A Strategy for Members at Jachin Church to Identify and Practice Authentic Forgiveness

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Ministry Focus Paper Approval Sheet

This ministry focus paper entitled

A STRATEGY FOR MEMBERS AT JACHIN CHURCH
TO IDENTIFY AND PRACTICE AUTHENTIC FORGIVENESS

Written by

JOHN CHUEN WAH TRAN

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary
upon the recommendation of the undersigned readers:

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Date Received: October 1, 2017
A STRATEGY FOR MEMBERS AT JACHIN CHURCH
TO IDENTIFY AND PRACTICE AUTHENTIC FORGIVENESS

A DOCTORAL PROJECT
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

JOHN CHUEN WAH TRAN
SEPTEMBER 2017
ABSTRACT

A Strategy for Members at Jachin Church to Identify and Practice Authentic Forgiveness
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The purpose of this study is to develop a strategy for members at Jachin Church in Hong Kong to identify authentic forgiveness and to practice it. Conflict and hurt are inevitable in life. To forgive and to be forgiven are crucial to turn conflict and hurt from being life-destructive to being life-constructive. Authentic forgiveness that is biblically based is a divine gift that God offers to humanity, so that hurt can be healed, the cycle of retaliation can be broken, one’s painful past can be released, and impaired relationships can be reconciled. However, forgiveness carries different meanings and expressions within different cultures. Not all kinds of forgiveness that people practice in various cultures are biblically based and equally life-transforming. For example, some forgive by forgetting, some forgive in order to avoid conflict, and some forgive in order to achieve self-healing.

The way many members at Jachin Church perceive and practice forgiveness deviates from authentic forgiveness because of the cultural influence of the Chinese tradition and western individualistic culture. For example, some forgive in order to maintain harmony, but they ignore the truth. Others forgive as a unilateral act of self-healing without reconciling the broken relationship. Authentic forgiveness should comprise genuine repentance, which requires dealing with the issues, and reconciliation, which is a mutual transaction.

This study employs a one-year timeline for implementing the pilot project. It intends to inspire and motivate members at Jachin Church to identify authentic forgiveness and to confront the tendency to trivialize it due to cultural influences. Further, this study also develops concrete steps for those in need to practice authentic forgiveness in order to receive the blessedness that God intends through it. An assessment will be done for the effectiveness of the pilot project before its full launch by the end of 2018.

Content Reader: Jimmy Tan, PhD

Words: 298
To my beloved wife Angela for her love and care for the past thirty years and many years to come, and for patiently supporting me to pursue what God has placed on my heart.

To my wonderful children, Joshua and Rachel, for their prayers, support, and understanding, and the joy they bring to me.

To my other family members who always assist and encourage me.

To those who are broken and hurt.

To our God who cares.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. David Augsburger, my teacher and mentor, for inspiring me to discover the importance of biblically based forgiveness eight years ago, encouraging me to write this study, and giving me his invaluable and continual support throughout the past years. Without him, I could not have come this far.

I would also like to thank many good friends and fellow colleagues in my church, many of my former classmates, many pastors of other churches, and a few professors who have given me much precious advice to complete this study.

Lastly, I would like to give thanks to the faculty and staff of the Doctor of Ministry Program at Fuller Theological Seminary, who are extremely helpful, friendly, caring, and knowledgeable in equipping students to pursue what God has placed on their hearts.
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PART ONE

COMMUNITY AND MINISTRY CONTEXT
INTRODUCTION

Two years ago, a church leader shared an experience of his wife Sharon,¹ who was molested several times in her childhood by her brother. When she grew up, she met a counseling and prayer team with whom she shared her experience and sought help. The counseling and prayer team “taught” her to forgive her brother unconditionally without addressing the misdeeds. She tried to pray the forgiveness prayer with her will but not with true feeling, but she wondered how her hurt and broken relationship with her brother could be dealt with. Then one day, she courageously confronted her brother in the presence of her parents and sisters. However, both her parents and her brother ignored her and said it was long ago, and they did not want to disrupt the harmony within the family. They told her to forget about it, and they did not offer any genuine apology or request repentance from her brother. They sought no justice in the situation.

Sharon was hurt three times. First, she was hurt by the molestation in her childhood. Second, she was hurt when the counseling and prayer team asked her to forgive unconditionally without any suggestion regarding how to deal with the injustice and broken relationship. This caused her to become puzzled about the nature of true forgiveness. Third, she was deeply hurt by her parents, who ignored her pain and request for her brother’s repentance for years. Sharon has asked a valid question, “What is true forgiveness?”

¹ All names mentioned in the stories of this study have been changed to protect the confidentiality of those involved.
What the counseling and prayer team and her parents did deviate from what Jesus intends us to do in order that true forgiveness can occur. Jesus states that we are to show one’s fault, bring justice to the victim, request the offender to repent, and forgive and reconcile with one another. Jesus said, “If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him” (Luke 17:3) and, “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault. . . . If he listens to you, you have won your brother over” (Matthew 18:15).

Conflict, evil, and hurt are inevitable in life. One needs to forgive or be forgiven because forgiveness is a transforming process. In his book, Helping People Forgive, David Augsburger explains that this process “allows us to change our minds, begin again, and risk further relationship. . . . This breaking of the cycle of blind retaliation or judicial retribution allows persons, relationships, or institutions to start over, to begin again.”

However, many people misunderstand what forgiveness truly is. It is not forgetting the past, overlooking a wrongdoing, maintaining harmony, or a one-sided act to release pain. Instead, it is a social transaction that comprises genuine repentance of the offender, the offer of forgiveness by the victim to the offender, and restoration of the broken relationship of the parties involved.

As it is impossible for one to avoid conflict, evil, and hurt unless one removes oneself from relationships, one has to respond to them proactively and in the right way. Forgiveness is God’s precious gift offered to humanity, which can transform and turn conflict, evil, and hurt from being life-destructive to being life-constructive as it heals

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2 All biblical references are taken from New International Version, unless otherwise noted.
4 Ibid., 14-16.
people’s hurt, releases them from the cycle of retaliation, and empowers them to reconcile. However, not all kinds of forgiveness practiced in different traditions and cultures are biblically based or equally life transforming. In his book, *Conflict Mediation across Cultures*, David Augsburger points out that forgiveness has many faces in different cultures, as each culture shapes its own understanding and practice of forgiveness from its central values.\(^5\) Thus, forgiveness that carries different meanings, expressions, and practices in different traditions and cultures deviates from biblically based forgiveness in different degrees and aspects. Such deviation caused by cultural influences trivializes the transforming power of authentic forgiveness that God intends to renew people and empower them to reconcile with each other. This kind of trivialization indeed occurs in many churches in Hong Kong, including mine.

For the people of Hong Kong, their understanding and practice of forgiveness is shaped by the values of their eastern roots and western culture. As Hong Kong is an international city where one’s eastern roots meet western culture, a Chinese person raised in Hong Kong is rooted in the Chinese tradition of thousands of years, and this person is also continually influenced by western culture. Thus, the way in which the Chinese people of Hong Kong deal with relationships and forgiveness is a mixture of these two cultures. For those who are Christians seeking to practice forgiveness, these eastern and western influences affect their interpretation of the Bible. Chinese tradition and western culture, to a varying extent, distort the way Chinese Christians in Hong Kong perceive

and practice forgiveness. This is true also for the members of my church, Evangelical Free Church of China Jachin Church of Hong Kong (hereafter, Jachin Church).

I am the senior pastor of Jachin Church. I had attended my mother church, Evangelical Free Church of China Tung Fook Church of Hong Kong (hereafter, Tung Fook Church), since 1994, becoming one of its deacons in 1999, and then a full-time minister there in 2009. In 2014, I led four pastors from Tung Fook Church to plant Jachin Church. Now, there are approximately one thousand people attending Jachin Church, and 4,300 people attending Tung Fook Church. Both churches are now among the top fifty churches in Hong Kong in terms of population. Over the past twenty-three years, I have noticed that many members at both Jachin Church and Tung Fook Church perceive and practice forgiveness in a distorted way, as their understanding of it is tainted to some extent by Chinese tradition and western culture. For example, some forgive by forgetting the past and focusing on the future, some forgive by passive acceptance, some forgive to avoid conflict, some forgive in order to achieve self-healing without dealing with the impaired relationship, and some forgive by pretending all is well again.

Authentic forgiveness is much more than all these deviations and distortions. God not only wants people to unilaterally forgive and be healed, but he also wants people to repent and reconcile with one another, so that a true communion is formed. This project defines biblically based forgiveness that is free from distortion caused by cultural influences as “authentic forgiveness.” Authentic forgiveness offered by the victim must be consummated by two aspects: genuine repentance of the offender and reconciliation of impaired relationship of the parties involved. And genuine repentance of the offender
should consist of three elements, which are remorse, restitution, and renewal. This project intends to inspire and motivate members at Jachin Church and those in similar churches to identify and practice authentic forgiveness. It also seeks to confront the tendency to trivialize the practice of forgiveness due to the cultural influences of the Chinese tradition and western culture.

Only through authentic forgiveness can people be released from their broken past and reconcile damaged relationships to the full extent that God originally intended. Biblical examples of authentic forgiveness, comprising repentance and reconciliation, are shown in the incidents of Joseph and his brothers, the prodigal son, and in the Scriptures of Leviticus 6:1-7, Matthew 5:23-24 and 18:15-17, and Luke 17:3-4. When facing a wrongful act, if one does not strive for the genuine repentance of the offender and reconciliation of the broken relationship, authentic forgiveness is undermined and both the offender and the victim are not completely reconciled. Anything less than authentic forgiveness is not enough for complete healing. While it may not always be viable to achieve authentic forgiveness, due to various reasons such as unrepentance, unwillingness to forgive, or death of a party, one should strive for complete forgiveness to the greatest extent possible. If this cannot happen, one shall, like King David, grieve the failure of full reconciliation, and, as stated in Matthew 5:44, love and pray for the enemy.

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The Shaping Factors for Christians in Hong Kong to Perceive Forgiveness

As mentioned above, the way Christians in Hong Kong perceive relationships and forgiveness is shaped by three factors, namely, eastern tradition, western culture, and the Bible. Regarding the characteristics of eastern tradition, Chinese values and expressions are deeply rooted in Confucianism. Traditional Chinese at Jachin Church and Tung Fook Church tend to be relatively hierarchical, respectful, harmonious, and less expressive as compared to those brought up in western countries.

In relation to hierarchy and respect, many traditional Chinese pay full respect to seniors. For example, it is often an offense to call one’s father or mother by his or her name directly. Children are obliged to call their parents “father” and “mother” respectfully no matter how old the children are. It is impolite to call a teacher by name without a proper title such as Professor, Mister, Miss, or Teacher. Respect is a good Chinese tradition, but with such a tradition of respect, it is not difficult to imagine that confession is not a usual practice among traditional Chinese if the wrongful act involves a senior person. Looking deeply into the issues involving the fault of a senior person would cause him or her to lose face. Thus, many traditional fathers rarely say, “I am sorry.” Issues concerning conflict and hurt between parents and children are not often discussed due to face saving and a desire to show respect. For instance, an elderly Chinese pastor who is a grandfather himself once shared about the hurt he experienced in his childhood. The elderly pastor regrettably recalled that over the past years, whenever he wanted to discuss his hurt with his father, his father refused to talk to him. The hurt

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7 Augsburger, Conflict Mediation across Cultures, 262-266.
was not properly dealt with even though the pastor was ready to forgive. His father passed away leaving the wound untouched.

Traditional Chinese also tend to be less expressive of their feelings. For the older generation, not only do many traditional fathers rarely say, “I am sorry,” they even seldom express the words, “I love you” to their wives and children. In a public seminar held in 2016 in Hong Kong, a world-famous Chinese theologian shared that he and his sisters had never heard their father, a reputable pastor and professor who passed away few years ago, express his love for them explicitly, such as saying “I love you.” It is not that his father did not love them, but he was acting according to culture, and traditional Chinese rarely express love or emotion verbally and directly. In fact, some traditional Chinese prefer to express their love by other means such as by actions or in writing.

When facing conflict and hurt, many traditional Chinese tend to seek harmony. Harmony is a precious core value of Chinese tradition, but sometimes, justice and fairness are sacrificed in exchange for it. It is not uncommon for one in Chinese society to overlook a wrongful act in order to maintain harmony, or at least on the surface. Thus, inexpressiveness and preservation of harmony tend to cause many traditional Chinese to avoid facing sensitive issues in depth, bury these matters and feelings deep in their hearts, and be unwilling to identify whom should be responsible. Sometimes, this kind of harmony is not genuine, as deep down in many undiscussed and unresolved conflicts and hurts, people’s hearts and relationships are decaying. Sharon’s case is a typical example. Authentic forgiveness is beyond harmony; it is about genuine discussion of the conflicts and hurts in depth in order that the offender is given an opportunity to confess and repent, and also to be reconciled with the offended.
Apart from its eastern roots, the values of the people of Hong Kong are also immensely influenced by western culture, as Hong Kong was a British colony for over 150 years. Over the past few decades, Hong Kong has experienced strong economic growth and is now ranked in the top twenty in GDP per capita in the world.\(^8\) She has developed into a major global trade hub, financial center, and famous tourist city. In this international city, the values of the Chinese people of Hong Kong, to various degrees depending on the age group and their exposure and openness to western culture, are products of the East and the West. The way the Chinese people of Hong Kong deal with relationships and forgiveness is also a mix of the two cultures. If a person wants to understand how a Chinese in Hong Kong sees relationships and forgiveness, it is necessary for one to also look at western culture in that respect.

Western culture is permeated by individualism, which incurs many challenges to westernized Chinese in Hong Kong. The good side of individualism is that it encourages individuals to be responsible and to have dignity and self-worth as opposed to being insignificant atoms in the mass of humanity. However, the problematic side is that individualism promotes an individual’s self-care as its central value. Every individual is acting on one’s own behalf, and the needs of each individual are more important than the needs of the community.\(^9\) However, authentic forgiveness is not merely about one individual’s own need and self-healing, but it is a social transaction, restoring and reconciling a broken relationship between the offender and the offended. Due to the


\(^9\) David Augsburger, email to the author, November 8, 2016.
individualistic task of self-care, forgiveness in an individualistic culture has turned from an interpersonal bridge to an intra-personal process of self-healing unrelated to the community. Unfortunately, unilateral forgiveness is the norm nowadays in western culture because of different psychological and sociological reasons, such as self-love and the understanding of forgiveness as a private act of intrapsychic release.10

As a result of the cultural influences of Chinese tradition and western individualism, many people in Hong Kong understand forgiveness as a mixture of preserving harmony without facing the conflict in-depth and acting out of internal self-love without reconciliation of the impaired relationship. Sharon’s counseling and prayer team is an example of this, since they invited her to forgive as an act of internal self-care without addressing the broken relationship.

