forces that are way beyond our control.

Focus on your breathing.

Here we are, down on the ground, in the web of life. We are here on our island, with the kangaroos and kookaburras, the waratahs and the wallabies.

We feel the ground under our feet. We listen to the sounds of our here and now.

This picture of our planet invites the renewal of our wonder.

How amazing it is to be here at all!

How beautiful that our Creator invites us each into communion; into friendship.

Looking at our planet, we ask ourselves if we have made our God too small?

What may we need to unlearn? Are we open to being expanded by God?

We pray:

Gracious God,
we give thanks anew for your gift of our life.
We give thanks for the wonder
of our life in this vast universe.
We pray for your Holy Spirit's guidance
as we strive to live with gratitude,
wonder, and with divine illumination.
As we listen and discuss now the wisdom
at the heart of our faith,
guide us, we pray,
through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

REFLECTING ON SCRIPTURE

READINGS

¹⁵Christ Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; ¹⁶for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. ¹⁹For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

COLOSSIANS 1:15-20

²¹Then Peter came and said to Jesus, 'Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?' ²²Jesus said to him, 'Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.'

MATTHEW 18:21-35

- One member of the group reads the passages aloud slowly.
- Keep a few moments' silence following the first reading.
- Another member of the group then reads the passage through a second time.
- Invite everyone to say aloud a single word, or short phrase from the passage that strikes them or they resonate with.
- A third person reads the passage a final time.
- Share with the group why you chose that word or phrase.

REFLECTION

+PHILIP HUGGINS

Stories tell us about people's experience of the humble, giving and forgiving love of God. That is, people's experience of the One who was, who is, and who is to come; the Alpha and Omega; the beginning and the end. The One who creates from nothing a universe of beauty and splendour, and who comes amongst us as a vulnerable baby in a manger, born of Mary. The One who endures the Cross and then emerges from the grave in radiant beauty to bestow upon us grace and peace in resurrection energy. The One in whom, as St Paul puts it, "all things hold together."

In Colossians we find deep wisdom: "Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation ... in him all things hold together." We appreciate further, that the One in whom "the fullness of God was pleased to dwell" is the One through whom "God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross."

A dear soul once told me her story of being in a very lost and distressed place. In desperation she began to pray over and over the Lord's Prayer, recalled from childhood. She recounted the moment when "a light seemed to go on in my mind and the words 'forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us' came into very sharp focus. I immediately understood my own need for forgiveness as well as my need to forgive others."

The woman found it in herself to forgive the person who had badly abused her. “I had never even thought about forgiving,” she told me. In fact some treating practitioners had told her it was alright to keep hating. But she realised that this was just poisoning her. Nelson Mandela once reflected, “hating someone is like drinking poison and then expecting the other person to die!”

As her heart softened, so began a journey of discipleship and healing. “I forgave many people who had wronged me over the years, secure in the knowledge that it was not up to me to judge them – just to forgive.” This woman’s testimony is that the grace and peace of the Risen Lord Jesus has helped her to live with this freedom in a sustained manner. The Word and Spirit of Colossians chapter one, had become her truth, her faith, and her life. Thereafter, she has offered a beautiful and reconciling ministry, walking alongside our First Nation people.

In Matthew’s gospel Peter asks, “how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” Jesus says to him, “not seven times, but, I tell, you seventy-seven times.” Jesus then gives the parable of the Unforgiving Servant, which ends with his insistence: “forgive your brother or sister from your heart.” These teachings are not easy or comfortable to follow.

The Jesus Prayer can assist us in this onerous task of forgiveness from the heart. It is an ancient technique of Christian meditation. We simply focus on saying the sacred name of Jesus. Settle where you are comfortable. Sitting is best. Lying down induces sleep! Settle. Close your eyes. A few deep breaths to help your mind and body settle together. Deep breaths but not to the point of strain. When settled, simply repeat over, to yourself, the short prayer phrase: “Jesus, have mercy.”

“Mercy” means compassion. This prayer takes us into the compassionate and forgiving heart of God. The only instruction is to repeat the prayer under your breath, rather effortlessly. When you lose the prayer, find you are thinking of other things, gently return to praying over, “Jesus, have mercy.” Meditate in this way

for a focused prayer time of 10-15 minutes. You can also pray “Jesus, have mercy” anywhere, including whilst we are walking, even swimming! It is simple, yet profound, like Holy Communion. Over time, as a matter of grace, we may find the prayer is praying in us, helping us to forgive, and has rather descended from the top of our head into our heart. Hence, sometimes the Jesus Prayer is called the Prayer of the Heart.

Meditation helps our self-awareness. Including our awareness of what we think about and what we let influence our thinking. This is important because our thoughts shape our words and actions. The pattern, over time, shapes our character and destiny. To be a more forgiving person, we need to be aware of what we are thinking, so we choose the thoughts that lead to more life-giving words and actions.

It is hard to overstate how important that is.

TELLING OUR STORIES

Tell your story, if you feel comfortable doing so, and listen actively to the stories of others in the group. The following questions may be helpful as you explore this session’s forgiveness theme:

- What is your story of the forgiveness journey? Recall a moment in your life when the Word and Spirit of Jesus intersected. Reflect on the continuing journey to be free of “self-poisoning” as in the Nelson Mandela quote?
- Share with the group a spiritual work of forgiveness that you are struggling with or have accomplished in the past.
- Have you experienced meditation as a means of moving beyond self-poisoning and into forgiveness?
- How could you use the Jesus Prayer, the Prayer of the Heart, to forgive “seventy-seven”?

CLOSING PRAYER

In closing this session, we say (or sing) the Lord's Prayer in our own first language.

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your Name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours
now and forever. Amen.

THE WEEK AHEAD: SEE, HEAR, FEEL

These additional resources and activities may be helpful for digging deeper, as you explore further the issues raised in this session and your response to Jesus' teaching. All on-line links below were successfully accessed on 29th November 2021, but over time some may cease to connect if updated or removed by the website owners.

SEE

CNBC Africa: A Tribute to Nelson Mandela:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TtF61x68Yzk>

HEAR

The Aboriginal Our Father: <https://youtu.be/2GZdPEsAZCo>

The Lord's Prayer sung in Maori:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QIyK7c_Az8g

Karen Lord's Prayer:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ScVdPmtTwPM>

Our Father, sung by a Dinka choir:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SNpKdSAxOjg>

FEEL

A "Forgiveness journaling exercise." Draw a line on a piece of paper, then write along the line, from childhood to now; the people who come to mind. They can be people mostly of grace and peace for you. There may be others.

It's good to remember them all. You may need to join a few pieces of paper! There might be faces from our childhood; folk of our extended family; teachers and parents of friends; people we fell in love with, even for a while; those of more serendipitous acquaintanceship!

Perhaps there are moments and matters we recall which invite our giving and our forgiving. We are inviting ourselves to heal over what is now past and live forward with a clearer spirit, peacefully. We may look back and now have a better understanding of those who have hurt us; times past.

