

Notes for Talk: Finding Healing Through Forgiveness
Given at GCI International Conference, 2013

I. Introduction

I asked a couple of months ago if I could do this workshop on forgiveness. I wanted to do some more thinking about the place that forgiveness has in the Christian life and in what the triune God is ultimately doing in us and through us. I know that this is a large topic and that this is not comprehensive, but my hope is that this seminar offers encouragement and hope for you in the midst of your own lives.

Like many, maybe all, of you, I have experienced very painful events and relationships in my life. I have been in the position of hurting others as well as being hurt. I have had to deal with the pain of others hurting those I love and having to work through the consequences of all these things. I have been seeking, over the years, to work through the process of receiving and extending forgiveness.

In my life and in the lives of those I know, I find we can get stuck on the idea and the practices of forgiveness—both receiving it from God and others, and extending it to others. From Jesus' words in the Lord's prayer (Matthew 6:9-13) and other places in the New Testament, it sounds as if extending forgiveness to others and receiving God's forgiveness are to be regular practices and that the two are somehow connected to one another.

I find that we can at times be reluctant to spend much focused time on this practice of forgiveness. This reluctance might primarily be due to not really understanding what forgiveness is and what it isn't:

-Maybe we don't see the point of it once something is past—we think it is better just to “forget it and move on.”

-We may think that to forgive someone is to minimize the sin and pain; it amounts to saying that the sin was “no big deal” after all or that if we forgive, we are letting that person off the hook.

-We may think that we shouldn't really be upset about what happened because the person didn't really mean to do us harm, so it is not worth working through with God.

-We may simply be having a difficult time letting go of the anger and hurt. It isn't that we don't want to forgive, but we are finding it very hard to get past the pain.

-We may not see the point if we aren't going to actually deal with the person who was involved. We are not always sure when to deal with something just with God and when we need to interact with the person involved.

-What if I forgive the other person and nothing changes? What if the other person doesn't ever acknowledge the wrong? What if this extension of forgiveness doesn't lead to any reconciliation of the relationship?

II. Finding Healing

Before we look more specifically at forgiveness, I want to consider what “finding healing” means.

Life of Christian Here is one of Becoming Mature

The New Testament writers speak of the Christian life here on earth as one of growing towards maturity or becoming sanctified. Paul tells the Thessalonians that God’s will is their becoming sanctified (1 Thess. 4:3). Becoming sanctified is the process of being made to truly belong to the triune God—to be able to fully be in and enjoy His presence, His triune life. The Old Testament writers spoke of God as holy, as being wholly other—the Creator and Lord of all the universe, whose ways are not our own, His created. But this holy One, because He is God and not man (Hosea 11) is able to make us so that we can share in that otherness, even though we are creatures and He is creator. To become sanctified is to be made pure, not mixed, not facing in two directions and so able to fully know and enjoy the triune God.

In Colossians 1:28, Paul describes the endpoint of his ministry this way, “to present every one mature in Christ.” The word mature here is a translation of the Greek word, *telos*, which means to be completed, fulfilled, perfected. The *telos* of a rose would be when it is at the point of full bloom, in its greatest glory. For us, to be mature is to be in a perfect relationship with the triune God and with all of creation.

Reality We Already Have in Christ

This maturing process is our growing up fully into the reality that is already ours in our union with Christ. Paul calls those that he writes to “saints in Christ.” Because of Christ’s work for and in us, we already can be called the sanctified ones in Christ. In 1 Corinthians 1:30, Paul says that God, who is the source of our lives in Christ Jesus, has made Jesus “our wisdom, our righteousness, and sanctification and redemption.” He *is now* all these things for us in Himself.

And we are now united to Christ—this is *who we are*. It is in this union with Christ that we receive our lives and identities. And our lives and identities *remain* in this union with Christ, so that we cannot see ourselves apart from Him. He is the only one who can tell us who we are.

