

# Integrity

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Permit No. 239

March/April 1986

# Integrity

INTEGRITY, a journal published by an independent nonprofit corporation, is intended to be a ministry of reconciliation which utilizes the varied talents of a large community of believers who seek accurately to reveal God to both the church and the world so that all may become one as He is one.

(Continued from page 18)

Elizabeth Morris based on her and her husband's experience in the death of their only son at the hands of a drunken driver. Her article, "Seventy Times Seven" is reprinted here with the gracious permission of Guideposts, Inc. We are deeply indebted to both Mrs. Morris and *Guideposts* magazine. Two articles in this issue focus on difficult situations with which the writers have personal knowledge. We appreciate the work of Diane Kilmer, *Integrity* board member, and Ron and Marti Van Horn, committed Christian couple of Grand Rapids in these two articles. We intend to provide our readers with resource suggestions on various themes whenever possible, so that you may purchase such works for more intensive study. Following this policy we asked Robert Mossman to prepare such an article which he has very graciously done, carefully and critically reviewing and assessing several current works on the theme of forgiveness. We are grateful to Elton Higgs for again providing us with creative poetic expression of our forgiveness theme in his Biblically oriented poem, "The Tears of Joseph."

Special bound volumes now include a recently published collection of the five issues of *Integrity* on the Holy Spirit, published in 1984,

material which might well be utilized in class or other small group study. The volume sells for only \$3.00. Our continued thanks to readers for your prayers, gifts, and letters of encouragement.

Joseph F. Jones, Chairman  
*Integrity* Editorial Board

## Readers' Response

Dear Dr. Jones:

. . . Thank you for the copies of *Integrity*. I've only had the opportunity to look at the November/December issue and I was very much impressed. Keep up the good work!

Best Wishes,  
Lee Lofaro  
New York, N.Y.

Ed. Note: We are deeply grateful to *Guideposts* and indebted to Ms. Lee Lofaro for permission to reprint the article by Elizabeth Morris, "Seventy Times Seven" in this issue of *Integrity*; and we appreciate her kind words of encouragement.

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Mar.-April 1986  
Vol. 16, No. 2

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### “Make Forgiveness Real and Sweet”

In a congregation where I served years ago there was a beloved elder who was frequently called upon to pray when someone responded during the invitation “to be restored.” Perhaps he was asked because he seemed to be so empathic with others, and his prayer invariably concluded with the petition that the confessing penitent would find “forgiveness real and sweet.” It is imperative that forgiveness become a reality, authentic and gracious; and when extended by God to us sinners, it is precisely that. The rub is when I am asked to forgive another who has hurt and wounded me, or when I need to humbly confess and ask forgiveness from one whom I have offended and damaged.

The importance of forgiveness can hardly be over-emphasized in our interpersonal dealings. In his little book, *The Lord's Prayers*, Dr. Elton Trueblood said, “Our relationship to God is conditioned by our relationship to men. Bitterness is a barrier!” How he had captured the mind of Jesus and the spirit of Paul. Jesus responded to the disciple's request about being taught how to pray with several penetrating insights; but perhaps the most difficult prayer petition he required centered on forgiveness. “And forgive us our debts (trespasses, sins), As we also have forgiven our debtors.”

The exhortation of Paul deserves full mention in the context of this issue of *Integrity* on forgiveness. “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” Bitterness is a barrier to relationships in life and in the Kingdom. In our initial article, efforts are focused on man's sinful predicament, that radical wrongness in people which seems so much a part of human nature, which so stubbornly refuses to yield to mere human discipline. Pious homilies and pulpit exhortations to be better are either not heard or tend to irritate us even more, since most of us feel so keenly our inadequacy to deal with sin alone. But thank God who in Christ loved us first, forgave us first, reconciled us to Himself, consequently enabling us to forgive and accept one another.

This issue of *Integrity* is especially blessed with an article by

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## Man's Need and God's Answer

JOSEPH F. JONES

Southfield, Michigan

Several years ago the brilliant Cambridge scholar, Herbert H. Farmer, declared that “the judgment that something is very radically wrong with human life can hardly be dismissed any longer as the outcome of the morbid pessimism of Christian orthodoxy.” (*God and Man*, p. 20) Now this radical wrongness has been variously characterized from the past to the present, ranging on a continuum from being the basic “original sin” which has corrupted man's nature, consequently producing the actual sins of his daily life, to the explanation of behavior as a “characteriological disorder,” resultant from maladaptive upbringing. The Bible tersely describes it as sin.

But what is sin? The Bible employs several words to define and describe its nature, and these words group themselves into two categories, depending on whether wrongdoing is viewed negatively or positively. Negatively, sin is shortcoming, sometimes pictured as a lapse, a slip, or a blunder; then again it is seen as a failure to hit a mark or target. Again it is pictured as an inward badness, a disposition which falls short of what is right and good.

Presented positively, sin is transgression, trespassing beyond a given boundary. Another word pictures it as lawlessness, while yet another sees it as an act which violates justice. Underlying both clusters of words is the assumption of an existence of a moral standard; for sin is either failure to reach an ideal or behavior which breaks law and order. The apostle's verdict is comprehensive and terse, “Every mouth is stopped, and the whole world held accountable to God. . . . For there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of his glory, they are justified by his grace as a gift . . . .” (Romans 3:19, 23-24).