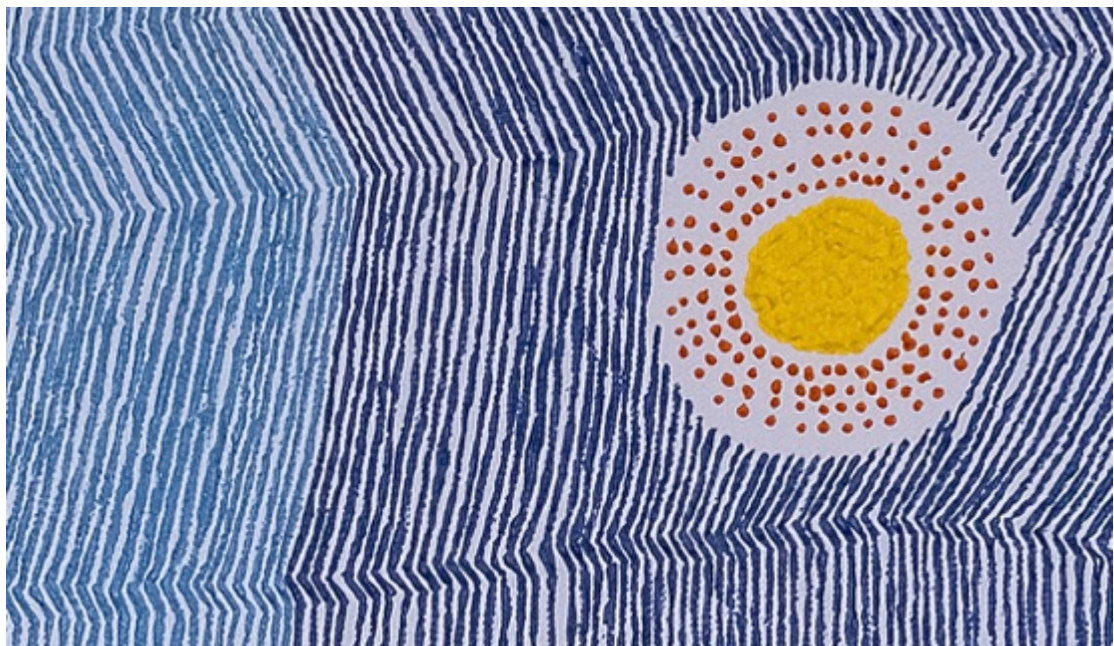
Our empathy may take us deeper into Jesus' words from the Cross: "Father forgive them for they know not what they do!"

At the same time, we may be reminded of moments that haunt us from our own behaviour. We may pray that those affected will be understanding of us, even now. We may pray to be healed of sad memories, in the giving and forgiving love of Jesus. We may pray to be forgiving of ourselves and given grace to carry forward our learnings, in faithful discipleship of the One who is our ever-forgiving Saviour.

These are deep matters and it is wise to take our time with this spiritual exercise.

SESSION THREE:

LET THERE BE LIGHT



In this session we will ask ourselves: Why forgive? We will draw our answers from sacred tradition as well as our observations of nature. We will consider the meta-narratives, the big-stories, of our First Australians' society, and probe Western neurological and social science about why it is so urgent to re-connect with our experiences of hurt, and forgive.

OPENING MEDITATION AND PRAYER



Fig 4: Waterfall - Awabakal country, Watagan mountains, NSW

First, we enter into a time of silence.

Sit still with your back straight. Close your eyes lightly. Then interiorly, silently, begin to recite a prayer word or short phrase. This could be the Jesus Prayer “Jesus, have mercy”; or the ancient Christian prayer word “Maranatha.”

Breathe normally and give your full attention to your prayer word. Say it, silently, gently, faithfully and – above all – simply.

Silence

Now, when you are ready, open your eyes. Take a moment to look at the photograph above.

Look at the way the waterfall sprays and pours itself into the awaiting river.

Nature teaches us about life. Nature invites us to trust and be received into the pool of community.

Nature encourages us to dive into the uncertainty of detachment, release, and forgiveness.

Let your memory return to times you have been in such special places, surrounded by nature.

Settle into a sense of safety.

Probe your recollections for moments of grace enjoyed in Nature.

Rest here for a few, quiet moments ...

Connect with your breath, be generous with yourself and thankful for the others with whom you gather.

We pray:

Lord, we meet today
open to your calling into renewal, relief and release;
open to the wisdom and action
of forgiveness in your world.
Sharpen our perceptions of heart, mind and sight.
Strengthen us to listen to our inner selves and to each other,
so that we hear you more clearly,
love you more dearly,
and follow you more nearly.
We celebrate your gifts, your planet,
and our capacity for
contrition and peace-making. Amen.

REFLECTING ON SCRIPTURE

READINGS

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ²Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. ³And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.

GENESIS 1:1-3

There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

REVELATION 22:5

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.

1 JOHN 1:5

While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

JOHN 9:5

- One member of the group reads the passages aloud slowly.
- Keep a few moments’ silence following the first reading.
- Another member of the group then reads the passage through a second time.
- Invite everyone to say aloud a single word, or short phrase from the passage that strikes them or they resonate with.
- A third person reads the passage a final time.
- Share with the group why you chose that word or phrase.

REFLECTION

FELICITY MCCALLUM

Who do we shine a light on in our society? Who do we praise and see as worth imitating? What parts of ourselves do we illuminate? How do we become more whole and celebrate our wholeness as

fully alive human beings? Those who embody life-affirming courage inspire us. Those who navigate the places of pain and darkness in our world give us light. Those who have learnt how to bring healing lead us on the way. The impulse to shine a light on places of brokenness and shame is a healing impulse. These are all steps we can take towards wholeness and wellbeing.

Connection with our own and others' woundedness is a window where the wisdom of God shines through. Real heroes, the ones who make our world better, are those who seek reconciliation, healing and forgiveness. Jesus tells us that, "the cornerstone rejected becomes the most important of all" and so to bring in the excluded members of our community, and those excluded parts of ourselves, we "turn the other cheek." We soften and open our hearts. This is the way forward for a future full of hope.

This is positive modelling and we hear about it in the following story from Bishop Philip Huggins:

A friend of mine is a South African leader who walked with Nelson Mandela from the prison gate on Robben Island towards the car which was to take Mandela to freedom, after 27 years in jail. So, just remember, this was going to be freedom after decades of suffering, overwhelming deprivation of time away from beloved family and torturous incarceration. My friend remembered Nelson Mandela's words as they approached the car: 'By the time I reach the car, I must leave all this behind through forgiveness and be free for the future.' (Huggins, 2021)

Neuro-science is the study of the human brain and how it impacts on our behaviour and choices. The research demonstrates that we are "born to be good" (Pfaff, 2016) correcting previous theories that we are by nature reckless and greed-frenzied. The "interdividual" or interconnected nature of human beings is now well established in the fields of neuropsychiatry and neuropsychology (Oughourlian, 2016). Like it or not, we are wired together, the people in the world are a part of us. We are one.

Social sciences show us that if we want a peaceful society, if we want peace for ourselves, we must want peace for others. What we do to others we do to ourselves; reconciliation is our only way through.

Reconciliation requires us first to recognise that we are relational (Girard, 1974). By imagining ourselves as being predisposed to relating, we first acknowledge the existence of the other. Then we look for the parts of ourselves, or the other, that we are in rivalry with, to actively work towards lighting this up, healing, re-connecting all parts. This re-remembering includes actual memory as much as the perspectives of those in our group or society who are different or harbour entrenched, difficult-to-bear experiences. “Let there be light” is then possible; a more whole society is lit up and received.

Mandela intuited that a lack of forgiveness would poison him and constrain his ability to lead South Africa to a better future. What is it about Mandela’s way of being that is worth imitating? “If he did not leave his hurts, bitterness and offences behind the prison wall, Mandela would continue to live in the prison of his mind” (Huggins, 2021).

Indigenous “yarning” is reconciliatory because it does not leave any fragments or people out of the whole. First Australians guide us to a society where, “real understanding comes in the spaces in between, in the relational forces that connect and move the points (the people, the environment, buildings, agencies and organisations)” (Yunkaporta, 2020). Indigenous Australians de-emphasise the points or nodes of interest like structures and stars in the sky and focus on the pattern outside linear time. Traditional Indigenous language does not base itself on a logic of ‘I’ or ‘you’ but ‘We-two’. Positive modelling like this gives us a



Fig. 5: Sand Talk

holistic, intrinsically connected view, and values our relationships above all things. This takes wisdom, courage and reflection.