Unfortunately, individualism influences many churches in Hong Kong today, so the understanding and practice of forgiveness at church has been distorted. Forgiveness taught in churches in Hong Kong places less emphasis on the restoration of impaired relationship and more on intrapsychic release. In his book, *Embodying Forgiveness*, Gregory Jones explains that the unilateral act from an individual paradigm trivializes forgiveness.11 It makes it therapeutically easy, but the result is damaging to the Christian community because there is no sense of restoration of communion and reconciliation of broken relationships. The unilateral act of forgiveness causes the offender to ignore the

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need for repentance and reconciliation, which are crucial aspects of authentic forgiveness both theologically and biblically.

**Theological and Biblical Foundation of Authentic Forgiveness**

People are trapped in the cyclical habits of sin, violence, and revenge from which they cannot break away. But God transcends the human tendency to sin and gives a new beginning through his Son, which is a self-giving love, to humankind through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. When Jesus, vulnerable as a human being, was oppressed, betrayed, and abandoned, he did not allow himself to be defined by all these and refused to act in the cyclical habits of sin, revenge, and violence. He broke this cyclical habit by his forgiveness. Jesus, who wills forgiveness, invites fervently all sinners to repent and be reconciled with him. Jesus embodies forgiveness as a new way of life, and we are thus called to follow and embody forgiveness as a new habit of life. In so doing, we can break cyclical habits and restore communion.

Authentic forgiveness, in both Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, is an interpersonal transaction of recognizing repentance and a reconciliation of broken relationship. Repentance, consisting of remorse, restitution, and renewal, and reconciliation of broken relationships are central to the process of authentic forgiveness, as shown, for example, in the stories of Joseph and his brothers, and the prodigal son, and in Scriptures of Leviticus 6:1-7, Matthew 5:23-24, 18:15-17, and Luke17:3-4. In the

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12 Ibid., 115.

13 Ibid., 110, 117-121.
story of the prodigal son, the younger son was filled with remorse when he confessed that he had sinned against heaven and against his father. His restitution and renewal came when he felt contrition and asked for nothing but to be a slave to serve his father. Reconciliation occurred when the father welcomed his lost son with full honor upon the repentance of his son. As authentic forgiveness should comprise both repentance and reconciliation, it is incomplete if there is only repentance but not reconciliation. Reconciliation as the end result is the central motif of biblical forgiveness. Augsburger points out, “Authentic forgiveness is that cluster of motivations which seeks to regain the brother and the sister in reconciliation. . . . The courage to forgive is an excellency of character, a virtue that enables one to . . . risk in reconstruction of social networks.”

For traditional Chinese Christians in Hong Kong, virtue, morality, harmony, and reconstruction of social networks are the continued pursuit of their daily lives, as these are the central values of Chinese tradition. However, the pursuit of confession, repentance, and justice is a challenge to many traditional Chinese Christians as these may disrupt harmony and cause a loss of face. To westernized Chinese Christians in Hong Kong, the difficulty is to subordinate their feelings to moral integrity and to take risk in the reconstruction of community as individualism exerts a controlling grip on their minds. Authentic forgiveness is neither merely about harmony nor self-healing, but about justice, love, mercy, repentance, and reconciliation. This kind of authentic forgiveness, comprising both repentance and reconciliation, is not practiced as often as it

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15 Ibid., 114-115.
should be at Jachin Church and Tung Fook Church, as well as at many other churches in Hong Kong.

Indeed, many Christians in Hong Kong are taught to pray for the ability to let go and be healed when they are hurt, or to pray to God for God’s forgiveness when they wrong others. Two years ago, a well-respected international preacher who is a British Chinese educated and residing in London came to preach in Hong Kong. The preacher touched on the topic of forgiveness. He preached powerfully in English with translation in Chinese. However, when he asked those who had been hurt to respond to the altar call, he only asked them to pray to God for healing and the strength to forgive those who had hurt them in their hearts. Many cried and prayed for God’s grace and help. The message was touching and comforting, but it was a unilateral act that did not address the importance of repentance of the offender and reconciliation of the impaired relationships. This unilateral act represents a struggle in one’s heart, a love of one’s enemy, and a willing heart to forgive, all of which are important, but it is only the first step to consummate authentic forgiveness. Jesus taught us to do much more: “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift” (Matthew 5:23-24).

Authentic forgiveness offered by the victim to the offender reaches its final step when the victim reconnects with the one who has hurt him or her. Authentic forgiveness requires one party to repent and the other party to have the grace to accept one who repents with trust and respect. When the two parties mutually recognize that both repentance and acceptance are genuine and the broken relationship is reconstructed,
authentic forgiveness occurs. By doing so, the victim discovers that the strange chemistry of reconciliation can heal the wound until nothing remains but the remembered scar with a transformed meaning. Such forgiveness shall result in a deeper and stronger healing and union than before.  

**The Content of the Project**

The question this project deals with is what authentic forgiveness is and how it can be practiced. When a Chinese in Hong Kong, who has lived under the teaching of Confucianism and the influence of western culture, accepts Jesus as one’s Lord and personal Savior, this new faith should change the way one understands and practices authentic forgiveness. Genuine repentance and reconciliation of community are central to the process of authentic forgiveness, and the purpose of this project is to inspire and motivate the members of Jachin Church to identify and practice authentic forgiveness and to confront the tendency to trivialize it under cultural influences.

Part One of this project discusses two contributing factors that shape the way people in Hong Kong perceive and practice relationships and forgiveness. The first factor is the manner in which they have been deeply rooted in Confucianism. The second factor is the impact that stems from western individualism. This section then analyzes how the first and second factors together distort the way Christians perceive and practice biblically based forgiveness, defined as authentic forgiveness in this project, at Jachin Church as well as in many other churches in Hong Kong.

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Part Two of this project provides a literature review in Chapter 2, and it discusses the theological and biblical foundation of authentic forgiveness in Chapter 3. The literature review provides an overview of works that focus on the following topics: the inevitability of conflict and hurt in human life, the meaning of authentic forgiveness and its key elements, and the tendency to trivialize authentic forgiveness under the cultural influences of the East and the West. Regarding theological and biblical foundations of authentic forgiveness, Chapter 3 examines the theological concepts of God’s will for forgiveness and communion and of Christian forgiveness as communion with God and with one another. It also explores the biblical foundation of what authentic forgiveness is and the relationship between repentance and forgiveness in the Old and New Testaments. Understanding the importance of genuine repentance helps one to confront the trivialization of authentic forgiveness as cheap grace, the mere pursuit of harmony, or a unilateral act of self-care.

The final part of this project develops a ministry plan to implement the theory into practice for Jachin Church. This ministry plan involves recruiting and training pastors and lay leaders to lead people toward authentic forgiveness, which would take place in small focus groups for the entire congregation of Jachin Church. This chapter also details both quantitative and qualitative means to assess the effectiveness of the new ministry initiative.
CHAPTER 1
CONFLICT AND FORGIVENESS IN HONG KONG

As mentioned above, there are two contributing factors shaping the way people in Hong Kong perceive forgiveness. These include the eastern tradition rooted in Confucianism and the western individualistic culture. This chapter discusses and examines how these two factors taint the way Christians in Hong Kong perceive and practice authentic forgiveness.

Conflict and Forgiveness in the Chinese Tradition

Confucianism is the first factor that shapes the way people in Hong Kong perceive relationships and forgiveness. This section explores how traditional Chinese see personhood, virtues, values, and relationships, which become the incubating ground for them to perceive and deal with conflicts, resolution, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

In the Analects, Confucius said, “In the application of the rites, harmony is to be prized (禮之用，和為貴).”\(^1\) In the ethics of Confucianism, each person is never viewed as

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\(^1\) 文灼非和鄭赤琰：《中國關係學》 (香港：香港中文大學香港亞大研究所，1996)，頁 19 (Cheuk Fei Man and Check Yim Cheng, *The Studies of Chinese Relationship* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Chinese
an individual, but as part of a community. How Chinese live and act in a society are linked with many aspects, such as other people’s feelings, the consequence of one’s different expressions, family hierarchy, and harmonious relationships. Harmony is both the goal of personal virtue and human society. Further, traditional Chinese are relatively humble and inexpressive as compared to westerners. Confucius once said to his students, “The way of a person of virtue is threefold, but I am not equal to it. Virtuous, he is free from anxieties; wise, he is free from perplexities; courageous, he is free from fear (君子道者三，我無能焉：仁者不憂，知者不惑，勇者不懼).” There is an interesting point in this statement. When Confucius taught his students what a person of virtue should be, right at the beginning he stated that he was not qualified to be one of these. This is a surprising statement, since Confucius was the founder of the philosophy. But he was exhibiting this virtue of humility.

Inexpressiveness and humility cause older generations to rarely express words of love and appreciation to those who are close to them, such as saying, “I love you” or “I am proud of you” in public or even privately. Rather, they keep silent of their abilities and good deeds. One may see some older parents show appreciation for the children of other families, but they do not do so to their own children. In fact, many traditional Chinese may even publicly deny any praise given to their children or grandchildren by others, so that the family can appear to be humble. For example, if a neighbor says to the


2 文和鄭，頁 (Man and Cheng), 16-19.

3 Wikisource, “Confucius.”
parents that their child is polite and clever, a typical answer given by the parents would be, “No, no, no. Not at all! No!” This reaction is very different from how western parents react to a neighbor who says the same thing.

Harmony, humility, and inexpressiveness are common characteristics of many traditional Chinese. As discussed, the core values and virtues of Confucianism shape the mindset of traditional Chinese in Hong Kong in the areas of relationship, expression, dignity, conflict, and forgiveness in a personal and a communal sense. These can be traced back to the “Five Constant Virtues (五常)” and “Three Cardinal Guides (三綱).”

Of the Five Constant Virtues (五常), Confucius expounded on three virtues: Ren (仁, meaning benevolence), Yi (義, meaning righteousness), and Li (禮, meaning propriety). Mencius, a follower of Confucius, further developed one more virtue of Zhi (智, meaning wisdom). Other followers later developed the fifth virtue, Xin (信, meaning trust), in the first century BCE. Confucius believed that human beings are different from other species due to their potential for moral virtues. This potential and the development of moral character determine our human dignity. Different from the western values of rationality and self-determination as factors to realize humanity, Confucius emphasized moral virtues as the distinguishing characteristic of humanity.4

In relation to humanity, Mencius believed that human being is born with four seeds of moral virtues: Ren, Yi, Li and Zhi, for he said, “Heaven is the author of the

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4 Julia Po-Wah Tao Lai, “Reconstruction of Traditional Values for Culturally Sensitive Practice,” in Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage, ed. by Katherine P. H. Young and Anita Y. L. Fok (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005), 276-277.
virtues in me (天生德於予).”5 These virtues are as real as the four human limbs. Human beings should cultivate and develop these virtues just like they develop their limbs. Although everyone is born with the potential for these virtues, it is necessary for one to cultivate, develop, make choices, act, and be provided with a suitable environment in order to realize and practice these virtues and become a moral person. To become a moral person with full moral potential, human effort is crucial. Mencius said, “By nature, humans are nearly alike. By practice, they become very different (性相近也，習相遠也).”6

Among the four virtues, Ren (benevolence) is the highest virtue. The word Ren (benevolence) is formed by two Chinese words: “two” and “men.” So, it carries a sense of getting along with one another harmoniously and benevolently. If humans are true to themselves and to others, Ren (benevolence) would drive them to love others and Yi (righteousness) would motivate them to fulfill their moral duties to others. Ren and Yi are interrelated and work hand in hand to promote social harmony.7

Traditional Chinese put a lot of human effort to develop Ren (benevolence) and Yi (righteousness), and become moral persons. By practicing Li (propriety), Ren (benevolence) and Yi (righteousness) can be revealed in ones’ life. Li (propriety) is the way, route, and standard to achieve Ren (benevolence) and Yi (righteousness). In order to practice Li (propriety), two phases are significant. The first phase is “subduing the self (克己).” This phase requires one to subdue and cultivate oneself. It is illustrated, for

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5 Ibid., 278 and Wikisource, “Confucius.”
example, by what Confucius once said, “Look not at what is contrary to propriety; listen not to what is contrary to propriety; speak not what is contrary to propriety; make no movement which is contrary to propriety (非禮勿視、非禮勿聽、非禮勿言、非禮勿動).” The “don’ts” are what traditional Chinese are conscious of and practicing. Another example is, “Do not do unto others what you do not want done unto you (己所不欲，勿施於人).” This is similar to what the Bible says, “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you” (Matthew 7:12). However, the Bible states it in a positive and active manner, whereas Confucius worded it negatively with “don’ts.” The “don’ts” restrict traditional Chinese from saying too much. The element of subduing the self enables one to get along well with others, but the flip side is that it contributes to the inexpressiveness of traditional Chinese. It is not uncommon to see that when there is disagreement, many traditional Chinese tend to be inexpressive, tolerate, compromise, and make concessions even if other parties have wronged them. Therefore, “I don’t agree with you” is not a common statement among traditional Chinese.

The second phase of practicing Li (propriety) is “loving others (愛人).” Mencius stated that the phase of “loving others” is part of human nature because “all men have

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8 文和鄭，頁和 (Man and Cheng), 15, 19, and Wikisource, “Confucius.”

9 Ibid.


11 文和鄭，頁 (Man and Cheng), 16-19.
natural sympathies; and all men have a sense of pity (惻隱之心，人皆有之).” The path of “loving others” begins with parents and siblings. Family is the starting point to practice Ren (benevolence), and then the goal of loving others would be extended from filial piety to those who are farther from us, unrelated to us, and even to the non-human sphere. Practicing Li (propriety) is meaningful, but overdoing it may cause people to bury issues in their minds as they may be unwilling to open up or to confront others when necessary.

In addition to the virtues, Confucianism also encourages its followers to obey the Three Cardinal Guides (三綱). Confucius focused on relationship and connectedness as the essence of human existence, which is different from individualism and separateness in the West. Chinese usually forgo individual interest of a person for the benefit of the group since community is often their priority. The relationships and value of family, clan, and society of traditional Chinese are very strong and closely tied. Confucianism developed the “Three Cardinal Guides (三綱)” in order to maintain social order in the nation, family, and marriage. The Three Cardinal Guides are “Ruler Guides the Officials (君為臣綱),” “Father Guides the Son (父為子綱),” and “Husband Guides the Wife (夫為妻綱).”

