

To encourage, enrich and equip

*To Err is Human
To Forgive is Divine*
Alexander Pope

IN FOCUS

In this simple, well known quote the 18th century English poet presents the complex human controversy between man's propensity to sin, offend and cause great pain and his desperate need for forgiveness; a forgiveness that is impossible for his fellow sin-filled man to give. Only God can forgive.

Yet, this is exactly what Jesus asks of us in Matthew 6:14—15 “For if you forgive men their trespasses your heavenly father will also forgive you. But if you forgive not men their trespasses neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” If only God can forgive, what does Jesus expect of me? My consolation comes from Matthew 19:26; “with man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

Only God has the power to extend forgiveness. Indeed forgiveness begins with God; it is, in some sense, an outpouring of His character. In Exodus 34:6—7a God defines Himself to Moses as “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and *forgiving* wickedness, rebellion and sin.” The Hebrew word translated forgive is *Nasa* which means to lift up, carry off and bear a load¹. What a beautiful picture of Christ. In fact *Nasa* is the same word used in Isaiah 53:4; “Surely He has *borne* our griefs and carried our sorrows.” Our forgiveness was expensive, it cost the sacrifice of God's Son in order to meet the justice portion of His character (Exodus 34:7b, “He does not leave the guilty unpunished.”) Yes, this kind of forgiveness is only possible through the grace of our wonderful God and Savior who “delights in mercy and unfailing love” (Micah 7:18).

It is by this same grace that only God can give us the power to extend the forgiveness of Matthew 6 to others. The Greek word translated “forgive” in this passage means to let go, give up and send away². It rests upon and is the result of God's Divine forgiveness and is a product and wonderful gift of His grace. In the words of Corrie Ten Boom “Forgiveness {extended to others} is to set a prisoner free and to realize the prisoner was you³.” Jesus came to set the captives free. As we choose to “let go” and begin the process of forgiveness, God's grace brings freedom from the hurt, resentment, anger and bitterness that imprison us and keep us from enjoying our own forgiveness in Christ.

1. Strong's Exhaustive Concordance On-line; Hebrew #05375

2. Strong's Exhaustive Concordance On-line; Greek #863

3. What Does the Bible Say About Forgiveness; Mary Fairchild

And, in the process of forgiving others, especially for significant hurts, we somehow gain a deeper understanding of how great the grace of God is in extending His forgiveness to us. We are then free to allow Him to carry the burden of justice.

As Barnabas addresses children-in-crisis and forgiveness this quarter we are well aware that, in our sin-filled world, there are some offenses that are so grievous as to be labeled unforgivable, especially where the children are concerned. Yet, we are called to walk with them through the process of forgiveness in order that they be free to live the life of grace God intended.

To that end we are forever grateful to this issue's contributing authors who have given of their time and talent to bless the children. Dr. Stephanie Goins, co-author of the newest CCTI curriculum module focusing on children in situations of armed conflict, gives us great insight in her article *He Dreamed the Impossible*, as she discusses the role of forgiveness in community transformation and the reintegration of child soldiers. In *José's Choice*, Kathy Dow-Burger, speech therapist and foster Mom, encourages us to persevere in the battle for the hearts of the hurting children God calls us to as we walk with them in their journey of redemption and forgiveness. And, Marissa Phelps, educator, author and the newest member of our CCTI Team, captures our hearts in *The Power of Forgiveness* — a miraculous story of God's grace in the midst of terrible circumstances. In the *Training Tips* section Phyllis Kilbourn helps us understand the process and meaning of forgiveness. Finally, Pastor Josh Christiansen offers practical, yet dynamic, strategies in *Motivating Youth Toward Living in the Word*.

Because we live in a fallen world wrought with human error and sin, offenses will come. But, we are called and equipped of God by His grace to choose to forgive. But we cannot forget. By our choice the remembrance can either be a root of bitterness and deep destructive pain or, through God's gift of healing through forgiveness, it can become a monument to the grace and mercy and love and redemptive power of Jesus Christ!

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He Dreamed the Impossible:

*A story of forgiveness and
community transformation*

—Stephanie Goins Ph.D.