This life and identity that we have in union with Christ is so real and true that Paul can say in Colossians that we have co-died, been co-buried, co-raised and co-made-alive with Christ. We have been transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the Kingdom of God’s beloved Son (Col. 1:13). Paul even says that the reality right now for us is that we are “seated in the heavenly realms in Christ.” In His union with us, Christ truly has given us a share in all that He has done for us to redeem us and reconcile us to God.

The New Testament writers also tell us that we are now Christ's brothers and sisters, truly. John, in his first letter, says that we are called the children of God because this is actually the case—this is who we are in Him (1 John 3:1)

Living in the "Not Yet"

But while we have this work completed for us in Christ—He is indeed giving us a share in His sonship, in His relationship with His Father, by His union with us in the Holy Spirit—this is the reality we are growing up into.

Paul speaks of the time when Jesus will present us "holy and blameless and irreproachable before Him"—amazing! Can you imagine? But for now, we live in the "not yet."

God's work in us takes place by the Spirit that Jesus gives us after His ascension. In John's gospel, Jesus speaks to His disciples of "another counselor" He will send them after He goes to the Father. This Holy Spirit reminds us of Jesus' words to us, teaches us about the grace of the triune God. In other words, He gives us what He receives from Jesus (John 14; 16:6-15; 1 Corinthians 2:12-13). The Spirit works out *in* us what Jesus has accomplished *for* us.

This work of sanctifying us, given to us in Jesus and worked out in us through the Holy Spirit, is indeed the work of the whole God. Paul tells the Philippians that he is convinced that "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion (1:6)."

God's Whole Work of Reheading up All Things in Christ

This work of sanctifying us is a part of God's work of reheading up or reconciling all things in Christ. In Ephesians 1:9-10, Paul says "For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to rehead up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth."

God's work in Christ is to bring about righteousness, which is right relationship. God's purpose is to have *all* relationships—those with Him, with each other, and with all of creation—set right, meaning that we would be able to live in such relationships that reflect the love, life, joy and peace of the triune relationship, to the glory and praise of God.

God's work in us is not just to bring about a change of status, but a transformation at the level of our beings, a transformation that is a part of the transformation of all of creation to the new heaven and new earth. We will not just be called or regarded as holy and blameless, we *will be*. Our relationships with one another will be full and perfect participation in the triune relationship. Take a moment to imagine what this will be like. We will be able to be true blessings to each other—giving to and receiving from others with no tears or pain, no double messages or manipulations, no anxiety or fear. Salvation

means wholeness, and we will be made whole—free and safe, no longer bound by ridicule, death, illness, etc.

God will destroy evil—it has no future. There is nothing in the new heaven and new earth that will not have been made right in Jesus Christ.

Our lives here and now are lived *in the light of this future*. We are encouraged in Scripture to see and consider our present circumstances and relationships in the light of the reality of God’s purposes and activity, and not to regard our present situation as the biggest reality. Our circumstances, our struggles, our failings and others’ voices, our feelings and experiences, our present and our past *do not and cannot tell us who we are*.

We are now “Hidden in Christ”

Our identity is fully given to us and remains in Christ. But Paul, in Colossians 3:3, says that our lives are “hidden with Christ in God.” After John tells his readers that they are truly the children of God, goes on to state that “it does not yet appear what we shall be (1 John 3:2).” Not only is the truth of who we are and who we are becoming hidden to us, this is the case with our whole lives here on earth. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:12 that now, we see through a glass darkly. The author of Hebrews, in 2:8-9, assures his readers that God has placed everything in subjection to Jesus, everything under His rule and authority. But then, in v. 8b, he says, “As it is we do not yet see everything in subjection to him.”

This is so true, isn’t it? We look around at our relationships, our families, our churches, our communities, etc. and it is not obvious to us that God is reheating up all things in Jesus. So, where do we look in this life to see the truth about ourselves and our lives? The author of Hebrews answers this question in his very next sentence, “But we see Jesus.” Later, in 3:1, the author tells his readers to “consider Jesus” which means to gaze continually on, focus on, remain before Jesus.