In accordance with the Three Cardinal Guides, officials are submissive and respectful to the ruler, sons to their fathers, and wives to their husbands. Confucius believed that if every person knew his or her proper role in family and in society and

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12 Ibid., 19 and Wikipedia, “Mencius.”


14 Ibid.
could fulfill the related duty and responsibility properly, social stability and social
harmony could be achieved and maintained. When needed, people would sacrifice or
suppress the individual self in order to submit and obey the husband, family, or nation.

The family unit is like an invisible castle and acts as the safest harbor for all. To
many, the most important goal in life is to bring glory and honor to one’s family. There
is a Chinese saying that states, “Bring honor to one’s ancestors (光宗耀祖).”\(^\text{15}\) The concept
of filial piety has been well accepted as the paragon of ethics in Chinese society. Chinese
tradition is a culture of honor and shame. For a nation, Confucius believed that only
those who are submissive and obedient to parents can become loyal officials and
ministers. In the clan, the individual’s opinion and honor are not important when
compared to the reputation of the clan. People would sacrifice a talent for the sake of
glorifying or benefitting one’s family and clan. The challenge posed in this kind of
society is that it is not easy for human beings to have their own identities and
individualities, as more emphasis is placed on the identity of the family or clan.\(^\text{16}\) In a
culture of honor and shame, confession is uncommon and unacceptable because it is
considered a shame in Chinese tradition to reveal personal failure to others, not even to
relatives and close friends.\(^\text{17}\) The phrase, “I am sorry,” is rarely heard.

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\(^{15}\) 文和鄭，頁 (Man and Cheng), 17.


\(^{17}\) Augsburger, Conflict Mediation, 95-98, 265-267.
Regarding marriage, no matter how bad a relationship becomes, if the couple is rooted in Chinese tradition, they often remain silent or inexpressive in order to sustain the marriage and maintain the reputation of the family. Another Chinese saying states, “Family shames must not be spread around (家醜不得外傳).” Even if the harmony of the marriage is only on the surface, in order to maintain customary moral standards, the couple would sacrifice their individual interest for the benefit and “face” of the family. To maintain honor, every family member subdues his or her personality to cultivate unlimited patience and perseverance for the family and society.\(^\text{18}\) Face is a matter of reputation and it is interdependent on others’ face giving, so tolerance is necessary for living together in Chinese society. A couple recently shared with me that they have been sleeping in different beds for over ten years although under the same roof. They have not talked much to each other over the past decades. It is a spiritual divorce. They still maintain their marriage, partly because of their children, and partly because of reputation, honor, and face saving. Unfortunately, this kind of case is not an isolated one in traditional Chinese society.

Based on the content discussed above regarding how Confucianism sees virtues and relationships, it is not difficult for one to understand how traditional Chinese deal with conflict and differences. In addition to the traditional thought of “forebear and give in for it is the key meaning of propriety (讓，禮之主也),”\(^\text{19}\) Confucius believed that “the


\(^{19}\) 文和鄭，頁 (Man and Cheng), 20.
person of virtue has no contentions (君子無所爭).”\textsuperscript{20} That means contentions should be avoided. Only by giving in can harmony be achieved, and only harmony can result in peace and comfort. Avoidance of conflict to achieve harmony is the norm in traditional Chinese society. While harmony is an important virtue of Confucianism, Confucius did value differences among people to some degree, for he said, “The person of virtue harmonizes but does not conform; the mean person conforms but does not harmonize (君子和而不同, 小人同而不和).”\textsuperscript{21} Ideally, harmony is not supposed to be equal to conformity and should happen even in a state of difference. It is a balance between differentiation and integration.

However, for traditional Chinese, greater emphasis is placed on harmony and public conformity than difference. When there is unresolved disagreement, traditional Chinese prefer forbearance and perseverance to open discussion. Sometimes, being careful not to hurt others is not simply a matter of being kind, but an avoidance of bringing the conflict into the open and hurting others’ dignity and shaming them. To cautiously prevent hurting people’s dignity and causing shame is a hallmark of social skill. However, tackling conflicts based upon face saving can lead to the potential danger of not having a genuine resolution of conflicts as no details are ever discussed.\textsuperscript{22} In short, Confucian moral tradition lacks the western ideal of justice and equality because the

\textsuperscript{20}文和鄭, 聲 (Man and Cheng), 20 and Wikisource, “Confucius.”

\textsuperscript{21} Lai, “Reconstruction of Traditional Values,” 280.

highest ideal of Confucianism is to become a moral person who is benevolent and loves others harmoniously, but not to focus on equality, justice, and fairness.\textsuperscript{23}

With all these virtues and values mentioned above, it is also important to discuss how Confucius viewed \textit{Shu} (恕, forgiveness). A person once asked Confucius about this principle and “whether injury should be recompensed with kindness and virtue (以德報怨，何如？),” to which Confucius replied, “Recompense injury with straightness, and recompense virtue with virtue (以直報怨, 以德報德).”\textsuperscript{24} “Recompensing injury with straightness” means one should deal with hurt caused by the offender with integrity, wisdom, and a pure heart, without being affected by one’s crooked self and mind. It also means that when wronged, one can seek recompense and ask for an apology on a fair basis with integrity to balance justice with forgiveness.\textsuperscript{25} However, as discussed earlier, when there is an unresolved conflict resulting in tension between justice and harmony, Confucius prefers social harmony to a just resolution of the conflicts.

There is a Chinese saying that every Chinese knows: “The fewer incidents the better (多一事不如少一事).” When facing conflict, many traditional Chinese prefer less open discussion because it may cause confrontation and disrupt harmony. Even though open discussion can enhance fairness and justice, any disruption of harmony can easily bring such discussion to an abrupt end. If the conflict involves a senior person as an offender,


\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{25} Lai, “Reconstruction of Traditional Values,” 283-284.
the situation is more complicated and hierarchical. The victim may be considered disrespectful and disrupting harmony if one wants to interrupt a conversation and raise an open discussion to address an unjust treatment. Traditional Chinese are often expected to compromise, and it is not easy for them to think that a disagreement can be an opportunity in which new concordance can be formed. Therefore, when there is contention and in order to maintain harmony, traditional Chinese may act inexpressively to avoid conflicts, bury the thoughts in their minds, and leave the issues unresolved. They might do nothing and wait with forbearance and perseverance for the tide to turn. And if nothing happens and there is no improvement in the situation, any side who loses patience could burst out emotionally and uncontrollably. This kind of safeguard of social harmony does not only happen in Chinese society, but also in many Chinese churches in Hong Kong. Younger pastors or members are often not able to speak up and discuss openly if the conflicts involve senior pastors or elders.

To sum up, many traditional Chinese see and live out relationships and forgiveness through the lens of Confucianism. Virtues and values such as harmony, humility, inexpressiveness, community, hierarchy, respectfulness, submission, face saving, and honor are highly treasured and practiced in Chinese society. Sometimes, equality, justice, and fairness are sacrificed in exchange for these values when facing conflict, hurt, and forgiveness. The safeguard of social harmony at any cost incurs risk in the long run, as true social harmony is only possible with a reasonable degree of fairness.

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26 Augsburger, Conflict Mediation, 98.

27 Ibid., 95.
and justice. Augsburger contends, “No justice, no peace; know justice, know peace.”

Authentic forgiveness is more than social harmony, submission, or face saving. It is about genuine discussion of the conflicts and hurt in depth in order that the offender is given an opportunity to confess and repent, and also reconcile with the offended. For Jesus says, “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault. . . . If he listens to you, you have won your brother over” (Matthew 18:15-17).

**Forgiveness in Western Culture**

Apart from the Chinese tradition mentioned above, the people of Hong Kong, especially the younger generations and those educated in the West, are immensely influenced by western individualism, which promotes freedom, fairness, justice, and equality. Therefore, this section examines how western culture perceives relationship and forgiveness. It discusses how western culture has shaped people to see the world as being made up of individuals rather than communities, and how it has influenced Christians to see Christianity as solitary rather than communal. It also explores how individualism influences the way westernized Chinese people and the Christian community in Hong Kong practice forgiveness as an intrapersonal and unilateral act rather than an interpersonal and mutual transaction that emphasizes restoration of relationship.

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28 David Augsburger, email to the author, June 5, 2015.
In western culture, individualism rules. Individualism promotes the moral worth of the individual and grants utmost importance to the individual. Autonomy in western culture is self-determination. To actualize individuality, individuals are free to shape their lives according to their own views. There are two sides to individualism – good and bad. Augsburger opines that individualism set free the human person from being an insignificant atom in the mass of humanity to a responsible agent with dignity, worth, and lasting significance. The idea enters the social mind and we have autonomy idolized, individualism as an “ism” exaggerating self-aggrandizement. So, it is the loss of balance between social responsibility and personal responsibility, between solidarity with others and solitary dignity that we deplore.

The problem of individualism arises when it goes to the extreme. Individualism encourages that the interests, goals, and desires of the individual precede those of the community, and this leads to a separation of people from each other.

Individualism has not only permeated western societies; it has also influenced Christian community. Many Christians see themselves living solitary lives rather than in solidarity with Christ and fellow Christians. In his book, *Ethics: Systemic Theology*, James McClendon warns the Christian community that theology, sociology, and biology do not see the world being made up of individuals, each separable from all others. He points out that though individualism, collectivism, socialism, capitalisms, dictatorships, and anarchies define our times, none of these is faithful to the way of the Torah and Jesus. Human beings are more than being individuals, and our true sociality is a

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30 David Augsburger, email to the author, November 4, 2016.
community of the church. Christ’s church is a community of care that reaches out in love and care to the world (John 3:16; Galatians 6:16). There is no solitary Christianity, and the moral life of Christians is a social life. Augsburger contends that this communal sense of Christianity is much closer to “Confucius than to Emanuel Kant, Rene Descartes, John Stuart Mill, and an endless list of western philosophers that have, since the enlightenment, made each human into an atom of self will and determination, thus creating the idolatry of autonomy.”

Because of the western individualistic task of self-care, forgiveness has become an intrapersonal process, rather than an interpersonal bridge to restore broken relationships. This individualistic culture has adversely influenced the way western people, as well as westernized Chinese people in Hong Kong, perceive and deal with forgiveness. Unilateral forgiveness becomes the norm due to various psychological and sociological reasons, such as self-love and the understanding of forgiveness as a private act of intrapsychic release unrelated to the community.

Individualism does not only influence western societies to practice unilateral forgiveness, it also blemishes the way many churches in Hong Kong understand and practice forgiveness as a unilateral act rather than as a social transaction of interpersonal reconciliation. Jones points out that a unilateral act from an individual trivializes forgiveness by making it therapeutically easy. The result is damaging to western

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32 Augsburger email, June 5, 2015.

societies as well as to Christian community because victims feel better by simply letting go with no sense of restoration and reconciliation of broken relationships. Jones also confronts the tendencies in churches and in other social contexts to believe that forgiveness is impossible because violence is the solution. He points out that forgiveness and reconciliation, which are designed to foster and maintain community, have become of little importance for four reasons:

First, forgiveness has become an increasingly marginal notion. Modernity’s emphasis on such themes as individual autonomy, isolated acts rather than character, inevitable progress rather than repentance . . . have all helped to undermine practices of forgiveness . . . [Second], as Christianity has increasingly distanced itself from its Jewish roots and became the established religion in the fourth century, practices and conceptions of forgiveness began to take different shapes. . . . For example, in Western Christianity the confession of sin . . . moved from the community to individualized and increasingly privatized contexts. . . . God’s forgiveness became principally an individual transaction between God and a particular person . . . with virtually no consequences for either Christian community or social and political life. . . . [Third], as Christians we have increasingly secularized our own language . . . Instead of practices of reconciliation, we talk about “managing conflict.” . . . We have not been . . . immunized against “therapeutic” language. When forgiveness is seen in primarily individualistic and privatistic terms, we lose sight of its central role in establishing a way of life – not only with our “inner” selves but also in our relations with others. [Fourth, we] emphasize that Christian forgiveness needs to be attentive to and in dialogue with psychological and psychoanalytic concerns if people are to become holy. . . . But, “therapeutic” language has increasingly distorted the grammar of Christian forgiveness. . . . Psychological language and practices have become more powerful than the language and practices of the gospel, not only in the whole culture but even in the Church.

The four problems stated above have impoverished the perception and practice of forgiveness in modern western culture and churches. Augsburger also makes a similar point that the practice of forgiveness in churches nowadays has become a unilateral act

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from an individual paradigm, rather than a mutual transaction of an interpersonal paradigm. He explains the difference between the two: “The first sets the offended person free by releasing all resentment, all claims for recognition of the injury by the offender, all demands for repentance and restitution; the second is a mutual recognition that repentance is genuine (repentance by one or both parties) and right relationships have been restored.”

Unilateral forgiveness has permeated Christian community.

Christianity is not solitary. The Christian community should not be influenced by individualism. McClendon believes that through the covenant meal at the Lord’s Table hosted by Christ, the communal life of Christians was formed. Since then, disciples have been connected to one another as community. To maintain community, Christ’s costly forgiveness of human beings and human beings’ costly forgiveness of one another are essential.

Forgiveness, writes Augsburger, “is not a private act of intrapsychic release but instead a truly social transaction of interpersonal reconciliation. The conflict belongs to the community as well as to the disputants . . . and the understanding of forgiveness is focused on regaining the others as brothers and sisters.”

**Conflict and Forgiveness for Christians in Hong Kong**

This section explores how both eastern tradition and western culture adversely influence the way churches in Hong Kong perceive and practice forgiveness. As mentioned in the Introduction, Hong Kong is an international city where one’s eastern

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roots meet western culture. Hong Kong became a British Colony in 1841 after the First Opium War. Even after the sovereignty of Hong Kong was transferred back to China from Britain on 30 June 1997, Hong Kong continues to remain very multicultural, and the legal languages are still both English and Chinese. Hong Kong remains closely connected with the western world.