Long-term wars create multiple levels of crises in economic, social, cultural and political contexts, destroying the way a society is put together. Adults and children, families and communities, all are effected through these crises and even more so when the conflict has engaged children. From what we know of children's participation, it is easy to imagine that a large percentage would have little internal resources with which to recover and flourish. Some would say that children's participation in conflict increases their risk factors for resilience and encourages negative, less hopeful attitudes and expectations about the possibilities of change for the good.

*Some children
will not be deterred
by what seems hopeless*

At least, so the research may indicate. And yet, some children have imagined something different; they will not be deterred by what seems hopeless. Their faith enables them to believe in the impossible. Their resilient attitudes encourage their belief in the power of forgiveness; they will even risk their lives for it. Such was the case in the story that follows.

Fourteen-year-old Momoh was recruited into his village's civil defense force (CDF) because someone had to represent his family, though he had no desire to join. He and other young boys from his village fought against the rebel group, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), for just over two years. Often, they would be up against boys from their own village who had been abducted by the RUF. Momoh hated this! He had attended school with these boys, done homework with them; they had eaten and played together. Now they were enemy targets. Thankfully, Momoh never had to kill any of them.

At the war's end, Momoh and his friends easily reintegrated into their community. They had served their village. However, friends from the same village (who had been abducted by the RUF rebels) were ostracized by villagers. Momoh and his friends felt such disappointment. They had imagined all children who had participated in war being reunited with their families and peers. They had imagined themselves together, rebuilding their community.

These imaginings inspired Momoh and his friends to form the Community Theatre Agency (CTA) whose purpose was to promote reintegration of former soldiers. The CTA grew from a membership of 8 to nearly 30 members, expanding into three regional groups. They used theatre, song and dance as modes for addressing different issues relevant to reintegration of former adult and child soldiers with the civilian population.

The first of the CTA's reintegration efforts became a model for them as they worked in other areas of the country. They followed the expected protocol of initially contacting the village chief, requesting permission for the CTA to come speak with the villagers and ultimately do their performance. If and when they were given permission, they conducted an informal 'listening survey'. They made light conversation about the war while participating in what the villagers were doing. Through their listening, they could then ascertain the issues and concerns most relevant to villagers in regards to reintegrating former soldiers. These issues would be depicted through drama. Momoh said the following:

*You can't beg for
forgiveness if you don't
identify the problem*

"We presented what the rebels did, because you can't beg for forgiveness if you don't identify the problem. In the drama ... the rebels come into the community, with that sign of remorse. That is the question community members are asking, 'will the rebels show a sign of remorse, that they are sorry?' If you don't show remorse, nobody will appreciate that you are sorry."

Momoh believed that only by directly addressing the challenges and fears faced by both the villagers and former soldiers could community transformation take place. When the drama was finished, there was time for discussion. People would ask, "Are these people who have destroyed all our beauties, are they coming back to us the same as they were before?" They would say that a human being cannot behave like that.

They called them animals, and said, “Can they be human beings again, after what they have done?” Others would talk about the message in the drama, that it speaks of peace, of living together, of welcoming the rebels back. Momoh said they would ask the villagers,

“Is it really proper that our brothers’—normally, we don’t call them rebels, we call them brothers so they know they are part of one family—’is it possible for our brothers who are in the bush to come back?’ That is how we used the play, to kill the spirit of violence and take up the spirit of acceptance.”

*People must see
the humanity in one another
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become victims of their own pasts*

Momoh noted that before the dramas, villagers would refer to the rebels as just that – rebels. However, the dramas initiated a change in attitude towards former soldiers, though the villagers were still afraid. Momoh said, “We raised their hope, because it had been shattered.” The villagers would call them brothers if they were willing to accept these former soldiers back. When CTA members heard this transition in their language, they concluded that their message of reconciliation had influenced villagers.

CTA members also initiated reintegration efforts with former rebel soldiers. Though it was very risky, they went to demobilization camps and presented, through drama, how the rebels had offended the communities. They also communicated that communities were wanting them back under the right circumstances. Initial responses from former rebels were often negative. Yet there were those who heard the heart of the message in the CTA’s drama, realizing they had wronged society and needed to acknowledge this if they wanted to return to their communities. Some would say, “Now we know what the community representatives are yearning towards us. This is what we have done, and we have to acknowledge it.”