TELLING OUR STORIES

Tell your story, if you feel comfortable doing so, and listen actively to the stories of others in the group. The following questions may be helpful as you explore this session's forgiveness theme:

- What does it mean for you practically – on a personal, vocational, national or global level – to “let there be light”?
- Recall a relationship in your life where you know that there is a need for healing and forgiveness. What have you or they done or not done to try to alleviate or heal this matter?
- What is it about Mandela’s way of being that is worth imitating?
- Tell others of your experience of moving beyond ‘I’ or ‘you’ to ‘We-two.’

CLOSING PRAYER

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, ‘Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?’ Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won’t feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it’s in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”

Marianne Williamson, *A Return to Love* (1992)

We pray:

Lord, bring your light and restoring presence
to the dark places in our lives.

Bring your hope to hearts that feel defeated.

Bring your love and compassion to those in pain. Amen.

THE WEEK AHEAD: SEE, HEAR, FEEL

These additional resources and activities may be helpful for digging deeper, as you explore further the issues raised in this session and your response to Jesus' teaching. All on-line links below were successfully accessed on 29th November 2021, but over time some may cease to connect if updated or removed by the website owners.

SEE



Caravaggio, "The Calling of Matthew" (c.1600)

Light has long been a means to determine a way forward on the pathway of life and of society. Caravaggio here uses light to hinge us into the healing pathway forward; God’s loving guidance and will. When pondering a sense of God’s will in our lives or our relationships, a sense of lightness or consolation, rather than desolation, has been shown by Ignatius Loyola as a method of discernment. Where in your life do you sense lightness and consolation, and how might you make more of them?

HEAR

Emmaus Productions, “The Prodigal Child”:

<https://www.emmausproductions.com/vimeo-video/prodigal-child-episode-8-poetic-reflections/>

FEEL

Gaze at the stars one evening. Or during the day, go outside and touch a leaf or a blade of grass. Indigenous Australian wisdom tells us that when we touch a leaf, the stars feel it (Uncle Chris Tomlin, 2020). Marvel about the connection of all of creation. Feel the emotions that such interface of ourselves and Nature stirs for you and let this tell you about how much your life and choices matter for this earth.

SESSION FOUR:

LIVING IN RELATIONSHIP



In this session we will reflect on the elements of a quality relationship: trust, forgiveness, integrity, hope, and compassion. We will examine the central place that our relationships take in our lives and the way they inform our communities. Jesus' teachings, particularly those in the parable of the Prodigal Son, offer us a way of love and forgiveness. In the life of Jesus, forgiveness was the enabling force to establish loving, enduring and quality relationships. He taught this and demonstrated this finally from the Cross. He understood that we all do wrong and need forgiveness.

OPENING MEDITATION AND PRAYER



Fig. 6: Rock faces - Central Australia

First, we enter into a time of silence.

Sit still with your back straight. Close your eyes lightly. Then interiorly, silently, begin to recite a prayer word or short phrase. This could be the Jesus Prayer “Jesus, have mercy”; or the ancient Christian prayer word “Maranatha.”

Breathe normally and give your full attention to your prayer word. Say it, silently, gently, faithfully and – above all – simply.

Silence

Now, when you are ready, open your eyes. Take a moment to look at the photograph above.

Look at the grandeur of the rock faces in the image.

Notice the grain and contours, the colour and the dimensions. Sit for a moment with the sense of the height and the divide.

Focus on the distant clearing. See the security of the man as he stands in the middle, touching both frontiers. Consider how he is relating to all things present.

Allow yourself to switch from your usual mode of doing, to non-doing, to simply being.

Connect with your body and bring your attention to your breathing.

Follow your breath as it comes in, and then out of your body, without trying to change it.

Simply be aware of it, and any feelings associated with it. Give full attention to each in-breath and then to each out-breath.

Offer loving kindness to yourself, by letting these words become your words:

May I be safe
May I be happy
May I be healthy
May I live in peace, no matter what I am given
May my heart be filled with love and kindness

Notice the feelings and sensations that arise and let them be.

Take a few moments to be generous with your kindness of thought.

We pray:

Companion God,
we join with you and with each other
in these moments together;
we realise that your Holy Spirit joins us all as one,
with nature and one another,
within quality relationships.
May the work of our reflection deepen in our hearts,
deepen our conviction that it is through
our relationships that we are healed.
May we love others as you love us.
May we see your face in each other.
May we offer unconditional forgiveness
through Jesus Christ. Amen.

REFLECTING ON SCRIPTURE

READING

¹¹Jesus said, “There was a man who had two sons. ¹²The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.’ So he divided his property between them. ¹³A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. ¹⁴When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. ¹⁶He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. ¹⁷But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! ¹⁸I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.’”

²⁰So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹Then the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ ²²But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; ²⁴for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate.

²⁵Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. ²⁷He replied, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.’ ²⁸Then he became

angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. ²⁹But he answered his father, ‘Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. ³⁰But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!’ ³¹Then the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³²But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.’”

LUKE 15:11-32

- One member of the group reads the passage aloud slowly.
- Keep a few moments’ silence following the first reading.
- Another member of the group then reads the passage through a second time.
- Invite everyone to say aloud a single word, or short phrase from the passage that strikes them or they resonate with.
- A third person reads the passage a final time.
- Share with the group why you chose that word or phrase.

REFLECTION

JOHN HENDRY

We all live in relationships. When we live and work together differences are inevitable and errors are made. Relationships are tested. The intimacy of family, school, church, community are places where care and forgiveness may be found. If we are to live in quality relationships where we are safe and where we can grow individually and together, we must be caring and forgiving. This is where forgiveness finds a way forward; Jesus proclaims this from the Cross.

A strong and healthy community is based upon trust. The maxim of health professionals is important in all good relationships: “First, do no harm.” When harmful behaviour or conflicts occur we need to repair the damage caused to all relationships impacted,

and together we must find mutually acceptable ways forward. This practical approach can transform the way community members think, feel and act towards each other. We must do things *with* people, not *to* them. This brings to mind the golden rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

Forgiveness underpins this relationship-approach to dealing with mistakes. We make many mistakes, for to err is to be human. Often there is no intention to harm, and when harm is intended, those involved may have little real understanding of the effects of their harmful actions. All our actions impact on others, and of course ourselves.

The quality of a relationship has many different elements, but fundamentally there are five: trust, forgiveness, integrity, hope, and compassion. Relationships are beautiful, however, all require nurturing attention - always - for we all make mistakes. Our hope, like Jesus’ teaching in the Prodigal Son parable, is that we all learn from our errors. In quality relationships we recognise, acknowledge and understand the impact of wrong-doing, done to us or by us.

Forgiveness begins with acceptance of self or the other for making the error and dislocating relationships, and causing hurt and a sense of loss. All who have felt that the relationship has been harmed also must accept and acknowledge the error, understand the context, forgive the mistake-maker and then work with the mistake-maker to repair the relationship damaged. The co-creation of this repair process is essential, and although the heavy lifting is substantially done by the error-maker, the damaged party shares a responsibility to repair the relationship so far as that is possible. The ultimate object is to repair and to restore peace.

The heavy lifting aspect of the relationship-repairing process is the consequence of making the error. Mercy and grace are central to mending relationships. This is captured beautifully in the model (see fig. 7 below) developed by Desmond Tutu and his daughter

Mpho, reflecting on the “four-fold path,” a way of breaking the revenge cycle and walking the way of reparation.