Since the early 1990s, Hong Kong has become one of the most important financial centers alongside New York, London, and Tokyo. Its stock exchange was ranked among the top ten in terms of total market value of shares listed, market capitalization, and total equity fund raised in 2016. Mega firms from mainland China and across the globe have been coming to Hong Kong to set up their offices and go to the financial market to borrow money and raise capital funds. Many famous brands and firms all over the world have opened their shops and settled in Hong Kong. Many westerners have been working in Hong Kong for decades in various sectors, including retail, catering, banking, and finance, and many Chinese people of Hong Kong who studied abroad and experienced western culture have come back to live and work in Hong Kong. The official website of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region provides an introduction of Hong Kong as follows:

Hong Kong is a cosmopolitan metropolis where old tradition blends perfectly with western culture and post-modern trends. Ethnic Chinese make up the bulk of its population, but there is also a sizeable presence of expatriates and people of different ethnicities. . . . While the waves of western culture have long arrived on the shores of Hong Kong, traditional values are still held by many Chinese people. . . . Both English and Chinese are the official languages. This bilingualism features in daily life in Hong Kong with many people speaking

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fluent English. . . . All international newspapers are available in newsstands or convenience shops. . . . At the end of December 2013, Hong Kong had nearly 160 licensed banks, of which nearly 150 were foreign owned. Of the world's top 100 banks, 70 operate there.40

Undoubtedly, Hong Kong is a society that has been immensely exposed to and penetrated by global influence and western culture for decades. Therefore, a Chinese person born and brought up in Hong Kong lives between two cultures, and the way one perceives relationships, conflict, and forgiveness is also influenced by a mixture of both the East and the West. If that Chinese person subsequently accepts Jesus as his or her savior and attends a church service in Hong Kong, he or she would then be exposed to the values of the church which have been heavily influenced by western culture.

Over the last two centuries, Hong Kong has been blessed by missionary church-planting movements from western countries. However, Darrell L. Guder, in his article, “The Church as Missional Community,” points out that in the colonial period, the missionary movement was criticized as the insensitive imposition of western culture on the non-Christendom world.41 This imposition includes individualism. As discussed in the section above, western churches have been significantly influenced by individualism. Thus, if a Chinese person born and brought up in Hong Kong subsequently becomes a

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Christian, that person would be likely to learn an individualistic view of the practice of forgiveness on top of the Chinese traditional view on forgiveness.\(^{42}\)

Regarding Jachin Church, approximately 60 percent of the adult members have received tertiary education level or above, as compared to approximately 30 percent of the Hong Kong population.\(^{43}\) This shows that many members at Jachin Church are knowledgeable, bilingual, and capable of working in industries exposed to western culture, such as in the fields of finance, medicine, law, banking, accounting, and the like. Thus, they have inherited the Chinese tradition and are influenced immensely by western individualistic culture. Further, in the past two decades, most pastors of Tung Fook Church and Jachin Church have preached messages of forgiveness focusing on a unilateral act and release. Some interpret the phrase, “Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry” (Ephesians 4:26) as saying that one should bear and resolve one’s inner hurts by oneself, forgive the offender, and let go of one’s right to justice, leaving it to God. This is an act done for one’s own good and to free oneself from pain and anger independently of others’ attitudes. Repentance and reconciliation are seldom taught or encouraged, as they do not want to disrupt harmony.

To “forgive those who hurt us” without a genuine apology and repentance from the offender is not authentic forgiveness. This is “a forgiving heart,” “a willing heart to

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\(^{42}\) This phenomenon occurs at Jachin Church and Tung Fook Church as well as in many other churches in Hong Kong. I have discussed this project with numerous pastors of other churches and seminary professors in Hong Kong. Most of them, if not all, indicated that their church members also tend to practice forgiveness unilaterally, with little emphasis on open discussion of the issues in depth, especially if such discussion would disrupt harmony.

forgive,” or “a love of your enemy,” which is an important step, but is only the first step of Jesus’ teaching about authentic forgiveness. It is incomprehensive and damaging in a communal sense. It is insufficient to renew people from their broken past and reconcile impaired relationships to the full extent that God originally intended. God does not only want one to be healed unilaterally, but he also requires the offender to face his or her wrongdoings, confess, and make restitution (Leviticus 6:1-7, Mathew 18:15-17), the victim to forgive (Mathew 18:21-22), and both parties to reconcile (Luke 17:3 and Matthew 18:15). This should be a social transaction to reconstruct the community.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed two contributing factors that both shape and distort the way Christians in Hong Kong perceive and practice forgiveness. These are the influence of the eastern tradition, primarily Confucianism, and the influence of western culture, particularly individualism. Given the pervasiveness of Confucianism and the western individualistic culture, the majority of the members at Jachin Church perceive and practice forgiveness more along these lines rather than as the Bible teaches. Churches must intentionally provide biblical teaching of authentic forgiveness and how it can be practiced in one’s life. The next chapter reviews several books that examine conflict, sin, hurt, and forgiveness; they identify authentic forgiveness and the importance of practicing it.
PART TWO

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews seven books, all of which deal with conflict, sin, hurt, and forgiveness. The first two books explore the fact that sin, conflict, and hurt occur every day. While some conflict and hurt are the consequences of sin, some occurs even when people are acting with good intentions. How one deals with sin, conflict, and hurt will determine if one will benefit from it or be destroyed by it. The next three books discuss the meaning of authentic forgiveness and confronts the way it is trivialized, both in the Chinese tradition of avoiding conflict and in a western individualistic culture. The last two books focus on the importance of practicing authentic forgiveness and the relevant elements that could result in healing, forgiving, reconciling, and reopening a new future. Only authentic forgiveness can turn conflict and hurt into something constructive.

The Inevitability of Sin, Conflict, and Hurt

Sin: Radical Evil in Soul and Society, by Ted Peters

Ted Peters points out that the Greek words translated as “sin” in the New Testament include hamartia, meaning “to miss the mark,” adikia, meaning “injustice” or
“unrighteousness,” and *anomia*, meaning “lawlessness.”¹ The essence of all sin is one’s unwillingness to acknowledge one’s creatureliness and the failure to trust and depend on God. People fail to love God and their neighbors as commanded by Jesus. Instead, they establish their lives on a deceptive and independent basis. The effect of sin is a person’s insensitivity, unkindness, injustice, cruelty, and destruction towards his or her fellow-creatures. Many sinful activities are in some sense unintentional, that is, people believe they are acting for good, but their blindness and self-deceit make these activities evil. Other sinful activities are radically and deliberately done.² The consequences of sin, whether it is committed intentionally or not, make conflict and hurt inevitable in life.

Peters describes seven steps to radical evil, which constitutes a path progressing from innocence to maximum profanity.³ The first step is anxiety. Anxiety itself is not sinful, but feeling anxious readies one for sin. The cause of anxiety is the fear of loss. One is tempted to combat anxiety either by lying to oneself or by stealing from others.

The second step is what Peters calls “unfaith.” If people lack faith, anxiety will take control of them and they may strike out in violence. Lacking faith means not trusting God and one’s neighbor. If people trust God, who created them and sustains them, they will have no fear when facing anxiety and temptation. If one trusts his or her neighbors, that person is not likely to hurt them.


² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 11-16.
The third step is pride, which is treating oneself as if one were God. In doubt, people do not trust God and their neighbors, so their own egos rule. They hide their anxiety and exert control over others. Pride makes people believe that the world is made up of winners and losers, and they must always be winners. When facing resistance, they would go to war to try to eliminate it.

The fourth step is concupiscence, which encompasses desire, lust, envy, and greed. Desire makes one want to possess things that others currently possess. This stimulates one to possess more than what one needs to survive, and sometimes it leads a person to steal from others to satisfy one’s unlimited desire. Better or more houses, cars, profit, livelihood, sexual lust, and the like are all that people want to possess to protect them from the anxiety of loss. It is an illusion, for Jesus said, “You fool! This very night, your life will be demanded from you” (Luke 12:20).

The fifth step is self-justification, that is, one attempts to make oneself righteous, even if it takes a lie or a scapegoat to do so. For example, a guilty child blames his brother for the missing chocolate or an unfaithful husband blames his wife for not being attractive enough. Gossip is a common way in which people verbally devalue others with sins that they have not committed. This happens not only in the secular world, but also at church when someone is jealous of others’ giftedness of serving in leadership. Self-justification is the denial of one’s wrongful acts and the use of another evil to justify one’s own evil.

The sixth step is cruelty, which is one of the evil fruits of self-justification. Cruel people can still be sensitive to the feelings of others, but they choose to ignore them.
This cruelty grows out of the illusion that one can eliminate the anxiety of loss by destroying others.

The seventh and final step is blasphemy, the worst of all sins. It comes in two forms: covert and overt. The former hides the sin under the name of something good with the use of religious symbols to enhance one’s own position and power. In the latter, there is no more hiding, and blasphemy is evil in the name of evil.⁴

People are facing these sins every day at church, in the workplace, and at home, and the sins are caused by either the struggles within their minds or the actions of others. They are at war to choose to trust God or their own ego, to love their neighbor or their own selves. It is crucial for people to know how to fight sin and evil. In his book, The Prince of Darkness: Radical Evil and the Power of God in History, Jeffrey Burton Russell writes,

> We are called to fight evil, but we are also called to know how to fight it. Evil is not effectively resisted with hatred and with guns. Evil cannot be defeated with evil, negation with negation, terror with terror, missile with missile. The process of negation must be reversed. Only affirmation can overcome negation; evil can be integrated only by good; hatred can be laid to rest only by love. The only response to evil that has ever worked is the response of Jesus . . . that is to lead a life of love.⁵

One can only combat sin with good and love. We are enabled to love because we have first been loved by the Creator. When people realize that they have received the grace of being forgiven, they can borrow and rest upon the goodness of the forgiver.

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⁴ Ibid., 11-16.

They no longer need to rely on the illusion of their own goodness. They do not need to depreciate others to uphold themselves. Peters believes that the most powerful weapons against wrongful acts are, among other things, the law of love (Matthew 5:44, 22:34-40) and forgiveness. In response to radical evil, people need to show radical love, which is rooted in God to overcome hatred and hurt; only then can one forgive authentically.⁶

_A Work of Heart: Understanding How God Shapes Spiritual Leaders_  
by Reggie McNeal

Reggie McNeal describes how God shapes spiritual leaders’ hearts and develops their lives through six major themes: culture, call, community, communion, conflict, and commonplace. It is inspiring to learn that conflict is indeed a major element shaping our hearts.⁷ Some people have the strength of a sensitive heart and personal connectedness to care for others, but on the flip side, this also renders them vulnerable when exposed to the pain associated with conflict and hurt. Unless people have developed a strategy to deal with conflict and hurt, they withdraw themselves from these situations, and their hearts either collapse or become stunted and enclosed.

Conflict and hurt are inevitable. But the presence of conflict does not necessarily mean the displeasure of God. Disagreements sometimes happen even when people are doing the right things. McNeal describes examples in which Jesus and other biblical heroes struggled with conflict even when they were faithfully following God’s will.⁸

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⁶ Peters, _Sin_, 20-21, 264-265.


⁸ Ibid., 155-156.
Moses battled with the strongest king on earth, and he also had to struggle with his fellow people whom God delivered through him. David fought against his enemies to protect and extend Israel’s borders, and he also had to deal with attacks upon his life by his own king, Saul. Paul’s never-ending struggle with the opponents of the Gospel caused him to be beaten, stoned, and imprisoned many times, and he also had to deal with sharp disagreements with his own friends and fellow believers (see Acts 15). Jesus’ love and care for the blind and captives induced many attacks from the Pharisees, and he also had to address arguments among the disciples. The disciples were faithfully evangelizing and caring for others, but they had to deal with accusations and threats by authorities because of healing a crippled man (Act 3-4) and the issues arisen from the lies made by the new believers (Acts 5). These remind us that as Chinese, we do not have to be afraid of conflict, which may disrupt harmony as we cannot avoid it. Instead, we should face it positively and even benefit from it as stated below.

Conflict does strengthen some and destroy others. To benefit from it, one should not seek to merely survive the conflict. McNeal believes that one can benefit from conflict if one welcomes it as a heart-shaping tool of God. Chinese tradition encourages people to avoid confrontation and conflict, and Chinese tend to keep differences and disagreements within to preserve harmony. McNeal offers a different view of conflict, as a means to enrich life rather than impair it and to develop human character.\(^9\) McNeal suggests some key strategies for being strengthened by conflict: one should expect conflict as no one can escape it; choose the pain and hurt that is worthwhile to respond to;

\(^9\) Ibid., 156, 164.
examine the critics and see if they have a point; look in the mirror and do a thorough self-examination; get good advice from godly people, Scripture, and God himself by prayer; be kind and honest to oneself and one’s enemies, being motivated by love; forgive and reconcile; and make a decision to allow God access to one’s heart and grow.  

Forgiveness is critical. McNeal states that failure to forgive “binds people to pain and hurt . . . blocks the blessing of God . . . [and the unforgiver] winds up with bitter spirits.”  

He explains that those who do not forgive “see the world and life experiences through victim eyes. . . . What they see is a self-fulfilling scenario of rejection, spiritual entropy, and discouragement.” Those who forgive allow God to do radical surgery and rid the heart of the cancer cells of unforgiveness. McNeal also points out that we “can always afford to forgive, [but we] cannot afford not to forgive.”

**Confrontation of the Trivialization of Authentic Forgiveness**

*Forgive and Forget: Healing the Hurts We Don’t Deserve*  
by Lewis B. Smedes

Right from the beginning of his book, *Forgive and Forget*, Lewis Smedes frankly states a reality, “Deep hurts . . . do not heal with the coming of the sun. . . . Some people are lucky; they seem to have gracious glands that secrete the juices of forgetfulness. . . . But most of us find that the pains of our past keep rolling through our memories, and

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10 Ibid., 156-174.

11 Ibid., 174.

12 Ibid., 175.

13 Ibid.
there’s nothing we can do to stop the flow.”

He believes if a person refuses to face hurt, that person’s life will be destroyed.

God wants people to forgive. He began by forgiving people and then he invited people to do the same by forgiving each other. Fairness is natural, but forgiveness is not. Fairness means people should pay for the wrongful acts they commit, but forgiveness involves the power of love to break this natural rule. Smedes carefully differentiates what forgiving is not. Forgiving is not forgetting. Forgiving is not excusing. A person forgives because he or she refuses to excuse someone and wants to hold that person accountable. Forgiving is not the same as smothering conflict as smothering may rob the victim of the chance to forgive. Accepting people is not forgiving. People forgive when someone does something unacceptable to them. Forgiving is not tolerance.

