



RECONCILIATION...

Even Though It's Hard

RMPP EVENT 31

EVENT 31 SCHEDULE

Welcome and Zoom Etiquette

Opening Prayer

Speaker Introduction

Message: Reconciliation...Even Though It's Hard

Testimonial

Q&A and Discussion

Reflection

Breakout Rooms

Closing Prayer



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RECONCILIATION... EVEN WHEN IT'S HARD

EVENT 31

Reconciliation is often understood within the context of race relations, but there is a much-needed place for it in all of our other relationships. And while reconciliation may be challenging, and running away from it could be more comfortable, what would your marriage, friendships, and relationships experience if you choose to pursue reconciliation?

Scripture Reflection

First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. - *Matthew 5:24*

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. - *Matthew 5:9*

Personal Reflection

1. After hearing this message, which name(s) come to mind of someone who has offended you and whom you may have forgiven already but not reconciled with yet?

2. In response to this message, what may God be asking you to do in obedience to His Word?

Personal Application

1. Write down the name(s) of people with who you need to reconcile. Then, spend time in prayer before you decide to start a reconciliation process with them.

2. Write down, or share with a close confidante those whom you need to start a reconciliation process. The process can be done in person or by writing a letter or email.

DEVOTIONAL INTRODUCTION

BY CHRISTIAN LENTY

Throughout this year, our quarterly events have touched on the following topics, “Empathy...Even If It Takes Work”, “Love... Even When I Don’t Feel Like It”, and “Forgiveness...Even When I Don’t Want To.” And now, this event is on the topic of “Reconciliation...Even Though It’s Hard.” When you look at these four topics, you see four traits. But traits to what exactly? The four traits of empathy, love, forgiveness, and reconciliation are the essential ingredients for healthy relationships. Let’s see how these four traits look like according to Scripture.

Empathy, Hebrews 4:15-16

This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.

Love, 1 John 4:9-11

God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only

Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love - not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other.

Forgiveness, Ephesians 4:32

Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

Reconciliation, 2 Corinthians 5:19

For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation.

As we can see, these four traits are expressed to us through Christ or demonstrated to us by God, thereby giving us the perfect example of healthy relationships. As men of God, whether at home or work, whether single or married, whether a relationship expert or not, we can look to the examples given to us and commit to cultivating and maintaining healthy, honoring, and life-giving relationships in our life. I am willing to make that commitment. Are you?

CHRIST SETS THE EXAMPLE

DEVOTIONAL 1

Reconciliation with God is absolutely essential! Reconciliation in our other relationships is also important. Christ tells us this, and then shows us by His own example. Are you willing to follow Christ?

“So, if you are presenting a sacrifice at the altar in the temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God (Matthew 5:23-24).” What is Jesus telling us here? He is stressing the importance of reconciliation. In this case, reconciliation even takes precedence over worship. God is saying, “Be reconciled first - then come back and worship Me.” It’s one thing to say this - it’s another thing to follow through and do it. But that’s exactly what Jesus did!

“God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, no longer counting people’s sins against them...God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right (reconciled) with God through Christ (2 Corinthians 5:19, 21).” “For God in all His fullness was pleased to live in Christ, and through Him God reconciled everything to Himself. He made peace (reconciliation) with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ’s blood on the cross. This includes you who were once far away from God. You were His enemies, separated from Him by your evil thoughts and actions. Yet now He has reconciled you to Himself through the death of Christ in His physical body... (Colossians 1:19-22).”

Be reconciled to God...

“All of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to Himself (reconciliation) through Christ (2 Corinthians 5:18).” Have you accepted God’s free offer of reconciliation? In Jesus’ parable of the “prodigal son,” the father reconciled with his returning son. “And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him... His father said to the servants, ‘Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. And kill the calf we have been fattening. We must celebrate with a feast, for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was

lost, but now he is found...’ (Luke 15:20-24).”

Your Heavenly Father has taken the initiative to be reconciled with you. Have you reconciled yourself to Him? Your salvation is dependent upon this. “As a result (of Christ’s sacrifice for you), God has brought you into His own presence (reconciliation), and you are holy and blameless as you stand before Him without a single fault (Colossians 1:22).” “Since our friendship with God was restored (reconciled) by the death of His Son while we were still His enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of His Son (Romans 5:10).”

Be reconciled to one another...

Let us go back to a key Scripture in Matthew 5:23-24, where it says: “So if you are presenting a sacrifice at the altar in the temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God (Matthew 5:23-24).” Reconciliation is not only an act of obedience - it is an act of worship. We are saying to God, “Father, you desire me to be reconciled with my brother. Because I love you, I choose to worship you by reconciling with my brother.” Jesus reconciled with Peter (John 21:15-17). Paul reconciled with Mark (2 Timothy 4:11). Is there someone with whom you need to reconcile?

Share God's message of reconciliation with others...

“God has given us this task of reconciling people to Him... God gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. So, we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making His appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, ‘Come back to God!’ (2 Corinthians 5:18-20).” If you have accepted God's offer of reconciliation, you are now fully reconciled with God. As a reconciled child of God, God has now given you the task of reconciling others to Himself. Amazing as it sounds, God has made you an ambassador for Christ! God chooses to make His appeal through you. You speak for Christ when you plead, “Come back to God!” God has made you His representative. Are you willing to share His message of reconciliation with others?