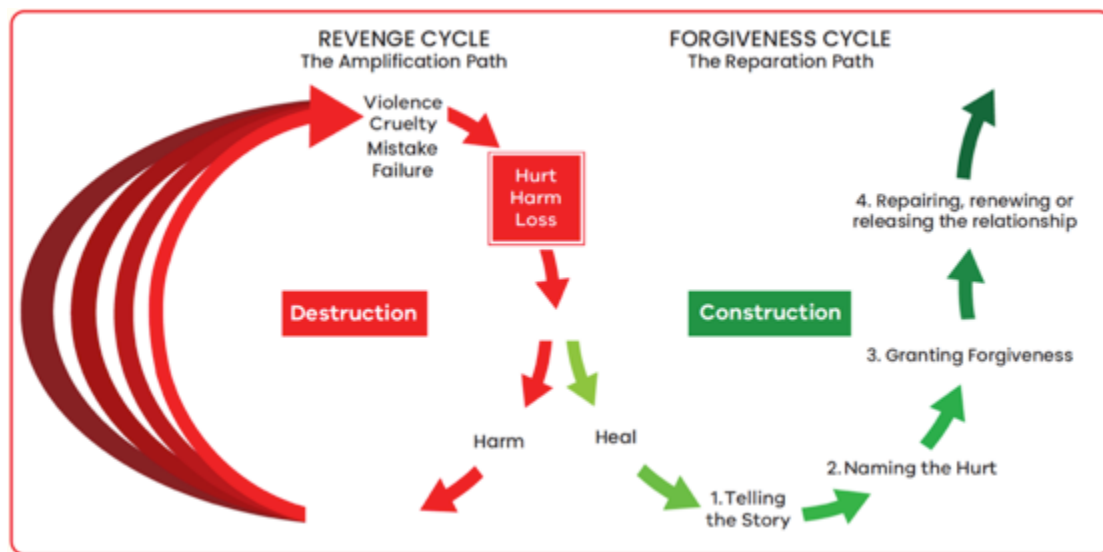


Fig. 7: The Fourfold Path

We decide to heal or harm at the moment we address the error; and it is at this moment that we are, as Christians, invited to heal through forgiveness. This is timelessly depicted in the parable of the Prodigal son. The quality of a relationship, a family, a workplace, a group, a community, or a nation, should not be judged on its successes but rather on the humane and constructive approach it employs in the management of mistakes.

TELLING OUR STORIES

Tell your story, if you feel comfortable doing so, and listen actively to the stories of others in the group. The following questions may be helpful as you explore this session’s forgiveness theme:

- Recall a time when you hurt another person either intentionally or accidentally.
- Reflect on a time when someone forgave you. How did you know you were forgiven? How did the other person communicate this to you?
- Tell others about an organisation or group that you know, which manages mistakes well.

- How have the experiences of forgiveness taught you or changed you? What insights about these experiences do you have now?

CLOSING PRAYER

Say together this prayer in closing:

Our God, we know how important relationships are to you. One of the greatest commandments is to love one another; this is good and pleasing to you.

We pray for healing in our relationships:

where trust is broken, may trust be restored.

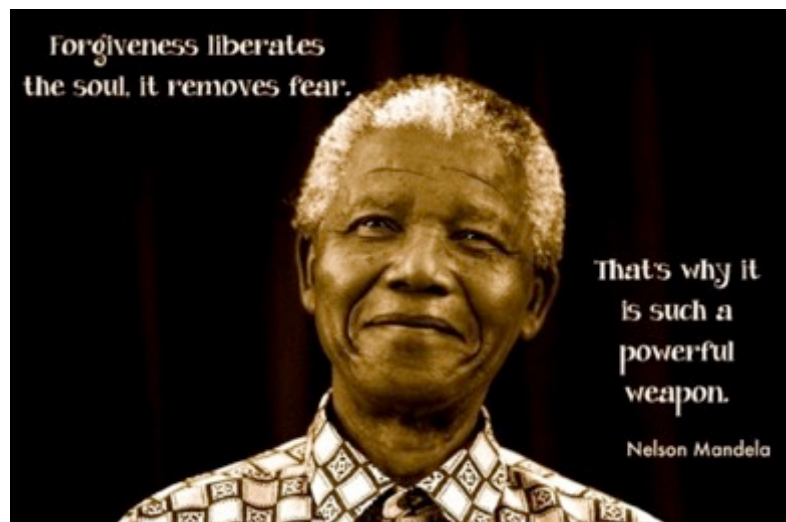
where there is unforgiveness, may forgiveness emerge,

and may the love of Jesus flow through all we do. Amen.

THE WEEK AHEAD: SEE, HEAR, FEEL

These additional resources and activities may be helpful for digging deeper, as you explore further the issues raised in this session and your response to Jesus' teaching. All on-line links below were successfully accessed on 29th November 2021, but over time some may cease to connect if updated or removed by the website owners.

SEE



HEAR

Robert Waldinger's TED Talk, "What makes a good life? Lessons from the longest study on happiness." A talk from the current Director of "The Grant Study," a remarkable 75-year longitudinal study that has followed 268 Harvard-educated men, the majority of whom were members of the undergraduate classes of 1942, 1943 and 1944.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8KkKuTCFvzI>

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks' pre-Selichot address, "We Live in an Unforgiving Age."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0MaU0kfkK-k>

ABC's *God Forbid*, with James Carleton: "the Gift of a Second Chance."

<https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/godforbid/the-gift-of-a-second-chance/12097950>

FEEL

Imagine. Identify a person whom you blame for mistreating or offending you in some way. Then imagine that you are sitting down with this person or talking to him/her. Imagine yourself forgiving the person. Try to imagine feeling empathy for this person, seeing him/her as a whole person rather than as someone who is solely defined by their offensive behaviour. While imagining this, see if you can consider your thoughts, behaviour and feelings in detail. What do you say? How do you feel? What does your facial expression look like? What physical sensations do you notice?

Write. You may wish to write, but not send, a letter of forgiveness to someone who has hurt or wronged you in some way. If this past wrong-doing and the lack of forgiveness you feel leads to you experiencing intrusive thoughts, ruminating about the event and/or keeps you from feeling content, you may benefit from writing a forgiveness letter. You can write a letter to anyone whom you have not forgiven, even if they are no longer in your life or

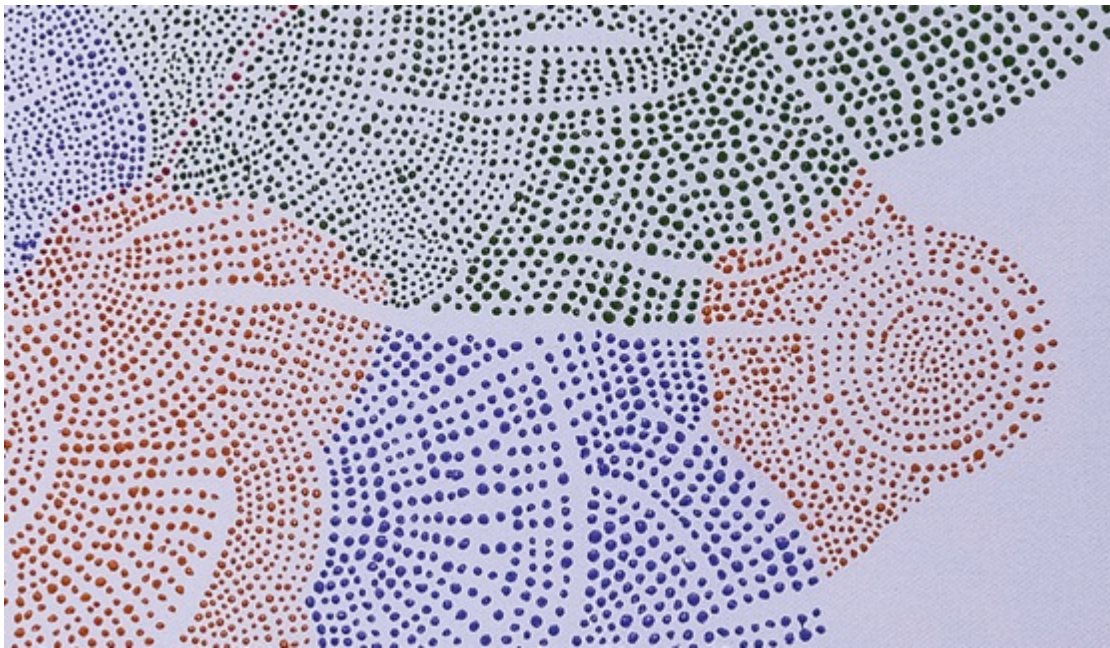
even alive. Explain in the letter what the person did that hurt you and what you wish they had done instead. Finish the letter with an explicit statement of forgiveness, such as: “I realise that you were doing the best you could at the time and I forgive you.”