“There is no man who does not sin,” Solomon avers during his dramatic prayer at the dedication of the Temple (I Kg. 8:46). The Psalmist's confession and conclusion is the poignant question: “If thou, O Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?” (Psalm 130:3) And again from the New Testament writers we are confronted with the same awareness of the human predicament, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves,” and “If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar.” (I John 1:8, 10).

But the universal extent of sin is not a truth known only by revelation; it is a fact of our everyday experience. The news media graphically flash before us the radical wrongness of man in every nation of the earth. (Paul's nineteen specific designations of human wrong in Romans 1:29-30 written in A.D. 58 are as current today as when first penned.) We see sin's presence in our marriages and family life, and often to the point of disruption and divorce. Law and order are apparently not enough, for we must have police to enforce them; doors are not enough, we must have locks; and a promise is inadequate, we must have signed and witnessed contracts. Indeed, revelation is confirmed in human experiences.

It is hardly necessary to continue efforts to convince ourselves and others of our plight. In his closing Lyman Beecher lecture, “The Preaching of the Cross,” George A. Buttrick said, “We shall not waste time to argue that we need forgiveness. If we do not sense that need, no argument will help us. Indeed, we are most of us too conscious of our own sins to dream that we have much right to talk to other people about theirs.” (*Jesus Came Preaching*, p. 212.) Man's most glaring need is some way

to rid himself of the mess he has made of life; the relationships he has bungled, the hearts he has broken, the lives he has damaged and defaced. And just how is this need initially met? Through the gracious work of God in Jesus the Savior, and its implications for life and behavior.

It is the essence of the Gospel that God has taken the initiative to make right man's wrong; to remove this radical wrongness in man, to reclaim man the creature for his originally intended purpose, "To know God, and to enjoy Him forever." "But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." (Rom. 5:8) "We love because He first loved us." (I John 4:19). "Behold (See) what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the children of God." (I John 3:1) "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (II Cor. 5:21) In his apostolic salutation to the Galatians, Paul speaks of "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from this present evil age." (Gal. 1:3-4) Here then is God's gracious initiative, His unconditional love, being offered to rectify man's radical wrongness; and we are told that it is ours for the accepting.

This experience of accepting the redemptive work of God in Christ, of trusting in His saving work and not our own egoistic stirrings, is nowhere more succinctly stated than in Gal. 3:26-27: "For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." This experience is variously referred to by other New Testament writers and apostles as "the remission of sins," (Acts 2:38) the "washing away of your sins," (Acts 22:16) "baptism now saves you," since it is "an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." (I Peter 3:21)

## Benefits of Forgiveness

Now we may appropriately ask how God's forgiveness meets man's needs. How does it af-

fect man's sinful predicament? The benefits are multiple, but we must discipline ourselves to mention only a few.

(1) Upon being forgiven, man enters into a new personal relationship with God in the person of Jesus Christ. No one in Christian history has ever expressed this new relationship more elegantly than the converted Saul of Tarsus: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me." This new personal relationship is characterized by a Spirit-filled life, with the fruit of the Spirit as evidence of this new relationship. (Gal. 5:22) God is no longer perceived as dealing with man on the basis of law and law-keeping; but rather in terms of a Father-son relationship. Christ has done for man what he could not possibly do for himself, in all his righteous strivings: forgiven, man has now come into a new and vital spiritual union with the Eternal and Living Christ.

(2) God's forgiveness provides both divine *acceptance* and consequently the *obligation* and *ability to accept* one another. All of the strivings of Saul the Pharisee could now subside, for no longer was he required to perform perfectly the law of the fathers to be acceptable to God; now "in Christ" he was both forgiven and accepted. And the impact of God's acceptance led Paul to the insight about accepting others as fellow believers, even where there were differences as sharp and conflicted as between Jew and Gentile, slave and free, or between male and female! The weak and the strong can now lovingly accept each other. So the apostle wrote, "Welcome (accept, receive) one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God." (Rom. 15:7) When forgiven by God in Christ, we can forgive others and accept one another in the Body of Christ. "May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Rom. 15:5,6)

(3) The recipient of the Gospel of forgiveness is characterized by an inward peace of soul which passes all understanding. (Phil. 4:7; Rom. 5:1) "Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." To that striving, restless, aching and divided heart of Saul came God's peace; how He settled the raging conflicts within and brought him victory over sin. But this peace is more than stillness of the heart; it has an objective capacity to bring alienation and hostility to an end, and to make persons who were formerly enemies brothers and sisters. God's peace in Christ reconciles "us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing hostility to an end. And he came and preached peace to you who were afar off (Gentiles) and peace to those who were near (Jews); for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father." (Eph. 2:16-18) "For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility." (Eph. 2:14) Forgiven through the graciousness of God, man is now at peace with God the Father, reconciled and at home (Luke 15:22-24); consequently, the forgiven one can live at peace with other forgiven ones, with hostility banished and alienation washed away in the blood of the cross. (Eph. 2:16)

