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# The Baptist Pietist CLARION

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Edited by G. WILLIAM CARLSON, Professor of History and Political Science at Bethel University; RON SAARI, Senior Pastor at Central Baptist Church.

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## The Cost of Not Forgiving



WAYNE ROBERTS,  
former professor of  
mathematics at Ma-  
calester College and  
advisor to Intervarsity  
student organization.  
Sermon given at Cen-  
tral Baptist Church,

A Sunday School paper illustration led me as a child to envision Jonah sitting at a table in a quite comfortable looking space; a picture hung from the lining of the fish's belly. I think for years the mention of Jonah conjured up in my mind the promise that God prepares a table before us in the presence of our enemies.

So began a lifelong interest in the story of

Jonah which next came to my attention when, as a high school student very interested in reconciling science and what I had learned in Sunday School, I read all I could pro and con about the possibility of a fish swallowing a man. I knew several accounts of people and animals surviving such an adventure.

I had read several accounts, for example, by a Dr. Harry Rimmer who wrote of meeting a man who, while trying to harpoon a large shark, fell overboard, was swallowed by the shark, and was pulled out alive by shipmates when they caught the fish 48 hours later. Rimmer reported that the man subsequently appeared in freak shows, devoid of all body hair and having a pasty, blotchy skin, evidently the result of the stomach acid

~ ~ ~ ~ ~ continued on p. 15

## Forgiveness: Truly Divine!



TERRI L. HANSEN, for-  
mer Children's and  
Spiritual Develop-  
ment Pastor at Central  
Baptist Church | Her  
hair was disheveled  
and she barely had a  
chance to pull her thin  
robe up over her bare

shoulders. She squinted and stumbled as her rough captors muscled her through the door into the early light of dawn. She had always been so careful, keeping her nightly activities secretive and hidden. There was no question – she had been set up. She knew it the second her customer was allowed to slip out the back door.

The group maintained its tight grip on her as they entered the temple court and approached the Galilean. He was there

once again addressing a growing crowd of people. She had seen him before. He had caused quite a stir as he had gone about doing amazing miracles and healing the sick. They were scared to death of him, these religious leaders. He was upsetting the system, inciting the people – such was the power and mystery that surrounded him. Now she was bait in their trap.

“We have caught this woman in the very act of adultery. It is written in the Law that such a woman be stoned. We were just wondering what you thought.” The Galilean bent down, taking the posture of a teacher. He wrote on the ground with his finger as their impatience mounted. “What say you?”

His eyes were unsettling as he straightened up and scanned the faces of her accusers. “I say whoever amongst you has never sinned – he is the one who gets to throw the first

~ ~ ~ ~ ~ continued on p. 14

# Inside this Issue of the *Baptist Pietist CLARION*

## *Living and Forgiven and Forgiving People*

G. WILLIAM CARLSON, *Professor of History and Political Science, Bethel University* | This is the sixth issue of the *Baptist Pietist Clarion*. The primary mission of this journal is to affirm the core values of the BGC pietist heritage and allow them to be part of the discourse of today's Christian witness. We have focused recently on issues of Baptist Spirituality through the life and witness of Dr. Carl H. Lundquist and Religious Liberty through Wal-fred Peterson's and C. Emanuel Carlson's work with the Baptist Joint Committee.

Last fall, Terri Hansen and I co-led a Spiritual Retreat, including parishioners from Central and Elim Baptist churches, entitled *Living as Forgiven and Forgiving People*. The theme suggested that "forgiveness and reconciliation are practices that give concrete expression of our calling as disciples of Jesus."

As one explores the history of the Baptist pietist heritage of the Conference, two themes are extremely important. First, there is a need for all to have a "new birth" experi-

ence. This is well expressed in our affirmation of faith which states that God "saves from sin and death all who come to Him through Jesus Christ." We can live as forgiven people. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (I John 1:9)

Adolf Olson, Professor of Church history at Bethel Seminary from 1919-1955, wrote an essay entitled "Faith of Our Fathers." He strongly emphasized the commitment of early Swedish Baptists to preach the gospel of redemption through the "shed blood of Jesus Christ." Olson wrote: "As Paul, when he came to Corinth, determined to know nothing save Jesus Christ and Him crucified, in like manner also the Swedish Baptist pioneers made the crucified and risen Lord the central theme of their preaching and their testimony. Listen to Gustaf Palmquist, writing from New York to his friends in Rock Island: 'Jesus died in our stead, Jesus our Savior. I would like to raise my voice to be heard from New York to Rock Island, and cry out, Jesus died in our

stead, Jesus rose for our justification – is not this sufficient?' And from thousands of humble hearts of Swedish Baptists on the American frontier we seem to hear, as it were ascending to the very gates of heaven, a loud Amen!"

Second, one of the characteristics of Christian disciples is that we are "forgiving" people. The Lord's prayer reads "forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors... For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." (Matthew 6) What does it mean to say this prayer? What does it mean to be a forgiving people? Why is this an important characteristic of Christian discipleship?

I trust you will enjoy reading these articles. The next issue will publish the addresses given by Chris Armstrong and Virgil Olson at the pietist heritage seminar during the June 2006 BGC meetings at Bethel University.

Previous issues of the Baptist Pietist Clarion can be found at the following website: [http://cas.bethel.edu/dept/history/Baptist\\_Pietist\\_Clarion](http://cas.bethel.edu/dept/history/Baptist_Pietist_Clarion)



## Pietist Values: A Summary



DR. CHRIS ARMSTRONG, *Associate Professor of Church History, Bethel Seminary* | On June 28, 2006 Dr. Virgil Olson and Dr. Chris Armstrong gave

presentations concerning the pietist heritage and its influence on the Baptist General Conference. Chris created a one-page handout on the core values of pietism. It is a useful summary and helpful to understanding the roots of our spiritual heritage.

### *Spener and the Pietist Tradition*

In response to the *theologia spinosa* ("prickly theology") of the Protestant orthodox heritage, Philipp Jakob Spener and his Pietists stressed the following theological and spiritual foundations:

1. the personal dimension of our relation-

ship to god – begun in the experience of the New Birth;

2. the need, and the spiritual power, that we have to improve our Christian life in both inner and outer ways – that is, sanctification or holiness;

3. the foundational status of the Bible in faith and practice – over against the orthodox Protestant's near-exclusive focus on systematics; and

4. the need to see the church reformed – that is, pulled out of its cultural and theological "ruts" to better live and spread the gospel.

In pursuit of a *living orthodoxy*, the Pietists also created new practices. These innovations seem commonplace today – but that's because they worked so well they changed the Protestant church forever:

1. small-group Bible studies,  
2. practical ecumenism that joins hands across denominational boundaries in the cause of the gospel,

3. lay engagement in spiritual disciplines, and indeed, in...

4. active Protestant missions – long before William Carey.

All of these came from the Pietists.

The Pietists also modeled:

5. a heart religion with a social conscience. Their works of mercy, including inner-city ministries, orphanages, and hospitals, gave public form to their devotion.

And finally, the Pietists

6. insisted that Protestant seminaries institute programs of spiritual formation.

They didn't use that modern catchphrase, of course. But Spener argued in his book *Pia Desideria* that spiritual formation stands with careful biblical scholarship and lively theological study as a pillar of seminary education. And that was centuries before today's initiatives in "holistic" or "integrative" ministerial training.

# Ubuntu and Forgiveness: Lessons from South Africa



Laura Gilbertson, Adjunct Instructor of Theology and Assistant Director of Discipleship Ministries, Bethel University

I've just returned home from South Africa as part of a delegation of 25 Bethel University faculty, staff, and students. The purpose of our trip was to learn about the process of racial reconciliation that is occurring in that country since the dismantling of apartheid in the early 1990s. The politics of apartheid enabled the white, Dutch minority to oppressively rule persons of color by creating systems of segregation, economic disparity, fear, and even imprisonment, torture, or death. South Africa has become an example to the world of what forgiveness and redemption may look like on a socio-political scale where separation, hatred, and violence once held power. Whether I was in a home, school, or government office, I was inspired by the hopeful vision for a "rainbow nation" where all persons are equal members of society.

This climate of forgiveness and hope has emerged after decades of struggle for liberation. South Africans' active fight for justice must not be overlooked in a discussion of reconciliation. Yet, once freedom was obtained, the country had to decide whether to seek revenge or offer forgiveness to those who had so long abused their power. According to Archbishop Desmond Tutu, South Africans have committed to corporate forgiveness because of the African concept of *ubuntu*: "my humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours."<sup>1</sup> A person with *ubuntu* senses that we are inter-dependent and that dehumanization is not an isolated act of violence, but rather affects the entire community.

Although the African word *ubuntu* (pronounced *oo-boon'-too*) may be unfamiliar to Baptists in the United States, the concept has parallels in historic Christian tradition. These concepts of interdependence and loving unity are essential to the relational nature of the Triune God. Isn't our experience as members of the Body of Christ meant to be

a reflection of the loving, personal communion of the Triune God? Sin, which requires forgiveness, is the breaking of communion with God and others. According to Bethel Seminary professors Steve Sandage and LeRon Shults, sin "does not refer to an abstract substance; it indicates ways of relating to ourselves, others, and God that prevent us from facing one another in love."<sup>2</sup> Forgiveness of sin, therefore, is the act of restoring relationship, understanding ourselves to be intricately linked with one another, even our enemies.