Journal. Some things to reflect on:

- What personal rituals have you established to forgive yourself and to forgive another?
- How would you like to be treated when you make a significant mistake?
- When another has forgiven you, what was your response? How did it feel? Why do you think they forgave you? What was difficult about accepting forgiveness?
- Come up with your 5 essential steps to forgiveness.
- On what basis do we form relationships and what does a sense of inner-security and self-trust dictate about our availability to forming relationship?
- How have you managed to overcome resentment?

SESSION FIVE:

LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS I HAVE LOVED YOU



In this session we will dig deeper into the physiological, ecological and social wisdom of forgiveness. We will explore the question: how does forgiving and being forgiven inform personal authenticity, healthy community, and protection of the planet? Both Jesus and Paul point to our interconnectedness. The meta-narratives, or big stories, of the First Australians similarly encourage us to reconcile and love one another. As we love and forgive others, Jesus teaches that we are to also love and forgive ourselves.

OPENING MEDITATION AND PRAYER



Fig. 8: Bee & Kangaroo Paw - Awabakal country, NSW

First, we enter into a time of silence.

Sit still with your back straight. Close your eyes lightly. Then interiorly, silently, begin to recite a prayer word or short phrase. This could be the Jesus Prayer “Jesus, have mercy”; or the ancient Christian prayer word “Maranatha.”

Breathe normally and give your full attention to your prayer word. Say it, silently, gently, faithfully and – above all – simply.

Silence

Now, when you are ready, open your eyes. Take a moment to look at the photograph above.

Look at the way the bee hovers and awaits the nectar of the plant to be poured out.

Both the insect and the plant, distinct forms of life, cooperate and communicate their dynamic interplay fuelled by exuberance.

Waves of new life spread and sprout because of their mutuality.

Recall times you have beheld such moments in nature.

Settle into a sense of safety.

Rest here for a few, quiet moments ...

Connect with your breath, be generous with yourself, and thankful for the others with whom you gather.

We pray:

Lord, we join today to pull back the shades
that hold us away from seeing we are all one.

May we open our inner selves to you.

Draw us more deeply into the silence
that dissolves our self-consciousness.

May we transcend our divisions,
and understand what it is to be one.

May we be peace-makers.

Amen.

REFLECTING ON SCRIPTURE

READINGS

⁷ Ask the animals, and they will teach you; the birds of the air, and they will tell you; ⁸ ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you. ⁹ Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? ¹⁰ In

his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of every human being. Job 12: 7-10

¹²Just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. ²⁷Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. 1 Corinthians 12: 12-13, 27

³⁰You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength ...

³¹You shall love your neighbour as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these. Mark 12: 30-31

³⁴I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.’ John 13: 34-5

- One member of the group reads the passages aloud slowly.
- Keep a few moments’ silence following the first reading.
- Another member of the group then reads the passage through a second time.
- Invite everyone to say aloud a single word, or short phrase from the passage that strikes them or they resonate with.
- A third person reads the passage a final time.
- Share with the group why you chose that word or phrase.

REFLECTION

FELICITY MCCALLUM

Living authentically brings with it a natural interaction of parts within ourselves, some of which we might like to leave out of our awareness. This inner-authenticity requires steps in self-forgiveness. These positive inner-life steps echo within our bodies, and emanate beyond, into our communities as well as the natural world.

Our bodies and neurological systems will not function healthily if we favour inner-division. Maturity means gently and graciously enquiring after, and welcoming the unfamiliar, sometimes awkward parts of ourselves, into our self-understanding. Authenticity involves self-forgiveness. This usually brings with it grief, some allowances, and inner-generosity as we tussle and make way to accommodate a new largesse. We literally then embody a bigger heart.

What is inside us, our inner conflicts and layers of inner peace, project onto the outside of our lives. This does not mean we are better off aiming for a manageable, safe or stagnant inner life, so that we can rule over our public or outer life. Fun, intimacy and fulfilment come from movement and dynamic shifts in our lives. The mysterious merging of our inner and outer lives lets us know who we are. We are one, even though we have much variety. Nature is like this, as is human society. Depth and integrity emerge when we lovingly, and non-rivalrously give attention to the movement of the Holy Spirit within us and within others; whether human, tree, flower or fish. We must love one another. Celebration naturally breaks out when we see more of our selves revealed in our relationships with others.

As we align more truthfully with our inner-authenticity, accepting that we are becoming- rather than static-beings, so our relationships recalibrate and change positively. We are better able to love ourselves as we discover new parts of ourselves, and to love others as we discover their newness. It is like this in our cultures, our systems of interacting together. Like bees interacting with flowers, we are drawn into interactions with others who are different. New life sprouts from unexpected connections, as does exuberance and possibilities. What happens if we listen to and interact with our intuition, embracing the sacrament of the now rather than fearful divisions or false security? Reconciliation is true security.

Forgiving ourselves creates many possibilities. Life opens up. We see more clearly. Bridge building becomes possible where

relationships have been rough. We are able to diverge from unhealthy paths, and embrace memories that disrupt us. This work requires courage. We find resonance in the big stories, the meta-narratives of a good culture.

For my people, the Awabakal people, a big story is “The Mystic Ring.” This is the circle in our traditional dance and corroboree – of foot-stamping and song – a crescendo on the earth, near the lake, in the dark, when the moon is full, the light beaming. “The Mystic Ring” is about relationships. It speaks of light and shade, of risk and comfort, of the deep human need to belong, not just to each other, but to the land, sea and sky.

For Christians, one of our biggest stories is the Paschal Mystery. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus speaks to us about our own and others’ life, death and resurrection. No matter how bad things get, new life is always a possibility, an amazing grace. Light is always stronger than darkness.

Our big stories are like strap-hangers. When standing on a bus they help us to move around and orientate without falling, even when the road is filled with potholes. They help us associate with others and build knowing. Big stories mean most when they come to us through relationships. Awabakal elder Shane Frost teaches that when the basket grass is in full bloom on country, the fish will be plentiful. Micro-awareness like this is not just about spiritual fulfilment; it has clear implications for economic survival, for land and ocean governance.

Like the concentric circles of ripples in a pond, new knowledge emanates as the stone of awareness plumbs submerged parts of ourselves. With increased self-understanding we get better at looking after our country and our world. The same dynamics apply at community and national levels as they do within ourselves. We are less likely to act up: “look at me!” Instead, we search for life-giving interactions and relationships: “how can we co-create opportunities for healing, creativity, and justice-based reality together?”

By championing authenticity, self-forgiveness, and oneness, we are endowing Australian cultures with leadership for our times. There are implications here for the healing of our planet too. When we awaken to the mutual interactions of the environment – Kangaroo Paw, bee and nectar – then we may become a blessing to nature, as we are blessed by it. By paying attention, by loving ourselves, our place, all of the species, and the people in it, then we become the global peace we seek.

This future-proofs us all. For justice is never for *just us*. Justice and mercy are like the loaves and fish; they multiply and turn what had seemed to be a limited, pessimistic reality, into an elastic and providential one. The light gets in.