There is a beautiful and expressive word used by Luke when, narrating how the younger son (prodigal, wasteful) was received by the father, and how his return meant cessation of hostility and alienation. The text reads, "Now his elder son was in the field; and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. There is that word "music," *sumphonia*, from which we get our English term *symphony*, referring to that indescribable kind of harmony which is sung by angelic choirs when a sinner repents and experiences forgiveness, acceptance, and reconciliation by the Father! (Luke 15:7, 10, 24)

(4) Forgiveness produces a *forgiving person*. A hurt, angry, grieved young husband adamantly said, "I will not, I cannot forgive her." He was then asked to read the penetrating exhortation of Ephesians 4:31-32, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander

be put away from you, with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." Six hours later an exultant young wife, literally crying with joy, burst forth over the phone without even introducing herself, "He did! He did! He forgave me!" When one experiences the genuine love demonstrated on Calvary, knows that God in such love and mercy has forgiven and accepted him, he can then even in all his own hurt and bitterness extend the same forgiveness to another: Father forgive her! Help me to forgive her, because of what you have done for me in Christ."

(5) The church, the Body of Christ, exists as a *fellowship of forgiven sinners*, now made saints in the blood of the cross. This is the unity of the church, the oneness made possible by a common experience of forgiveness. Since God has forgiven and accepted me in His fellowship, how can I not forgive and accept another? That huge body of believers in Jerusalem were enjoying the apostles' teaching and fellowship, the breaking of bread and the prayers; and we are told they had "all things in common." Now while this "in-commonness" might have referred in part to the community of goods (Acts 4:32), it is all too obvious to the perceptive student that *what they had in common was forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38)*.

Out of His eternal purposes and infinite love our God and Father acted to grant us the greatest of all gifts, removal of the barrier of sin through forgiveness, and reconciliation to Himself. Groping for words which are so inadequate even for an inspired man, the apostle Paul declared, "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! . . . Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift."

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Joseph Jones has served in various capacities with *Integrity* for more than a decade; has served with the Troy Church of Christ for the past eighteen years both as preaching minister and now as elder. He and his wife, Geneva, have six children and three grandchildren. Dr. Jones has taught in three colleges, written widely for various journals. He is a psychologist, marriage and family therapist associated with the Meredith Outpatient Psychiatric Clinic, Farmington Hills, Michigan for the past twelve years.

# Seventy Times Seven

ELIZABETH MORRIS

Herndon, Kentucky

Two nights before Christmas I relaxed on the sofa beside a glittering tree, waiting up for my son, Ted. My husband, Frank, a United Parcel Service driver, was having his busiest time of the year and he'd turned in early. But I never went to bed till Ted was in. It was Christmas break after his first semester at college and he'd picked up a job as a clerk at the mall. Tonight he was working late and planned to meet a friend afterward for a hamburger. I glanced at the clock. 10:40.

My thoughts were suddenly interrupted by the jarring ring of the phone. "*Ted's running late,*" I thought. One thing about Ted, he always called.

But it wasn't Ted. "Mrs. Morris, this is the hospital," said an unfamiliar voice. "Your son's been in an accident."

My breath hung in my chest. "Is he all right?" I pleaded.

"Please, just get to the emergency room as fast as you can." Suddenly the room would not stand still. I held onto the table and shouted for Frank.

At the emergency room we learned there'd been a head-on collision. A speeding car had swerved into Ted's lane. The other driver had escaped with minor cuts, while Ted was unconscious with serious neck and head injuries. It never occurred to me then to ask why the other car was going so fast on the wrong side of the highway. All that mattered was Ted, our only child.

"I'm afraid it's very bad," the doctor said. An hour later we were racing through the darkness behind an ambulance to a larger hospital in Nashville where a neurosurgeon was available.

Our minister and his family joined us there as we waited for some word. I kept trying to hold onto hope. "*Ted can't just come home from college one Christmas and die at 18. He*

*has his whole life.*"

A nurse approached and handed me Ted's class ring. I wrapped my fingers around it as if it were still on his hand. My mind, muddled with shock, couldn't form much of a prayer. "Oh, dear Lord," I repeated over and over and over.

But the doctor walked in and shook his head. Ted was gone.

Frank and I arrived home in the dark morning hours of Christmas Eve. Lights glowed all around the house. There was a wreath on every window; bright red ribbons festooned the porch columns. Inside I slowly unwound the garland that draped the banister, a terrible black emptiness nearly swallowing me up.

That afternoon Frank and I walked into the police station. A drunk driver had killed my son. They told me his name, Tommy Pigage. The named burned in me like a live coal. I was a Christian who believed in the way of love, but in that moment I began to feel hate.

Tommy Pigage was arrested on charges of murder. His blood alcohol had been three times the legal limit.

I entered the courtroom for the preliminary hearing on a bitter day in January. My eyes searched every face. Which one was he? When his name was called, I watched a rumpled, blond-haired tobacco warehouse worker of 24 walk toward the judge.

The sight of him sickened me. My hands began to tremble and tears ran together beneath my chin. "*Does he know what he's done? Does he have any idea of the suffering he's caused?*" He never even looked at me. He simply pleaded not guilty, without a backward glance.