After several careers, Roger is now retired and living in Bangkok, Thailand with his wife. He continues to learn about following Jesus, and welcomes others to join him in this adventure.

Think About It

1. What does the significance of being reconciled to God mean to you?
2. What do you think about reconciliation being described as an act of worship?
3. How would you share with a non-Christian about being reconciled to God?

Read

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Reflect on This

“When you repent and operate on God’s standards, now you have restoration and reconciliation.” - *Tony Evans*

WHY BOTHER? I'VE ALREADY FORGIVEN!

DEVOTIONAL 2

Forgiveness and reconciliation are closely related, but they aren't the same thing. You can forgive someone and not reconcile, but you can't reconcile with anyone without first forgiving. While you may be willing to forgive, are you ready to reconcile?

People tend to use the expression “to make up” more readily than “to reconcile”, and that’s fine as long as they know what they mean. However, where there is confusion sometimes is between “reconciliation” and “forgiveness”. Now, while it is true that these two notions are closely related, they are not the same thing. Indeed, it is possible to forgive someone and yet not be reconciled with that person. But, you can’t be reconciled with someone without first forgiving them.

I remember realizing not long ago that for some time now, I had been finding it difficult to be reconciled with a brother who had fallen a few years previously. Finally, I came to the

conclusion that in my heart, I had not forgiven him. I do need to point out though that he had not directly offended me but rather his actions had been disappointing and had left a stain that no one seemed able to remove. What I had to admit also was that I had been perceiving him in a very condemning manner instead of with the mind of Christ. As a result, I had literally placed him outside of Jesus' realm of grace, as someone unworthy of Christ's forgiveness! At least that is what my actions reflected.

The moment the Holy Spirit convicted me of this truth, I had a mental picture of Jesus forgiving me of every sin, taking me by the hand, and literally raising me up so that I could have a better glimpse of what a forgiven life looks like. As this brother's face came to mind again, I knew what I had to do. I also sensed that Jesus had held my hand in that mental picture to demonstrate the degree of personal commitment and heart engagement required in the act of forgiving. To cut a long story short, I experienced a release of the unforgiveness I had harbored towards this brother, and it was as if a great burden had been lifted off my shoulders. The next thing that came to mind though was this question: having been willing to forgive, was I ready to reconcile? As I said earlier, there is a difference between forgiveness and reconciliation.

Forgiveness is based on your relationship with God, not your offender, and is a way of recognizing God as the final judge. Reconciliation, on the other hand, is a process dependent not only on the attitudes and actions of the offender, but sometimes it also depends on the pattern of the offence.

Although it involves forgiveness, reconciliation goes beyond forgiveness. When you forgive someone, there is no guarantee that your relationship will be restored. Reconciliation, however, restores the relationship. The only challenge is that reconciliation requires both parties to be willing to participate in restoring the relationship, and you have no control over how the other person might respond.

In Romans 12:18, the Apostle Paul tells us that, “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.” In other words, we need to make an effort to reconcile, and thereby restore broken relationships. We must remember though that it is a process that implies regaining trust - with the offender owning the wrong they have done.

Going back to my story and the question I raised, I do believe that I am ready to “live at peace” with this brother, conscious of the fact that he, on the other hand, might not be the least bit interested in whether I have forgiven him, or even in the olive branch of reconciliation that I want to extend to him.

So, why bother with reconciliation then if I have already forgiven him? There was too much pain and offence already associated with his action that wouldn't I simply be stirring up the wrong emotions? The fact is, it's not about me or him, but rather about striving to be more like Jesus in a very real way. From a worldly perspective, reconciliation might be seen as reducing the injustice gap for the person offended. From a biblical perspective, reconciliation is the key to a relationship with God and many other relationships as well. God's answer to the pain of rejection is reconciliation.

We should be motivated by Christ's love for us which compelled Him to reconcile us to the Father by His death on the cross. Therefore, we need to approach reconciliation with hope because of the power of Christ's love at work in each of us. In John 13:35, Jesus says to us, his followers, "They will know you by your love for one another." As His followers, we display this kind of love most in the kingdom values of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Steve is on the pastoral team at the Evangelical Church of Bangkok where he oversees the Discipleship Ministry. He has lived in Thailand for the past ten years and resides in Bangkok with his wife.

Think About It

1. What challenges have you faced in trying to reconcile with someone whom you have forgiven?
2. Describe a time when the unforgiveness in you prevented reconciliation from taking place.
3. How does Jesus' act of forgiveness and how He reconciled us with God help our own attempts to reconcile and be reconciled?

Read

2 Corinthians 5:18-19

Reflect on This

“In the end, reconciliation is a spiritual process, which requires more than just a legal framework. It has to happen in the hearts and minds of people.” - *Nelson Mandela*

WHAT IS MY ROLE?

DEVOTIONAL 3

Reconciliation is acknowledging that a wrong must be corrected and that restoration is needed. But often, we can put the responsibility of doing so on the shoulders of the other person. But what role do you have in the process of reconciliation, and are you willing to embrace that role?

I've started two small fights with my wife in the past 24 hours. Of course, I didn't realize I was the one starting the fights - at the time I was certain she started the first fight by saying something I felt to be insensitive. The second fight was also her fault - at least that's what the anger and self-justification I was experiencing seemed to be telling me.