TELLING OUR STORIES

Tell your story, if you feel comfortable doing so, and listen actively to the stories of others in the group. The following questions may be helpful as you explore this session's forgiveness theme:

- Tell the other group members a story of your relationship with nature. Do you have a sense of belonging to the land, the sea, the sky?
- Recall a time when you knew you needed to forgive yourself or another. How was a lack of forgiveness impeding your relationships, your creativity, or your work life?
- Who or what helped you get past the barriers to self-forgiveness or forgiving someone else?
- Describe the flow of forgiveness beyond yourself: personally, work-wise, spiritually or globally?

CLOSING PRAYER

Pray together "The Magnificat" in closing (Luke 1:46-55):

Mary said:

My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.

His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;

he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.

He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.'

Amen.

THE WEEK AHEAD: SEE, HEAR, FEEL

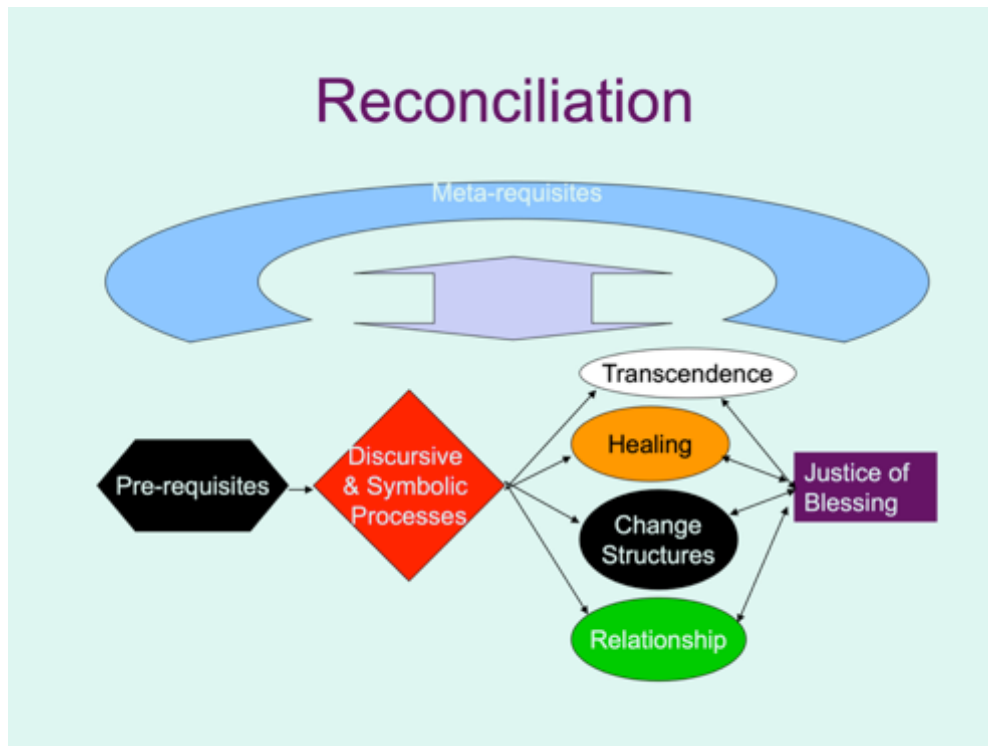
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SEE

Emmaus Productions, "On the wings of One-der":

<https://www.emmausproductions.com/vimeo-video/on-the-wings-of-inder-episode-5-thought-for-the-day/>

Healing is possible through dialogue and symbolic peace-making gestures, which lead ultimately to the justice of blessing. Vern Neufeld Redekop reflects on the components of reconciliation in this diagram.



For First Nations people “yarning” is a system of conciliation and reconciliation that imbues a spirit of forgiveness.



HEAR

The Blessing Australia:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCrs25S_RR7-wTQmiCzA6vWA

The *Magnificat* from Taizé:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-6k6qTOMvE>

I Am : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jkBW2gZ0bDQ>

Amazing Grace, Gurrumul and Paul Kelly -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MVORrx9jIiE>

St Teresas's Prayer -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eqVbLQh-IT0>

My dear friends, Brandon Bays and Kevin Billet through *The Journey*, have been lighting up the world for 20 years imparting practical tools and processes on forgiveness to liberate self, people in our lives, business, economies and ecology. A self-forgiveness meditation is found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TY90loPPLrg>

FEEL

Take some time to walk outside, and sit for a while. Take time to practice *wi-yel-lai ko-a* (pronounced as it looks) the Awabakal word for reciprocal speaking and listening.

Draw or write about the parts of the world, or places in your life where you experience the most relational, generative and creative vitality. List and describe the fruits and enduring gifts these bring you.

In the Eucharistic prayer we hear that God's gifts are fruitful and enduring. Note the parts of the world where you see relations that are not fruitful and enduring, and build a range of alternative choices that could be taken to reach out, balance, heal and fortify those relationships.

For every possible pathway of healing that you have outlined, be sure to mark down what is the life-affirming growth that such steps would bring.

SESSION SIX:

FATHER, FORGIVE THEM



In this session we will reflect on Jesus' words from the cross, in Luke's gospel: "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." From the medieval Mystic Julian of Norwich, to the Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Jesus' Passion has inspired and enabled forgiveness, against the odds.

OPENING MEDITATION AND PRAYER



Fig. 9: Memory Mountain, Eastern Arrernte Country, Central Australia

First, we enter into a time of silence.

Sit still with your back straight. Close your eyes lightly. Then interiorly, silently, begin to recite a prayer word or short phrase. This could be the Jesus Prayer “Jesus, have mercy”; or the ancient Christian prayer word “Maranatha.”

Breathe normally and give your full attention to your prayer word. Say it, silently, gently, faithfully and – above all – simply.

Silence

Now, when you are ready, open your eyes. Take a moment to look at the photograph above.

We give thanks to the almighty eternal Creator, who places us for a moment of time on this great land, and tasks us with the awesome responsibility of stewardship and healing.

The ancient rocks were formed in the bowels of the earth at the beginning of time, and still move beneath us.

The living soil clothes the depths, offering so graciously the miracle of nourishment in due season.

The heavens above, living and fragile, sustain all life, within their intricate balance.

The people of the land learn and teach stewardship of these sacred places.

We meet and walk on the lands of First Nation people, alongside newer arrivals from across the globe, saddened by the violence and injustice unresolved here; searching for peace.

The cross stands silently in the midst of all life; the still point of forgiveness and salvation.

We pray:

O God, we thank you for this universe,
our great home, for its vastness and its riches,
and for the diversity of the life
which teems upon it and of which we are a part.
We praise you for the arching sky
and the blessed winds, for the driving
clouds and the constellations on high.
We praise you for the salt sea
and the running water, for the everlasting hills,
for the trees, and for the grass under our feet.
Grant us, we pray you, a heart wide open
to all this joy and beauty, and save our souls
From being so steeped in care,
Or so darkened by passion,
That we pass heedless and unseeing
When even the thorn bush by the wayside
Is aflame with the glory of God. Amen.

REFLECTING ON SCRIPTURE

READING

³³When they came to the place that is called 'The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. ³⁴Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.' And they cast lots to divide his clothing. ³⁵And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, 'He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!' ³⁶The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, ³⁷and saying, 'If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!' ³⁸There was also an inscription over him, 'This is the King of the Jews.'

³⁹One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, 'Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!' ⁴⁰But the other rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?' ⁴¹And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.' ⁴²Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' ⁴³He replied, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'

LUKE 23:33-43

- One member of the group reads the passage aloud slowly.
- Keep a few moments' silence following the first reading.
- Another member of the group then reads the passage through a second time.
- Invite everyone to say aloud a single word, or short phrase from the passage that strikes them or they resonate with.
- A third person reads the passage a final time.
- Share with the group why you chose that word or phrase.