That night I wandered into Ted's room, pausing to read a note he'd left on his desk of things to take back to college. . . clothes, tapes, a Bible. I sank onto his bed, remembering another note Ted had written when he was only 11.

He'd slipped it to his dad after church. "Please baptize me," it said. "But all the people I want in there is me and you." (Baptism by any faithful Christian is permitted in our little Church of Christ.)

That very night Frank immersed Ted in the baptismal pool behind the pulpit, while I watched from front row of an empty church.

Suddenly it seemed outrageously unfair. "*Tommy Pigage should have been the one to die, not Ted!*" I stormed down the stairs. "If I ever see him walking across the street," I cried irrationally to Frank, "I'll run him down!"

"I know how you feel," he said. But I could tell the extent of my hatred startled him. It surprised me, too. I'd always been a loving person. I'd never raised a hand against anyone. Of course I could never have run Tommy down, but there was no doubt I wanted him dead.

As the weeks, then months went by, the charges were reduced to second-degree manslaughter. Then his court dates were postponed, one after another. Meanwhile, Tommy Pigage walked around free with a driver's license in his pocket. He'd never spent a night in jail. Now the hate in me was like fire sweeping down a dry canyon. I lost interest in everything but seeing him punished. Every day I wandered about the house in an old faded T-shirt of Ted's.

"Why not invite some friends in? Frank urged. "You need to see people, laugh some." I shook my head. It seemed I'd forgotten how to laugh. I could only monitor Tommy's court dates and talk about his case.

But I did continue going to church. One Sunday a friend stopped me. "Oh, Elizabeth, you're doing so well handling Ted's loss," she said. I cringed inside. "*If she only knew, the rage inside me.*" I thought, "*even here in our church that preaches and teaches God's love.*"

"Oh, dear Lord, help me," I prayed that night. "I don't want to hate like this. Please help me get rid of it."

Bible verses began to weigh on my conscience almost daily after that. "*If you forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. . . Love your enemies. . .*

*Forgive seventy times seven times.*" And especially Jesus' words on the cross: "Father, forgive them." In some unreachable part of me I knew God was asking me to forgive Tommy Pigage. But "I forgive you" struck me as the most impossible words in the world.

Meanwhile, as the autumn of 1984 approached, I waited on edge for the case to finally come before the court. If only Tommy would get what he deserved, maybe I would find some peace.

Leaves fell softly as Frank and I stepped into the courthouse that day. To my dismay, Tommy got just five years' probation. Only if he broke probation would he have to serve a 10-year jail term. I was filled with bitterness. He was still free.

Along with a few other minimal obligations, his probation required him to spend alternate weekends in the county jail. "*Precious little punishment for killing Ted,*" I thought.

I determined right then he would not get away with the slightest infraction. Sometimes I called the jail to be sure he was serving his weekend sentence. Every time I drove along Tommy's street, I slowed just a bit, wishing I could catch him violating parole somehow.

One afternoon I was nervously setting up chairs in the Trigg County High gymnasium for a MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving) program. Tommy Pigage was to speak as part of his probation. I was there because it was Ted's school and there would be a small tribute to him, but when I saw Tommy striding across the floor, I fled.

I couldn't stay away, though. I retraced my steps and slipped in the back of the gym. "I want to tell you about the night I killed Ted Morris," he said into the microphone. "I got drunk. I got in a car. And I took a human life.

"When I heard Ted died," he continued, "I couldn't stop crying. To think of all the anguish I've caused. . ." His face twisted, and for a moment I thought he was going to cry again. "The truth is, I belong in prison," he said.

I gaped at him in disbelief. Could it be possible that Tommy was not the monster I thought he was? Could he be a lost, remorseful boy, drowning in his own problems? That kind of

thought about Tommy Pigage came out of the blue. Was I really thinking it? What was this fragile bloom of compassion that I was feeling?

As the students left, I went up to Tommy. "Please sit down. I want to talk to you," I said. He sat, staring at his feet, looking like a whipped puppy. "It took courage to say what you did," I said.

Tears rolled down Tommy's cheeks. I leaned over to pat his shoulder and smelled alcohol on his breath. The tiny bloom of compassion withered. "You've been drinking!" I cried. I left him there, his face full of tears.

But the next day I found myself driving along his street, still angry, but also puzzled. Who was the real Tommy Pigage?

I spotted him out front. I don't know what made me do it. But I pulled up and rolled down the window. "Get in," I told him. Once more he shuffled over. He had a stubble of beard and reeked of alcohol. I wanted to run as far as I could from him, but something held me there. Maybe it was the brokenhearted look on his face.

"You don't need your driver's license in this condition." I snapped.

Tommy reached in his pocket and tried to give it to me, and mysteriously the little bloom started to grow again. "How much are you drinking, Tommy?" I asked.

He stared at the dashboard. "Every day after work, I cover the phone with a pillow and drink till bedtime."

"Tommy, you need direction in your life. Would you mind if I sent you some Bible study material?"

To my amazement he nodded yes. "I'll never forgive him," I told myself, "but at least I can do this."