It was in the spirit of *ubuntu* that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established as a temporary system of justice in South Africa during the transition into democracy, and "the central concern [was] the healing of breaches, the redressing of imbalances, the restoration of broken relationships, a seeking to rehabilitate both the victim and the perpetrator..."<sup>3</sup> The TRC heard 22,000 cases and offered compensation to victims and amnesty to perpetrators who were willing to publicly state their involvement in violence. While the TRC did not attempt to legislate forgiveness, its goal of recording truth for the purpose of fostering reconciliation has become a symbol of the quest for healing and forgiveness in South Africa. Certainly, it has inspired the global community to consider the power of socio-political forgiveness. I would like to offer two observations based on the work of the TRC and other theological reflection on socio-political forgiveness.

First, forgiveness must be grounded in honest remembrance of the past in ways which compel transformation. The practice of forgiveness is inadequate if disengaged from the process of rebuilding unjust relationships and systems.<sup>4</sup> We must avoid the injury of prematurely coercing forgiveness, particularly if we hold positions of power, because this further devalues the voices of those who suffer injustices. South African theologian Allan Boesak calls for the church to function with "prophetic memory" that allows the works of God's justice and power in history to inform current efforts toward social transformation.<sup>5</sup>

We remember the life, death, and resurrec-

tion of Christ for the purpose of transforming ourselves and the world. So, too, we are called to remember the experiences of our brothers and sisters around the world to help us become what we were designed to be: a community reconciled to God and one another. In the case of the TRC, forgiveness and amnesty were granted only after history was acknowledged, power became shared, and victimization was ended. One of the goals of the TRC was to ensure that truth would be uncovered for the purpose of healing and protecting the future from similar events.

Second, forgiveness must also be inspired by our hope for reconciliation. In his award-winning book, *Exclusion and Embrace*, Miroslav Volf suggests that a simple notion of a "truce" cannot be an adequate biblical understanding of forgiveness. According to Volf, "forgiveness is the boundary between exclusion and embrace. It heals the wounds that the power-acts of exclusion have inflicted and breaks down the dividing wall of hostility. Yet it leaves a distance between people, an empty space of neutrality, that allows them either to go their separate ways in what is sometimes called 'peace' or to fall into each other's arms and restore broken communion.... Forgiveness is therefore not the culmination of Christ's relation to the offending other; it is a passage leading to embrace."<sup>6</sup>

Only when we keep the biblical vision of reconciled humanity before us will we be able to fully forgive and embrace our enemies. Passive indifference cannot be our goal. Rather, as we are inspired by the love of the Triune God, we must seek to restore our interdependence in light of *ubuntu*. In John 17: 21, Jesus prayed, "As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us."

1 Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (New York: Doubleday, 1999) 31.

2 F. LeRon Shults and Steven J. Sandage, *The Faces of Forgiveness: Searching for Wholeness and Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003) 194.

3 Tutu, 55.

4 Flora Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories: A Theology of Healing and Transformation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000) 195.

5 Allan Boesak, *The Tenderness of Conscience: African Renaissance and the Spirituality of Politics* (Stellenbosch: SunPress, 2005) 128.

6 Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996) 125-126.

# God's Gift of Forgiveness: An Evangelistic Tract of John Alexis Edgren

## Introduction

G. WILLIAM CARLSON and DIANA L. MAGNUSON | John Alexis Edgren, founder of Bethel Seminary, spent much of his early life on the sea. He became a mariner when he was a teenager and traveled widely to England, Egypt, Cape Horn and the United States. In 1859



Edgren finished his schooling at the navigation school at Stockholm and became a captain. After signing up with the Union Navy during the American Civil War, he

developed a distinguished naval career, a career that offered great promise for the future.

In February of 1862, Edgren encountered Rev. Anders Wiberg one of the most significant leaders of the Baptist movement in Sweden and the United States. Wiberg urged Edgren to leave his mariner vocation and devote himself totally to the spread of the Gospel. Although he declined to do so at that time, after the Civil War was over he entered full time Christian service. When asked to continue his naval career Edgren responded "Woe unto me if I preach not the gospel." He became a student at Colgate University, was ordained at the Mariners' Baptist Church, was elected a member of the Baptist Seminary in Stockholm, Sweden and became a pastor in the church at Gothenburg.

In the 1870's Edgren moved to the United States to serve the Swedish immigrant population and settled in Chicago. Eventually he came to the conclusion that the immigrant churches needed an educated clergy to protect the congregation from heresy and provide for a more articulate communication of the Gospel. In 1871 Edgren was invited to open a school at the Baptist Union Theological Seminary in conjunction with the University of Chicago.

"On the Sea of Life" was delivered as an illustrated sermon in Kiron, Iowa in 1884.

The ship is the world, ravaged by fire. How shall the person on the burning boat be saved? Is there a hope for rescue? A ship is coming from the Gloryland to rescue the shipwrecked with a symbol of the cross on the flag. On behalf of the King it signals for the person to look at the God who can save the world from fire. The lifeboat of atonement is sent to the burning ship and the person drops into the boat and is saved. The tract ends by the singing of the song of the rescued which says that nothing is capable of separating the rescued person "from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The illustrations are comparable with Edgren's previous sketches of sea life. He received some instruction from Edward Moran, a famous American maritime artist. His talents are evident in his work on the American Civil War, especially his portrait of the battle between the Monitor and the Merrimac. Although the drawings for *On the Sea of Life* are quite good, they best reflect Edgren's desire to use art as a way to assist in understanding the message.

This tract is followed by an extended essay which outlines the pitfalls in Christian living as the rescued one moves from salvation to heaven. Although, not included, it is a somewhat meandering saga as the rescued one moves through the temptations of life and continues to need God to assist him in remaining faithful to the Gospel.

Edgren never forgot his mariner past. It is interesting to note that several of the major figures in the early Swedish Baptist movement in Sweden and the United States, Anders Wiberg, G. W. Shroeder and F. O. Nilsson, all had experiences at sea and were

actively involved in the Mariners' Baptist Church in New York City.

For Edgren, the life on the sea was an important component in his spiritual journey. It provided him with a number of the experiences that brought him to faith. Several times when there were storms at sea, Edgren promised God that he would give his life to gospel service if God would abate the storm. He began to realize that only divine intervention would salvage the fate of the men of his ill-fated ship.

Edgren loved to tell the story of how on a voyage in the Atlantic near the Bermuda Islands, a terrific storm whipped up. The ship was threatened and many sailors feared the worse. After a giant wave threw Edgren into the spars and beams, the sailors released

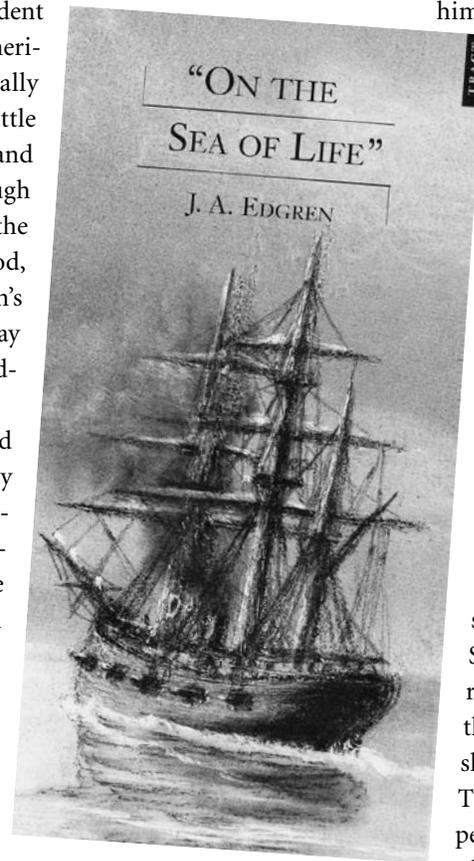
him and carried him to

the cabin. The following morning, after the storm had subsided; the whole crew honored Edgren's faith in God and its stabilizing influence during the turmoil.

For Edgren, human beings were enslaved by sin and would be summoned before the judgment seat of God and answer for their lives of servitude to sin. The Son of God came to redeem humans from their sins through the shedding of his blood. The church is a forgiven people who have accepted the salvation message.

One must choose to accept the hand of God through Christ or not. What would it profit a man if he were to gain the whole world and lose his own soul?

What must a person do to be saved? This eternal question remains as important in today's world. Each person must still answer it.



## ON THE SEA OF LIFE

JOHN ALEXIS EDGREN, *Founder of Bethel Seminary* | In my younger years I followed the sea, and that long enough to advance from cabin boy to the Captain. Having thus had ample experience of both the practical and theoretical side of a seaman's calling, I thought once in years of Gospel work I might prepare some address, illustrated by images from the sea. The following is substantially that address. It is hereby committed to print, if perchance in that form it may be of some use to immortal souls.

As will be seen, it deals especially with the subjective side of salvation, with man's own experiences in being saved, but not without allusion also to the objective side, to God's purpose and method in saving souls. Indeed, in any treatment of the way of salvation that side could not be left out of view, for from it flows to us the power by which we are saved, and without which salvation would be impossible.

Let us then learn at least something from the Bible, but in images from the sea, concerning the way of salvation. Here we see a burning vessel on the ocean. A man is standing on the deck, perplexed about what to do to be saved. Such is the sinner's position. Fire shall one day devour this earth. This material fire shall be but the emblem of the more terrible flame that

shall sweep through the sinner's soul under the just condemnation of God.