Ultimately, forgiveness in our own strength, as important as that is, will always be left wanting. Forgiveness is a reality we need to actively work towards, but equally it is a gift, something beyond our selves and our efforts. Forgiveness is a divine act. In his Easter Sermon, St John Chrysostom proclaims: “Let no one mourn that they have fallen again and again; for Forgiveness has risen from the grave.” Jesus is forgiveness personified. As Henri Nouwen writes, in his poignant reflection “Forgiveness: The Name of Love in a Wounded World” (*Weavings*, vol. vii, no. 2, 1992):

The hard truth is that we all love poorly . . .
We need to forgive and be forgiven
every day, every hour – unceasingly.
That is the great work of love
among the fellowship of the weak
that is the human family.
The voice that calls us the Beloved
is the voice of freedom
because it sets us free to love without wanting
anything in return.
This has nothing to do with self-sacrifice,
self-denial or self-depreciation.
But has everything to do with the abundance of love
that has been freely given to me and from which
I freely want to give.

Over Holy Week, in Christian churches, we traditionally focus our thoughts and prayers on the Cross of Christ. We may walk the Stations of the Cross. We are invited to journey with the faithful into the Triduum, our annual pilgrimage from Maundy Thursday to Easter Day. On Good Friday, with countless Christians around the world, of every creed and colour, we enter into the great mystery of the Atonement: “When I survey the wondrous cross | On which the Prince of glory died | My richest gain I count but loss | And pour contempt on all my pride | See from His head, His hands, His feet | Sorrow and love flow mingled down! | Did

e'er such love and sorrow meet | Or thorns compose so rich a crown?"

As Jesus hangs in excruciating pain, between two criminals, on a splintered wooden cross, we reflect on the profound compassion and forgiveness of our Lord, for his executioners, and for all of us: "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." As we meditate on the Passion, as we re-enact the institution of the Eucharist, as we celebrate the Empty Tomb, we are mysteriously drawn into the real presence of Christ crucified and risen, with us in the here and now.

It is an ancient Christian discipline, entering into the Passion of Jesus. In the opening chapter of her book, the medieval mystic, Julian of Norwich, tells of three graces that she earnestly prayed for as a younger woman: to enter more deeply into Jesus' Passion; to embrace as a gift any sickness that might come her way; and to receive three wounds: contrition, compassion and a longing for God's will. Her devotional intensity faded as she grew older, and she largely forgot the passionate prayer of her youth.

But then, at the age of thirty, Julian fell seriously ill, perhaps with the plague. Her priest came to visit. He gave her a crucifix to gaze on: "Daughter, I have brought you the image of your saviour. Look at it and take comfort from it, in reverence of him who died for you and me" (Colledge and Walsh, p.128). As her life seemed to be slipping away, Julian beheld the crucifix, and then suddenly she was reminded of the prayer of her youth. Be careful what you pray for! Illness had indeed come upon her, and so she now asked the Lord to fill her body with "recollection and feeling of his blessed Passion ... that his pains might be my pains" (p. 129).

A most remarkable thing then took place; God answered Julian's youthful prayers with a series of sixteen "showings." Contemplating the crucifix, Julian saw blood pouring from the crown of thorns, as real as if she was at Jesus' crucifixion. As she beheld, she saw the blood dry and her beloved Lord's face turn

deadly pale, then blue, and finally brown. Death took hold of his flesh. And then she writes (pp. 214-6):

I watched with all my might for the moment when Christ would expire, and I expected to see his body quite dead; but I did not see him so, and just at the moment when by appearances it seemed to me that life could last no longer . . . he changed to an appearance of joy . . . Then our good Lord put a question to me: Are you well satisfied that I suffered for you? I said: Yes, good Lord, all my thanks to you; yes, good Lord, blessed may you be. Then Jesus our good Lord said: If you are satisfied, I am satisfied. It is a joy, a bliss, an endless delight to me that I ever suffered my Passion for you.

These showings, and Julian's profound theological reflections on them, encapsulate a deep truth: only in and through Jesus can betrayal, cruelty, and even death, be truly transformed into joy and victory. The way of the cross becomes the way of life. No matter how loving we may be in our own strength, forgiveness often escapes us, especially if the cuts are deep. It is only Jesus who can take on the unbearable burden of wrongdoing and intercede on our behalf: "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."

I would like to close with a forgiveness story of my own. Between 1997 and 2003 there was an eruption of ethnic violence in the Solomon Islands. The Istabu Freedom Movement, an indigenous Guadalcanal militant organisation, led by the warlord Harold Keke and others, fought a bloody battle for political power and land rights with the Malaitia Eagle Force. More than 200 people were killed, and thousands of innocent civilians were impacted by the brutal violence. On 24th July 2003 the Australian-led Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) commenced, also known as Operation *Helpem Fren* (Solomon Islands Pidgin for "help a friend"). It took ten years, and an estimated AU\$2.6 billion, before the last of the 7,270 Australian personnel were withdrawn.

In 2009 Father Sam Ata, from Malaitia Province, former Dean of St Barnabas Cathedral Church in Honiara, was appointed Chairman of the Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The 2012 TRC Report opens with a quote from human rights activist, Priscilla Hayner: “Remembering is not easy, but forgetting may be impossible.” The Report goes on to document six sets of human rights violations that came to light through the TRC hearings: killings, abductions/illegal detentions, torture/ill-treatment, sexual violence, property violations and forced displacements.

I remember vividly the day I picked up my friend Father Sam from Melbourne airport. He was thin, drawn, and exhausted; a shadow of the fit muscular young man I had studied with at theological college in New Zealand. Bishop Terry Brown, the retired Anglican Bishop of Malaita, and editor of the 2012 TRC Report, had recently gone behind the back of Prime Minister Gordon Darcy Lilo, and released the politically-charged five-volume Report to some sixty individuals and select media outlets. In his accompanying press release Bishop Brown wrote: “The Report is very accurate and comprehensive and gives proper recognition to the victims of the conflict whose stories should be heard. It is not good enough to forgive the perpetrators and forget the victims, which seems to be the approach of the Government. I feel strongly about this as I too lived through this period of Solomon Islands history and was a participant in the tragedy of those times.” The pre-release was motivated by justice, no doubt, but it was an explosive decision in the build up to the 2014 election. As TRC Chair, and the only Solomon Islander on the Commission, Father Sam was caught up in a political tornado; not to mention the trauma of years of hearings, and the ongoing grief of losing loved ones himself during the conflict. He quite literally had the weight of the world on his shoulders.

After Mass at St Peter’s Eastern Hill, in Melbourne, one morning, over breakfast, he told me of his search for a mass-grave hidden in the dense bush: “The pathway ahead of us mysteriously disappeared, and we became lost; blinded almost. It was a spiritual

battle. But we pushed on, and eventually found the grave.” I was overwhelmed just listening, “How did you ever find the strength to keep going?” He replied, “I know many of these people. And I know the atrocities they committed. In my own strength I would have given up long ago. But as priests, as Christians, you and I have the greatest gift. We can lay these impossible burdens at the Altar. It is Christ crucified who forgives when I can’t.”

TELLING OUR STORIES

Tell your story, if you feel comfortable doing so, and listen actively to the stories of others in the group. The following questions may be helpful as you explore this week’s forgiveness theme:

- Are there situations that you can think of, where forgiveness is almost impossible?
- Recall a time when you have laid a heavy burden at the Altar, or at the foot of the Cross. What did you do? How did it feel?
- What do you think about the Truth and Reconciliation process in countries such as South Africa, Rwanda, or the Solomon Islands? Is it fair that perpetrators escape incarceration? How do these processes bring healing?
- Restorative Justice programs have been developed within the criminal justice system, in schools, and in response to family violence. Have you had experience of this? What do you think of this as a response to crime and wrong-doing?

CLOSING PRAYER

Say together this prayer in closing:

Saviour, you have conquered tears by your crying,
pain by your suffering, and death by your dying.
We come together before your cross to remember your suffering,
and to realise afresh the wonder of your compassion and love.
As we listen to your words from the cross,
show us the truth about ourselves.
Let us know, and help to acknowledge, what our sins have done.
And let us determine to follow your way of life,
Bringing glory to your name for ever.
Amen.