Participating in Our Own Becoming Whole

This is the New Testament understanding of healing—the hope and trust that God will, in His own time and in His own way, make us whole, complete, and in the deepest sense healed. His purpose for us, to transform us and grow us up into the person He created us to be, to make us right, will leave us knowing ourselves healed and whole in every fiber of our being.

The New Testament writers tell us that we are to participate in this process of becoming whole here and now. And how do we participate? Not by primarily looking at ourselves, our lives, or even directly at the places we most want healing right now. The truth is that our lives, hid in Christ, are hidden even to us. We cannot see ourselves clearly, do not see all that needs to be straightened out, redeemed, and healed. We cannot see ourselves apart from Him. And when we try to look at ourselves apart from Him, what we see is not really ourselves.

So, as the late Scottish theologian James Torrance often said, we are to look away from ourselves to Christ. *We participate by seeking to remain in Christ*—to abide, be rooted and grounded in Christ. This involves actively seeking to listen to God’s word, God’s speaking to us, through the Scripture and the Holy Spirit, who helps us to see those things in us that are not us, that need to be handed over to Christ and so make room for His work in our lives.

We want to remain or abide in Jesus so that we live, think, speak, and act more and more out of a real, living relationship with Christ in the Spirit. We want this reality that is ours, by being united to Christ, to sink more and more fully into our souls, affecting our behavior, thoughts, attitudes, self-image, and motivations. We want to live, more and more, moment by moment, out of the peace, joy, faith, hope and love that is ours in Christ.

We participate in our own becoming, and in the becoming of others, by trusting in, receiving, again and again the grace of God in Jesus Christ. By our obedience, rooted in trusting in the good presence and activity of God, we make room in our lives to welcome God’s transforming work. We want to come with empty hands so that we can receive what God is actually giving us.

Maturing in Christ, as I am sure we all know, is not automatic, not easy, and not instant. It is an active process of grabbing a hold again and again of that which has grabbed a hold of us (Philippians 3:12). Here are some of the ways that the New Testament speaks of this process:

-Strive to enter His rest (Heb. 4:11) This seems especially contradictory, doesn’t it? What does rest have to do with striving? Isn’t it a ceasing to strive? But, we can understand this verse when we consider just how quickly un-restful our lives in this fallen world become. To enter God’s rest requires actively and continually getting rid of all that does not lead us to live in this rest.

-Work out your salvation ... because God is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure (Phil. 2:12-13). Because God is so actively at work in us, we can participate in working this out in our own lives with awe and anticipation!

-Give up childish ways (1 Cor. 13:11; Heb. 6:1)

-Put off the old man and put on the new nature (Eph. 4:24)

-Walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16)

-Straining forward to what lies ahead (Phil. 3:13)

Turning towards Christ with open hands to receive from Him, we are to set aside grumbling, complaining, jealousy, fear, anger, resentment, etc.—because all these things do not reflect the truth about who God is and who we are in Him and they get in the way of our receiving from Him. It seems to me that setting these things aside again and again is like the work of weeding in a garden. It calls for a continual effort of making room for the fruit to grow. It doesn’t make the fruit grow, but it does clear the space of what might get in the way of the plants being able to grow fully.

We Live in His Grace

Growing in maturity means living more fully in God's grace. John, in the prologue of his gospel, says that from Jesus we have all received "grace upon grace." But what does this mean—to live in grace? I think that our misunderstandings about the nature of forgiveness are often grounded in a misunderstanding about grace.

I often find that people think of grace as making an exception to the rule, or as that little extra help we need from God when we can't do it on our own. God is only gracious towards us, then, when we mess up or are overwhelmed.

But grace, as James Torrance used to say, is *all* of God's relationship towards us—all that He does towards us to reach down to us and draw us up into relationship with Himself, to give us Himself, to give us his very life! Grace is God opening up the triune relationship of love to include others who are not God. Grace is Jesus Christ. So, as we grow in Jesus Christ, we grow in grace.