Did the CTA efforts actually make a difference in the communities? The CTA members saw the fruit of their work when they would return to a village in a month or two and see the former rebels walking around reconciled with the villagers. Momoh saw former soldiers, both adults and children, being reintegrated into their families and communities through ceremonies or cleansing rituals. Momoh also observed some villages where there was simply a natural reintegration without ceremony.

Momoh’s story suggests the following:

1. A child’s dream can provide a powerful impetus towards community transformation.

Had Momoh been deterred by his own context—protracted war with all its destruction, existing hatred, hostilities and despair—there would have been no Community Theatre Agency. A percentage of children and adults would have remained isolated from their communities and families. The likelihood of resorting to violent conflict would increase.

2. Focusing on shared values can help a community transform.

The CTA called on community members to think in accordance with their shared cultural values - that is, community first, family first, with individual importance dependent on the placement of the former as priorities. Tragic experiences of the war were acknowledged; at the same time, there was a plea to imagine a different future, a healed community.

3. Attitudes and processes of forgiveness support resilience as they bring people back together.

Following the crises associated with war, individual, family and community resilience is supported through transformation of attitudes and behaviors on the part of all those concerned.

People must reconnect, see the humanity in one another, if they do not want to become victims of their own pasts. This most certainly can happen through practices and processes of forgiveness. Change for the good, growth through crisis, becomes possible. And the best person to show the way just may be a child!



Stephanie Goins, PhD, is a trainer, writer and consultant, currently specializing in work with children in difficult circumstances. Additionally, she is involved in discipling, team building and training, and counseling. Since 1990, Stephanie and her husband J. have served in Youth With a Mission (YWAM) in Africa, Europe and the United States. Their current ministry to Native

Americans takes them to various parts of North America.

Publications:

Book Chapter: “The Place of Forgiveness in the Reintegration of Former Child Soldiers in Sierra Leone” in Nurturing Children’s Spirituality: Christian Perspectives and Best Practices (2008). Edited by Holly C Allen.

Paper to be published in the proceedings of the XVIIIth International Congress for Personal Construct Psychology, Venice, Italy, July 2009.

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José's Choice

—Kathy Dow-Burger



*In life a moment, or perhaps moments,
can mark our lives
and define our character:*

decisions are made to start something, stop something or to think in a certain way. These moments are forks in the road of life, each decision leading down a mutually exclusive path, determining what you will see and experience and ultimately what kind of life you will live. We live in a fallen world where everything is fair game—life is full of choices, good or evil, light or dark. As a result we are confronted with many forks in the road of life; some leading to bitterness and others leading to forgiveness.

*We have
journeyed with José down
his road of life to redemption
and forgiveness*

The effects of life-altering choices are brought to life in the story of Joseph (Genesis 37, 39–50). After being sold into slavery, he had good reason to be bitter. However, he chose to believe the dreams God had given him and to forgive his brothers, consequently saving both his family and his nation. This Bible account has come alive in my life. My family and I have been foster parents for six years and have had 20 children in our home —each child having a story to tell. We have heard first-hand about the neglect, abuse, violence, abandonment and torture that our foster children have endured, usually at the hands of their parents. But there is one child—our modern-day Joseph (I will call him José) —with whom we have journeyed down his road of life to redemption and forgiveness.

After being abused by his father, Papi, and abandoned by his mother, Mami, he also suffered the pressure and ridicule of his siblings for the decisions he made and the road he chose to take. He chose a different road as he turned a corner and crossed the bridge to a different way of life.

José came from a very large family and the LORD's calling was upon him just as it was with Joseph. He was singled out within his sibling group to be ridiculed and beaten at the hands of his Papi—a mentally ill person harboring hate, insecurity and jealousy. Because José had big dreams and the LORD's favor and higher calling was upon his life, he suffered under Papi's abuse. However, we know that darkness cannot overcome the light; José represented the light and Papi was in darkness.