Smedes has remarkable insight regarding hurt. He describes hurt as having three dimensions: personal pain, unfair pain, and deep pain. When one feels this three-dimensional pain, one has a wound that can be healed only by forgiveness. First, explains Smedes, personal pain means one can only forgive when he or she has been wronged. A person has no right to forgive when he or she has not been hurt; only victims have that right. If someone claims to forgive a perpetrator when the forgiver was

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14 Lewis B. Smedes, Forgive and Forget: Healing the Hurts We Don’t Deserve (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2007), xv.

15 Ibid., xv-xvi.

16 Ibid., 38-49.

17 Ibid., 5-19.

18 Ibid., 5-7.
not the one who was hurt, that person cheapens forgiveness. The second dimension, unfair pain, occurs when one is hurt unfairly by others.\textsuperscript{19} This is pain that one does not deserve or that is not necessary is unfair. There is a difference between fair pain, such as a mother yelling at her son for slapping his sister, and unfair pain, such as a drug addict yelling at his daughter for requesting food when she is hungry. The last dimension of pain, explains Smedes, is deep pain. Some hurts are shallow and slight, and they may be annoying or disappointing, but they are not worthy of any action. For instance, someone cuts the queue. But deep pain incurs hurts that separate one from the person who causes the pain. These hurts require one to take action to address them.\textsuperscript{20}

The hurt caused by the three-dimensional pain may involve any of the following: disloyalty, betrayal, or brutality. Disloyalty is someone close treating you like a stranger. Betrayal is someone close treating you like an enemy. Brutality is either someone close or a stranger treating you violently.\textsuperscript{21}

Although Smedes has remarkable insight on hurt, this book has a severe limitation in that the way in which he sees and practices forgiveness actually trivializes authentic forgiveness. Smedes focuses on intraphysic release that emerges from psychology and therapeutic culture. While Paul Tillich believes genuine forgiveness is participation and reunion that overcomes the power of estrangement and is completed only when people are brought together in a renewed relationship that is mutually accepting and reconciled,

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 7-9.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 13-15.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 15-19.
Smedes responds, “Tillich was wrong. . . . We can have reality even if we do not have the whole of it . . . We can forgive and be free in our own memories.”\(^\text{22}\) Smedes internalizes forgiveness within an individual’s heart and mind and believes that to heal the hurt is a therapeutic mindset that underplays or even distorts central practices of authentic forgiveness of responsibility, repentance, and reconciliation. According to Jones, Christian forgiveness must be “embodied in a way of life, a life marked by specific practices that enable us to unlearn patterns of sin, to repent for specific sins, and to foster habits of holy living.”\(^\text{23}\) None of these is of concern to Smedes, as he ignores the questions of sin that cause the hurt and the need for repentance. This is shown when Smedes states that the purpose of forgiveness is “for our own sakes” and to “free our own memories,” and that the steps to forgiveness include “healing ourselves” rather than being healed by God in the process of practicing forgiveness.\(^\text{24}\)

Further, although Smedes inspiringly invites people to ask for and put on “magic eyes” to have a new way of looking at things and see those who hurt them as weak, needy, and fallible,\(^\text{25}\) he does not mention that they also need to use “magic eyes” to see how God sees them as sinners who need to repent, to be forgiven, and to reconcile with God and others.\(^\text{26}\) Jones argues that Smedes’s therapeutic forgiveness is “divorced from

\(^{22}\) Ibid., 30.

\(^{23}\) Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness*, 49.

\(^{24}\) Smedes, *Forgive and Forget*, 13, 27, 30.

\(^{25}\) Ibid., 27.

Christian practices and doctrine . . . and a false compassion without attention to repentance and culpability . . . a failure to exercise a discerning judgement oriented toward graceful reconciliation.”\textsuperscript{27} Based on the small-scale pilot run done recently, which is discussed further in Part Three, the way many members at Jachin Church perceive and practice forgiveness is similar to what Smedes describes, which is a unilateral act that undermines authentic forgiveness. Authentic forgiveness is more than feeling, healing, and health; it is also about responsibility, repentance, and reconciliation.

\textit{Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis}  
by L. Gregory Jones

L. Gregory Jones provides a Christian theological analysis of authentic forgiveness in his book, \textit{Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis}. Jones employs a stereoscopic vision that reorients our understanding about the presuppositions and implications of authentic forgiveness. Apart from the theological analysis, Jones also addresses social, cultural, philosophical, and psychological theories. To confront the tendency to trivialize authentic forgiveness under cultural influences, Jones insists on taking the Christian doctrine of the Triune God to be central to the most truthful and comprehensive account of authentic forgiveness.\textsuperscript{28} He states, “While I applaud the growing conviction that forgiveness can become a means of breaking apart cycles of violence, vengeance, and bitterness, I suggest that the issues need to be more carefully

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 52-53.

\textsuperscript{28} Jones, \textit{Embodying Forgiveness}, xiii-xiv.
situated within the Christian doctrine of the Triune God.”

Jones resists faulty understandings of forgiveness, challenges the assumption that forgiveness does not involve accountability, and insists that one cannot separate forgiveness from justice.

Authentic forgiveness is more than absolution of guilt. Jones argues that confession and forgiveness should take place communally based upon the Trinitarian idea that God is a communal being. God, as self-giving communion, is willing to bear the cost of forgiveness to restore humanity to communion in his eschatological Kingdom. In response, human beings are called to embody forgiveness, aiming to restore communion between God and humankind, and with one another, seeking to remember the past truthfully, repair brokenness, heal division, and reconcile relationships.

Jones confronts the tendencies in the Church and in other social contexts to see the world either as “lighter” than it is or as “darker” than it is. To see the world as lighter than it is means the tendency to trivialize forgiveness by making it therapeutically easy without repentance and justice. Dietrich Bonhoeffer polemicized against cheap grace. He resisted, among other things, preaching forgiveness without requiring repentance and communion without confession. Sin cannot be overlooked or forgotten. Instead, it must be confronted and judged in the context of forgiveness. Human sin is forgiven only when

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29 Ibid., xi.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid., xii, 163.
it is confronted and judged. To see the world as darker than it is, on the other hand, means that forgiveness is impossible as violence is ultimately the master of us all.\textsuperscript{33}

Jones points out that there are problems with forgiveness in western culture. Forgiveness has become a marginal notion with emphasis on “individual autonomy, isolated acts rather than character, an inevitable process rather than repentance, and the fascination with technique.”\textsuperscript{34} Authentic forgiveness, which is designed to foster repentance, reconciliation, and maintenance of community, is of little importance. Confession of sin, which in its origins is a communal practice, has moved from the community to the private sphere. The language and practice of Christian forgiveness have become increasingly secularized, and they emphasize therapeutic language and practice. Our inner selves are more highly valued than relationships with others, and the intrapersonal dimension has become more important to people than the interpersonal dimension.\textsuperscript{35} All of these trivialize authentic forgiveness, for Jones states, “Psychological language and practices have become more powerful than the language and practices of the gospel, not only in the whole culture but even in the Church. In Bonhoeffer’s terms, Christians have substituted cheap grace for the costly grace of discipleship.”\textsuperscript{36}

Jones resists the notion of having either grace without judgment or judgement without grace, or of having forgiveness without repentance or repentance without

\textsuperscript{33} Jones, \textit{Embodying Forgiveness}, xv.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 37.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 37-39.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 39.
forgiveness. Grace without judgement is cheap grace that results in no transformation of lives; judgement without grace results in holding others accountable and unbroken cycles of violence. Forgiveness without repentance invites continuity of sin; repentance without forgiveness can lead to despair and self-destruction. To confront the tendency to trivialize authentic forgiveness, Jones asserts, “When we fail to see and embody this forgiveness in relation to particular lives, specific situations, and concrete practices, we too easily transmute the notions of judgment and grace, forgiveness and repentance, into abstractions that destroy rather than give life.” This is applicable to the traditional Chinese context, which often avoids facing specific details of conflict in order to maintain harmony. This may eventually destroy life.

*Helping People Forgive*
*by David W. Augsburger*

In his book *Helping People Forgive*, Augsburger asks questions about forgiveness, such as, what exactly forgiveness is, whether forgiveness is optional, and what the connection is among forgiveness, repentance, and reconciliation. A major paradigmatic shift occurred two thousand years ago when Jesus taught about forgiveness, which allows people to repudiate their past and alter their future. Augsburger states, “Forgiveness allows us to change our minds, begin again, and risk further

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37 Ibid., 135-137.

38 Ibid., 136.

relationship. . . . This breaking of the cycle of blind retaliation or judicial retribution allows persons, relationships, or institutions to start over, to begin again.\textsuperscript{40}

Augsburger diagnoses that the ideal self has undergone a major change from modernism to postmodernism, thus, a therapeutic sensibility has preceded over a moral sensibility.\textsuperscript{41} That is, in postmodern times, one is encouraged to act on the basis of one’s own desires, needs, and feelings rather than on one’s integrity and morality. Following our own desires, natures, and feelings can result in rudeness, crudeness, immorality, or even crime. If human beings are to live in community, one’s natures and feelings must be subordinated to integrity and morality as the proper standard of human maturity.\textsuperscript{42} Forgiveness requires a moral context.

As western culture has become increasingly individualized, the importance of a moral context has been trivialized, and forgiveness is reduced to passive forbearance. Forgiveness would again become important only when moral values and virtues are central to the meaning of personhood. Augsburger states, “Authentic forgiveness is that cluster of motivations which seeks to regain the brother and the sister in reconciliation. . . . The courage to forgive is an excellency of character, a virtue that enables one to act in restoration of personal relationships, to risk in reconstruction of social networks, to commit oneself to live in moral integrity.”\textsuperscript{43} Forgiveness demands

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 9-10.
\item \textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 103.
\item \textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 115-116.
\end{itemize}
moral values and virtues of justice, fairness, love, mercy, repentance, and reconciliation.\textsuperscript{44}

To traditional Chinese Christians, moral integrity, virtues, and reconstruction of social networks are highly valued. However, the pursuit of justice, fairness, and repentance is a challenge to them as these may disrupt harmony, cause a loss of face, and fail to achieve anything they think is good. To westernized Christians in Hong Kong, their challenge is to subordinate their feelings to moral integrity and take risks in the reconstruction of community as individualism takes control in their minds.

Augsburger stresses that forgiveness should not become a unilateral act from the individual paradigm, but a mutual transaction from an interpersonal paradigm.\textsuperscript{45} In both Hebrew and Christian Scriptures (Genesis 42-45; Matthew 18:15-17), the primary understanding of forgiveness is about the restoration of right relationships. The understanding of forgiveness should not be a private act of intrapsychic release, but a truly social transaction of interpersonal reconciliation. Repentance and reconstruction of right relationship are central to the process of forgiveness, and repentance in Christian tradition, according to Augsburger, should consist of three dimensions—remorse, restitution, and renewal. Remorse is a genuine sorrow with an in-depth discussion of the details of the matters. Restitution is an attempt by the offender to restore what was destroyed and to discuss it as much as possible. Renewal is a change in life direction when one disavows his or her old behavior and affirms a new principle of moral action.

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 114-115.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 14-16.
Forgiveness is the mutual recognition that repentance is intended, embraced, and pursued.\textsuperscript{46} Forgiveness is not unconditional. Ausburger writes, “Love may be unconditional and forgiveness is not. . . . The familiar teaching of unconditional, unilateral forgiveness is not forgiving but a return to loving. . . . Forgiveness . . . recognizes the complexity of reopening the future in risk, restoring relationship in trust, and recreating the nature of that alliance in justice.”\textsuperscript{47} Thus, forgiveness without repentance and reconciliation is incomplete; it is simply a love for one’s enemy and/or a willing heart to forgive.

The practice of authentic forgiveness can become possible when the victim begins by retelling the story repeatedly until he or she can separate from anger and reframe the meaning of the matter in a more freeing way. When the telling becomes less of a lament or complaint, the victim is urged to discuss the matter with increasing distance from the injury. As trust begins to re-germinate and the risk of reopening the relationship increases, one side may be willing to appreciate the other’s view and genuineness in apology, repentance, and reconciliation. Gradually, both sides recognize that authentic forgiveness has begun to occur.\textsuperscript{48}

Practicing authentic forgiveness is more than just freeing oneself from bitterness, grief, and anger or resolution of exhausted emotions and fatigued memory. It is indeed a transaction that ends the past situations of failure, forgoes future mistrust and suspicion,

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 16.

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 43.
determines to be with one another despite the injury done and the alienation and avoidance mutually experienced. Telling the story becomes a healing narrative. As each person belongs to a larger community, one’s individual life story is framed in a larger communal story, and this gives each person identity. Authentic forgiveness is grounded in a healing story of two parties involved in a common and connective story that they share with each other in a community of reconciliation. The healing narrative releases one from the bonds of one’s old binding story of resentment, self-destruction, distortions, and violence, and begins with a new open-ended story of grace and forgiveness.49

The true meaning of a person’s story is not just found in that individual, but in a larger story of community. People need a larger and greater story than their own narratives that can overcome their persistent self-deceit, redeem their common lives, develop their character, and express the virtues of justice, courage, love, mercy, and forgiveness. This larger and greater story offers them content for their moral lives. The narrative of a community draws people together, bridges breaches, and invites reconciliation.50 This happens very often at Jachin Church when members listen to each other’s stories of authentic forgiveness, and they then begin to practice their own.

Recently, there was a session about authentic forgiveness in a small group at Jachin Church. During that session, pastors encouraged the disciples to meet with their enemies, forgive, and reconcile. Many disciples initially felt stressed and refused to do so. A few weeks later, a woman named Sophie boldly shared her story of forgiveness

49 Ibid., 117-121, 125.

50 Ibid.
and reconciliation that amazed the group. Sophie shared her struggle of calling an enemy who had bullied her for years when she was staying at the Juvenile Home. Sophie’s parents both passed away when she was a teenager. Sadly, when Sophie entered the Juvenile Home, she was bullied unceasingly by another teenager and was deeply hurt. Sophie had not met her enemy for over ten years, but because of the encouragement to practice forgiveness and by God’s grace, she was able to contact her enemy and arrange to meet with her for lunch. Sophie was shocked that her enemy agreed to the lunch date during which they shared about their past as well as their present lives. A miracle occurred. Mutual forgiveness and reconciliation emerged. She shared in the group that she was very reluctant to meet her enemy at first, but she was very grateful in the end.