The Biblical understanding of mercy isn't exactly an exception to a rule either. In the Old Testament, mercy is understood to be God's choosing to respond to the sin/distrust of the Israelites out of His *hesed*, His faithful covenant love, rather than in reaction to the sin directly. In mercy, God provided help to His people so that their sin didn't become the last word or the deciding factor in their relationship with Him. Instead, God's faithfulness to His covenant purposes was always the deciding factor.

God could be merciful because He would deal with the sin by providing atonement, redemption for it—something the Israelites could not do. Ultimately this atonement is provided by God through God the Son uniting Himself to us in our fallen humanity, taking on our actual sins and brokenness, healing our sinful nature, straightening us and turning us back to God.

Forgiveness

God's forgiveness is always connected to His work of atonement or redemption. In Colossians 1:14, Paul says, "He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom *we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*" And in Ephesians 1:7-8 we read, "In him we have *redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses*, according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us."

God can forgive sin because He separating us from it, judging and condemning it and redeeming and transforming us. In his book *Atonement*, Scottish theologian Thomas Torrance said this, "Forgiveness here is a stupendous act which only God can do, blotting out what is past and recreating what has been wasted by sin. ... Forgiveness is not just a word of pardon but a word translated into our existence by crucifixion and resurrection, by judgment and recreation" (p. 222). God doesn't simply overlook our sin, he will actually, in the end, redeem, recreate, renew and restore us, making everything right, undoing the wrong.

This understanding of God's forgiveness has been great good news to me over my life. When I was in college, I can remember talking with one of the upperclassmen in our fellowship one evening. I was struggling with a recurring sin—angry at myself and frustrated that here I was again. The woman, attempting to comfort and encourage me, assured me that Jesus forgave me. I burst out, "I don't want to be forgiven. I want to change!" My understanding of forgiveness was that Jesus just said, "It's okay, Cathy. I'll let it go." I feared that my Christian life was going to consist of just sinning and Jesus forgiving—but not with real hope of transformation and healing. I was in despair.

I continued to long for hope of change in my life and prayed for God to help me. A few years later, I met a Christian counselor who agreed to meet with me. I remember in one of our early sessions, she said to me, "Cathy, I want you to stop complaining—all your complaining." I am embarrassed to say that the first words out of my mouth, before I thought about it, were, "But, what am I going to talk about then?" This woman was one of the first Christians I had met who took this command from the New Testament seriously, who believed that our priority as Christians was to participate in our own becoming. With her, I came to see that forgiveness was God providing room for me to continue growing in my trust in Him and in living as His redeemed child. I began to have real hope that God's forgiveness included His commitment to change me as I followed Him.

We are called as Christians both to receive forgiveness and to extend it to others. Wrestling to both receive God's word of forgiveness to me and offering forgiveness to others has been a significant part of my learning to live in the grace of God to a greater extent than I had thought possible as a young Christian.

Receiving Forgiveness from God

God has already reconciled us to Himself. He has provided redemption, forgiveness for our sins, and forgiveness in Jesus Christ. So, the first point I want to make about receiving God's forgiveness is that we are not earning it. Our repentance, our confession of our sins is not to condition God to be gracious. Sometimes, we might be tempted to think that *if* we repent, *then* God will forgive. But this understanding of repentance was identified as a legal repentance by Calvin and so rejected it as a distortion of the gospel. The reformers spoke instead of "evangelical repentance." Evangelical repentance is, "Christ has borne your sins on the cross, therefore repent."

In this case, as we confess, repent, we are receiving the forgiveness of God that has been extended to us in Christ. And in receiving His forgiveness, we receive the judgment on our sin that this forgiveness implies. James Torrance, in his book *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace* said, "God in Christ has spoken to us His word of forgiveness, His word of love which is at the same time the word of judgment and condemnation, the word of the cross. But implicit in our receiving the word of grace and forgiveness, the word of the Father's love, there must be on our part, a humble submission to the verdict of guilty." We agree with God that the sin has to go and hand it

over to him to be done away with, looking forward to the time when we'll never see it again.