When Christ comes again, he shall come in "flaming fire, rendering vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus, who shall suffer punishment, even eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might." (II Thess. 1: 8,9)

How shall this man, you see on the vessel, escape? Delay will make him a sure prey of the flames. Thoughtlessly to continue in sin is with certainty to meet the judgment. To cast oneself overboard is the sooner to meet death. Behold, there is also the shark of the sea, awaiting the unfortunate to swallow him up. To do as many, in despair to take one's own life, is to cast oneself at once and for ever into the power of Satan. Behold, oh sinner, in this image your

own position! What will you do?

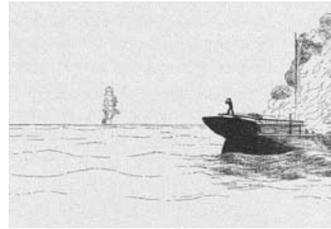
Could that man be saved by tearing the flesh from his bones? No. That would not help him. And yet, how many in this position seek salvation by self torture. But the torture of the body does not remove the guilt of sin, and does not create a new heart.

Or could this man be saved by putting on his best clothes? Impossible? Yet how many, when they are without peace with God, seek to build up a righteousness of their own as a ground of justification with God. But in vain! For "by works of the law shall no flesh be justified." (Romans 3:20) It is well and necessary to seek righteousness of life, and to make restitution for sin, as far as that lies in man's power; but in all this the ground of salvation is not to be found. (Romans 10:3) Something else is necessary to constitute this ground. What shall the man do? There is no boat. That is already destroyed. Since the fall, man has no means of his own, by which he could restore his lost good relation to God.

Is there no hope of salvation? Yes, for behold, a ship is coming yonder! Its name is the Gospel. Many a storm has it experienced, but not a sail is blown away, not a spar is broken! "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away," saith the Lord. (Luke 21:33) By the King in the Land of Glory this ship has been sent out, just in order to seek and save the shipwrecked. In the symbol of the cross on its flag we already perceive that "God is love." (I John 4:8) And it signals in behalf of the King: "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else." (Isaiah 45:22)

But how shall the man come over to the ship? Shall he put on wings and fly thither? That he cannot do. And so he might perish, although the ship is in sight. God's gentleness and one's own virtue, so think many, will surely lead to salvation. These are the two wings by which they would fly; but the Bible knows of no salvation without atonement.

Now the ship has arrived. The lifeboat of atonement has been sent, and is close to the burning ship. Now the man can be saved. To do this is so simple, that it needs no description. He only leaves the vessel on which he stands, and feeling assured, that the



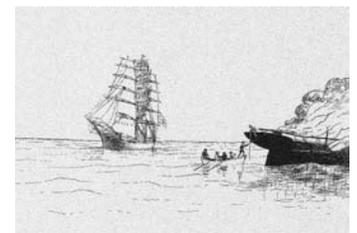
boat is able to carry him, he lets himself down into it. Act in a similar manner. Confess and forsake your sins, forsake also all dependence

on any righteousness of your own for justification and acceptance with God; and cast yourself as an unworthy and altogether needy sinner upon Christ, for whose merit's sake alone God can and does justify and save all who repentantly and trustworthy turn unto Him, even the most ungodly. (I John 2:1,2; Romans 4:5; Luke 23:42,43)

This boat will carry you - Christ for you with God - Christ your representative having suffered for your sins and paid the penalty in your behalf, and having in your behalf fulfilled the law and presented to God his own absolute righteousness. This is the God given ground of the Sinner's justification. Trust then in Jesus, and God will not impute to you your sins, because they have been imputed to him, and he will impute to you his righteousness for his acceptance of you, and you shall be restored to his favor. (John 3:16; Isaiah 53; Matthew 26:28; Exodus 28:36,38; Jeremiah 23:6; Romans 3:21; Romans 4:6-8; Luke 15:20-24) Then will also follow the gift of the new life, which in its nature is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

After the man is in the boat, it is pulled for the Gospel ship, and we hear him gladly exclaim, as the boat passes away from the burning vessel:

"There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus...Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ Jesus that died, yes, rather, that was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us...For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord." (Romans 8:1, 34-39)



# The Pietist Poetry of Signe Olson Peterson

G. WILLIAM CARLSON, *Professor of History and Political Science, Bethel University* |

In recent issues of the Baptist Pietist Clarion we have published the poetry of Signe Olson Peterson. She wrote under the name "Signe" and was joined, in various Mid-west Swedish newspapers and journals in the first half of the twentieth century, by other Swedish poets such



as David Nygren, C. R. Osbeck, and C. O. Dahlen. Recently she was honored in the

*Swedes in Canada Newsletter* (#5 December 2005) that is edited by Elinor Barr.

More than eighty of her early Swedish poems were written while she lived in Canada between 1911-18. She worked as a domestic for a widow in one of Port Arthur's grand homes (now part of Thunder Bay, Ontario). Just recently Elinor Barr located a history of the

Baptist Church in Port Arthur from 1930 and found a copy of a poem written by Signe in celebration of her experiences in the Port Arthur church.

Signe was born in Upper Ullerud, Värmland. After moving to Minnesota she married Rev. E.B. Peterson and raised six children. She published around 300 poems and essays. Many were found in Swedish newspapers and journals located at the Baptist General Conference History Center in St. Paul, Minnesota.

A major theme was her deep Christian faith as an active member of the Swedish Baptist church. She also wrote about the immigrant experience. Her poems frequently define characteristics of the pietist tradition. Such include a need for a born again experience, a delight in prayer and Bible study, a celebration of the community of faith, a desire for holy living and a hope for the promise of heaven.

The immigrant experience was a hard one. Her poems reflect a sense of loneliness and isolation. She laments over the immigrant's inability to be with family members and thanks God for the prayerful lives of her mother and father. There is a sense that life is hard and only God can provide strength and support in time of need. There is a constant reflection on the pillars of strength she was able to access: the support of the faith community, the realization that ultimately this life is not all there is, and the necessity of God's presence.

For Signe the poet's muse was a creative way of thinking about alienation, the messages found in God's creation, and the value

## 17. Lead the Children to Jesus

*(Söndagsskolan och Hemmet, Vol. XXI, No. 6, February 6, 1916, p. 4) (Mel. 184 Psalmisten). (translated by Tom Coleman)*

Lead the small to Jesus,  
Before sin succeeds,  
In the fields of their hearts,  
There to sow its seeds.

Chorus: Heaven belongs to them,  
Do not let them stray,  
Why not therefore start them,  
On the homeward way.

Direct them to Jesus,  
Tell them tenderly,  
His love goes out to all,  
Though they wayward be.  
Chorus: Heaven belongs to them.

Carry them to Jesus,  
Upon prayers strong arms  
Hide them beside his heart,  
From the world's alarms.  
Chorus: Heaven belongs to them.

Follow them to Jesus,  
Show them that they here,  
In all life's storms may be,  
Calm and free from care.  
Chorus: Heaven belongs to them.

of holy living. She loved children and wanted to ensure that all heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ, received adequate care and nurture, and delighted in their creative activities. Signe had a strong commitment to Klingberg's Children's home and John Klingberg, its founder, was a strong supporter of her poetry. The poems on this page are written to emphasize a call to live as forgiven and forgiving people.

Some of her poems have been translated from the Swedish by Tom Coleman, a retired Baptist Conference missionary to Ethiopia and Cameroons. He is not only a gifted translator, but also a gifted poet.

## 233. Forgive

There is a word we have on earth,  
Which Heaven does not know.  
Where perfect joy is not disturbed,  
By sorrows here below.  
And yet, by Heavens very gate,  
Its mighty power abound,  
For no one ever enters there,  
That does not know its sound.

This word was placed on mortal tongue,  
Because of sin and woe,  
When man had wandered from the way,  
His maker bade him go.  
And then it did become a guide,  
How dying souls may live,  
And reunite them with their God.  
This glorious word FORGIVE.

When hearts each other find anew,  
And hope and faith restore,  
When tender love within o'er flow,  
Where bitter memories of the past,  
With tears are washed away.  
No word is sweeter than FORGIVE,  
We ever learn to say.

Here is the will I aim to leave,  
To all, I've learned to know.  
It matters not if it be known,  
A while before I go.  
With open arms I plead with all,  
While yet our lives we live.  
Unbound eternity is near,  
FORGIVE, FORGIVE, FORGIVE!

# Christians as Forgiven People: Karl Karlson on *The Lord's Prayer*

## Introduction

G. WILLIAM CARLSON, *Professor of History and Political Science, Bethel University* | Dr.



Karl Karlson was dean of Bethel Seminary from 1925 until 1948. He was born in Sweden in 1877. He encountered a community of baptized believers in 1894 and there came to

know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. He was baptized in 1894 and almost immediately felt a call to ministry.

After graduating from Bethel Seminary in Sweden he began a life of church ministry. He emigrated to the United States in 1904, where he served Baptist churches in Connecticut, Massachusetts and Maine. While serving in ministry he completed his education, finally receiving a Doctorate at Clarke University.

Karlson came to Bethel Seminary in 1922 to teach historic theology, a post vacated by Professor Emmanuel Schmidt. When Arvid Gordh resigned as Dean of the Seminary in 1925, Dr. Karlson became the Seminary Dean. He was deeply committed to evangelism and missions. One of the major tasks for the new Dean was to help transition the Seminary from Swedish to English.