Here's what's most ridiculous: in the past 48 hours my wife has also been unusually friendly, extra attentive to my emotions and desires, all the while being patient and considerate even beyond her normal saintly self.

So, what gives? Is it just that we are trying to eat healthier, and cut back on caffeine (which makes me Mr. Grumpy)? Did I stack up too many external commitments one on top of the other without leaving enough energy for home? Is it a spiritual attack (or opportunity?) at the start of writing a devotional on reconciliation? Could be.

Maybe trying to figure out “what went wrong”, or “who did what”, or “why did I act like such a jerk” might be pouring energy into the wrong direction. Instead, what if I took a cue from Jesus and started with some more basic premises: 1, I am a sinner; 2, my wife is a sinner and 3, while we (and the whole wide world!) were yet enemies of God, Jesus took the initiative to begin a sacrificial reconciliation process that I am both invited and commanded to engage in myself! (Romans 5:6-11)

Some scriptures come to mind: if someone I care a lot about does something that really hurts me, I am commanded to forgive them as many times as they come and seek forgiveness! (Matthew 18:21-35.) It isn't easy, but at least they are initiating and acknowledging their wrong! Jesus also said:

“If...you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice

to God (Matthew 6:23, 24).” I take that to mean even if I didn’t mean to offend, and they are super sensitive, or possibly even if I am still mad at them for something that they did to me - whether the relational problem was initiated by them or by me, I am still instructed to initiate reconciliation. And this is really good news. Because if I am commanded by Jesus to be a reconciler, then I know what to do (seek them out to pursue reconciliation). I am also able to do something (rather than just waiting for the other person to start - which can leave me feeling powerless) and I know when to do something (as soon as I notice or remember that there is a problem).

Easy, right? No. So why is it so hard? Usually for me it is because I am feeling angry, hurt, or “right” in my actions. I don’t want to reconcile. I don’t always expect the other party to be friendly, but I don’t want to go first. Naturally I want to withdraw and numb the hurt. Maybe pick up a screen or something. There’s a voice inside me whispering, “Don’t risk asking for connection that might be painful or disappointing or leave me feeling rejected.” Pursuing reconciliation does not guarantee that the person we are approaching with a spirit of reconciliation will respond with the same attitude. So why risk initiating reconciliation?

First, they can’t respond if we don’t initiate. If we are genuinely willing to approach them first by telling the truth, that we

are sinners (not as an excuse, but in humility, really open to seeing our role - however large or small - in the pain or hurt that has been caused) to whom God has already extended reconciliation, then more often than not, things will start to get better. At the very least, we will have removed the excuse that no one is willing to start the process!

Second, initiating reconciliation is a command of Jesus and our job is to obey. I also notice that Jesus makes this such an urgent priority that I am to leave my gift at the altar - in other words I am to pursue reconciliation with my brother or sister or wife or boss or coworker or parent or child or friend (asking for forgiveness, extending forgiveness, and seeking relational healing) even before I seek forgiveness from God!

If we are to become like Jesus, we will become intentional reconcilers - initiating reconciliation even when it hurts. It's worth it.

Iven is still learning how to be himself! He has lots of help from Jesus, his kids, lovely wife, ministry teammates and neighbors as he lives and serves under YWAM Thailand with "Rak Teh" on the streets of Old Bangkok.

Think About It

1. Are there any times that you can think of where someone has initiated reconciliation with you? How did it feel? How did you respond? Did the relationship get better with time?
2. Ask Jesus right now, are there any relationships in your life where there is a relational barrier, or a hurt that is still unreconciled? Ask Jesus, “Is there anything you want to bring to mind about my pain, or the pain I have caused this other person?”
3. Make a plan (before putting down this devotional) to initiate reconciliation in that distressed relationship: a) when will you initiate?, and b) what might you be able to apologize for?

Read

1 Timothy 2:5

Reflect on This

“Our love ought to follow the love of God in one point, namely, in always seeking to produce reconciliation. It was to this end that God sent His Son.” - *C. H. Spurgeon*

BEWARE OF THE STUMBLING BLOCKS

DEVOTIONAL 4

Stumbling blocks can keep us from reaching a desired destination or accomplishing a specific goal, and they exist on the path to reconciliation as well. The stumbling blocks of unforgiveness, pride, denial, and stubbornness can be barriers to life-giving relationships with God and others. Are you willing to overcome these stumbling blocks?

Relationships aren't possible without reconciliation. In this broken world, sin always finds a way to bring hurt and distance to close connections. The type of relationship doesn't matter. Whether it's a friendship or with workplace, romantic, or family relations, the chance to engage in a relationship without some form of conflict doesn't exist. The real issue isn't how to achieve perfect relationships, but rather how to make sure that relationships can continue despite imperfections. And sometimes it's even necessary to start with a step further back.

Sometimes reconciliation is required before a relationship can begin at all. I grew up overseas. My father's work meant we lived in places like Israel, the Gaza Strip, Jordan, and Egypt. Like many regions of the world, these lands know their share of violence and division. However, unlike many regions of the world, the conflicts and stories from these lands stretch back through millennia and hold a pivotal role in the world as we know it today. Arabs and Jews, in particular, have an enmity reaching back to biblical times. Though related generationally by blood, these two people groups often hold a deep-seated mistrust of each other exacerbated by events surrounding the creation of the state of Israel in the last century. The stumbling blocks to reconciliation between these two groups are many: religious, political, personal, and historical.