When we confess, however, we do not confess alone. Jesus gives us a share in His vicarious repentance that He did perfectly in our humanity for us—that which we could not do ourselves. It is Christ, Torrance continues, who “stands in for us in our humanity, in our name, on our behalf, to make that perfect submission to the Father. That is the wonder of God’s grace! God not only speaks a word of forgiveness to us. He also provides for us one, in Jesus Christ, who makes the perfect response of vicarious penitence. So God accepts us, not because of our repentance, we have no worthy repentance to offer—but in the person who has already said amen for us, in death, to the divine condemnation of our sin—in atonement” (pp. 54-56).

So when we confess, we “say with” Jesus that this sinful word, thought, feeling, or action does not arise from the truth of who God is and who I am in Him, does not arise from trust in Him and His good purposes, and it doesn’t lead to life, or help me rest in Jesus and enjoy the peace and joy that He is giving me. This sin of which I am repenting, arising out of distrust and being curved back on myself, is a lie, the non-reality God is freeing me from.

When we *receive* His forgiveness, we see our sin, our failings, in light of Jesus and His presence and work. We acknowledge the truth that He is still meeting us in His grace—He is able to be faithful from here. So we can hand over the sin to Jesus, because He knows what to do with it.

And over time, the Holy Spirit helps us to see what we need to die to, hand over—either what we haven’t seen as sin before or things that need to be re-handed over to God.

In the matter of receiving God’s forgiveness—I often find that I swing between beating myself up and so trying to earn the forgiveness with my repentance, trying to justify the sin in such a way that it doesn’t really need to be forgiven, or just ignoring my sin and trying to move on.

But when I do these things, I realize they are just ways for me to speak to myself instead of opening my ears and heart to hear and receive God’s word to me. To receive His forgiveness means listening only to His word of grace and redemption and standing with open hands to receive it. I give up all my words of justification and self-condemnation and let Him tell me the truth about my sin and my new life in Him.

To receive His forgiveness is to live again suspended in His grace. It is to acknowledge that the truth is, and will continue to be, that I am *a recipient of God’s grace*—that is who I am. We turn to hear Him tell us, “I know all about this—hand it over to me because this is not you, but the sin I am saving and healing you from. I am not thwarted or finished with my work in your life. I am confident that I can complete my work in you and that this sin is not the last word for you.”

There was a time when I had to deal with the pain of realizing that I had not kept my children from being hurt. I struggled to know how to move forward with God. I felt that I had failed as a mother, and that I didn't deserve His grace and love. To encourage me, others assured me that since I hadn't known at first about the wrong done to them, this was not my fault. Even though this was true, I found myself remembering all the times when I hadn't done my best, all the words or attitudes I had expressed that were not out of trust and confidence in the good and wonderful triune God. I wanted to receive His forgiveness, but wasn't sure what exactly that meant. I feared that God was disappointed with me.

As I wrestled before God in prayer, I came to realize that to receive His grace meant to stop looking at myself, but to turn truly to Him—to let Him tell me who I am and who I am becoming. He helped me to see that His wonderful grace, His faithful work of redemption in my life is what truly defines me. He told me that He called me to be the mother of my children out of His love and delight, knowing more of who and where I was than I did and trusting in His own faithfulness to redeem and transform me in the process. He released me from looking directly at myself and helped me to rest in a deeper way in Him. I thought of Paul's words to the Corinthians: "I count it a small thing to be judged by you or any human court. *I do not even judge myself* . . . it is the Lord who judges me." How wonderful to hand over the sin, all that arises out of our distrust—again and again—and to live again in the light of His grace, not justifying myself or denying my sin—but letting His word be the first and last word, the one that tells me the truth about who I am in him.

The late theologian, Karl Barth, said that Scripture forbids us to take sin more seriously or even as seriously as grace.