He was deeply committed student of the Bible and developed an extensive set of notes on the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Life of Christ and Book of Ezekial. The article on the Lord's prayer was published after his death in 1948 in the *Bethel Seminary Quarterly*. It reflects Dr. Karlson's commitment to Biblical scholarship as well as a need to be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ. It illustrates his view on the value of forgiveness as a Biblical principle.

Dean Edwin Omark wrote the following about Dr. Karlson:

"Christian both in doctrine and life. To him the sacred Scriptures were the sole source of authority and guidance. The

crucible of his trained mind had tested other purported authorities and found them wanting: only the divinely inspired Bible was adequate for faith and life."

## A LESSON IN PRAYER: LUKE 11:1-13

DR. KARL J. KARLSON, *Dean of Bethel Seminary, 1925-1948* | *Bethel Seminary Quarterly* Vol. VI, No. 1, November 1957.

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"...Jesus was praying. It must have been a wonderful prayer for the disciples felt the impact of it. This is the kind of prayer that comes after much praying. And one of His disciples gave expression to this feeling of the need among the disciples to be able to pray as the Master prayed... Jesus gave them a prayer."

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### A Model Prayer

Jesus granted the request and furnished the disciples with a model prayer. It was not Jesus' intention that they should learn this prayer by heart and repeat it thoughtlessly for that is contrary to the intent and purpose of prayer. The prayer is brief but it contains the elements which should be included in every prayer.

But the difference between the prayer in Matthew and Luke, whether they are two prayers or one, indicates that the disciples did not understand it as a prayer to be learned and repeated as a formula but as indicating the elements of true prayer. If the two evangelists report the same instruction in prayer, Matthew's is probably the more original for it has in it certain elements that give added touch to an actual prayer...

"After this manner therefore pray ye." The Gentiles may have their forms of prayer and John the Baptist may have had his but ye shall

have this. Vain repetitions and useless words have no place in prayer to God. This prayer contains neither.

The prayer contains the following facts:

**1. The address:** "Our Father who art in heaven." It was Jesus who brought the Fatherhood of God to men. He called God His Father; He was His Son. He associates Himself with the disciples and says: "Our Father." In Him we become children of God. Everyone who has identified himself with Jesus Christ is a child of God, and can address God as "Our Father."

This Father is of another world, the heavenly, the spiritual: "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit." (Isaiah 57:15) "Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool." (Isaiah 66:1) He is exalted, majestic, and holy, still accessible to and connected with the children of men through the Son of Man.

**2. Then follows three petitions which pertain to God's glory, God's dominion, and God's respect.**

**a.** "Hallowed be thy name." God's name is holy in itself because of Him who bears it; "but this holiness must be asserted and displayed in the whole being and character of the believers, inwardly and outwardly, so that disposition, word, and deed are regulated by the acknowledged perfection of God and brought into harmony with it." (*Meyer Commentary on Matthew*)

There is an identification between the name and the person that bears the name; the name stands for the person. That which is impure and repugnant to God brings dishonor to His name; it profanes His name. "Let thy name be kept sacred." May it always be worshipped and revered.

**b.** "Thy kingdom come." This was an important prayer for all the Jews. It meant the Messianic kingdom. Jesus makes this the prayer of his disciples. Whether Jesus meant it so or not, the disciples understood it to mean the Messianic kingdom. When that kingdom would come, the political world events would be wound up and a new order of things be inaugurated. It was God's kingdom among men.

The petition has to do more with the

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condition under which the kingdom can come than with the kingdom itself. The idea expressed here is the same as Peter voices: “Waiting for and hastening the day of God.” (II Peter 3:12) There is a way in which we can hasten the day, that is the condition of the coming, not the kingdom itself exactly. The missionary work that the disciples are to do is thus indirectly included in the prayer.

c. “Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth.” Luke omits this petition. Hence, some exegetes have maintained that it is not a petition itself but an unfolding of the meaning of the preceding. There is here, an emphasis upon something else: The angels in heaven do God’s will; men on earth should do the same, even if God’s kingdom has not come. Believers should be anxious to realize God’s purpose in their lives. This is a prerequisite for admission into the kingdom of God. The prayer is not for God to exert His will in heaven and on earth, but for the production of a condition in which God’s will is realized.

**3. The next three petitions pertain more intimately and directly to man, to him who is praying.**

a. “Give us this day our daily bread.” This petition concerns temporal goods, the only one that does. There seems to be a contradiction between Jesus’ teaching here and His teaching in the Sermon on the Mount concerning cares for tomorrow: “Be not anxious for tomorrow.” But the contradiction is not a real one. If there be any in the mind of anyone it is due to a misunderstanding of what Jesus said and the situation in which He said it. This is a morning prayer. In the morning Jesus taught His disciples: “Give us our sustaining bread for the approaching day.” The word which is translated “daily” is *epiousion* which is of uncertain meaning and is used only twice in the New Testament, in the two editions of the Lord’s prayer and nowhere else in the Greek language. It is apparently composed of *epi* and *ousios*, *epi-* upon and *ousios*—being or substance, and so it might mean “sustaining” or “for the present,” i.e. the approaching day. And so He teaches them to pray for enough bread each day for the approaching day, i.e., the day that is just beginning and not be anxious for the morrow. It is a reminder of the manna in the wilderness which fell every morning just for the day...

The meaning of the prayer is abundantly plain. We are enjoined to present to God our needs for this life and trust Him for them. If we ask for our daily bread today there is still some futurity but we have no right to go beyond tomorrow’s need. The idea that we should receive today our bread for tomorrow is absurd and still a good many Christians think that would be all right.

b. The second petition of this group pertains to our social relationship; we are taught to pray for forgiveness of sin because we have also forgiven, i.e. our relation to our fellow beings is the condition on which we base our request. It we do not forgive we pray that God shall not forgive us.

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 “...we are taught to pray for forgiveness of sin because we have also forgiven...”  
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The son of Sirach had written: “Forgive thy neighbor the hurt that he hath done thee; and then thy sins shall be pardoned when thou prayest,” (Ecclesiastes 28:1) and the Son of Man said: “If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” (Matthew 6:14-15) And it is so important that “if you art offering thy gift at the altar and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.” (Matthew 5:23-24) Mark has recorded another saying of Jesus similar to this one: “And whensoever ye stand praying, forgive if ye have aught against any one; that your Father, who is in heaven, may forgive you your trespasses.” (Mark 11:25) The religious function cannot be performed unless the social relation is right.

Matthew presents the case as if the petitioner had already forgiven his debtor when he asked God to forgive him; Mark and Luke as if he did it at the same time.

The importance of the situation is plain enough. We should probably not take it to mean that our forgiving our debtors would merit our forgiveness, although that would

probably be maintained, but rather that our forgiving is the necessary moral condition upon which we could be forgiven; it would produce in us the necessary attitude for forgiveness...

c. James writes: “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempteth no man.” (James 1:13) The only way in which He can bring us into temptation is, as Meyer points out, to produce, or bring about, “situations and circumstances that furnish the occasion for sinning.” The subjective cause, the active principle, in temptation is “when he is drawn away by his own lust and enticed.”

For this reason Jesus can instruct His disciples to pray that God, in His providential care, should not permit such situations to arise that might lead them to sinning: “Bring us not into temptation.”

Moreover, the word for temptation has also the meaning of trial. This does not, however, fit into the meaning and purpose of the petition, which is to assure against sinning and a trial is not for that purpose. Still trials are of doubtful issue. A strong character, a hero in the faith overcomes in it and grows stronger every time. Such a hero may welcome a trial, even a temptation, and can do as James says: “count it all joy, my brethren, when ye fall into manifold temptation; knowing that the proving of your faith worketh patience.” (James 1:2,3)

But all the disciples are not of that kind. Some of them are weak and timid. Hence, they are instructed to pray this prayer and to add: “Deliver us from the evil one.” It is he that tempts to sin. When God withholds His hand Satan has a free hand with us and we have not much chance.

The Greek word for deliver is taken from military life and refers to a soldier who has been captured by the enemy and is delivered, liberated, from the enemy’s hands. The picture is so vivid that we are almost ready to say that he is in the hands of the evil one. Well, the danger might be close.

There is a question whether we should translate “evil” or “evil one.” The Greek word has the article and may be either masculine or neuter. “The evil” is a more inclusive word and may really be preferred to “the evil one...”

# Christian Freedoms Baptists Value: Religious Liberty and Soul Liberty Galatians 5:1, 13-14



DR. RON W. SAARI, *Central Baptist Church July 2, 2006* | One of the stories from my childhood comes from a time when I was three years old. I have no recollection of the event, but have heard my mother tell the story enough that it has become reality to me. When I was three I was outside playing and my mother lost track of me. I disappeared from sight. I'm not sure how nervous she was or if she thought eventually I would show up. Obviously, even though I didn't understand the term, I was free of my mother's control. Such freedom is cherished by all three year olds alike.

I'm not sure how long it was before I showed up at our backdoor. I was accompanied by a stranger. He was a neighbor, one with whom we didn't associate. He was angry that I had gotten free from my mother's control. Evidently as the story goes, I had entered his house and gone down his basement, all without his permission. I had climbed onto his train table and was pushing his train cars along the tracks. He was greatly disturbed that I was enjoying such activity without his permission.

The incident reminds me that our lives are always experiencing the tension between order and control and the exercise of freedom. Freedom is cherished by our country. Over this 4<sup>th</sup> of July holiday weekend we are reminded of the core value of freedom: freedom of religion; freedom of speech; freedom of the press; and freedom of assembly. However, as I said earlier, freedom always lives in tension with order and control.