And yet, there are some who choose to overcome these obstacles. My father started a non-profit medical relief organization called Shevet Achim in the early 90s. Its purpose is to find Arab children with heart defects and arrange for life-saving surgeries in the advanced medical facilities found in Israel. Over the years, countless stories of beautiful relationships emerged from this humble work. Jewish doctors worked tirelessly to preserve the lives of Arab infants. Many Jews welcomed Arab families with high respect and open arms. Likewise, Arab families left with an abiding appreciation of

their Jewish neighbor's capacity for love and relationship. So-called "enemies" were united over the value of a young life and were changed by the encounter. The many stumbling blocks preventing reconciliation between these people groups fell away in the clear light of what was truly important. New relationships were formed in the wake of great mercy.

This is a sweeping example of reconciliation happening at an ethnic level, but not all reconciliatory actions are so dramatic. Everyday relationships require the same commitment to overlook past wrongs, both assumed and actual. My relationship with my wife requires a willingness to move past my own pride and unforgiveness of perceived slights on a weekly, if not daily, basis. I've seen relationships with friends derailed at times over hurts given and received. But I've also seen eventual reconciliation with those same friends when both of us decided to move past the stumbling blocks of stubbornness and unforgiveness. The same things are true in family relationships. It's all too easy to hurt the people we're closest to and then remain estranged rather than reach out to each other in love. In all these examples, we always have the choice of resolution through a laying down of our "rights" and a pursuit of peace and love with each other — sometimes even when the other person(s) in the relationship isn't ready to do so. The greatest example of this form (and of any form)

of reconciliation is found in the person of Jesus Christ. John 3:16 summarizes this idea succinctly. God loved the world, and so He gave His Son that we might live forever. And how is this eternal life possible? How can a holy God allow sinful beings into His presence? The answer is through the miracle of reconciliation. 2 Corinthians 5:18-20 details how God is reconciling the world to Himself through removing the stumbling block of sin through Jesus. Despite that obstacle of obstacles, anyone who calls on the name of Jesus is saved. All it takes is the choice to surrender pride and choose the free gift of life (Romans 6:23). For those of us who choose to follow Christ, we find a new motivation to pursue reconciliation in our own lives and relationships. Our Creator set the example for us to follow. If our hope for an eternal life free from sin lies through Christ's reconciliation, then it's clear that God cares deeply about repairing what is broken. How much then should we value reconciliation as those who are saved by and are trying to mirror Christ? When we do choose to lay aside the barriers of unforgiveness, pride, denial, and stubbornness, we find the blessed results that pursuing reconciliation brings.

Ben lives with his wife in Bangkok, Thailand, where he and his wife teach at an international school. In his spare time, Ben enjoys reading, writing, music, games, and time with friends and family.

Think About It

1. Are you looking for perfect relationships or the ability to pursue relationships despite imperfections?
2. In your own relationships, are you aware of the role you play in overcoming relational obstacles?
3. How willing are you to lay aside obstacles like pride and stubbornness to pursue reconciliation in your relationships?

Read

Romans 12:17-18

Reflect on This

“The Cross is the ultimate evidence that there is no length the love of God will refuse to go in effecting reconciliation.” - *R. Kent Hughes*

THE KEY TO LIFE

DEVOTIONAL 5

We may think that any number of things is the key to happiness in our lifetime, but sadly, we know that's not true. But what if we understood that there was a key that led to something far more significant than happiness? What if that key was reconciliation, and it opened the door to peace and fulfillment?

Every day, the illusive quest for happiness drives us humans, regardless of age, culture, economics, or country of origin. While some claim to have achieved “happiness,” they are often blind to the collateral damage left in the wake of the supposed utopia they have created. We are acutely aware of the temporary nature of earthly delights. We must guard against cynicism or despair and instead pursue a greater goal: reconciliation, first with God, and then with man. It is the only key to deep abiding joy.

Think for a moment of the magnitude of this statement: “God

was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in [Jesus], and through Him to reconcile everything to Himself” (Colossians 1:19 HCSB). God found pleasure in making reconciliation with us a priority. God, who was betrayed, maligned, and undervalued, did not let the offence stand in the way of taking the first and decisive step to reconcile us back into full relational joy.

Now He calls us to be ambassadors of that reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:16-21). He wants us to participate in His grand design! And not just for obedience’s sake. Wouldn’t it make sense for that same reconciliation that brought Him joy and pleasure to be the key to our own happiness and end up more deeply satisfying than mere illusive pleasures?

One way the Father brings us this joy is by cleansing our wounds and purging painful memories. Miroslav Volf writes about this in his book “The End of Memory.” Reconciliation “starts with remembering truthfully...and it ends with letting go of the memory of wrongdoing...non-remembrance of wrongs suffered is the gift God will give to those who have been wronged. It is also a gift they will gladly share with those who have been wronged.” Sometimes the full emotional cleansing of holy “forgetting” takes place over time, but it is well worth the sacrifice required.