Unfortunately, José would not have experienced Papi's severe abuse if not for the choices made by his Mami. He and his siblings had been given freedom from Papi's tyranny when, after several criminal convictions, Papi was deported from the U.S. However, their Mami chose darkness rather than light when she traveled to Papi's home country and left the children there with him.

José and his siblings were told that they were just going to visit Papi for “a couple of weeks.” But they were abandoned to three years of uncertainty, terror, torture and even death— just as Joseph had been when his brothers placed him in the cistern and later sold him to the Ishmaelites who took him to Egypt.

*I believe Jesus
will honor the person who is
willing to forgive.*

We do not know everything that happened to Joseph during the time he was enslaved and imprisoned in Egypt. The Bible highlights key events that marked and shaped him and revealed his character. This is true for our José— God's José—as well. This part of his journey is personal and for

him to share when the time is right. Our roads met when José came into foster care with his siblings.

Through a series of unbelievable events he settled into our home. Immediately, my family and I recognized that José was set apart from his siblings. Even though he was beaten down throughout his childhood, he had remarkable endurance and perseverance and he had a willingness to try new things. But most amazingly, he had a desire to forgive those who damaged him.

This is a battle between the light and the darkness ... the process of forgiving can be messy

I believe Jesus will honor the person who is **willing** to forgive and then lets Him do the rest. This is a personal road that can only be traveled by the forgiving person. We cannot piggyback on someone else's forgiveness nor have someone else forgive in our place. With God's help we must offer it willingly. It truly takes an act of God to be able to forgive the unforgivable, and this process has not been easy for José. How could it be when the two most important people in his life, his Papi and Mami, had betrayed him? He was stretched beyond his perceived capabilities. But during those times, Christ supernaturally used the gifts He had implanted in José; gifts of *endurance, perseverance* and *courage*. José needed them to wrestle with the bad memories of his childhood, the fear of his Papi coming back to find him and, most importantly, with the process of forgiveness.

Remember, this is a battle between the light and the darkness. The process of forgiving can be messy. Consequently, while we saw the evidence of God in José we also saw evidence of the flesh—those pertaining to pride, self-centeredness and self-pity. He not only battled with self, but also with the evil one. My husband and I spent countless hours praying with José, processing with him, and crying with him, trying to show God's goodness and love in the middle of the mess. As José's foster parents, but most importantly, as his spiritual parents, we were called to intercede for him and his siblings. We knew we had to be strong in the LORD and in his mighty power. We had to put on the full armor of God so that

we could take our stand against the devil's schemes. We knew our struggle was not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 6: 10–12).

Not everyone has gone through extreme events like Joseph and José. However, for us, forgiveness can still be an extreme act. We may be forced to visit and re-visit old wounds and tend to new ones inflicted by those who have hurt us previously. But the LORD was quite clear during His exchange with Peter (Matthew 18:21–22): "*Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me—up to seven times?*" Jesus answered, "*I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.*" God's Word states the importance of forgiveness in the healing process and in growing as a Christ follower. Remarkably, some of Jesus' last words before he died on the cross were, "*Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing*" (Luke 23:34 a).

Last week José's Mami terminated her parental rights, clearing the way for us to adopt him. When the adoption is complete it will have been a three-year process and a total of six years since José began his journey of redemption and forgiveness. He still is in the process, but aren't we all? He has grown to be a healthy, strong, joy-filled young man who is allowing Christ to shape him bit-by-bit into the man He wants him to be.

I echo for him Paul's prayer in Philippians 3:13 that, José does not consider himself yet to have taken hold of it [that for which Christ Jesus took hold of him]. But for one thing, for José to know that he should forget what is behind and strain toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called him heavenward in Christ.

Kathy Dow-Burger and her husband, Don, have 5 children and live in Silver Spring, Maryland. They are part of the Vulnerable Children Work Group which is an Apostolic Mission's Ministry at Immanuel's Church in Silver Spring, Maryland. Kathy has started working full-time again as a speech-language pathologist working with children who have autism.