Sophie’s story touched many in the group, and others began to follow and practice their own. In postmodern times that emphasize feelings and emotions, storytelling unites people and reconciles us with each other and God. Augsburger describes that a person’s story “must be greater than any social, communal, or national narrative. It is a faith story, an eternal narrative of the meaning of our existence. Only such a story can reconcile us to ourselves, to each other, and to God, who is author of all reconciliation.”\(^{51}\) The forgiving community exists within the story of God’s forgiveness. Augsburger contends, “To be a participant in a reconciling community is our highest experience of being human and the one undeniable evidence that God is in our midst.”\(^{52}\)

\(^{51}\) Ibid., 121.

\(^{52}\) Ibid., 164.
Healing and Restoration of Relationship by Authentic Forgiveness

*Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*

by Miroslav Volf

Born in Osijek, Croatia, Miroslav Volf is a theologian in what used to be Yugoslavia who uses two extremes, exclusion and embrace, to theologically explore identity, otherness, and reconciliation. Much of his work emerges out of his reflection on the war that took place in his country. Volf asserts that as God donates the divine self for the godless in order to receive them into divine communion through the cross of Jesus Christ (Romans 5:6), we, as humanity, should also self-donate for others, even if others are our enemies, and provide space for others to come in.53

In a conflict, people often see exclusion. Exclusion is problematic as it cuts the bonds that connect the conflicted parties, and it erases the separation between them. Cutting the bonds occurs when a person with an identity sees the other as an enemy that must be pushed away from one’s own self and identity. Erasing the separation means no longer recognizing the other as someone who in his or her otherness belongs to the pattern of interdependence.54 Volf explains,

The other then emerges as an inferior being who must either be assimilated by being made like the self or be subjugated to the self. Exclusion takes place when the violence of expulsion, assimilation, or subjugation and the indifference of abandonment replace the dynamics of taking in and keeping out as well as the mutuality of giving and receiving. . . . Boundaries are part of the creative process

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54 Ibid., 57, 67.
of differentiation. For without boundaries there would be no discrete identities, and without discrete identities there could be no relation to the other.\textsuperscript{55}

The ultimate exclusion is ethnic cleansing.

Volf proposes embrace as a theological response to exclusion. He takes sin and hurt very seriously when addressing the issue of forgiveness and reconciliation through embrace. Volf asks a difficult question of how one can be loyal “both to the demand of the oppressed for justice and to the gift of forgiveness that the Crucified offered to the perpetrators.”\textsuperscript{56} In times of conflict, the question is how one can bring justice to the victim while embracing the perpetrator. To Volf, embrace, meaning full reconciliation, cannot happen until the truth has been revealed and justice done. To move from exclusion to embrace, four central sections are analyzed, which are repentance, forgiveness, making space in oneself for the other, and healing of memory.\textsuperscript{57} Unlike Smedes, Volf deals with sin seriously. There are many remarkable points made by Volf that are of particular importance to this project.

Volf does not underplay repentance, and he believes that “repentance implies not merely a recognition that one has made a bad mistake, but that one has sinned.”\textsuperscript{58} As Jesus came to call not the righteous but sinners (Mark 2:17), admitting one’s sin is important for real repentance. Volf argues that not only do the oppressors need to repent, but the oppressed also need to repent. Though the oppressed suffer at the sinful hand of

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 67.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 9.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 9, 29, 100.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 113.
others, they also commit sins of their own. They have to be released from the understandable but nonetheless inhumane hatred that has captured their hearts. To repent means to let God establish a new order of his reign in their hearts and to resist the sinful values and practices to seduce them. Volf points out that “if victims do not repent today, they will become perpetrators tomorrow who, in their self-deceit, will seek to exculpate their misdeeds on account of their own victimization.”\(^59\) Many of those who are oppressed need to repent because they often mimic the image of their enemies and excuse their own reactive behavior, though they claim it is necessary.\(^60\) Volf makes a prominent point about forgiveness and justice:

The very idea of forgiveness implies an affirmation of justice. The Lord’s Prayer makes this plain. . . . We imply that we owe God something and that other people owe us something. What we owe and what is owed to us can be established only by applying the principle of justice. Hence, no justice, no forgiveness. But if justice, then why forgiveness? Because strict restorative justice can never be satisfied. . . . Nothing can rectify the original offense. . . . Forgiveness is not a substitute for justice. Forgiveness is no mere discharge of a victim’s angry resentment and no mere assuaging of a perpetrator’s remorseful anguish. . . . On the contrary, every act of forgiveness enthrones justice; it draws attention to its violation precisely by offering to forego its claims. Only those who are forgiven and who are willing to forgive will be capable of relentlessly pursuing justice without falling into the temptation to pervert it into injustice, we could add.\(^61\)

One needs to have a willing heart to forgive before pursuing justice, so that one does not fall into the temptation of adding injustice from pain and hatred when pursuing justice. Further, in many cases, it is not possible to rectify the original offense, and

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\(^59\) Ibid., 117.

\(^60\) Ibid., 113-114, 116-117.

\(^61\) Ibid., 122-123.
having a willing heart to forgive would prevent the seeking of revenge instead. The next question, then, is how one can have a willing heart to forgive and abate one’s passion for revenge so that one can practice authentic forgiveness and pursue justice. Volf suggests,

By placing unattended rage before God we place both our unjust enemy and our own vengeful self face to face with a God who loves and does justice. Hidden in the dark chambers of our hearts and nourished by the system of darkness, hate grows and seeks to infest everything with its hellish will to exclusion. In the light of the justice and love of God, however, hate recedes and the seed is planted for the miracle of forgiveness. Forgiveness flounders because I exclude the enemy from the community of humans even as I exclude myself from the community of sinners . . . . In the presence of God, our rage over injustice may give way to forgiveness, which in turn will make the search for justice for all possible. 62

Unlike Smedes’s magic eyes without mentioning God’s intervention, Volf’s way to practice authentic forgiveness is in God, with God, and with the other. One needs to have the light of God to see one’s enemy and one’s own vengeful self in order to nourish the seed to forgive. Moreover, authentic forgiveness leaves an empty space for the other to restore broken communion as “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. . . . Forgiveness . . . is a passage leading to embrace.” 63 Only in the midst of the mysterious presence of God would people who have been sinned against and sustained hurt be willing to surrender their willful mind of hatred and revenge to God of love and justice. This makes authentic forgiveness possible in reality.

62 Ibid., 124.
63 Ibid., 125-126.
Augsburger argues that forgiveness is not a denial that allows one to pretend all is well again, a memory fatigue that overwhelms one’s anger when one is exhausted with hatred, or a self-centered goal that provides one with inner peace. Instead, true forgiveness is a painful journey, a prolonged wrestling with a wound, and a process aimed at having genuine repentance by the offender, graceful acceptance by the victim, and restoration of broken relationships. This is true forgiveness in the biblical sense.

To “forgive those who hurt us” without genuine repentance by the offender is not true forgiveness. It is how, explains Augsburger, a person finds “a mystery of a forgiving heart while the other person in the drama goes another way.” Augsburger states that this is considered a slow discovery of a forgiving heart of the victim, which is focused on the inner battle to rage against the offender or to let go and be healed. This forgiving heart is only the first step of Jesus’ teaching about true forgiveness. It is the “love of our neighbors” and the “love of our enemies” which together form the foundation of forgiveness. Forgiveness requires one to go beyond the forgiving heart and to invite repentance that risks the self in restoring the relationship. To see the other person as having real worth again and to restore perceptions of love are the two feet needed in order to walk toward forgiving. True forgiveness is a process, and this process begins when people seek to take whatever steps possible “toward attempting to restore, reconstruct,

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65 Ibid., 14.
and rediscover a relationship.”

This is what Jesus wants his disciples to do. True forgiveness requires one to go to the other person to rebuke, forgive, and reconcile (Matthew 5:23-24, 18:15, 18:21-35; Luke 17:3). 

To confront the trivialization of true forgiveness under the influence of an individualistic culture, Augsburger lists what true forgiveness is not. It is not something you do to yourself for your own good, but not for the other, such as, to free yourself from pain or put an end to being a victim. Forgiveness is not taking control, so that one can refuse to be held hostage emotionally by the event or by the other person. Forgiveness is not in one’s own power to choose, to act and to leap ahead independently of the other’s attitudes or actions. Forgiveness is not a private ritual of release where there is no atonement and power to make reconciliation happen. These are not what true forgiveness is, but they are important, as stated by Augsburger, because they are the prerequisites to authentic forgiveness. They “are the groundwork of restoring attitudes of love on which forgiveness will stand if it is to ever happen. . . . Forgiving is risking something more. Forgiving is risking a return to conversation and a resumption of relationship.”

Forgiving is not an instant solution or a quick fix. Instead, it is a long, deep, difficult, and painful process of wrestling with the injury and risking a return to conversation and a resumption of relationship. The Christ of the Cross shows how costly

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66 Ibid., 26.
68 Ibid., 29.
it is for God to forgive and this is our great example (I Peter 2:21). Augsburger states, “God used the Cross to make forgiveness possible and to model forgiving to an unforgiving world.” Like the road to the Cross, it is worthy for all of us to learn from Christ to practice authentic forgiveness, though it is inestimably costly and lengthy.

Some people wonder whether or not one should forgive. Augsburger believes there is no better alternative than to forgive. For one thing, to exact repayment from the oppressor of one’s loss is often not possible, especially when the crime is rape or bullying. Taking revenge only lowers one to one’s enemy’s level and the injury persists within. Hidden hatred is self-destructive, and it turns one’s trust and faith in others into suspicion and cold cynicism. Burying the bitterness only paralyzes the mind and soul that would freeze one’s reason and emotion. For anyone who needs to be forgiven, one should not hesitate to forgive. Forgiving and being forgiven are two sides of a coin (Matthew 6:14-15; 18:21-35).

Some people ask when authentic forgiveness is achieved. Augsburger states, “Grace and truth, acceptance and confrontation, sacrifice and prophetic rebuke are needed in resolving alienation, injustice, or interpersonal injuries.” Authentic forgiveness requires one party to repent and the other party to have the grace to accept with trust and respect. When the two parties mutually recognize that both repentance and

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69 Ibid., 29-30.

70 Ibid., 30.

71 Ibid., 18-21.

72 Ibid., 32.
acceptance are genuine and the severed relationship is mended, authentic forgiveness occurs. Authentic forgiveness reaches its final step when the victim reconnects with the one who has hurt him or her. The victim discovers that the strange chemistry of reconciliation can heal the wound until nothing remains but the remembered scar with a transformed meaning. Such forgiveness shall result in a deeper and stronger union than before.\footnote{Ibid.} Authentic forgiveness with mutual recognition of genuine repentance has a lot of implications for members at Jachin Church because, as discussed, confession is not a usual practice in Chinese society. The disclosure of the fault may cause one to lose face, especially for senior person, and disrupt harmony, which make many issues untouched.

Some ask when one can give up authentic forgiveness. The answer is never. Achieving anything less is considered falling short of the goal. Augsburger believes that seeking authentic forgiveness “is not an optional goal. It is the central task, and when it is not possible, we grieve, feel the loss, experience the failure of relationship, talk about it with a surrogate . . . and reach out for reconciliation.”\footnote{Ibid., 26.} While it may not be always viable to achieve authentic forgiveness due to, for example, unrepentance of the offender, death of a party, or unwillingness of the offended to forgive and reconcile, one should strive for as much forgiveness and reconciliation as possible.

There are different scenarios wherein it is not possible to achieve authentic forgiveness. In one scenario, the offender is unrepentant. The offended grieves and reaches out in love that fully embraces the other, no matter what the offense is. Then, the
offended can move as close to the offender as possible in working through the injury and its impact on his or her life. A second scenario in which authentic forgiveness is not possible is if either party has passed away. When this happens, the desired goal of healing and reuniting cannot be met. This is a sad outcome, but it happens. The offended party needs to come to terms with the failure, give it up to God as one is longing for authentic forgiveness, accept that one must settle for what is possible with fallible human beings, and grieve the failure of the hope for reconciliation. A final scenario is if the offender repents and reaches out for reconciliation, but the offended refuses to forgive and reconcile. In this case, the offender feels the sadness, grieves the unwillingness to forgive and reaffirms love of the other, while praying to God for God’s forgiveness.

People can only move as close toward full and complete forgiveness as is possible, as people are all fallen and broken in one way or another. One cannot force any part of reconciliation. One can only invite, but invitation is the most powerful form of communication. While one cannot control any part of the other party’s response, one can be faithful in reaching out, offering genuine confession and repentance or acceptance and love, and inviting communication and connection. Invitation may be refused, or the other may respond in a partial or conditional way. In that case, one grieves and reaffirms love of the other. Forgiveness is a process rather than a single act or decision. It requires time and a series of concrete steps, which are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

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75 David Augsburger, email to the author, March 15, 2017.
Conclusion

This chapter has discussed that it is necessary for one to forgive and love when dealing with conflict, sin, and hurt in order to benefit from it. It has also identified what authentic forgiveness is, the importance of practicing it, and the way to confront the trivialization of it by cultural influences. The next chapter examines the theological and biblical foundation of authentic forgiveness.
CHAPTER 3

THEOLOGY OF AN AUTHENTIC FORGIVENESS MODEL

Authentic forgiveness is more than just a phrase, a feeling, or an action; it is a process. From theological and biblical perspectives, authentic forgiveness is a mutual transaction of an interpersonal paradigm and a restoration of right relationships. Repentance and reconstruction of relationship are central to the process of forgiveness. This chapter explores the theological and biblical foundation of authentic forgiveness. It first discusses the theological foundation of our God who wills communion and forgiveness, and the theological foundation of Christian forgiveness as a communion with God and with one another. Then, it examines the biblical foundation of the relationship between repentance and forgiveness in the Old and New Testaments. This relationship is important because human sin cannot be overlooked or forgotten; it can only be forgiven when it is confronted and dealt with.76 Next, this chapter explores the biblical foundation of genuine repentance comprising remorse, restitution and renewal, pursuit of justice, and love of enemy.

Authentic forgiveness is a mutual recognition that repentance is genuine and reconciliation has been obtained. Without repentance, authentic forgiveness offered by the victim cannot be consummated because the victim can only extend a forgiving heart, which indeed demonstrates a love of one’s neighbor and enemy. The incidents of Joseph and his brothers (Genesis 37-45), the prodigal son (Luke 15), and the Scriptures of Leviticus 6, Matthew 5, 6 and 18, Luke 6 and 17, John 14-16 and 20, and Ephesians 4 are used to draw different principles for practicing authentic forgiveness.