In 2017 one of my children was going through a hard patch of life, and I was in the process of leaving the country to serve in Romania for a few weeks. I asked my mother to reach out and assist in helping my wife manage the situation. Mom refused with an abruptness and hostility I had never encountered. It pained me deeply since I was desperate on the behalf of my child. We exchanged hard words and departed with hurt feelings. The stress of that situation had me feeling as if my mother had died and taken my child with her.

I left the country broken and crushed but praying in earnest. After returning from my trip, I was deeply reluctant to see my mom - something that would be hard to avoid since I was both her son and pastor. Would I love her, forgive her, and seek out reconciliation? I had preached this to God's people repeatedly. Could I say I believed this if I didn't live it out?

At the end of a church service, my mom and I talked, and we both repented and reconciled. It was healing, and I was able to enjoy a deeper relationship with my mom that surpassed the pain of the offense. In July 2020, I preached at her funeral with no regrets, no animosity. Only joy. I know the reconciliation we had here will only be perfected when we meet again over there.

When we offer reconciliation, we let go of the offense and the

memory and get a foretaste of what eternity with God and His saints will be like, where sin and its memory are no more. People who participate in God's designs will find they receive far more than mere happiness; they find the key to a deep abiding joy.

Chris is the director of Reaching Romania, the international ministry arm of The Union Mission Ministries in Norfolk, VA., and the incoming president of the Bashford Foundation in Timisoara, Romania. He was born and raised in Belle Glade, Florida and holds a Bachelor of Science in Communications from Florida State University and a Master of Divinity from the Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. He has served in seven churches in the United States and has worked in short term missions and international ministries (Mexico, El Salvador, Romania) for 23 years. He and his wife have three children.

Think About It

1. What would life look like if following Jesus felt easy? What is weighing me down that I'd like to give to Jesus?
2. What is one unresolved memory or story in the back of my mind that continues to pester me? How can I invite Jesus into that memory?
3. It's your turn to be heard. Write down what you believe God or others could never forgive you of. Now ask God and the others for forgiveness.

Read

Isaiah 43:25

Reflect on This

“Forgiveness is the giving, and so the receiving, of life.” -
George Macdonald

TAKING THE NEXT STEPS

DEVOTIONAL 6

Reconciliation not only sounds good but is the message that we have all been called to share. What practical steps can you take that will lead to reconciliation...even though it's hard?

Like me, you probably have more experience asking for and extending forgiveness than pursuing reconciliation in a relationship. While I learned about the reconciliation offered through Christ in various sermons growing up (Romans 5:10), I did not understand what it meant to pursue reconciliation in a relationship with someone else and may have trouble understanding the practical steps of how to do so. However, because we are in a relationship with others, whether they are familial or work-related, there will be times when those relationships will be strained, frayed, and perhaps even severed. And of course, when those times happen, we will need to forgive or ask for forgiveness, but that is only the first step that we must take, not the last. Once we forgive or are forgiven, we need to consider restoring the relationship, if possible, and pursuing

reconciliation, if appropriate. Over the years, I have had to ask forgiveness many times and learn what it means to seek restoration and reconciliation. Here are some of the steps that I take when needing to pursue reconciliation.

Pray First

First and foremost, you need to take the time to pray. And when you pray, ask God to help you align your heart in a proper posture with Him and towards the person(s) you need to reconcile with. It will be tough, if not impossible, to pursue the goal of reconciliation with someone else when your heart is leaning towards bitterness, hate, or even revenge.

Seek Counsel

Once you have prayed and aligned your heart with God, the next step you can take is to seek the counsel of a close friend or two (or perhaps a mentor, leader, or pastor) who can help you see perspectives that you are likely blind to. In almost any relationship experiencing brokenness, you need to see and hear more than just your point of view and perspectives. You need to hear from others you trust who can help you know where you likely made assumptions and blanket statements, leading to misunderstandings.

Take Responsibility

After you have allowed others to help you see more than just your perspectives, you need to take responsibility for any attitudes, words, or actions that contributed to the breakdown in the relationship where reconciliation needs to happen. A relational breakdown is rarely the sole responsibility of just one person; at some point, you likely said or did something that contributed to fanning the flames of mistrust and hurt. You need to take responsibility for your part, not seeking to blame the other person for your actions, but recognizing that you, and you alone, are responsible for the way you ultimately reacted and responded.

Ask for Forgiveness

Once you accept whatever role you have played in the relationship breakdown, the next step is to seek out the person you need to reconcile with and ask for forgiveness (or extend forgiveness). While forgiveness is instant, it doesn't mean that it will always feel easy. And that is because forgiveness is the willingness to put aside your pride, embrace the humility required, put others and the relationship ahead of yourself. Restoration and reconciliation always begin with saying either, "I forgive you" or "Will you forgive me?"

Rebuild Trust

Once the step of forgiveness has taken place, you now enter into the restoration and reconciliation stage. One of the first steps in this stage is to rebuild trust, especially if you are the offender in the relational breakdown. But whether you need to rebuild trust or set out a path for someone else to do so, you cannot achieve relational restoration or reconciliation without it. And while rebuilding trust may not be easy, and it may be a long process, it is a process that requires your total effort and long-term commitment. Your relationship(s) deserve this commitment.