THE WEEK AHEAD: SEE, HEAR, FEEL

These additional resources and activities may be helpful for digging deeper, as you explore further the issues raised in this session and your response to Jesus' teaching. All on-line links below were successfully accessed on 29th November 2021, but over time some may cease to connect if updated or removed by the website owners.

SEE

Documentary – “Journey of the Heart: The Life of Henri Nouwen”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0U8M1gx5Rk4>

Solomon Islands TRC, “Final Report: Confronting the Truth for a Better Solomon Islands” (2012)

https://truthcommissions.humanities.mcmaster.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Solomon-Islands-Truth-and-Reconciliation-Commission_TRC_Final-Report_Vol1.pdf

Film – “Saint Julian of Norwich” by Mary’s Dowry Productions
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gvQy7fgQrc0>

HEAR

Julian of Norwich, *Revelations Of Divine Love* read by David Barnes
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2OHGAjbyJcM>

Miracle Singers (Solomon Islands) - I Surrender:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IWcTIUBbL5s>

FEEL

Setting down the stone. For this ritual you will need a heavy stone. You want to feel its weight as burdensome. Walk with this stone some distance to a private place. Make a cross in this place, as best you can: from branches, or cut into the soil or sand. Sit for a time. Reflect on the heavy stone and all that it symbolises for you. Then undertake the following:

- Admit to the stone what you have done, or tell of what has been done to you.
- Express something of the anguish you have caused or experienced.
- Then apologise to the stone, or imagine receiving an apology yourself.
- Imagine the person or situation in your minds eye. Consider the details of what you recall.
- If forgiveness is beyond you, or being withheld, ask for God’s forgiveness.
- Decide on a forgiving course of action: making amends, seeking reconciliation, or deciding to end the relationship as lovingly as you can.
- In prayer, ask for God’s help, especially if forgiveness seems elusive or impossible.
- Then set the stone down at the foot of the cross you have made. Leave it there.

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Figure 1: “*Coquon* (Awabakal language for the Hunter River), Ash Island, Hunter Valley, NSW” Steve Plassow (used with permission)

Figure 2: “Bush Track, Victoria” Adnan Uddin (Pexels)

Figure 3: “Planet Earth” Pixabay (Pexels)

Figure 4: “Waterfall, Awabakal country, Watagan mountains, NSW” Steve Plassow (used with permission)

Figure 5: “Sand Talk” from Tyson Yunkaporta, *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World* (Melbourne: Text Publishing Company, 2019), p.89

Figure 6: “Rock Faces, Central Australia” Cassandra Brown (used with permission)

Figure 7: “Fourfold Path” John Hendry; from Desmond and Mpho Tutu, *The Book of Forgiving: the Fourfold Path for Healing Ourselves and Our World* (London: William Collins, 2014), p. 49

Figure 8: “Bee and Kangaroo Paw” Steve Plassow (used with permission)

Figure 9: “Memory Mountain” Ken Duncan (used with permission)

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THE AUTHORS



(left to right): Bishop Philip Huggins, John Hendry, Felicity McCallum, Father Hugh Kempster

JOHN HENDRY OAM

For more than 50 years John Hendry has been working in schools throughout Australia and internationally in China, Hong Kong, Singapore, NZ, South Korea, and Europe. He has presented at UNESCO conferences on bullying and harassment, trauma, and resilience; as well as international conferences on restorative justice, education and school cultures. He has run workshops for industry as well as retreats for religious



organisations. John's work with elite sporting bodies on the role of forgiveness in personal and team performance has been significant. John was a primary player in the establishment and development of Positive Psychology into education (and the workplace) through his pivotal work in establishing Positive Education as a significant focus of student wellbeing while Director of Student Welfare at Geelong Grammar School. Also known as the "Bradman of Bendigo" in 2014 John was awarded the Order of Australia Medal (OAM) for services to Education and Cricket.

PHILIP HUGGINS

After years of ministry in diverse settings Bishop Philip Huggins brings many experiences to these studies. At the individual level, from the poignancy of standing at grave side with families in unresolved division, to observing the sadness of former friends, with many abilities, who seem unable to recover friendship after mistakes. At the global level, for example, he has pursued nuclear disarmament as nations, who



are locked into negative stereotyping of each other, consider it rational to threaten mass destruction. Philip has also helped offer services and advocacy to people displaced from their homes as refugees and asylum-seekers. Listening to these dear souls as well as to dear First Nation folk in Australia, has taught him about the nature of trauma, intergenerational trauma, and the place of forgiveness in the journey of healing. Philip's wife Liz is a psychologist and artist. They are blessed with a beautiful family and are doing what they can so their grandchildren may flourish in a kinder world of giving and forgiving. Recently, much involved in advocacy and prayer regarding climate change, Philip sees the links in these Studies to a more beneficial life for all God's creation.

HUGH KEMPSTER

Father Hugh Kempster is Senior Chaplain at Melbourne Grammar School, and formerly Vicar of St Peter's Eastern Hill, an historic Anglo-Catholic parish in Melbourne. Hugh has also served as a Director of the Brotherhood of St Laurence, a not-for-profit organisation that works toward the vision of an Australia free of poverty;



and as a member of the Geelong Grammar School Council. In 2008, after 20 years of parish ministry in New Zealand, and receiving a PhD in Medieval Studies, Hugh was appointed Senior Chaplain at Geelong Grammar School, the same year that Prof. Marty Seligman took up his first six-month residency at the School. Since then Hugh has had an active interest in the interface between faith and positive psychology. Prior to becoming an Anglican priest Hugh was an Electronic Engineer. He and his wife Ree have two daughters and four grandchildren living in New Zealand and Australia.

FELICIY MCCALLUM

Felicity McCallum is an Awabakal Elder. She has been relying on forgiveness-focused methods for healing children, and streamlining young people’s education in Catholic schools as well as maximising their enrichment via youth ministry activities for 25 years. She is a teacher of yoga and a practitioner of “The Journey” for people of all ages, both holistic healing based approaches that focus on union, forgiveness and letting go of past hurts. Felicity has found through her doctoral research, university teaching, and civic leadership activities for Indigenous-non-Indigenous engagement that peacemaking naturally comes when truth is set free, that relationships matter above everything else, and gentleness is usually the key. She ascribes to the belief that there is no human heart or relationship that cannot be healed through forgiveness, and that Reconciliation is the only way to true personal, family, and global security.



THE ARTIST

GLEN LOUGHREY

Father Glenn Loughrey is a Wiradjuri man from NSW, an Anglican Priest in the Diocese of Melbourne, and the Vicar of St Oswald's, Glen Iris. He is an artist who fuses Indigenous art styles with Western forms of storytelling. He



often uses his art to reflect on the diversity of Indigenous identity and its disconnect from the dominant culture. He explores his own journey of discovery to reclaim the sense of country on a personal and community level. He is an established author and speaker on Aboriginal and contemplative subjects and is a recognised scholar of the work and thought of Thomas Merton.



“In Search of Peace” acrylic on canvas, painted with a stick, 2021.

The central figure in this painting is a small red clown with head down rolling up a ball of almost invisible red string as he or she goes in search of peace.

Peace is often seen to be a foolish mission in our aching world.

The string winds its way through a complex world under a changing sky. The landscape contains a range of symbols and motifs, a cross, human figures, a pregnant woman, a praying man, a war/slave/colonial ship ... and more.

On the right of the painting, there are 3 birds, often symbolic of the trinity or the transcendent in my art, but also the totems of many ancient nations silhouetted against an unpainted white sky suggesting that there is something greater than what we see or experience.

The Rev'd Canon Glenn Loughrey



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