This process of redemption will be completed. It may take longer than any of us wish, but we can count on it. This is our hope, and our lives today are lived in the light of its certainty. We want to receive God's word of grace each day so that we don't carry around the wrong word about who we are. In Heb. 2:11, the author makes this astounding statement: because He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified "are all of one," "he is not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters." He is not ashamed—amazing!

Receiving Forgiveness from Each Other

In speaking of receiving forgiveness from and extending forgiveness to one another, it is important to remember that, just as we are hidden in Christ, our relationships are hidden in Him as well. God's work to rehead all things in Christ includes our relationships with one another—they too have a *telos*, a completion that God will bring them to in and by His grace.

Some of our relationships are, right now, more reflective of the grace of God and the mediation of Christ than others. But all of them are in the "not yet" phase. We do not yet see Jesus' complete sovereignty over them. We can be tempted to view our

relationships as broken but which could become ideal if we only could exert sufficient effort. But that would be a mistake. Rather, we want to remember that Jesus is actually present and active in our interactions with others, mediating them in and through His grace. We can look for where He is at work and trust His faithfulness to bring to completion the good work He has begun in those relationships.

We receive and extend forgiveness to others in the light of this future, in the light of Jesus as the last word. This receiving and extending may not lead to full reconciliation and healing between us and the other person here at this time. But we pursue forgiving and receiving forgiveness from others because it reflects the reality that God is faithfully at work. It is a sign of our real hope in Him. We receive and give forgiveness out of hope in God's faithful activity to redeem, make whole, renew, reconcile.

When we ask for forgiveness from others, we ask in hope of Christ's work of mediation in the relationship and realize that the forgiveness we receive from them is grounded in the person and work of Christ, whether the other person realizes it or not. We seek forgiveness from the other to help us keep our lives uncluttered—making more room to live in and by the grace of God.

Extending Forgiveness to Others

As I said earlier, in the New Testament extending forgiveness to others is often connected with receiving forgiveness from God. I will just make a few comments about this here. First of all, in Matt. 6 the word "if" is more accurately translated "as"—"as you forgive others, your heavenly Father will forgive you." Second, looking at the passages on this topic as a whole, I think the best way to understand them is that when we are not extending forgiveness to others, we are not receiving God's forgiveness ourselves. Not extending forgiveness keeps us from having God's forgiveness because we are not truly receiving it. It isn't, then that God doesn't forgive us. We don't have forgiveness because we won't receive it. Refusing to forgive others is to resist receiving God's forgiveness of us.

To receive forgiveness from God is to receive His work of grace in our lives. It is His grace that relativizes everything else, that shines true light on the situation. So we aren't, as Torrance said, receiving just a word of pardon, *but a work of redemption!*

When we extend forgiveness, we are extending *God's grace*. We are recognizing that God is still at work, He is not done with us, with others and our relationships. And that He has the last word on everything and everyone. We extend forgiveness because God is reheading up everything in Christ, including this relationship and situation. So, in truth, we never forgive others "in our own name." We forgive others in the name of Jesus Christ, --because we're trusting him to make everything right in the end.

We can extend forgiveness because we trust that the triune God takes sin more seriously that we do and we can. God never says that the sin is okay, no big deal. He makes our wounds His own—to heal us from the inside out. His word of grace says,

“This ought not to be.” In asking us to forgive, God is not telling us to just “get over it.” He will deal with the sin and He knows and grieves over the damage sin does, far more than we do. His wrath is poured out on sin because He is against what is against us. Sin and evil do not have a future. We can count on it. No exceptions.

He is telling us to trust Him with this—that He will, somehow, make this all right. No one, in the end, will be getting away with anything. In extending forgiveness, we hand the person who has wronged us, or those we love, over to God. We trust His purposes and work. So when we refuse to forgive, we are refusing to trust that God can redeem this situation. Unforgiveness ultimately signals unbelief, distrust in God.

Extending forgiveness may or may not include saying anything to the person—this is something that you may have to discern.