Demonstrate Change

And finally, for your relationships to enjoy a new level of trust and intimacy, change needs to be observed, not just once but consistently. Did you say or do something demeaning towards someone? Did you react harshly and without grace and understanding to others? These kinds of hurtful behaviors, can be repented and forgiven. In response, you can learn new ways to relate and communicate. Forgive, restore, and reconcile becomes a lot easier to experience and achieve when you are willing to leave behind the patterns of hurt that caused the relational breakdown in the first place and make an effort to better yourself, thereby improving your relationships.

Sometimes, in the pain of relational breakdowns, we need help to get on the path to restoration and reconciliation. These steps have served as a path for me, and my prayer is that they will do the same for you. Let's not just talk or teach about reconciliation; let us live it out...even though it's hard.

Christian is the founder and director of The MST Project, a ministry that seeks to mentor men into a pursuit of sexual purity and greater spiritual wholeness. Christian has lived in Thailand for over 20 years and resides in Bangkok with his wife.

Disclaimer: The steps of reconciliation listed in this devotional may not be helpful or appropriate in situations and relationships where abuse, in any form, has taken place. In those instances, any victim should seek assistance from a law enforcement officer, trained therapist, or counselor.

Think About It

1. Which one of the six steps mentioned would you find hard to do? Why?
2. Is there anyone in your life with whom you need to reconcile? Have you tried to do so? If not, will you commit to trying?
3. How can you live out reconciliation as part of your walk with the Lord and witness to the world?

Read

Romans 5:8-11

Reflect on This

“Repairing what’s broken is a distinctly biblical concept, which is why as people of faith we should be leading the way into redemption, restoration, and reconciliation.” -

LaTasha Morrison

A BRIEF REVIEW

DEVOTIONAL 7

During this connect group cycle, we pray that you have been challenged, encouraged, and inspired as you pursue greater purity and wholeness in your life. We want to encourage you to take some time to reflect on the last six devotionals and see how you can consistently apply in your life the many truths that have been shared.

Devotional 1

What are 1-2 truths from this devotional that you would like to reflect on from time to time? What is one aspect from this devotional that you will commit to applying in your life?

Invite one other person to hold you accountable in this area.

Devotional 2

What are 1-2 truths from this devotional that you would like to reflect on from time to time? What is one aspect from this devotional that you will commit to applying in your life?

Invite one other person to hold you accountable in this area.

Devotional 3

What are 1-2 truths from this devotional that you would like to reflect on from time to time? What is one aspect from this devotional that you will commit to applying in your life?

Invite one other person to hold you accountable in this area.

Devotional 4

What are 1-2 truths from this devotional that you would like to reflect on from time to time? What is one aspect from this devotional that you will commit to applying in your life?

Invite one other person to hold you accountable in this area.

Devotional 5

What are 1-2 truths from this devotional that you would like to reflect on from time to time? What is one aspect from this devotional that you will commit to applying in your life?

Invite one other person to hold you accountable in this area.

Devotional 6

What are 1-2 truths from this devotional that you would like to reflect on from time to time? What is one aspect from this devotional that you will commit to applying in your life?

Invite one other person to hold you accountable in this area.

ABUSE & RECONCILIATION PT. 1

BY REX DEKONING

What if in your life you were emotionally, physically, or sexually abused by someone? People who have harmed your integrity or intruded into your private space, either by speaking bad words or curses to you or by physically using your body or parts of it, to pester you or for their pleasure? What do you do with such an experience and history?

Abusers are often people who are close to the family. Sometimes it is a father or a brother, or sometimes it can even be a woman who abuses her child. Perhaps it is a neighbor or an uncle, which is not all uncommon either. Sometimes it can even be a friend or a friend of the family. Abuse can have devastating effects on you or the one who has been abused. The consequences of abuse can last for a very long time, and so it is essential that if you struggle with abuse in your past, you find someone to talk to, someone you can trust, and someone who will keep your story confidential. By reading this, you can recognize whether you were abused or whether you were the abuser yourself.

God knows you intimately, and it is only by His grace that you can be released from the power of abuse. You can experience freedom even if you have been a victim, and as an abuser, you can also experience forgiveness. My encouragement is that you come out of the abuse by beginning to confide in someone trustworthy, who will not immediately share your story with others, but who takes the time to listen to what happened and understand as much as possible. Sharing your story with a trusted person, preferably a trained counselor, will help you begin a process of forgiveness and perhaps later reconciliation.

One requirement for beginning the reconciliation phase is that the abuser demonstrates active and ongoing repentance of the heart that is evidenced by a visible change in their life for a minimum of 6-12 months. It is only after a trained counseling team has observed ongoing repentance and change in the heart and life of the abuser, and the victim is ready, that a discussion about reconciliation can begin. The obligation to the victim is to ensure (as much as anyone can) that the abuser recognizes their actions as hurtful and sinful. They must admit that in their quest for power, control, and demonstrations of anger, they have harmed an image-bearer of God (Genesis 1:26) and that their sin has grieved and angered a holy God (Psalm 51:4). Reconciliation can only happen when there is no longer any abuse going on.

Reconciliation requires two people to agree to a truce, laying down all their grievances, guilt, and shame. That process can be very long, often lasting from many years up to one's entire lifetime.