Only a few days later Tommy signed into jail for the weekend with an alcohol level over the limit—which meant he'd broken probation. He began serving his 10-year sentence immediately.

Strangely unsettled by the news, I visited his probation officer. "Has anyone been to see Tommy?"

"No one," he said.

"No one at all?"

The officer shook his head.

"Can I see him?" I heard myself ask.

It was clear and cold the next evening when I rang the buzzer inside the jail. I'd never been inside a jail, and the bars were a frightening sight. "Dear God, why am I here?" I thought in a panic. I was quivering all over.

Tommy appeared in the same clothes he'd had on for three days, his shoulders drooping. "Hi," he said, in a meek voice.

I felt a surge of warmth and compassion. This time a whole garden of it. It made no sense. None at all.

As we talked, Tommy seemed to want to say something. "Mrs. Morris. . . I'm so sorry," he finally blurted. "Please forgive me."

For a moment everything stood still. I stared at him with the words from the cross falling down all around me. "Father, forgive them. . . Father, forgive them. . . Father, forgive them. Oh dear God, You lost an only Son, too. Yet You forgave those who killed Him. . ."

And suddenly I saw it clearly. God had led me to this moment. He'd drawn me to the high school gym, to Tommy's street, and now to his jail—places where I could begin to see Tommy, not as the murderer of my son, but as a person in need of love and guidance.

I couldn't stand it anymore. "I forgive you, Tommy," I said. "Now I want you to forgive me."

"F-forgive you? Why?"

"For hating you," I told him.

"Oh, I do, Mrs. Morris. I do."

And there we were. The drunk driver and the mother of the one he'd killed, feeling the torment begin to fall away. We were free. Both of us.

Things didn't end there. It might have been easier if they had. But Jesus said not only to forgive your enemies, but to do good to them. We had learned that Tommy came from a troubled family. He needed help to rebuild his life. I couldn't help Ted anymore, but I *could* help Tommy. So I kept going back to the jail.

Alcohol has wiped out one life," I said to him. "Please don't let it ruin yours."

"I want to stop," he said. "But. . ."

"Then you will!" I declared. "God can help

you. And I'll be here for you, too."

He looked at me, bewildered by my caring, rubbing his eye.

On January 12 Frank and I picked Tommy up for another MADD program. Frank had never spoken to Tommy and wasn't quite sure he wanted to. But as we drove along, they talked about the Bible study course Tommy was working on. It was clear he was a new believer.

"I really wish I could be baptized," Tommy said.

"If you're serious, I'll baptize you now," said Frank. By some curious bit of timing we were just about to pass our church.

We stopped and went inside. I put on the lights, but there was no way to start the furnace. It was freezing and I could only imagine how icy the water was in the baptistry. But Frank and Tommy slipped into the water while I sat on the front pew with an odd sense of déjà vu. It was just as it had been the night Frank baptized Ted in an empty church.

He stood dripping wet, wisps of fog rising off his body as it met the frigid air. "Please, I want you to forgive me, too," he sputtered to

## Whatever It Takes

DIANE G. H. KILMER

Lansing, Michigan

"Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Look to yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."

(Galatians 6:1,2)

How do we do this? How should we respond when confronted with a Christian brother or sister's sin? Maybe we found out what our friend has been wrestling with because he dared entrust his secret to us, hoping for help and healing. Or perhaps the sin had become evident

Frank, throwing his arms around him.

"I do," Frank said. And I could tell by his face that he was discovering the same thing God had showed me. That hate is a destructive thing. But no matter its size, love is always bigger.

After Tommy's baptism we petitioned the judge to let us pick him up for church every Sunday. Soon he was spending the days in our custody. We'd eat dinner, then discuss the Bible most of the afternoon before carrying him back to jail.

Tommy's on probation again. He hasn't had a drink since his release. His life is turned around. My life is, too. When summer came to Kentucky, I scurried about getting ready for our first party since Ted died. As I arranged the table, I caught a glimpse of Tommy cutting the grass. In that moment I felt the kind of peace only God could give.

How good it was to laugh again! To forgive and love and go on living.

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Carmel, New York 10512

to us and we spoke to him, hoping to persuade him to give it up. (Matthew 18:15). No matter what the circumstances, what attitudes should we hold in our heart toward someone who is facing his sin?

Jesus exemplifies some important attitudes for us in the "woman caught in adultery" situation. The crowd had done such a fine job of exposing the brutal facts regarding the woman that Christ believed it unnecessary to further impress her with the evil she had done. The woman was emotionally and spiritually fragile at this point and Christ was sensitive to this. After everyone left he spoke directly, firmly,

with compassion and without judgment: "Go now and sin no more." Jesus had taught that his coming was not to condemn a world that was already under condemnation, but to save it. That is how he treated the adulterous woman. And that is how our attitude should be: non-judgmental yet frank and strong regarding sin; loving and hoping to save.

The adulterous woman incident in John 8 also reminds us of some inappropriate attitudes we must dismiss when detected inside ourselves. Those in the crowd displayed no love toward the woman. They were likely not doing to her as they would have wanted to be treated if found in the same situation. The crowd was eager to condemn another's fault without reflection upon their own sinful status before the Lord. Consequently, they were bereft of humility or mercy. It would help us to keep Paul's reminder on our mind: "Look to yourself, lest you too be tempted." (Galatians 6:1). We might even want to recall the adage: "There but for the grace of God go I." We know we, too, have failed. We should be simply thankful for any portions of our life that might bring glory to God.