Training Tips

*Plans fail for
lack of counsel,
but with many advisers
they succeed
(Proverbs 15:22 NIV)*



An Excerpt from:

Offering Healing and Hope for Children in Crisis

Module 1: Trauma and Crisis Care

by: Phyllis Kilbourn, Ph.D.

A Crisis Care Training International Curriculum

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Forgiving the one who caused the loss

One of the most important dimensions of grieving is the ability to forgive the one who has caused the loss and pain. This act is not easy and some feel that it is impossible. How often we hear the statement, *Forgive? Never! After what that person did to me, I will never forgive him.*

One has to admit that most crimes committed against children are hideous and violent violations against their humanity and basic rights of protection. Forgiving anyone for such sins, even after dealing with the emotional pain, often seems impossible. Nevertheless, beyond being required by God, it is necessary for inner healing. And God does make it possible for one to forgive.

Forgiveness comes at the end of the grieving process. Often forgiveness does not occur because one lacks understanding of what real forgiveness is and isn't. The following explanation of forgiveness is vital to helping children understand the meaning of forgiveness which is a prerequisite to bringing closure to the traumatic event.

What Unforgiveness Does

Unforgiveness causes a root of bitterness to spring up, poisoning a person's mind and, eventually, making him or her an emotional cripple. Unforgiveness hurts the child

offended, not the offender. Wounded people often see their bitterness or hatred as a power that keeps them from being hurt again. They build a wall around themselves and live within this wall in a confined seedbed of anger, fear, bitterness, desire for revenge, jealousy and depression. The child thus becomes a prisoner within the walls created by unforgiveness.

What Forgiveness Is Not

Children highly prize justice. We all hear their cries of, *That's not fair!* Therefore they need to know that forgiving the offender does not erase his or her responsibility for the wrong done to them.

Forgiveness also is not forgetting. Forgiveness does, however, release the pain of the event even though the memory remains. The child does not have to pretend that the event never happened. While Jesus does heal the painful memories, He does not remove the history of what happened.

What Forgiveness Is

Forgiveness is a foundational principle to facilitate inner healing and is directly related to our emotional well-being. It is a process, not an instantaneous act. While God can forgive instantaneously, we cannot.

We need to understand the trauma and resulting losses to know why and for what we forgive the perpetrator. Forgiveness removes the moral hindrances that stand between the abused and the abuser, leaving the consequences in the hands of God.

At this point forgiveness becomes the lancet that pierces the emotional abscess created by hurt, anger and bitterness and allows the poison to drain away, setting the wounded free. We must allow the children to pour out their emotional pain before the Lord and, in His power, extend forgiveness. Only then will they truly be set free.

Coming to Closure

After a child's losses have been grieved, a concrete form of closure will help children move on and continue healthy childhood development. Once closure has

occured, caregivers can seek to restore, in some measure, the losses the children have suffered. Restoring their losses empowers children, helping them regain a measure of control over their lives.

Use of meaningful rituals in a culture can help children bring closure to their experiences. In Liberia the act of burning signifies that you have put something behind you and you are now ready to embrace new things. (For example, burning your witch doctor charms and turning to Christ.)

After the war, children and youth were encouraged to write about or draw pictures of things they wanted to put behind them. Then a bonfire was started at which time the children could come and burn the things they had written and drawn, signifying that they wanted to bring closure to their painful losses. The local pastor then anointed them with oil and prayed for them.

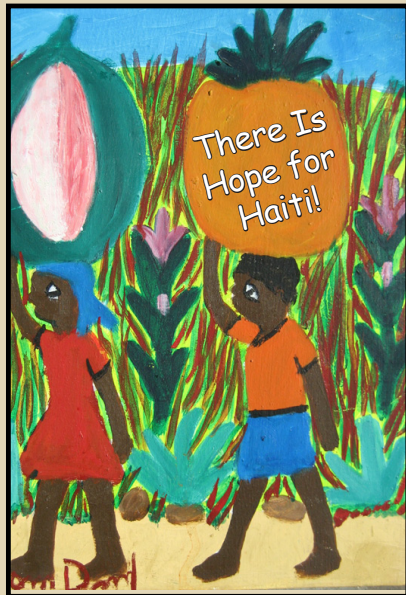
NEW RESOURCE

Trauma recovery Book for Children of Haiti

This booklet helps caregivers walk the children of Haiti through understanding and identifying the losses they have suffered due to the earthquake. It also helps the children grieve their losses and begin the process of closure and healing through the grace and power of Jesus.