I also believe that it is important to extend forgiveness in those situations where we do not think the person meant to hurt us. Real damage has been done, so again we want to take the time to hand it all over to God because we know He takes it all, is dealing with each and every hurt, redeeming and making whole what was broken—in His own time and in His own way—whether or not someone intended it to be harmful

Wrestling to Forgive

I have found that extending forgiveness, really handing it over to God and not picking it back up again, involves a real wrestling in my life. I believe, however, that God is at work by His Spirit to enable me to overcome my unforgiveness, to truly hand it to Him and to experience freedom from that heavy burden. I believe that He can enable us to more and more live in His grace towards that person and can help us pray for them to know Him and His redemption in their lives.

For me, the wrestling includes even handing over my struggle to forgive, any continued anger, hate, or anguish. He already knows I am struggling and is able to work with what I give Him, no matter if all I have today is the desire to hope that He will enable my forgiveness to arise more and more from the heart. Experiencing full freedom can take a very long time. But we can know God’s grace all along the way. He faithfully meets us again, in each moment of our lives, one step at a time.

Asking someone else to help you wrestle can be very beneficial. I have often prayed with others in my own wrestling to forgive or in theirs. You can listen to God and trust He will bring things to mind that you need to hand over—you can picture nailing each of those moments to the cross or ask Him to help you see where He was in those times. There are moments of deep, intense work to forgive and there are daily opportunities to immediately hand over a stray word, a perceived slight or wrong, and the person who did this—thankful that He is not done with any of us.

We may need to forgive and receive forgiveness over and over again. But every day, as we meet the God who is with us and at work, we want to key off the truth, off the

deepest reality about our identities our relationships and our lives—that they are in Christ. I am *so* glad that He is faithfully at work!

The Spirit is always able to work with us where we are and take us to the next step. We participate by receiving His help to empty our hands of all that keeps us from living in His grace and peace. Each day, we hand Him what we have—even when all we have is our resentments, our self-pity, our depression, our confusion. He can work with it. Sometimes the loaves and fishes I have to hand over are pretty rotten. But Jesus has invited all who are weary and heavy laden to come to Him so that He can give us His rest. My unforgiveness, self-condemnations, etc. are not my burdens. There is only one yoke Jesus gives me and that is His relationship with the Father. I want to look away from myself (especially as I cannot see myself clearly) to Jesus.

We may be tempted at times to think that all this work isn't worth it because we won't be fully sanctified and mature on this side of death. But the wrestling is *worth it*. We have no idea all of what God can do in the time we have here to live. The Spirit works within us, with groans too deep for words (Ro. 8:26). God is making us whole and will make us whole and in doing so *will fulfill our deepest longings*. Why settle for less? Why not see how far He will take us in this life?

One Final Point

As I thought about this subject at first I only considered our need to extend forgiveness to others, while we receive forgiveness from others and from God. But, as I continued to work through the topic, I realized that sometimes our anger at others or at our circumstances includes anger at God. And I think there are times when we want to hold onto our anger and resentment towards God, maybe hoping that we can force Him to change our circumstances or make the pain go away or punish the other person involved. But this too we want to hand over to Him. He knows what we are struggling with—He can handle our anger at Him.

At various times in my life, I have struggled with the question “why me?” I have looked at others who have seemed much healthier emotionally or psychologically than I am and wondered why God had me deal with the things I have had to deal with. What comes to my mind when I struggle with this is the story of Jesus and the blind man in John 9. The disciples asked Jesus if the man is blind because of his own sins or the sins of his parents. Jesus says that it is for neither of these reasons, but rather “he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him.” God allows the circumstances and trials for one reason—that His glorious works might be revealed in us. *God doesn't allow what He can not and will not redeem. So we can hand over and entrust everything to Him to see how He will demonstrate His glorious grace to us through whatever we face.*

I have found that in the practice of handing over, again and again, whatever is in my hands and receiving His grace has, over time, enabled me to see something of what He is doing in me. I find I am indeed more able to enjoy and live in His grace and hope right now. But I still need to hand it over—every day.