The crowd was harsh and we know we want to avoid that attitude. Neither do we want to go toward the other extreme. When confronted with the sin that has held dear friends in bondage and which they are at this moment trying to face, we must not gloss over what they have confessed. We must assist our friends and do whatever it takes to help free them from the grip of their sin.

This leads us to what Paul said about restoring another and bearing his burdens. How do we "restore" someone? How do we bear one another's burdens? When sin has been confessed or has been made evident to a trusted Christian friend, some very positive things can happen. First, the heavy burden of trying to break the powerful, destructive habit can shift onto both sets of shoulders. Further, when we know a Christian friend's problem, God can use us as His spokesperson to convey the love and forgiveness and promise of power that God wants to give us all. (Ephesians 4:32, II. Tim. 1:7). A natural relationship of accountability has

been set up that can strengthen our friend when he is weak from the struggle of changing. He no longer feels alone. When he is with us the stress of pretension is gone. He can call someone who understands what he is going through. And we can call him and see how he is doing, give him our time, love him, accept him, and provide him with loving encouragement continually.

James 5:16 teaches us: "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." This is not necessarily one-time praying. This is spending time often before the Father, discussing the whole situation, asking Him for ideas and guidance, strength and persistence, listening to Him and studying the Scriptures in order to keep both ourselves and our friend on course.

Our hope is that what was said about the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah 42 can also be said of us, His people, today:

A bruised reed [he] will not break,  
and a smoldering wick [he] will not snuff out.

[I will make you] to open eyes that are blind,  
to free captives from prison  
and to release from the dungeon  
those who sit in darkness.

Let us, as God's family on earth, be a church of saved sinners helping each other to heaven. Let us be a people who can be glad when someone admits his sin, because only then is there a chance that God can be glorified where He could not be before. Let the community around us know that we, the people of Jesus, offer tangible help and hope to those who cannot shake by themselves the destruction and despair in their lives. Let us be a group of Christian believers who are known by our love to each other!

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## Christianity Malpracticed

RON AND MARTI VAN HORN

Grand Rapids, Michigan

"You can't be serious!! Forgive that idiot? He nearly killed my reputation with that lie! I plan to make his life miserable for him. . . forever! He's damaged me for life. I can hardly show my face in public!"

Where in the world could we find a cold, unforgiving person such as this? *Church!!* He's sitting on the left side, fourth pew from the back; he's there to worship. That person is me or possibly you. Or maybe I'm the "idiot" that he mentioned, sitting on the right side of the church, second pew from the rear.

We like to use the world's rationalizations for our UN-Christ-like behavior.

The person sitting on the right side says:

1. "It was just a joke."
2. "He should be a big enough person to ignore it."
3. "I can't believe anyone would take that statement seriously."

The person sitting on the left side says:

1. "It was his fault."
2. "He deserves to feel guilty."
3. "I have a right to be angry with him."

That may be the way some of us view it *but* how does the Holy Spirit weigh these excuses? In Ephesians 4:29-5:2 we read:

"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another forgiv-

ing each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

"It was just a joke." God doesn't seem to make an exception here for jokes at another person's expense. In fact, He emphasizes:

"Do not let *any* unwholesome talk come out of your mouths."

*Whew!* How many times have I joked with Ron about being a sleepy, Dutch husband? I'm guilty. Then too, if that slander or gossip were never spoken we wouldn't need to ignore it or be expected to not believe what was said.

Verses 31 and 32 speak directly to those of us harboring anger. I recall a Sunday when this was the lesson being taught. All of us that were sitting in the congregation, spit and polished in our Sunday best, were taken aback by what Scripture says about this. We were challenged to look to our own lives in reference to Matthew 23:23-28. Oh yes, we were all clean on the outside but the Holy Spirit worked on each person who sought His guidance.

"I don't have any BIG anger to confess," I thought to myself. It's so easy to sit in my seat looking ahead piously when I'm trying to ignore the obvious.

Then came the prick of the conscience. I'd been unjustly angry with our son Aaron while getting ready for church. As I was reflecting on this we were challenged again from Scripture. God's Word says in I Corinthians 11:27-28 that we should examine ourselves before we eat and drink at the Lord's Supper. I had to let the bread and the cup pass by since I had wronged my son and needed to ask his forgiveness. I was the hypocrite that Jesus was condemning in Matthew 23. How many times

before I'd ignored the family when I was challenged to examine my heart! The more that I contemplated this incident the more heavily it weighed on my heart. Which brings us not to a theological dissertation but rather the "Malpractice of Christianity" within our home.

I think that all of us as children dreamed of the day when we could say to someone in a LOUD OUTDOOR voice, "You make me *soo* angry! What do you think you're doing?!?!" and then without waiting for an answer hand out the discipline. When I think of "building up" our three children "according to their needs" in an atmosphere that is filled with love . . . I fall short! I am guilty of malpracticing Christianity in one of God's most precious portals: our home.