CCTI
makes this booklet available (along with a Facilitator's Guide in both English and French to those ministering currently (or planning to minister) in Haiti.

For further information contact: Rosemary Sabatino
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CCTI Curriculum

Available at crisiscaretraining.org

Offering Healing and Hope to Children in Crisis is a curriculum prepared to train caregivers to work with children who have experienced deep trauma.

∞ **Module 1: Trauma and Crisis Care:** this core module presents foundational issues and principles that provide caregivers with an understanding of children's traumatic experiences and the resulting impact of trauma as well as basic prerequisites to planning and implementing interventions. Textbook for use with this module: *Healing the Children of War: A handbook for ministry to children who have suffered deep trauma.*

∞ **Module 2: Street Children:** provides an understanding of the impact of street life on children and their behavior. It also discusses effective prevention and intervention principles and strategies that assist children to give up street life and return to a structured environment with adult oversight. Textbook for use with this module: *Street Children: A guide to effective ministry.*

∞ **Module 3: Care for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC's):** provides an overview of the situation for OVC's worldwide and an understanding of their lives and needs. It explores the impact on children losing their families and homes, and discusses models of alternative placement programs for children requiring out of home care. Some basic intervention strategies are considered and how best to care for those involved in the children's lives.

The Power of Forgiveness

—Marissa Phelps



I still remember the fresh and invigorating atmosphere that surrounded us that night. It was truly a beautiful evening in Saposoa, Peru, a small town located in the jungle. I was part of a ministry team from the U.S.A., and that night we happened to be showing the Jesus film in the main plaza. Many people had gathered to watch this film and we were happy to see such a great turn out. While the people watched, we prayed for God to open up their hearts and move them to come to Christ.

*Her heart was carrying
a heavy burden of
resentment and anger*

As we were praying, I noticed a young girl seated alone watching attentively. Her face gave her heart away. She looked tired and lost. When the movie finished I noticed she stayed around but didn't show much interest in talking or praying. I sat close by and watched the Spirit move in her heart as we struck up a conversation. We started by talking about her family situation. From there I really didn't know where our conversation was headed, but I could see God's hand so I sat back to watch, listen and wait.

Little by little she started opening up and pouring out her heart. This young girl was living with her aunt and uncle who openly and cruelly rejected her. They constantly humiliated, neglected, mistreated and put pressure on her hoping that she would run away and leave them alone. She was at the end of her rope and it was obvious that her heart was carrying a heavy burden of resentment and anger against her relatives. Her mother had died several months before our conversation. Her father had taken her to her aunt's house and abandoned her there. It was obvious to me that she was still grieving the loss of her mother, the abandonment of her father and the rejection of her relatives (an amazing amount of baggage for a young girl to carry).

I must say that I did not know how to counsel and comfort her. Her pain and needs were overwhelming for me as well. I listened to every detail while I prayed for God to affirm His love to her. As our conversation and

prayers went on, and many tears were shed, God started to break through the layers of her heart. God was taking her from a place of resentment and anger to a place of forgiveness and freedom.

Although this young girl was a Christian, I could see that her deep pain and the anger she felt towards her relatives, father and circumstances were taking her further and further from God to a very real place of isolation and despair. But God's plan for her was different. He was offering her grace and compassion to prepare her heart to forgive.

God was preparing her to forgive as an act of obedience and trust in Him to move her a step closer toward inner healing and peace. God wanted to free her so that He could fill that empty place with His love and compassion.

As we were praying, God gave me a clear picture of His love for her. He gave me a picture of a terrible storm at sea where there was no hope in finding refuge. As we talked about this picture I told her that a light was shining through the storm. God was saying to her: "Your eyes are fixed on the storm and you have missed the light shining through the storm. The light is Me—fix your eyes on Me. You will see the storm begin to calm as you come to me."