## *Freedom has not always been a cherished value for the Christian church*

It might come as a surprise to us to hear that in the history of the Christian church freedom has not been widely and uniformly championed. Dr. Jeffrey Rogers, pastor of First Baptist Church in Greenville, South

Carolina comments in a sermon entitled "On Christian Freedom:"

"In none of the dominant theologies of the Christian faith down through the ages has freedom played a central and indispensable role. In spite of that great saying of Jesus in the gospel of John, 'You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free' (8:32), freedom is merely a note in the margins of Christian theology. In spite of Paul's liberating assertion to the church at Corinth, 'where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom' (1 Cor 3:17), freedom is only a footnote in most Christian theologies."

Freedom has always been a Baptist value over the years. It is not something that we take lightly. Freedom is one of the defining elements of Baptists' place in the long and storied history of Christian faith and

Church and State must be kept separate as having different functions, each fulfilling its duties free from dictation or patronage of the other."

## *What does freedom mean to Baptists?*

The Baptist movement began in the 1600's. Baptists, like those of the Baptist General Conference, are part of the free church tradition. Many Baptist churches and their denominations began as "persecuted" church communities, either because they challenged the supremacy of the state church or because they were often critical of the social, economic or political norms of the "mainstream" institutions and policies of the civil order. Therefore, among Baptists, freedom is often a higher value than order.

### *1968 BGC Resolution on Religious Liberty*

We believe that God created man in His own image and endowed him with the freedom to respond to His redemptive love; that man is responsible to God for his Christian convictions and practices; and that Christian commitment and participation must be voluntary to be real.

Therefore we maintain that it is a human right as well as a prerogative of Divine grace that man be free to worship God; that the state should guarantee the right of all citizens to believe, to worship, to teach, to evangelize, to change their religious affiliations, and to serve their God as their consciences dictate; that this is best effected when state and church are separate in program, administration and support.

Furthermore we believe that the Christian citizen has a responsibility to his government in defending and promoting human liberties and rights by opposing discriminatory practices based on religion, race, economic or social status; by resisting any forms of totalitarianism, such as communism or fascism, that deny these basic rights; and by positively fulfilling the goals of religious liberty by being obedient to the first and great commandment: To love the Lord our God with all our heart, our soul, our mind, and our neighbor as ourselves.

theology. It is important to me that one of the major principles of the Baptist General Conference's Affirmation of Faith includes a statement about religious liberty. It reads as follows:

"Religious Liberty : We believe that every human being has direct relations with God, and is responsible to God alone in all matters of faith; that each church is independent and must be free from interference by any ecclesiastical or political authority; that therefore

Baptists, like John Leland and Isaac Backus, were instrumental in the establishment of the first amendment to the American Constitution and the later establishment of religious freedoms at the state level. They often supported the work of James Madison and Thomas Jefferson on these issues. Baptists wanted to ensure that they would not be discriminated against at either the national or the state levels.

Baptist history records that on October

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7, 1801, the Danbury Baptist Association in Danbury, Connecticut, suffering from persecution because they weren't part of the Congregational Church, the official church of that state, wrote a letter to President Thomas Jefferson asking him to assure them of their right to religious liberty. Here's what Jefferson wrote back:

"Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between man and his God...I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should 'make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,' thus building a wall of separation between church and State."

From that point on, that phrase "separation of church and state" became the part and parcel of the lexicon of our nation. Baptists played a huge role in the establishment of this concept. Baptists have long fought for the value of religious freedom and the ability to be different and worship according to their own conscience.

On Wednesday, June 28, 2006, I had the privilege to listen to a presentation by Dr. Virgil Olson, well-known to many of you and a Baptist scholar in his own right. He described the lay movement called "Lasare" meaning readers or "students of the word" in Sweden, "who separated themselves from the national church and its hierarchy. When these pioneers came to this country and in particular to Minnesota, they carried with them this spirit of independent separatism." These pioneers are the forefathers and mothers of what is now known as Central Baptist Church and the Baptist General Conference. In other words, they viewed freedom as a higher value than order.

### ***Freedom is our Baptist legacy, our obligation, and our identity as a people of God.***

A distinguished Baptist historian Dr. Walter Shurden has summed up the Baptist perspective on freedom in a superb little book titled *The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms*. Shurden highlights four essential freedoms that Baptists value:

- a. Bible freedom (the authority of the word over creeds)
- b. Soul freedom (the right to deal directly with God)
- c. Church freedom (autonomous from any hierarchical mandates or directives)
- d. Religious freedom (autonomous from government intervention).

These freedoms, Shurden argued, are rooted in the nature of God and how he made us. They are rooted in a belief that there can be no authenticity of belief without autonomy. Most recently Dr. Shurden made these comments:

"The biblical image that comes to mind when I think of the BJC (Baptist Joint Committee) is that *Flaming Sword* that God fixed on that wall in Genesis 3. I like to think of the BJC not as sword, a weapon of war, but as a kind of *Flaming Torch*, a *Flaming Torch* of Freedom and Liberty. This Flaming Torch is positioned on the Wall of Separation, guarding the way to the garden of religious liberty and to the tree of separation of church and state."

There is a drumbeat in evangelicalism today that somehow our only hope to save America is to make it a Christian nation again. The methodology of such a movement is to utilize the political process and make everyone believe the way we believe. That methodology is not any different than the State church movement of Sweden of a couple of centuries ago. Just as they tried to use power and control to make everyone believe the same so we today want to use power and control to have everyone pray in schools and put the *Ten Commandments* back in the public square.

Friends, our hope is not in the use of political power. Our hope is not in requiring everyone believe the same way we do. Freedom requires freedom to believe according to our own conscience. Our hope is in Christ and His Kingdom. We, as Baptists, rejected the State church methodology in the 1800's when it forced us to believe a certain way and we ought to reject such use of power and control today.

I am pleased we live in a country that pro-

vides the wall of separation between church and state. We are a religious nation because of this protection and because we refuse to adopt a "state church" approach. Religious power and identity is strongest when it is not related to the State for its identity and function. These are the truths of religious and soul freedom. It is also why Baptists strongly support the separation of church and state. Baptists always fear the rise of a "theocratic" state and its oppressive nature. Therefore Baptists need to assert the following principles:

- 1) Our own religious freedom is best protected when we grant religious freedom for all and not a select few.
- 2) Separation of Church and State does not mean acquiescing to secularism.
- 3) Believing in separation does not mean our voice is silenced in the public square. We have always been and will always be a countercultural movement.
- 4) Our views are best expressed when we respect the ethnic, religious and political pluralism of our nation.

### ***Baptists and Religious and Soul Liberty: Relevance for Today's Christians***

First, our commitment to religious freedom is grounded in the nature of God and in the life and work of Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul, in Galatians chapter 5, provides us with some understandings of how today's Baptists ought to understand the meaning of religious liberty and soul liberty. "Christ has set us free," he says, in Galatians 5:1. Walter Shurden recently argued in a speech entitled "How We Got that Way: Baptists on Religious Liberty and the Separation of Church and State" that for Baptists "religious freedom is rooted in the nature of God." He argued:

"...A Sovereign God who dared to create people as free beings is portrayed in the Bible as a liberating Deity. Throughout the Old Testament, God is set against persons and institutions that restricted the freedom of God's people. And the complete thrust of Jesus' ministry was to free people from all that would hold them back from obedience to God. Freedom for Baptists was far more than a constitutional right or a government gift. God, not nations or courts or human

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# Living as Forgiven People: Prayers of Gordon Johnson

G. WILLIAM CARLSON, *Professor of History and Political Science, Bethel University* | Gordon Johnson was Dean of Bethel Seminary from 1964-1984. He is author of the book *My Church* which has been a standard resource on the Baptist heritage for members of the Baptist General Conference. He was active in the Baptist World Alliance and a strong articulator of our pietist tradition.

Recently, Marie Schultz presented to me a copy of the “Prayers of Gordon Johnson” put together by Edna Schultz. Edna worked at Bethel College and Seminary from 1951-1985. From 1964 to 1978 she was secretary to the Dean of Bethel Seminary and Registrar. From 1978 to 1985 she was Registrar of the Seminary. This collection is a cherished expression of the Dean of Bethel Seminary who modeled a life built around Bible reading, prayer, evangelism and service.

Dr. Johnson was also a gifted preacher and wonderful storyteller. Recently, he published a new work entitled *Making God Known Through Story*. He supports the principle that the “Christian life is the creating of one’s own unique story, shaped and understood by the story of Christ.”

Gordon Johnson suggests that preachers must address two audiences: those who are seeking to know God and those who, having known God, desire to experience a “dynamic, vital relationship with God.” Therefore, God’s story must arise out of the biblical text that shows its relevance to the contemporary world.

To be an effective communicator of the gospel, Dr. Johnson argues, we need to see “how God reveals himself through story in the Bible. Revelation is God making himself known. He takes the initiative. He wants the seeker to find him. He desires the church member to vitally know Him. God has taken the initiative throughout the ages by his encounters with men and women in vital experiences of knowing Him.”

The Bible, states Dr. Johnson, is not “a systematic theology. One does not find the

teaching of abstract doctrines in a philosophical framework in the Bible. The discovery of teachings about God is observed in the stories of women and men as they are confronted by God in the midst of their human activity. What is seen are truths coming through the human situation.”