Forgiveness, acceptance and fellowship seem to be under attack at all levels, including the family. Although we are certainly not experts, we are in the process of learning *how to* forgive, accept and fellowship in our family.

It started out because of my need to ask for Aaron, Janelle and Christanna's forgiveness for my anger and proceeded into a revealing concept.

"Be kind and compassionate to one another forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children." (Ephesians 5:1-2)

We needed to start living this way in our family *and* it needed to start with us as parents becoming "imitators of God. . . as dearly loved children." What beauty there is in this instruction! To be childlike imitators of God we would need to be constantly seeking God's wisdom in *all* situations. This has become a high priority in our family prayers. Children do fail at things on occasion; like children we frequently need to seek forgiveness—from those we've wronged and from our Father in Heaven whom we've also wronged.

The book *A Mother's Touch*, by Elise Arndt, has examples in it that are invaluable to the family. One example that we've implemented and insist upon in our family is the process of asking for and receiving forgiveness.

The two people must face each other holding both hands and have direct eye contact. The offending party must say:

"You are my \_\_\_\_\_  
(sister/brother/daughter/son).  
I love you very much.  
I'm sorry that I \_\_\_\_\_.  
Will you forgive me?"

This is followed by the offended party's response, "You're forgiven," and a hug.

It's a humbling experience to ask Janelle, who is five, for forgiveness but it teaches us so many things. We're learning to be kind, compassionate and forgiving. We're naming each other as members of the family (son, sister, brother) We're stating our love verbally. We're repenting of our wrong. We're asking for forgiveness. And finally we're forgiving the wrongdoer and strengthening the bonds of a loving relationship by hugging.

Last Sunday I was greeted by our three-year-old Christanna. She had to speak with me about something important. She took both of my hands, looked me directly in the eyes and said tearfully:

"You are my mommy. I love you very much. I'm sorry that I ate your duck's eyes. Will you forgive me?" She was forgiven and hugged. I grinned and bought some new eyes for the red calico stuffed duck.

It takes time. Most assuredly a quickie "SORRY," is less time consuming. . . but just picture the loving bonds being built through family practice.

We've seen them! It becomes an independent action without prompting; forgiveness is sought and lovingly given. We are becoming convinced that the Body of Believers needs to strengthen their loving bonds in this way also.

Listen to what "Christianity Healed" not *malpracticed* sounds like:

The person sitting on the right side says:

1. "You are my brother."
2. "I love you very much."
3. "Will you forgive me for my careless speech?"

The person sitting on the left side says:

1. "You are my brother."
2. "I love you very much."
3. "Will you forgive me for my anger and malice?"

In Unison:

"You are forgiven!"

The two brothers hug.

The tear in the fabric of unity has been mended. In Christ, two brothers are once more

united. This then is the process: Forgiveness, leading to Acceptance, leading to Fellowship, equals Healed Christianity.

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## Experiencing Forgiveness Some Resources

ROBERT E. MOSSMAN

Wheat Ridge, Colorado

Genuinely forgiving those we consider most responsible for our greatest hurts is a significant step toward spiritual growth for many Christians. Hurts may come out of a variety of circumstances. Parents or other important adults may have caused hurts during childhood. Failed or difficult continuing adult relationships may create sharp pain. Illness or other tragedy can result in feelings of being victimized. The resulting paralysis of bitterness and desire for revenge can drain vitality from both our relationship with God and our ministry with others. Fortunately, Christian writers from several traditions have written excellent materials designed to assist believers in moving toward the liberation of true forgiveness.

David Augsburger's *The Freedom of Forgiveness* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984) is a guide to "right thinking" about forgiveness. The discussion of "the tiger," anger expressed in outbursts of temper, is particularly effective. Prof. Augsburger describes the commitment needed for true forgiveness as being to follow Christ and, ". . . forgive immediately, forgive continually, and then forgive—finally" (p. 35). The repeated encouragement of forgiveness and

confession of our wrongs establishes a solid basis for close relationships. Carefully considered Biblical attitudes, combined with Prof. Augsburger's weaving of Mennonite emphases on nonviolence and pacifism, result in stimulating discussions of the nature of forgiveness, especially for those of us who have grown in other Christian traditions. *The Freedom of Forgiveness* is published as an adult church school elective course; as such, it is a fine cerebral consideration of the Biblical approach to true Christian forgiveness.

The most effective discussion of the process of forgiveness is Lewis B. Smedes' *Forgive and Forget* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984). Prof. Smedes' examples, including many personal anecdotes, move us to a level of empathy which is beyond intellectual consideration. The toughest issues are faced in each of the discussions. The sequence of hurting, then hating, followed by healing, and possibly coming together with the person who hurt you is distinguished from practices which are not forgiveness. Forgetting, excusing, smothering conflict, accepting and tolerating all have their place, but they are not forgiveness. The discus-

sion of each of them, however, sharpens our understanding of bonafide forgiveness.