**Theological Foundation**

God is not self-enclosed. God is one, but he has revealed himself as a Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit relate to each other as Persons and share an unbounded communion of mutual love and harmonic difference. The Trinitarian relations manifest not as a finished totality, but an eternal and perfect communion. God is ever self-giving within the Trinity. Further, according to Scripture, God is love (1 John 4:8). Love is the nature of God, so his self-giving is a giving of love. Love requires otherness to give and receive. Thus, the Triune God wills a relationship of eternal, perfect, self-giving, receiving, and loving communion.\(^77\)

The God Who Wills Communion and Forgiveness

The self-giving and receiving of love is not only among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as the Triune God also loves those whom he has created. The Triune God not only wills communion among himself, but he also wills communion with his creation. Thus,

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\(^77\) Ibid., 113.
God created human beings in the divine image and likeness, for he said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground. And God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:26-27).

**Christian Forgiveness as Communion with God and One Another**

Human beings are created in God’s image and likeness, so one is created and destined for loving communion with God and with one another. As God is not isolated and self-enclosed, human beings created in his image and likeness are also not made to live in isolation or as self-enclosed individuals. However, human beings have rejected their creatureliness, and have refused and continue to refuse such loving communion with God, with one another, and with God’s creation due to their sins committed against God and their wrongful acts, violence, revenge, and destruction done against others.78

Apart from loving communion with God and with others, human beings are also supposed to be created and destined for self-giving and receiving. However, human beings do not give freely to and receive freely from others due to their self-centeredness, anxiety, and concupiscence. Instead, they steal from others and strike out in violence. When they do not trust God, their own egos rule and they exert control over others. Sometimes, people want others’ possessions to satisfy their own desires, lust, and greed. Sometimes, people lie and belittle others to make themselves look righteous even when

78 Ibid., 114.
they have wronged others. People are trapped in the cyclical habits of sin, evil, violence, and revenge from which they cannot break away.  

However, the restoration of our communion with God cannot occur merely on human initiative and repentance, but rather on God’s gracious will and initiative for communion with his creation through his Son Jesus Christ. It is a breakthrough that God transcends the human tendency of committing sins and gives a new beginning through his Son, which is a self-giving love to us through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ initiating forgiveness and restoration of our communion with God and with one another has also inaugurated the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God. This shows how “God’s desire for communion with Creation leads God, as a sign of mercy, to draw human history into God’s life.”

The incarnation of Jesus not only draws us into the life of God’s communion, but he also embodies us despite our sinfulness and alienation to God. Jesus’ incarnation as a human being makes all human beings not deemed alien to God’s being, mercy, and love. When Jesus, vulnerable as a human being, was oppressed, betrayed, and abandoned, he did not allow himself to be defined by all these and refused to act in the cyclical habits of sin, evil, revenge, and violence. He broke down this cycle by his forgiveness. Jesus

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79 Ibid., 115.
80 Ibid., 119.
embodies forgiveness as a new way of life and, thus, human beings are called to repent as the only appropriate response to God’s forgiveness and follow Jesus to embody forgiveness as a new habit of life.\(^8\) Jones explains that

> those who are forgiven by Jesus are called to embody that forgiven-ness in the new life signified by communion with Jesus and with other disciples. Indeed, that forgiven-ness calls believers to live penitent lives that seek to reconstruct human relationships in the service of holiness of heart and life. For Jesus, forgiveness cannot be earned, whether through repentance or by any other means. But our repentance is the only adequate response to God’s forgiveness.\(^8\)

God does not abandon the godless, sinners, and even enemies, and as stated by Volf, God donates the divine self even for the sinners and enemies in order to receive them into divine communion through the cross of Jesus Christ and his atonement (Romans 5:6, 10). Through the cross, God shows that he does not want human beings to remain as enemies and he creates space for the offenders to come in. In a larger narrative of God’s dealing with humanity, Volf states, “Humanity belongs to God and God will not be God without humanity. While human beings were enemies, they were reconciled to God through the death of His son. The cross is the giving up of God’s self in order not to give up on humanity; it is the consequence of God’s desire to break the power of human enmity without violence and receive human beings into divine communion.”\(^8\)

In a similar way, when an individual is baptized, one is identified with Christ in his death, so one puts to death whatever belongs to one’s sinful nature. One would die to

\(^8\) Ibid., 117-121.

\(^8\) Ibid., 121.

\(^8\) Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 126.
self and live to God and others. One does not just live for those inside the self-enclosed community, but one should give of himself or herself even to those who are one’s enemies. Volf states,

By the Spirit we are not only baptized into one body but also made “a new creation.” Hence the Spirit . . . sets us on the road to becoming truly catholic personalities. . . . In the Eucharist, then we celebrate the giving of the self to the other and the receiving of the other into the self that the triune God has undertaken in the passion of Christ and that we are called and empowered to live such giving and receiving out in a conflict-ridden world.\(^84\)

One shall make space for others to come in because one who is Jesus’ disciple is to follow the same messianic pattern.\(^85\) Jesus’ disciples should insist on living according to the same pattern of life and death shown by Jesus. They are called to embody forgiveness, which reflects the fullness of God’s triune communion, and they are called to be faithful witnesses to God’s inbreaking Kingdom by Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. By giving of oneself to one’s enemies and embodying forgiveness to break away from the cycles of sin and revenge, one restores communion with God and others.

**Biblical Foundation: Relationship between Forgiveness and Repentance**

This section explores the relationship between forgiveness and repentance, and the difference Jesus has made upon his incarnation, death, and resurrection in relation to forgiveness and repentance. The relationship between forgiveness and repentance is important because many pastors and Christians in Hong Kong tend to trivialize forgiveness to be a unilateral act without talking the matter over or seeking genuine

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\(^{84}\) Ibid., 130.

\(^{85}\) Ibid., 23-24, 125-131.
repentance and reconciliation of the broken relationship. Many misinterpret that Jesus forgives all on the cross without any pre-conditions to be acted upon by the sinner, so the victims follow this misunderstood path. Thus, this section examines how Jesus practices forgiveness and whether Jesus’ forgiveness requires repentance of the offender.

Relationship between Forgiveness and Repentance

Repentance is the crucial element required for sinners to be forgiven. Some misinterpret a few events in the Bible that seem to show that Jesus proclaimed forgiveness without requesting the sinners to repent. For example, Jesus offered forgiveness in his ministry to a paralytic without requesting repentance of this man (Luke 5:17-26). The first words Jesus said from the cross were, “Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). Insights from these events are discussed below to show if Jesus’ forgiveness is free of cost or if it does require repentance of the sinners. This would affect the way Christians at Jachin Church practice forgiveness as they are called to follow Jesus to embody forgiveness.

The first words Jesus began to preach right at the beginning of his ministry were, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near” (Matthew 4:17). It is apparent that Jesus’ ministry is shaped by his request for the repentance of sinners and his proclamation and enactment of God’s inbreaking Kingdom. When Jesus offered forgiveness to the paralytic (Luke 5:17-26), he did not primarily address the issue of whether forgiveness requires repentance, but revealed his authority over sin and his power as God to forgive. This is shown when Jesus offered forgiveness to the paralytic, and the scribes and Pharisees immediately questioned, “Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can
forgive sins but God alone?” (Luke 5:21) Thus, Jesus asked, “Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk?’” (Luke 5:23) Then, Jesus healed the paralytic to show that the Son of Man has the authority as God on earth to forgive sins (Luke 5:24).

Later in Luke 5:27-32, when the scribes and Pharisees complained again, Jesus indicated that he is called to spend time with sinners. Luke often shows that Jesus welcomes sinners, eats with them, and reaches out to them, but his ultimate call is to ask sinners to repent, for he said, “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:32). This call is also shown in the parables of the lost sheep, lost coin, and the lost son (Luke 15:1-32) as well as the incident of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), which are examined below.

Luke 15 begins with the parable of the lost sheep and the parable of the lost coin, then comes the parable of the lost son, which is well known as the prodigal son story. When sharing these parables, many pastors stress the lavish love of God who tirelessly seeks the lost. This is very true. When the scribes and Pharisees did not agree that Jesus had spent so much time receiving sinners and eating with them (Luke 15:1-2), Jesus used the parables to point out that the call of God is to spend time seeking the lost. The images of the shepherd and the woman showed the determination to seek and restore the lost. It is not easy for one to understand how the shepherd could leave ninety-nine sheep at risk in the wilderness to seek only one lost sheep, or why the woman made such a big effort to find only one tiny coin and was so happy to celebrate with her neighbors when

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she found it. Nowhere in Scripture is it shown that the shepherd asked someone else to look after the ninety-nine sheep or that the woman was so poor that she needed to use all effort to find only one little coin. It seems that both the shepherd and the woman went beyond what was rational when they sought the lost and celebrated the found.

The parables’ emphasis was not merely the finding of the two objects, but more importantly, the subjects of the lost souls. The themes of the parables are lost, found, and rejoice (Luke 15:6-7, 9-10, 23-24, 32). However, not many pastors emphasize the crucial element of the lost being found, which is the repentance of the sinners, and the subsequent joy in heaven, for Jesus said, “I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent,” and “In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Luke 15:7, 10).

While the first two parables express how deeply God is concerned for and committed to seeking the lost, Luke also wants to show that it is the repentance of the lost causing the supreme joy in heaven. Being found is not only about one’s physical appearance, but is about the sinful mind being transformed. The necessity of repentance of the lost completes what the parables want to tell us—the lost is found. This is further explained in the prodigal son.

How God finds a lost person is much more complex than how a shepherd finds a lost sheep or a woman finds a lost coin. The parable of the prodigal son is an elaboration of the lost sheep and the lost coin in terms of God’s grace and the necessity of repentance which together result in salvation. Nowhere in the parable does it show that the lost sheep or the lost coin was bad or guilty and responsible for its lost condition, but the
younger son in the third parable was guilty and is responsible for his own lost. The father was there in the beginning and at the end of the story. His love towards his two sons was extravagant. Though the younger son dishonorably requested the inheritance from his father even before his father’s death and squandered all the money not long after, his father still waited for him to return.

However, one should not miss the important point of the awakening of the younger son in this parable. When famine came and he had nothing to eat except the food from unclean pigs (Leviticus 11:7-8), he was sobered by his downfall. He decided to go back to his father and ask for food, and he began to rehearse how he would talk to his father upon meeting him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men” (Luke 15:18-19). Luke here describes the confession and repentance of the younger son, and how he humbly placed his future in his father’s hands and requested only to be a slave. He asked for nothing but the grace and mercy of his father—this is genuine repentance with contrition. The father saw his younger son at a distance, and without waiting for him to walk to the house, he ran to him, embraced and kissed him, and restored him with full honor by giving him the best robe, a ring, sandals, and a celebration feast. It was culturally inappropriate for a father at that time to run out to welcome a son and lavish such gifts upon him, especially when this son had been so unfilial. This shows that God’s grace is beyond one’s rationale, for it is a great joy to see the lost being found upon one’s repentance (Luke 15:24).

The story then turns to the older son, who did not accept his younger brother’s repentance and return. When the older son returned from work and heard what happened,
he was angry and refused to go into the house. He questioned his father’s justice and fairness. The father pleaded with him to join in the festivities celebrating the younger son’s return. But the older son did not understand how the return and repentance of the sinner was precious, and he complained that he received nothing from his father despite his years of faithful service. The father explained the joy of finding what was lost, and said to the older son that what father had was his (Luke 15:30-31). Interestingly, the story ends without any response of the older son. Luke does not say whether the older son repented from his pride and envy, or if there was reconciliation between the older son and the father, or between the two sons. The son who ran away from home in the beginning was within the father’s grace at the end of the story, whereas the son who had always been “in” was in the end “out.”87 Repentance and reconciliation are crucial in order to be “in.”

The first two parables show that repentance causes joy in heaven, while the third parable expresses what repentance is. Repentance comes with remorse, restitution, and renewal. The younger son repented with remorse when he met his father and said that he had sinned against heaven and against his father. His restitution and renewal came when he felt contrition and asked for nothing but to be a slave. This was all he felt he could do—be a slave in order to compensate and show his contrition. However, without completing his rehearsed words, his father welcomed and treated him with full honor. In all these three parables, it is apparent that Luke stresses the importance of repentance.

after what is lost has been found: “there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents” (Luke 15:7); “there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Luke 15:10); and “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you” (Luke 15:21).

The importance of restitution and renewal is further shown by Luke in the incident of Zacchaeus. He was a sinner for being a chief tax collector who, at that time, earned his money by taking for himself a portion of tax paid by the people. Zacchaeus, a high-level tax collector, admitted that he had cheated on others in the way he had collected taxes (Luke 19:8). Tax collectors were definitely not welcomed and were considered as sinners at that time (Luke 19:7). Jesus, fearless of others’ impressions of him as one who associates with sinners, came to seek the lost (Luke 19:10) and stayed at Zacchaeus’ home. Upon the welcoming and remarkable action by Jesus, Zacchaeus wanted to right his wrongs. Because of Jesus’ welcoming communion with a sinner, Zacchaeus repented and showed Jesus that he was a renewed man by giving half of his possessions to the poor and giving back to those he had cheated four times the amount (Luke 19:8). Again, Zacchaeus’ response to Jesus’ acceptance included his repentance not merely with words or a phrase of apology, but with actions. Repentance with actions completes true forgiveness.

In this discussion of biblical instances of repentance and forgiveness, it is important to note the controversial words that Jesus cries out on the cross to proclaim forgiveness for his crucifiers: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). Some misinterpret this statement by assuming that Jesus requires no repentance from the sinners. However, Jesus’ words echo the practice of sacrifice for
unintentional sin in the Old Testament (see Numbers 15:27-31). Luke lets his readers know that Jesus’ words show that his death is a once-for-all sacrifice to offer divine forgiveness, even to those people who act wrongly in ignorance. But this wrongful act in ignorance does not mean less condemnation and that no repentance is needed.

In Acts 3:13-19, Luke stresses that people who deny God in ignorance also need to repent. To those who ignorantly denied or even killed Jesus, Peter said, “Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord” (Acts 3:19). Upon Jesus’ resurrection, Luke describes that Jesus had explained to the disciples how things written about him in Israel’s Scriptures, including his suffering, death, and resurrection, must be fulfilled (Luke 24:44-46), and then Jesus authorized the disciples to go to all nations to preach in his name the gospel of repentance and forgiveness of sins (Luke 24:47). Following what Jesus asked the disciples to do, when the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter preached powerfully in the Spirit about the gospel of repentance and forgiveness of sins: “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” (Acts 2:38). Repentance, as emphasized by Luke, is an inevitable act for God’s forgiveness of sin and salvation.