I had the opportunity to grow up in the Montclair Baptist Church in New Jersey. Dr. Johnson was a pastor of that church early in his ministry. Our family experienced first hand his commitments to evangelism, spiritual development and holy living.

Gordon Johnson has always been firmly committed

to the Baptist pietist heritage. All people need to respond God’s call of salvation through Jesus Christ, to allow the Holy Spirit to work in our lives, to develop an intentional spiritual development through Bible reading and prayer and to reach out to people in need.

The following two prayers are Gordon Johnson’s expression of the need for believers to live as “forgiven people.”

## *We are Grateful for Your Forgiveness: A Chapel Prayer*

Our Father,  
You are worthy of our adoration.  
Your power as creator and sustainer of all that exists makes us bow in awe and fear.  
Your love so clearly exhibited in your Son, Jesus Christ, makes us respond with repentance for our sin and failure.

We are grateful for your forgiveness, for Your renewal in our lives, and for Your enabling us to better use the gifts You have given.

Grant, Lord, that this chapel will bring honor to Your name as we re-think our responsibility of mission in our world today.

In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, we pray, Amen.

## *We Trust You for the Forgiveness You Have Promised: A Chapel Prayer*

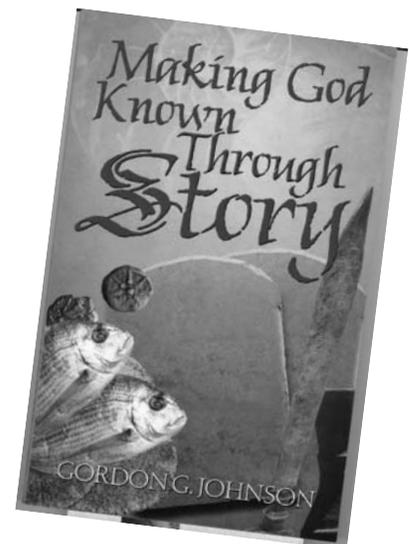
Our Father,  
We bow in humble adoration before You because we have discovered no more adequate manner to be in Your presence.  
We confess our sin, failure and neglect.  
And we trust You for the forgiveness You have promised.

We live in a world full of want and despair.  
And we have done so little to right the wrongs which in every corner of the world cry out to be righted.  
In this land of plenty we have thought too much in terms of our privileges and our rights, and all too little in terms of our duty.

All of us have duties as Your children.  
Duties which we dare not neglect.  
We know that we are prone to substitute pious words and lofty phrases for performance of Christian duty.  
We talk glibly of love and do so little to make a world where love can have a chance to exert its power among men.

Make us aware of our own helplessness to so live and influence our world apart from Your work within us.  
In this moment we submit to Your Lordship in our individual lives so our lives can make a difference in a wounded, troubled world.

In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord we ask this. Amen.



law, is the ultimate source of liberty.”

**Second, religious liberty necessitates a commitment to soul liberty.** Baptists are committed to the belief that faith must be free. Isaac Backus, a major contributor to the Baptist commitments to religious liberty in the United States, wrote that “true religion is a voluntary obedience to God.”

Shurden quotes Dr. Martin Marty when he defines a concept called the “Baptistification” of the faith. This includes such phrases as “where there is not autonomy, there is no authenticity;” “if faith is to be valid, it must be voluntary;” “to cram a creed down a person’s throat is rape of the soul;” and “the only conversion that counts is conversion by conviction.”

The Baptist General Conference emerged as an immigrant church which was committed to maintaining religious liberty and soul liberty. We came from Sweden which suppressed Baptist believers because they were opposed to the state church. We came from a community which was committed to evangelism, believer’s Baptism, holy living, world missions and the irenic spirit.

Believers were individuals who responded voluntarily to the saving work of Jesus Christ. We were believers who suggested that “holy living” meant a commitment to a discipleship lifestyle that often challenged the norms of the larger community.

**Third, Christian freedom is not “an opportunity for self-indulgence.”** Paul says this in v 13 of Galatians 5, “You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.”

Recently, I read about the story of Pastor Larry Shotwell who sat down with a stranger who had come in for help. When Larry asked how he could help, the stranger explained that his mother had died and they were holding up the funeral until he could get there. He said, he was down on his luck and he didn’t have any money. All I need is a bus ticket and I can get to the funeral.

Larry said he would see what he could do. He asked, “Could you give me your name?” Name’s Lee, Johnnie Lee. Thank you Johnnie, I’ll be right back.” Pastor Larry said. He left the stranger and went to the office to review the list of drop-ins for help.

He returned to the stranger and said, “I’m sorry about your mother. I’ve just checked our book and you were in six months ago. Your mother had also died then. To lose your mother twice in one year must be really painful.”

Johnnie got up and left without saying a word. Johnnie had not found the freedom from behaviors that were destructive to himself and others. He used his freedom for self-indulgence.

Driving back on Wednesday with Pastor John Anderson from the Baptist General Conference sessions at Bethel, we talked about several things. One of the things we talked about was the *Achilles Heal* of our capitalistic system. Now we aren’t always so philosophical. The *Achilles Heal* is greed. It is the self-indulgence here described. What is the greatest check against greed? It is the balance of the Gospel. It is in the gospel that we discover the love of God and that it is a love for us and others. It is in the power of the gospel that greed is held in check.

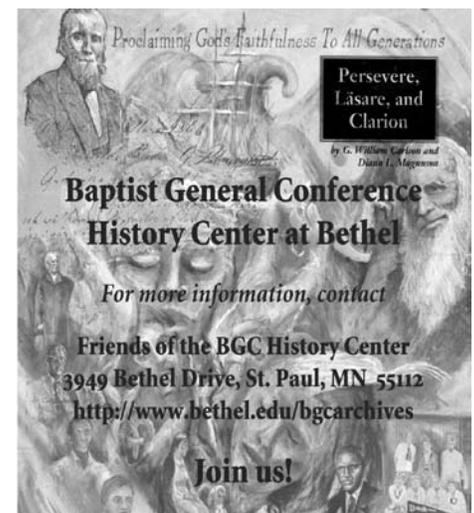
**Fourth, Baptists need to be champions of religious liberty in today’s America and the larger global community.** We should value a nation that is committed to “religious pluralism” and be skeptical of those who wish to create a 21<sup>st</sup> century Christian America. Baptists believe that people of faith should strongly influence the values and norms of our society in the public square. However, we are not supportive of efforts to encourage the government to use religion for political purposes, choose one faith as having more legitimacy over another and provide specific religions a favored status. Baptists firmly believe that our job in evangelism and discipleship best takes place in a pluralist religious community which encourages and values voluntary church freedoms and a strong belief in religious liberty.

Baptist efforts to support the separation of church and state is not an effort to create a “secular” America but to sustain a vital religiously influenced America. C. Emanuel Carlson, a major Baptist General Conference contributor to the life and witness of the Baptist Joint Committee, stated that “what ever the state touches it secularizes.” He was concerned with the emergence of a new civil religion that equated the gospel of

Jesus Christ with American nationalism.

Baptists are a Christocentric and Biblicentric people. As Baptist historian Leon McBeth wrote: “In no areas has Baptists’ witness proved clearer and more consistent than in the struggle for the right of persons to answer to God and not to government for religious beliefs.” C. Emanuel Carlson concluded that he had the feeling “...that if we ever clearly identify the Baptist genius we will find it very closely related to religious liberty. We will find it related to an understanding of the gospel which sees the person as called of God in Christ to a life of responsiveness and obedience to the mind of God, which in turn sends him into service as a free man. Our emphasis has been on responsiveness to God, a responsiveness which springs normally out of full faith and confidence in His word, in His redemption, in His power, in His love.” Isn’t this a Baptist distinctive to celebrate?

I encourage you to celebrate the great American freedoms of religion, speech, the press, and assembly. And celebrate as well those distinctive Baptist freedoms of Bible, soul, church and religion. Yes, freedom is a hallmark of our country and we thank God for it. Freedom is also a hallmark of our Baptist heritage and we must protect it. Let’s celebrate as well, the universal freedom of the Christian faith that is built into the very structure of the universe and human existence, the freedom to refrain from self-indulgence that leads to slavery and destruction, and the freedom to love, even as we have been loved. when we gather around the communion table, we celebrate the freedom that Christ brings to our lives!



# Living as Forgiven People: Ten Principles of Authentic Forgiveness



G. WILLIAM CARLSON,  
*Professor of History  
and Political Science,  
Bethel University* |  
In October 2005  
Terri Hansen and I  
had the opportunity  
to conduct a Day of

Spiritual Renewal on the topic of Living as Forgiven and Forgiving People. The retreat was co-sponsored by Central and Elim Baptist Churches. The core assumption was that “forgiveness and reconciliation are practices that give concrete expression to our calling as disciples of Jesus Christ.” It is a theme that is derived from our pietist heritage and needs to be emphasized in a world that too often values “revenge and triumphalism.”

Each of us has experienced times where being a forgiving person has been difficult if not impossible. A student once asked me how one could forgive a family member who has been abusive, slanderous and irresponsible? A faculty colleague once asked me how one can forgive the leaders of the former apartheid regime in South Africa who have killed his friends and made it difficult for him to gain an education? How do you minister in a Baptist church in Croatia in a manner that allows for Serbs and Croats to worship and serve the Lord Jesus Christ together? How does a society ask for forgiveness for failing to stop the lynching of African-Americans in the 20<sup>th</sup> century? How do you ask forgiveness from a student who received an irresponsible tongue lashing during the classroom experience? Can pastors forgive church members who have intentionally undermined a significant church ministry?