Distinctions about the nature of forgiveness are followed by considerations of the most difficult circumstances in which to grant forgiveness. Invisible people, such as dead or absent parents or impersonal organizations, can frustrate our intentions of forgiveness. Uncaring people who hurt us and "monsters" who cause senseless and unnecessary suffering pose special challenges. Smedes' discussions about forgiving ourselves and forgiving God complete consideration of the most difficult applications of forgiveness.

Further consideration is then given to the dynamics and values of this difficult process. It happens slowly and gradually. Understanding of all the elements grows. As forgiveness can be given freely, fundamental changes take place in our feelings. To our culture which usually professes not to value forgiveness, Smedes effectively demonstrates its superiority. Avoiding the destructive alternatives of overt revenge or resentment can lead to creative new alternatives. While hate can provide energy for a period, it ultimately drains the person who harbors it; true strength grows out of the creative force of love, received from God and shared with other people. Forgiveness allows us to accept ourselves, including our faults, and meaningfully to relate to others.

A discussion of the healing experience of forgiveness would be incomplete without consideration of excellent work which has been done with "healing of memories." Dennis and Matthew Linn, brothers who are both members of the Jesuit order, wrote *Healing of Memories* (New York: Paulist Press, 1974) and thereby helped many outside (as well as within) the Roman Catholic tradition. Their emphasis on the healing ministry of prayer to the Holy Spirit is broadly Christian. Excellent written exercises make this a book which one is unlikely to loan to others; you buy them their own copy so they can do their own written exercises (and not see yours). The active power of God the Holy Spirit building His "new creation" (II Cor. 5:17) in each of us is demonstrated and encouraged. In their less focused *Healing Life's Hurts* (New

York: Paulist Press, 1978), Dennis and Matthew Linn provide additional case studies and Biblical commentary about the healing of memories. Many of the new insights and exercises are excellent, but the structure of the book is marred by superimposing the stages of grief developed by Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross upon an ostensibly Christian discussion about the healing of memories.

For the evangelical Christian, a significant addition to the literature on forgiveness was recently made by David A. Seamands' *Healing of Memories* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1985). *Healing* grows out of lifetime pastoral counseling and takes us a step beyond his *Healing for Damaged Emotions* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1981) and *Putting Away Childish Things* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1982). The first two books were basically group study courses with leader's guides; *Healing* instructs the helper in the practice of prayer for healing of memories. The anecdotes and Biblical discussion, however, make the book useful to any thoughtful Christian who has overcome or helped others overcome significant hurts.

A young woman is immediately introduced to us as Pastor Seamands encourages her in a prayer of healing in which the Holy Spirit reveals long "forgotten" childhood memories that are sources of bitterness in her adult life. Forgiveness of the central persons in these memories allows freedom for present relationships in her life. Memory is so inclusive, as Pastor Seamands points out, that it . . . "includes feelings, concepts, patterns, attitudes, and tendencies toward action which accompany pictures on the screen of the mind" (p. 15). Release through the power of the Holy Spirit from early memories which are controlling adult life is encouraged by the pastor/counselor. An atmosphere must be created in which healing can occur through both preaching and counseling. Pastor Seamands is not presenting a restricted professional skill, but rather a ministry of the Holy Spirit which Christians can minister to each other. Varieties of memories are catalogued which need to be brought forward consciously for healing through forgiveness. Distorted concepts of God which

are rooted in emotions are explored and their treatment considered. Overcoming the special damage of sexual trauma is also individually discussed. Careful instructions are provided for leading the prayer of healing. Forgiveness is the final stage of the thorough healing of a memory.

Jesus taught that God's forgiveness of us and our forgiveness of others is crucial to spiritual wholeness (Matt. 6:14-15 & Lk. 6:37). The Apostle Paul directs us, "Forgive as the Lord forgave you" (Col. 3:13b, NIV). Allowing forgiveness to enter the relationships of our lives is for some of us the hardest work of the com-

mitted Christian life. We can be thankful for the excellent resources available to help us personally appropriate God's forgiveness through the power of the Holy Spirit, the power which enables the liberated relationships on which valid ministry is built.

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Robert Mossman holds the Ph.D. in English from the University of Pittsburgh, his graduate degree in Theology from Denver Conservative Baptist Seminary. He was recently ordained into the ministry of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. His undergraduate work was done at Abilene Christian University. Dr. Mossman also has had success in the field of business.

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### THE TEARS OF JOSEPH

(Gen. 42:24; 43:30; 45:1-3)

A cleansing, salty stream now  
Flushes dust of bitter years away:  
Dust of the road to Egypt,  
Raised by shackled feet;  
Dust of prison,  
Dark with shattered hope;  
Dust of rancor  
Long unquenched by God's success.

The Pharaoh's man,  
The master of Egypt's grain,  
Finds nourishment within  
As wells gush forth  
To wash away the past  
Though brothers now have bowed  
As youthful dreams foretold,  
And could be crushed beneath his hand,  
There is no triumph in his heart.  
They too have walked the road to Egypt now,  
And he must wash their souls  
With God's forgiving tears.

— Elton D. Higgs

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Dr. Higgs is a long term member of both the Board of Trustees and the Editorial Board of *Integrity*, and a frequent contributor through articles and poetry. A tenured professor at the University of Michigan (Dearborn), he will spend the next year in England on sabbatical.