*Only Jesus can help us
forgive and walk in
that forgiveness*

It is truly only God who can walk us through our grief, pain and anger to take us to a place of forgiveness and healing. When we forgive those who have inflicted pain on us we allow the Holy Spirit to bring us to a place of spiritual freedom to experience God's healing and restoration.

It goes without saying that what this young girl was going through was not fair. She had done nothing wrong to deserve so much pain. But isn't that what Christ went through for us? Dying for us on the cross? Only He can enable us forgive and help us walk in that forgiveness.

Certainly, forgiving others often comes with a cost. Self-denial and “giving up our rights” are things that we must learn in order to forgive and be free.

As I reflect on this story, the life of Joseph comes to mind. He suffered under the rejection of his brothers, but always remained faithful to God even in the hardest times. He was able to extend forgiveness and compassion to his brothers only because God’s love enabled him to do so.

How important it is for us to provide for children the affirmation and support they need for them to forgive those who may have caused them so much pain, and then to trust God for their future. I don’t know how soon this girl’s circumstances changed after we left, but I was comforted with the fact that she went back to her church and renewed her relationship with Christ. I truly believe that she started to experience the abundant life of joy and compassion that God was offering her. Why do I say this? I saw the change in her face!

God can enable us to see our lives in the light of His eternal perspective and plans for us if we trust Him. My prayer is that my friend will learn that God’s plan for her life is not to harm her but to give her hope and a future (Jeremiah 29:11).

Marissa Phelps came to the States from Mexico in 1997 to attend Asbury Seminary in Wilmore, KY where she graduated with an M.A. in Missions and Evangelism and a second degree In Christian Education. During her time in seminary she also served with GO International as their Children’s ministries coordinator.



In the past 8 years Marissa has served children by focusing on training indigenous church leaders in the importance of ministering to children on the local level and she wrote a training manual for this purpose. Marissa has recently joined CCTI with a passion to serve children in crisis as God leads.

Marissa is married to Dan Phelps, who graduated from Asbury with a Master in Divinity and Music. They have two daughters: Abriel who is 6, and Haylie who is 2. They are expecting their third child on January 23, 2011.

Dan, Marissa and their two daughters currently live in Artesia, NM where Dan serves as pastor of The First Presbyterian Church.

• NEWS • EVENTS • RESOURCES

Resources on Forgiveness

- **“The Place of Forgiveness in the Reintegration of Former Child Soldiers in Sierra Leone.”**
By: Stephanie Goins (2008).
In H. Allen (ed) *Nurturing Children’s Spirituality: Christian Perspectives and Best Practices*, 289-304;
Eugene, OR: Cascade Books.
- **“Culture and Ethnic Identity in Family Resilience: Dynamic Processes in Trauma and Transformation of Indigenous People.” *Handbook for Working With Children and Youth.*** By: Laurie McCubbin and Hamilton McCubbin; 2005.
SAGE Publications.
15 May. 2010. <http://www.sage-ereference.com/hdbk_youth/Article_n2.html>.
- ***Healing the Children of War: (Forgiveness and the Healing Process pg. 267-283; By: Dale Henry Schumm);***
Phyllis Kilbourn, editor; 1995;
World Vision; ISBN 0-912552-87-5
(available at www.crisiscaretraining.org)
- ***Forgiving the Unforgivable***
By: David Stoop
Gospel Light, 2005
ISBN: 0830737235
This book Dr. Stoop discusses what do when confronted with the unforgivable—an act that shakes our moral foundations to their roots, often committed by someone trusted and loved. Murder, sexual abuse etc. leaving lifelong wounds and are unforgivable trespasses that can be forgiven through the grace of God.
- ***Amish Grace***
By: Donald B. Kraybill, Steven M. Nolt, Daniel L. Weaver-Zercher
John Wiley and Sons; 2010
ISBN: 9780470344040
On October 2, 2006 a gunman killed five Amish girls in Pennsylvania. A stunned nation watched as the children were laid to rest and as their grieving parents forgave the murderer. How could they pardon such a heinous act? The question is explored by the authors as they reveal how God’s grace can triumph over our vengeful world.
- ***Making Peace With Your Father***
By: David Stoop
Gospel Light; 200
ISBN 0830734414
This book is a for pastors, youth leaders and anyone who counsels others. It offers a comprehensive look at the role of the father, a study of father absence and a description of the impact of abusive fathers. It offers a journey of healing to wholeness.