Jesus’ ministry suggested that a “forgiving” disposition was a characteristic of discipleship. (Matthew 18) The “Living as Forgiving People” section of the retreat focused on three stories in Christ’s life and three illustrations of forgiveness found on the “Journey Toward Forgiveness” video. Participants were encouraged, through small group discussion, to develop a set of principles for the achievement of authentic forgiveness. The following were the results of the participants’ conversations.

## **A. Seeking authentic forgiveness: recognizing and defining the issues**

In John 8:1-12, Jesus engages in a dialogue with the religious leaders concerning a woman caught in adultery. After some discussion about the “impact of the law” on adultery cases, Jesus queried: “If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.” When the elders went away leaving Jesus with the adulterous woman, he said to her, “neither do I condemn you... Go now and leave your life of sin.” Jesus offered the woman a fresh start. She was to commence a new life because of her encounter with Jesus Christ.

Walter Wangerin, a distinguished Christian writer, tells the story of Elijah, a well-loved African-American school principal and his wife, Mary, a bright, thoughtful and determined third grade school teacher. Elijah tragically died of cancer. He had often asked Wangerin to pray the Lord’s Prayer at his bedside.

When his last death rattle passed, Mary continued to be angry with a God who “allowed her husband to die too soon and too quick and through too much pain.” Wangerin preached about the “merciful God that Elijah consistently saw as the God of the whole universe and the God who held kindness and love and forgiveness for all the people.”

One Sunday, just about the time of the saying of the Lord’s Prayer, Mary stood up, without anger in her eyes, looked at the members of the congregation and said “Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be they name. Thy Kingdom come.” The congregation raised their arms and prayed with her. Wangerin saw a woman who “sang us sweetly home, past her grief to amen, to amen and to forgiveness.”

What do these two stories tell us about the nature of forgiveness and how it can be achieved? What core principles can one reach about the “authentic forgiveness” that God wishes us to have and to share with others?

1. Forgiveness allows each party to a conflict the possibility of a fresh start.
2. Forgiveness is a choice that one must make. It is an intentional response to difficult and painful issues.
3. Forgiveness allows one to understand and take responsibility for one’s part in the development of the conflict.

## **B. Seeking authentic forgiveness: learning to let go/learning to let God work in your life.**

In Luke 19:1-9 Jesus engages in a dialogue with the tax collector Zacchaeus. Jesus broke socio-religious boundaries to commune with Zacchaeus at his home. The encounter encouraged Zacchaeus to confess his misuse of power. He gave half of his possessions to the poor and restored fourfold the taxes that he had stolen. Jesus stated that “salvation has come to this house.” What a transformation! Zacchaeus’ encounter with Jesus brought about a desire to seek restoration and restitution.

In the video, “Journey toward Forgiveness,” John Perkins tells the story of his journey from anger to reconciliation. He tells the story of how his brother, returning home from military service in World War II, is shot by a white marshal at a movie theater. John was himself beaten when serving time in prison protesting the ills of segregation. John eventually moved to California, came to grips with the forgiving God and returned to Mississippi to develop a Christian community known as Voice of Calvary Ministries.

John now works with law enforcement to provide support for young people in trouble. The Community provides educational, economic and leadership development, low-income housing options, and a tutoring program. John lives as a forgiving Christian: “I say all the time, the saddest people that I know are people who are not able to forgive...and so forgiveness frees me.”

What does it mean that “forgiveness frees me?” How do reconciliation and restitution relate to one another? What does it mean to take the initiative? Is reconciliation possible and under what circumstances?

4. Forgiveness demands that people seek restitution with those who have been harmed.
5. Forgiveness requires people to take the initiative to break the cycles of animosity and hatred.
6. Forgiveness has as its ultimate goal the possibility of reconciliation.

## **C. Seeking authentic forgiveness: a journey that has no guarantees.**

*continued on p. 16*

stone at her.” He returned thoughtfully to his position near the ground. The tight grip on her arm began to ease off. One by one, those who had plotted against her, against the Galilean, began to disappear into the crowd. Suddenly, she was aware that only she remained.

The Galilean’s gaze locked on hers. She suddenly became painfully aware of her unkempt appearance. Shame enveloped her body and froze in the pit of her stomach, cutting off her air. She blinked back the tears that were welling up like a volcano in her soul. She searched his face for a clue to his thoughts. She braced herself for his condemnation and judgment. But she saw none of that in his eyes – eyes that saw right through her – knew everything about her. “Where are they that brought you here? They brought you here to condemn you and now none are left to accuse you?” “No one, Sir.” Her voice was shaky and tentative.

“Then I don’t accuse you either. Go and do not commit this sin anymore.” Such tenderness and kindness no man had ever extended to her. Her breathing relaxed and her heartbeat slowed as relief swept over her frightened frame.

One encounter – one brief exchange, and a life of shame was erased from the record. Nothing was requested by or required of this woman as a condition of her pardon. Only a prompting to walk away new – to find her feet headed in a different direction away from a life of sin, born anew to fresh innocence and freedom.

Forgiveness – both the acceptance of it for us and the meting out of it to others – is only possible in the shadow of divine forgiveness. We must know unsolicited, unmerited forgiveness if we can ever hope to offer unconditional forgiveness to another.

In the gospels, there are many other incidents and teachings of Jesus that deal with the theme of forgiveness. This particular encounter is found in John 8. It is obscure in that it exists only in John’s account. It is well

known because of its redemptive message. It provides a powerful glimpse at the plan of God to restore humankind to himself.

First we learn that divine forgiveness is unsolicited. The woman did not come to Jesus begging for mercy. She was a pawn in a plot. She had no intention of seeking forgiveness for her activities. Something happens when we encounter Jesus Christ. An ordinary exchange becomes extraordinary. Zacchaeus was just looking for a better view. Jesus did not wait for Zacchaeus to confess or even speak to him – he just invited himself over.

Jesus initiated the discussion and created an opportunity to be gracious. God did not send Jesus to die in our place after we repented and turned from our sin. He opened the floodgates and let his grace shower down on a sinful world “while we were yet sinners.”

Secondly, we learn that forgiveness does not have to be accusatory. Because he is righteous, Jesus stands as the only one with the right to condemn and judge. Yet his response time and again is one of mercy and kindness. He lives to forgive and not to judge. He

had every right to make a public example of the sinful woman. The Law was clear as to what her punishment should be. She should have had to beg for forgiveness and no one would have thought it out of line to see her sentence carried out right then and there.

Last, we learn that repentance is the result of forgiveness and not the condition. There is a moment of recognition. We encounter Christ and our hearts begin to break. Jesus’ statement to the woman to “go and do not sin again,” was about proof of the forgiveness that had already taken place. He was asking that her life become a living testimony to his loving grace and forgiveness. Under the circumstances, she could have considered herself as good as dead. Now, in light of Christ’s mercy, the least she could do was walk differently into the future. Forgiveness is an occasion for true remorse – a broken heart over our sin. It also is the motivation

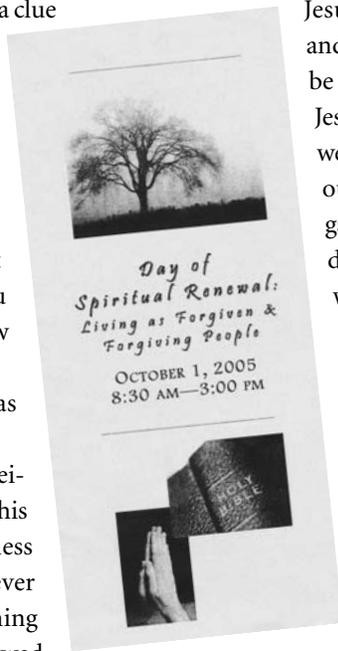
for joyful obedience. There is a huge difference between fulfilling a requirement—paying penance, if you will—and responding out of love and a desire to give back or pay forward the mercy shown to us.

The question now becomes, “Will I, in light of Christ’s merciful love and forgiveness, be able to offer unsolicited, non-judgmental, unconditional forgiveness to my fellow humans?” Not only are we able, but we are commanded. Eph. 4:32 tells us to “be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other just as in Christ God forgave you.” In Col. 3:13, we are told to “bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”

As Christ shows us, we must initiate forgiveness. We cannot always wait for a confession or an acknowledgement of wrongdoing by our offender. We also must heartily resist the temptation and desire to accuse and judge, to make an example of the one who has hurt us. Even though their acts are despicable and undeserved, we are not to serve as judge or jury – only God has that role.

We live in a cultural system that promotes getting even at all costs. We are born victims always waiting and living for the other guy to make a mistake so we can prove how perfect we are by comparison. In the paradoxical kingdom of Christendom, Jesus Christ has once again held up the only truly perfect standard. Our very lives depend on his action of forgiveness. As we are transformed by his gracious actions toward us, how revolutionary it would be to offer unsolicited forgiveness and then be able to watch in wonder as our kindness melts and breaks the hearts of those who have sinned against us.

To err is human, but forgiveness truly is a divine gift. Open yourself to the true unconditional forgiveness that God offers and you will find your heart of stone melting to a flowing stream fed from springs of freedom and strength. Offer this divine forgiveness to your brother or sister and experience the opening of a rare flower of hopefulness and love in the one who has hurt you. Witness the power of Jesus words, “I don’t condemn you either. Go and sin no more.”



to which he had been subjected.