Matthew 5:9 says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." Blessed are you when you make all efforts to pursue reconciliation.

ABUSE & RECONCILIATION PT. 2

BY ROGER MITISKA

Pharisees: "Should a man be allowed to divorce his wife for just any reason?"

Jesus: "Let no one split apart what God has joined together."

Pharisees: "Then why did Moses say in the law that a man could give his wife a written notice of divorce and send her away?"

Jesus: “Moses permitted divorce only as a concession to your hard hearts, but it was not what God had originally intended. And I tell you this, whoever divorces his wife and marries someone else commits adultery - unless his wife has been unfaithful (Matthew 19:3-9).”

What does divorce have to do with abuse and reconciliation? I believe there is a similar principle involved in both of these circumstances. Regarding divorce, God’s original intention without exception was that marriage was to last the lifetime of the man and woman. “Let no one split apart what God had joined together.” Divorce (or separation, for that matter) is against God’s intended purposes for marriage. Why then did God allow for the exception of divorce in the case of unfaithfulness (adultery)? Because of the “hardness of men’s hearts.” I believe God was showing love and concern for the injured party in the case of adultery. And we know how serious God is regarding spiritual adultery!

In the case of a woman whose husband has committed adultery, I believe it would be unloving to force her to take back her husband into the intimacy of the marital relationship without her desire and consent. By his infidelity, the husband has broken trust with his wife, as well as hurting her mentally, emotionally, or spiritually.

God still desires forgiveness on the part of the woman, as difficult as this might be. But reconciliation in the marriage is dependent upon a change of heart in the case of the man, and the desire, willingness, and ability of the woman to reconcile with the man.

By the grace of God, marital reconciliation after adultery is possible - and has occurred in many marriages. But not always. Again, the husband broke trust with his wife, damaging the marriage relationship. Whether the marriage is healed and reconciled is dependent upon God's grace, and the desires of the woman and man involved.

As with divorce, I believe God also allows for an exception to reconciliation in the case of spousal abuse and child abuse. Though not specifically addressed in Scripture, such an exception to reconciliation protects the injured party from being forced back into an abusive relationship, including physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual abuse. Allowing for such an exception to reconciliation in the case of abuse demonstrates the same loving care for the injured party, as in the case of adultery.

FAST & PRAY FOR YOUR SPOUSE

At any time this month, fast a meal and pray for one or all of the following points. As husbands commit to praying and fasting for their wives, we will see a great spiritual breakthrough take place and a spiritual legacy will be created.



Serve Her

My wife is not my mission field in the sense that I should be trying to change her into who I think she should be. I want to serve her better as her husband, her lover, and her friend.

Love Her

I want to love and support my wife better so that our marriage reflects the love that Christ has for the Church.

Honor Her

I want to honor my wife's emotions better by being a safe place where she can freely share her feelings without my trying to solve every problem.

Respect Her

I want to respect my wife better by learning to appreciate the unique talents, gifts, and perspectives that she has. Couples should complement one another and not be in competition with each other.

Listen to Her

I want to be a better listener. I want to listen to my wife with my heart and not just my ears.

INTRODUCING RMPP

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

| *What Is RMPP?*

Real Men Pursuing Purity (RMPP) is a community of men who are committed to growing in integrity, purity and wholeness through relevant teachings, accountability, mentoring and honest dialogue. You might not be sure that you really need to be part of a community like this because you don't struggle with compulsive addictions or sexual sin. While it is very important for many men to focus primarily on resisting sexual temptation and sin, we want to inspire and challenge you to pursue more. Although growing in purity is a big part of the vision for RMPP, it's much more than that. It's also learning about deep-rooted insecurities, developing proper work boundaries, embracing our identity in Christ, confronting fears and anxiety, expressing ourselves emotionally in a healthy way, and pursuing holiness in a safe environment with like-minded brothers. We believe that when we invite Him into these areas, He will extend His healing hand and bring about wholeness. Max Lucado says this very well.

RMPP EST. 2014

‘Our Savior kneels down and gazes upon the darkest acts of our lives. But rather than recoil in horror, he reaches out in kindness and says, “I can clean that if you want.”

We are men who are not willing to settle for a life of spiritual mediocrity. We choose to relentlessly pursue greater depths of purity and wholeness for ourselves and for our families. Welcome to the RMPP community.

| *How does RMPP support the local church?*

RMPP does not intend to replace or represent a church; it only creates a safe place for men who want to stay active in their own church community. When a man joins the RMPP community he joins other like-minded men who desire to pursue greater spiritual growth and Christ-likeness. He is choosing to walk out in greater honesty and vulnerability. He is choosing to pursue purity in all aspects of his life. Aspects

such as deep-rooted insecurities, developing proper work boundaries, embracing our identity in Christ, confronting fears and anxiety, expressing ourselves emotionally in a healthy way, and pursuing holiness in a safe environment.

We then pray that as these men grow in greater maturity that they would influence their families. That they would impact their communities and their work places, and that they would be an example for other men in their home church. We believe that as men take hold of the awesome and holy call to live lives that reflect Christ, that the church will be inspired and the world will take notice.

| *What happens next?*

If you have ever attended a men's retreat, you probably remember being deeply impacted by worship, challenged by teaching, and being in community with many men who shared your excitement and enthusiasm for growth and change. A few weeks or months down the road, the gathering became a distant memory as you settled back into the routines of daily life.