Caregiver's Time-out

—Josh Christiansen



Positive Peer Pressure:

Motivating Youth Towards Living in the Word

For a very long time I have been praying, pondering and asking other youth pastors—How do you motivate your students to read their Bibles? I honestly did not receive any effective answers. Some said, “People have to read in community, so when your group meets spend time in the Word.” That is well and good, but I am looking to motivate people to have the kind of personal devotional time I have with the Word everyday. I think this is vital to spiritual growth.

Praise God, an answer has been revealed in the last year or so. Just about everyone in the youth group is reading the Bible on a daily basis. How did this happen?

First a little background. For years, I tried to teach a traditional lecture lesson. Their eyes would quickly glaze over and I would often get frustrated. I knew I needed to make the lessons more interactive. So, I would have them read and I would ask a lot of questions. I even had them act out parables and stories. This had a very modest effect. They would still roll their eyes when I told them it was time for the lesson and I often would leave feeling like I had not made a real impact.

We always began our group time with a game. We would play sports or a group game indoors. Over time, I noticed that not everyone would be actively involved and only a few would get the spotlight. The athletically gifted would shine in the sports and the intelligent would rule the indoor games. However, certain games seemed to share the spotlight. Charades

was the most popular. Some were better non-verbal communicators than others, but everyone got a chance in the spotlight. Pictionary was the same way, regardless of the variety of artistic abilities. These games never got old. We continue to play these interactive, spot-light sharing games and have created some of our own variations of charades.

You may be thinking what does this have to do with getting into the word. Well, I found out that what works for games can be applied to our lesson time. Coincidentally (not to God of course), I decided to try a modified Wesley Class Meeting format. I knew I needed something more interactive and I had enjoyed using this format in an

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adult study.

We started circling up and going around asking each one in turn to —“Report on your spiritual progress.” At first the students were not sure how to answer this question. So, I would ask them what they were doing to affect their spiritual progress (emphasizing reading the Word, praying, service, evangelism and fellowship). When some reported that they had not made much spiritual progress that week I would respond with, “so what are you going to do about it?”

A few of the older students in the group began reading through the Bible in a year. They began reporting back about how the scripture spoke to them in their lives. They began showing the fruit of consuming “daily bread.” Of course, the younger ones followed suit. There is no substitute for good peer leadership. I challenged the leaders in private to lead by example and take the process seriously.

The consistency, group accountability

and the positive peer influence really made an impact. I read a marketing article recently about a study by a hotel chain on how they motivated people to reuse towels. They left various messages in the bathroom. The one they found the most effective was the message that a large percentage of other people were reusing their towels. They found that people were motivated to action by the realization — “if everyone else is doing it, I should too.”

By God’s grace, a culture has been developed in our youth group that says “we all read our Bibles daily.” When visitors come, they almost always state that they need to start doing the same.

We also share prayer requests and do a circle prayer in which each student prays out-loud for the person on their right. I have heard visitors comment, “I have never heard anyone pray for me out-loud before.” This too is interactive and shares the spotlight. I have noticed that many have made great strides at both praying in public and expressing their faith in public.

That is the entire format. We play an interactive game for about an hour then our group time takes about an hour for a group of 10-15. I begin the meeting with a Bible verse or two and I ask someone to open in prayer, then off we go. I have found that I do not need to say much. I really enjoy when they counsel and minister to each other. The adult volunteers and I join in the circle as well. Recently, we took a couple weeks off for the holidays. I felt like I was missing something and I realized how much the group ministers to me.

Each person gets the spotlight, it is interactive and the students see the time as “their time”. I am grateful to God for this answer to prayer and I hope this format can help you in your ministry. I welcome comments or questions. (joshchristiansen@hotmail.com)



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