Later, when my interest turned to theology, I was much taken with J. Vernon McGee's book, *Jonah, Dead or Alive*, in which he argued that the miracle of Jonah was not that he lived through his ordeal, but that he died ("the earth with its bars closed round me forever"), cried to God "out of the belly of Sheol," and was raised again. Jonah thus provides, argued McGee, an Old Testament foreshadowing of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, to which Jesus himself called attention in Matthew 12.

I am no longer much interested in whether we know of a fish that could swallow a man whole. If I can believe that God could raise Jesus from the depths of the grave, it is no trick to believe that God could raise Jonah from the depths of the sea when the fish could no longer stomach him.

My interest now is drawn to Jonah, sitting at a table, not in a fish's belly, but in a shelter of his own construction, thankful for a plant that has sprung up to shade his (possibly bald) head. Is he retired, like I am? Certainly he is immobilized. He is angry because the Ninevites are not going to be destroyed. He gets more angry when the plant that shades him withers (here today, gone tomorrow). He is angry enough to shout at God. At this point in his life, he is stewing in his own juices, and they are corrosive not to his skin but to his soul. What Jonah needs most to do, he cannot do. He cannot forgive.

But this failure to forgive, over time, proves hard on Jonah. At first he couldn't respond to the question, "Is it right for you to be angry?" but as his bitterness festered, he could later fire back to the same question that he would stay angry till the day he died; and so far as we know from this sad record, he did exactly that!

Before we are too harsh on Jonah, however, we need to be clear about what was being asked. Ninevah had been an aggressive, powerful, cruel enemy. He had his reasons for being dismayed at their being shown mercy. Those of us old enough to remember World War II remember that many Americans had trouble supporting the Marshall Plan that generously rebuilt the nations that had plunged the world into that bloody conflict.

On a personal level, how good are we

at forgiving someone who has cheated us, caused us pain, made real trouble for us or for someone close to us? The heroes of our literature and media entertainment don't forgive; they get even. And that is our inclination, even in small things. Let your spouse accuse you of mislaying something, and then discover that your accuser is the one who mislaid the item. Are we quickly forgiving of our spouse's unjust accusation? It is a time when for most of us, it would be magnificent to say nothing.

We even have trouble, of course, forgiving ourselves. The right kind of person has high self-expectations, and failure to live up to them can lead to harsh self-judgment. The lesson is clear. Failure to forgive at any level is destructive, and it is most destructive to the one who holds on to the hurt. I heard once that bitterness is a poison we take, hoping someone else will get sick.

Sometimes of course, it is incumbent upon us, not to give but to ask for forgiveness. If we have spoken sharply, or acted unwisely in a fit of anger, we should ask for someone's forgiveness. We find it hard to do. Do we not all know long-time friends who are on the outs because neither can manage to forgive some sleight that has come between them?

The consequences of refusing to admit error, and to ask for forgiveness is easily seen when we look at others. Would not both Nixon and Clinton have avoided impeachment proceedings if they had quickly admitted their errors and asked for forgiveness?

## *Forgiven and Forgiving People: A Selective Bibliography*

G. WILLIAM CARLSON AND TERRI HANSEN

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"Journey to Forgiveness" (Mennonite Media Productions, 58 minutes)

When was the last time you went to your spouse, or to a co-worker to ask forgiveness for some affront of which you were guilty?

Failure to ask forgiveness from someone we have wronged is as destructive to our well being as is failure to forgive others. James admonishes us to confess our trespasses to one another so that we may be healed.

Finally, if we can bring ourselves to ask for forgiveness, there is yet one more difficulty, which is to accept the forgiveness extended to us. The writer of Psalm 130, overwhelmed by his iniquities and writing from the depths of despair, recognizes that with the Lord, there is forgiveness. That's what our theology says, but what trouble we have feeling forgiven.

We confess our sins; we explain to ourselves and others that we are but human, a frail human, who did our best. But alone, sleepless at night, we wonder if a marriage couldn't have been saved, if we are somehow responsible for the bad choices of an errant child. We understand the Psalmist's sleepless night, his long watch for the morning.

Ah, forgiveness. Grant it when you have been wronged; ask for it when you have been wrong; accept it when it is offered.

I should not ask if Jonah, like I am, was retired. I should ask if I, retired, am like Jonah. Am I forgiving of those who have hurt me? Am I quick to ask forgiveness of those whom I have hurt? Am I learning to accept forgiveness that has been extended to me? Only in this way, I am convinced, can I enjoy sitting at the table that God has prepared for me.

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In John 13:31-38, 18:15-26, and 21:15-25 Jesus engages in a dialogue with Peter concerning the need for faithful disciples. Peter, the overly zealous and excitable disciple, eagerly pledges to be that faithful follower who would lay down his life for Jesus. Jesus predicted that Peter would deny him three times before the “rooster crowed.”

After Jesus’ death, three times Peter chose not to be known as Christ’s follower. Peter seemed to misunderstand the “political” nature of the Kingdom of God and probably sought for a more successful political transformation of the current political order.

The “good news” of Jesus Christ is that he did not give up on Peter. After the resurrection, Jesus had breakfast with the disciples and he particularly singled out Peter. He asked Peter three times if Peter loved Jesus. Peter replied “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.” Receiving God’s gift of forgiveness, Peter was given the assignment of evangelism and teaching. (Acts 2)

Bud Welch in the video, “Journey Toward Forgiveness,” tells the story of how his daughter, Julie Marie, was killed in the April 1995 bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. In his anger he would have killed Timothy McVeigh himself if given the

chance. He turned to alcohol and became a second victim to the Oklahoma tragedy. His hangovers lasted all day. In January 1996 he came to the bombsite, as he had done every day, and sought to do something different with his life.

He decided to visit Tim McVeigh’s parents and show them that he did not blame them. As he left their home he hugged Tim’s sister Jennifer who was about Julie’s age. In tears Bud said to Jennifer, “Look, honey, the three of us are in this for the rest of our lives. I don’t want your brother to die and I’ll do everything I can to prevent it.”

As he walked away from the house Bud realized that until that moment he had walked alone, but now a tremendous weight had lifted from his shoulders. He stated, “I had found someone who was a bigger victim of the Oklahoma bombing than I was, because while I can speak in front of thousands of people and say wonderful things about Julie, if Bill McVeigh meets a stranger he probably doesn’t even say he had a son.” Welch concluded that “about a year before the execution I found it in my heart to forgive Tim McVeigh. It was a release for me rather than for him.”

What does it mean for Peter to be “restored” to the Christian community and be given the assignment of “feeding Christ’s sheep?”

Why did Bud Welch take the risk of meeting Tim McVeigh’s father? How did he gain the courage to take that step? Who most benefits from the act of “forgiving” and are there any guarantees of a reconciliation outcome?

7. Forgiveness needs to be a part of one’s normal every day life in order to be able to accomplish the task in the most difficult of times.

8. Forgiveness is a product of our experience of God’s grace. This enables us to act in ways that may be difficult or to confront concerns we may wish to avoid.

9. Forgiveness brings no guarantees of successful results. It is a journey without predictable outcomes.

10. Forgiveness is a requirement of Christian discipleship. It is an illustration of a theology of reconciliation and role model of what it means to be sons and daughters of God.

These authentic principles are useful starting points for allowing all of us to think about what it means to be a forgiving people. As Christians, by God’s grace, we are a forgiven people. We are constantly in need for God’s forgiveness as we fail to meet God’s expectations for our lives. God expects that we will also be a forgiving people. As disciples of His, we are to be agents of reconciliation. Can we make this a norm in our lives?

## New Books by BGC and Bethel Authors

*Bethel Seminary: Shaped by Godly Leadership* St. Paul, Minnesota: Baptist General Conference History Center, 2006

Short essays on the biographies and analysis of the leadership commitments given by the Deans of Bethel Seminary.

Boyd, Greg *The Myth of a Christian Nation* Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan, 2006

A former Bethel University professor and current BGC pastor writes a provocative set of essays which question the current efforts to create a Christian America. He suggests they are in conflict with the requirement that Christians live as members of the Kingdom of God and be Christ like.

Johnson, Gordon G. *Making God Known Through Story* Enumclaw, Washington: WinePress, 2006.

Explores ways in which the use of stories

in the Bible can enhance the preaching ministry and encourage Christian spiritual growth.

Strauss, Mark L. *Truth & Error in the DaVinci Code* San Diego, California: Alethinus Books, 2006.

A readable work that helps Christians understand the challenge of *The DaVinci Code* to orthodox Christian beliefs. He argues that the believers in the real Jesus Christ have a “better story.”

Taylor, Dan *In Search of Sacred Places: Looking for Wisdom on Celtic Holy Islands* Bog Walk Press, 2005.

Reflections on a pilgrimage to the major sites of the Celtic Christian community in England, Ireland, Wales and Scotland. Challenges the “easy faith” tendencies of current American Christianity.

Shults, F. LeRon and Steven J. Sandage *The Face of Forgiveness: Searching for Wholeness and Salvation* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 2003.

Development of a theological support for a doctrine of forgiveness and an analysis of how it can be implemented in the life of the church.

Professor Steve Sandage Awarded Research Grant to Study Dynamics of Interpersonal Forgiveness and Relational Spirituality.