We don't want to create just another mountain top experience.

We are committed to creating a long-term mentoring relationship for everyone who attends an event. That is why you are holding this devotional book in your hands. As you flip through these pages you will see that there devotionals with corresponding questions. Each devotional is meant to solidify the teaching of the event by encouraging and challenging you, as well as helping to stimulate discussion through thought provoking questions, verses and quotes.

| ***Who writes the devotionals?***

Ministry leaders, pastors and members of a local church body have written these devotionals and have overcome real issues in their life through God's grace, goodness, mercy and love. We hope and pray that their testimonies and stories inspire, challenge and point you to Christ.

| ***What are RMPP connect groups?***

RMPP connect groups are a safe place for men to pursue both purity and wholeness within an environment of peer support and encouragement. The journey to greater purity and wholeness is a journey that involves inviting other men to walk alongside of you. It is a place where you can share your prayer requests, victories, and struggles and where you can be

heard, prayed for and challenged to grow in all areas of life. A connect group is designed to be a support system for you for as long as you want.

Committing to a group may be difficult but we believe that you will be willing to make that commitment because you want something deeper. You want to know that you aren't alone and that there are other men who want the same thing and are willing to pursue that with you. During your time in a connect group you will be:

Challenged: You will be challenged to grow in your love for Biblical truth. The men in your group will challenge you to grow in your knowledge and application of God's Word thereby enabling you to stand firm in the midst of life's trials.

Encouraged: You will be encouraged to persevere when life, work, and numerous responsibilities may seem overwhelming. The men in your group will support you through prayer, encouragement and a listening ear.

Inspired: You will be inspired to pursue greater spiritual growth and Christ-likeness. While pursuing Christ-likeness may not always be easy, it will also be worth it. The men in your group will be there to inspire you on that journey.

Accountable: The men in your group, as well as your group leader, will support you and hold you accountable as you pursue greater freedom and victory. Be assured that whatever you share in your group will be strictly confidential.

| ***When are the events held?***

RMPP events are held 4x a year in February, May, August, and November.

| ***Who can attend?***

RMPP events are open to all men everywhere.

| ***What about privacy?***

Because of the sensitive nature of RMPP events, video or audio recording is not allowed. Also, details of personal testimonies are NOT to be published via email, social media, or in any other form. Thank you for contributing to a safe and secure environment that helps build honesty and vulnerability.

| *Who started RMPP?*

Real Men Pursuing Purity was founded in 2014. RMPP is a joint initiative of The MST Project and New Counseling Service.

Christian Lenty is the founder and director of The MST Project, a ministry that seeks to mentor men into a pursuit of sexual purity and greater spiritual wholeness. Christian has lived in Thailand for over 20 years and resides in Bangkok with his wife.

Rex DeKoning is the 60-year old husband and father of a large family. A former nurse and pastor, he now works in Thailand with New Counseling Service as a counselor. Rex has experienced great healing of addictive behaviors after he confessed everything and began to live an accountable life. Rex is highly motivated to inspire other men to seek out a mentor, as it has helped him to walk freely, build honesty and vulnerability.

Nick Chilver is married and is part of a blended family containing 6 children. He is grateful for the people God has brought into his life and across his path. And as he continues to learn to better reflect Him, it is his prayer that God will grant him the privilege of helping others on the path to freedom and into the Light. He resides in Thailand with his wife.

Roger Mitiska and his wife are retired and living in Thailand. They are members of Evangelical Church of Bangkok. Greatly blessed by God, Roger desires to be used by Him to assist others in walking with Jesus. Roger's passion is Christian discipleship through understanding God's Word and applying it to everyday living.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

& ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

| *New Counseling Service*

New Counseling Service provides counseling and therapy for individuals and families in Bangkok. NCS provides services for expatriates as well as for Thai people.

W: www.ncs-counseling.com

E: newcounselingservice@gmail.com

| *A Pathway To Purity*

The book, A Pathway to Purity, is meant to transform your way of thinking about purity, taking you through an initial 16 sessions of encouraging, challenging and application of the material. Pathway to Purity will transform the way you think and live, putting you on a lifetime path of purity and wholeness leading to consistent victory.

W: www.mstproject.com/p2p

E: hello@themstproject.com

| ***With Gratitude***

We would like say thank you to the following for their contribution to this event:

Financial Donors, Thank you for generously providing the funding for this event.

Devotional Authors, Thank you for writing devotionals that inspire, encourage and challenge each of us to pursue greater purity and spiritual wholeness.

| ***Scriptural Oversight Team***

Real Men Pursuing Purity has a Scriptural Oversight Team consisting of several pastors from local churches that review all devotionals for theological integrity.

JOIN AN RMPP CONNECT GROUP TODAY

RMPP connect groups are a safe place for men to pursue sexual purity, spiritual wholeness, and Christlike maturity within an environment of peer support, encouragement, and accountability.

Connect groups are held worldwide on a weekly basis. To inquire about joining a group or to find out more information please email hello@themstproject.com.

If you are interested in starting an RMPP connect group at your church, men's ministry, Bible study, college group, etc., please contact us. We'd love to support you and have the resources to help you.



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