From the above discussion, repentance is indeed a necessary response to divine forgiveness and the salvation offered by Jesus. This is crucial because when disciples are called to follow Jesus to embody forgiveness, they will consider how repentance is associated with forgiveness in Jesus’ eyes. Many people, including those at Jachin

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Church, tend to trivialize victimization by ignoring the claims of victims if they interpret what Jesus does for us as, in Bonhoeffer’s term, cheap grace. One needs to reject the concept of cheap grace because the forgiveness offered by Jesus is very costly – it cost Jesus his life. He takes the offenses that human beings commit against God and against one another seriously and he requires sinners to repent.

The Relationship between Forgiveness and Repentance Differs after Jesus’ Incarnation

Another important aspect Christians should understand is how the relationship between forgiveness and repentance differs after Jesus’ incarnation, death, and resurrection. In the Old Testament, God forgave whenever people repented, but after Jesus was crucified, the relationship between God’s forgiveness and human repentance changed. This change affects the way members at Jachin Church practice forgiveness as they are called to follow Jesus to embody forgiveness. God forgives throughout both the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament, the Israelites had repeatedly experienced God’s forgiveness and loving kindness as a nation (Leviticus 16:29-34; Isaiah 54:8) and as individuals (Psalm 51) whenever they repent and return to the Lord. Prior repentance to God and making restitution to victims are the first steps in seeking forgiveness (Leviticus 6:1-7; Numbers 5:5-7). But the way disciples practice authentic forgiveness differs after Jesus’ death and resurrection. Jones explains the significance of Jesus’ incarnation and ministry:

It seems clear that Jesus’ proclamation of the Kingdom transforms the relationship between repentance and forgiveness by stressing the gracious priority of forgiveness. . . . In the Synoptic Gospels Jesus’ ministry is inaugurated with

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89 Ibid., 108-109.
his announcement of the Kingdom and his call to repentance (Matthew 4:17). But it does suggest that Jesus’ message and actions implied, and sometimes explicitly claimed, a transformed understanding of the relationship between forgiveness and repentance – a repentance contextualized within the announcement of God’s inbreaking Kingdom. Thus repentance comes to be situated within Jesus’ overall announcement and enactment of God’s costly forgiveness.90

Jesus’ message of God’s inbreaking Kingdom and his actions of incarnation, death, and resurrection stress the gracious priority of forgiveness. The stressing of the gracious priority of forgiveness means that repentance is no longer the first step in seeking forgiveness as in the Old Testament, but it comes within God’s costly forgiveness. This gracious priority of forgiveness has significant implications for how disciples practice authentic forgiveness with each other if they decide to follow Jesus and embody forgiveness. Disciples should have willing hearts to forgive before they pursue confession, repentance, and justice from others. In this regard, Volf adds a valuable reason as to why believers should have willing hearts to forgive prior to seeking justice. He states that only those who already have willing hearts to forgive can pursue justice properly; otherwise, it is easy to pervert the pursuit of injustice due to their own hurt, hatred, bitterness, and passion for revenge.91

To make forgiveness a new habit of life, the offended should be willing to forgive even before repentance and justice are obtained. By doing so, we can once again enter into a loving, giving, and receiving communion with God and with one another, which is what humankind is created and destined for. Offering a willing heart to forgive in

90 Ibid., 110.

91 Volf, Exclusion and Embrace, 123.
advance is a crucial first step of authentic forgiveness. In return, the genuine repentance of the offender is a necessary response to such a willing heart to forgive offered in advance by the offended—together these complete authentic forgiveness. However, if the offended unilaterally extends forgiveness and sweeps the offense under the carpet without requesting the offender to repent (perhaps for fear of the cost, conflict, and complications involved or for the purpose of self-healing), then reconciliation is inauthentic and the offended has sabotaged the completion of the process of authentic forgiveness.

As explained earlier, the harmony sought by traditional Chinese in times of conflict does not necessarily embody forgiveness. Further, the avoidance of conflict of traditional Chinese makes the victim less motivated to discuss and resolve the issues in depth with the offender. The biblical way of offering forgiveness before seeking confession and repentance from the offender provides an important breeding ground for Chinese victim to be harmonious during conflicts on the one hand, and on the other hand, to be motivated to take one more step to follow Jesus by offering forgiveness. Then the victims can further pursue justice, seek repentance from the offender, and reconcile.

**Biblical Foundations: Remorse, Restitution, and Renewal**

This section examines biblically the importance of three dimensions of genuine repentance in Christian tradition: remorse, restitution, and renewal. It also discusses reconciliation, the pursuit of justice and fairness, and the love of enemy. The incident of Joseph and his brothers and a few Scriptures in Leviticus 6, Matthew 5, 6 and 18, Luke 6 and 17, John 14 to 16 and 20, and Ephesians 4 are used to illustrate.
Joseph and His Brothers

The story of Joseph and his brothers is a touchstone passage when it comes to forgiveness. Augsburger contends, “It is the essential theme of Hebrew Scriptures’ teaching on forgiving and it embodies the Jewish understanding of reconciliation of broken relationships as the deeper essence of forgiving. It is not simply an attitudinal shift but a behavioral transformation and change that requires struggle and repentance.”

The conflict between Joseph and his brothers began with Joseph’s complaint to his father Jacob about his brothers. Scripture tells us that Jacob loved Joseph more than any of his other children and made him a long robe. As a consequence, Joseph’s brothers hated him. They hated him even more when Joseph told them about his two dreams in which all the brothers and even his parents bowed down to him (Genesis 37:1-11). The brothers let their own envy and pride take control. Indeed, if the brothers had trusted God, they would have let God take control; had they done so, they would have been secure enough not to harm Joseph. However, Scripture tells us otherwise. The brothers decided to resolve their hatred and envy by following their own evil ways. The lack of faith in God and lack of trust in neighbor—in this case, Joseph—led them to trust themselves rather than God, and act violently. Only by having faith in God can people live with courage, become fearless in the face of harm, and be able to resist sinning in times of temptation. Peters points out that “the temptation to strike out violently evaporates for a person of

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92 David Augsburger, email to the author, February 20, 2017.

93 Peters, Sin: Radical Evil in Soul and Society, 12.
faith. Faith is the alternative to sin.” With faith in God, people may still be anxious and jealous with hatred, but these feelings will not be able to control them.

The issue of pride is about where people put their faith. Pride refuses to allow God to be God. When people follow their own egos instead of God, their pride leads them to take control as if they were God. When Joseph’s brothers lived in unfaith and trusted neither God nor neighbor, who is Joseph in this case, their own egos ruled and their pride took charge. Their pride caused them to exert control over Joseph as if they were God. The key characteristic of a proud person is one only loves oneself, which makes the proud person lack empathy for others and be unable to experience other’s feelings. Pride produces insensitivity and causes a person to desire to dominate and enslave others. Proud people can deteriorate further to become cruel if they attempt to make themselves righteous when wrongdoing others.

Cruel people can still be keenly sensitive to others’ sufferings, but they choose to ignore them without feeling remorse. They may feel sympathy for the victim, but cruel people believe that the victim deserves the pain, and they may even justify themselves to take steps to cause suffering of others as a means to achieve a higher end. They may take delight in watching the suffering of others. This is what Joseph’s brothers did.

Joseph’s brothers were jealous, proud to act as God to exert control over Joseph, living in a state of unfaith, and they acted out of their cruelty by plotting to kill their own

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94 Ibid., 65.
95 Ibid., 87, 96-98.
96 Ibid., 15, 194.
brother (Genesis 37:12-20). They stripped Joseph of his long robe and threw him into the cistern. They chose to ignore the suffering of Joseph in the cistern while they were eating their meal. Even when Joseph pleaded with them for his life in distress, they did not listen (Genesis 42:21). Finally, following Judah’s suggestion, everyone except Reuben agreed to sell Joseph as a slave to the Midianite merchants. They showed no remorse and made up a story to tell their father that Joseph had been slaughtered by a wild beast. When they saw their father tearing his clothes and mourning for Joseph, they chose to ignore his pain and did not tell him the truth (Genesis 37:31-34). They sinned cruelly.

After Joseph was sold to Egypt, he lived as a slave and a prisoner for thirteen years. At age thirty, God gave wisdom to Joseph to interpret the double dreams of Pharaoh as a message from God. The ability to interpret dreams demonstrated that one had wisdom in those days. Pharaoh concluded that the Spirit of God was in Joseph and no one else was as wise as Joseph, so he raised Joseph to a high position to be in charge of all the land of Egypt. God vindicated Joseph. Just as Joseph had interpreted, there were seven years of plenty, followed by seven years of famine in Egypt and the countries around it (Genesis 41:38-57). As the famine also spread to Canaan, Jacob sent his sons to Egypt in order to purchase grain. It was by the hand of God that the brothers encountered Joseph again in this peculiar way, which led to the circumstances resulting in authentic forgiveness.

It is crucial to learn what had happened between Joseph’s initial encounter with his brothers in Egypt and the time that Joseph revealed himself and offered his forgiveness to them (Genesis 45:5, 7, 15). When Joseph first met his brothers in Egypt, they all bowed down to Joseph. This showed that Joseph did not make up his dreams,
which were fulfilled (Genesis 42:6). In the initial encounter, Joseph pretended to be a stranger to his brothers, treated them harshly, accused them of being spies, asked for their youngest brother Benjamin to come, and put them into custody for three days. Indeed, Joseph was testing them to see if they had been transformed (Genesis 42:15).

After three days of being in custody, Joseph put one of them, Simeon, in jail and told them that if they brought Benjamin to Egypt, Simeon would be released. Joseph wanted to test his brothers to see whether they would treat Benjamin in the same way that he had been treated. His brothers then confessed to one another with remorse in Hebrew, without knowing that Joseph could understand, “Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that’s why this distress has come upon us. . . . Now we must give an accounting for his blood” (Genesis 42:21-22). This confession demonstrated that the guilt and recriminations experienced by Joseph’s brothers for the past thirteen years had enslaved and imprisoned them—no less than when they enslaved and imprisoned Joseph by selling him as a slave, after which he became a prisoner held in jail for years.97 Their confession of hard-heartedness and bloodguilt brought an emotional response from Joseph, who turned away from them and wept (Genesis 42:24).

Despite his emotional response, Joseph had decided to bind Simeon and continue to test his brothers to see if their remorse was authentic. When his brothers went home with guilt and sadness, they were shocked and afraid to discover that all the money they

had paid for the grain was still in their sacks. They told Jacob everything and asked for Benjamin for the deliverance of Simeon, but Jacob refused, despite the extreme assurance given by Reuben (Genesis 42:37-38).

The severe famine continued for a long time, so Jacob had to ask his sons to buy more grain from Egypt when they were facing starvation again. This time, Judah persuaded Jacob to send Benjamin along with them and offered himself as personal collateral for Benjamin. He was willing to take all the blame if Benjamin did not return (Genesis 43:9). Without any option, Jacob agreed to send Benjamin and asked them to bring extra money and presents to Egypt.

On this second visit to Egypt, they were astonished to be invited as guests at a feast at Joseph’s home. They were seated in their birth order. Joseph was setting them up to test them, so he, in full view of all the brothers, gave Benjamin a portion of food five times more than the others (Genesis 43:17-18, 33-34). Joseph wanted to see if the preferential treatment given to Benjamin would cause them to respond with jealousy and hatred just had done in the past when he himself was favored. To let his brothers have an opportunity to act against Benjamin, Joseph asked his steward to secretly put his silver cup into Benjamin’s sack. When they finished the feast and left for Canaan the next morning, Joseph’s servants chased them and asked them for the silver cup “stolen” by them. Without knowing the cup was in Benjamin’s sack, the brothers proposed to Joseph’s steward, “If any of your servants is found to have it, he will die; and the rest of us will become my lord's slaves” (Genesis 44:9). The steward replied that only the one found to have the cup would stay and become his slave, and the rest would be set free. This prepared them for the real test as the cup was found in Benjamin’s sack. Joseph was
eager to find out whether they would gladly turn against Benjamin, who was now their father’s favorite and who had also enjoyed preferential treatment by Joseph at the feast. But they did not. Instead, they tore their clothes, loaded their donkeys, and all returned to the city to meet Joseph. This act was an indication that they had indeed been transformed and renewed.

When they went back to meet Joseph and were asked why they had stolen the cup, Judah indicated that all of them, not only Benjamin, should be held as Joseph’s servants because it was their corporate guilt. Then, Joseph wanted to test them one final time to see if they would betray Benjamin and seek their own welfare; he said, “Only the man who was found to have the cup will become my slave. The rest of you, go back to your father in peace” (Genesis 44:17). Judah stood up again to defend Benjamin and begged to take the place of Benjamin (Genesis 44:18-33). This act—admitting the deed as a corporate guilt and offering to take Benjamin’s place—was an act of restitution the sin they had committed against Joseph many years ago. They could not rectify Joseph’s pain and suffering, but they did so when they defended Benjamin, Joseph’s brother. Indeed, their restitution was clearly shown again upon their father’s death when they asked to be slaves for Joseph to compensate for their deeds (Genesis 50:18). Judah’s speech here to save and not “sell” Benjamin showed that he was totally renewed when compared to his suggestion to “sell” Joseph previously. Now, the brothers were sensitive not only to Benjamin’s feelings, but also to their father’s, as they knew that their father had indicated that he would die of sadness if Benjamin did not return. They were all renewed. The miraculous change in the brothers represented by Judah was as incredible as the change in the status of Joseph. It was the work of God.
Having noticed the change in his brothers, Joseph asked all his servants to leave. He could no longer control himself, and he made himself known to his brothers and wept so loudly that many Egyptians heard (Genesis 45:1-2). Then, Joseph offered his forgiveness and restoration of communion to his brothers by saying that it was God who sent him to Egypt, so that he could be preserved in order to save many lives. God has the ultimate sovereignty in every human deed. Joseph’s forgiveness was clearly offered repeatedly to his brothers upon the death of Jacob. When Jacob passed away, the brothers were afraid that Joseph might hold a grudge against them and pay them back for all their misdeeds to him, so they sent a message to Joseph to admit the sins they had committed to him; they asked Joseph, “Please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father” (Genesis 50:17). When Joseph heard their message, he wept. The brothers then came and fell down before Joseph and said they were his slaves as restitution for their misdeeds to him. It showed that the brothers acknowledged their misdeeds with remorse, restitution, and renewal, but they had not fully accepted Joseph’s forgiveness. Joseph reassured them of his forgiveness and reconciliation once again, “Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children” (Genesis 50:19-21).

Not only did Joseph have a strong sense of God’s control over the situation, he also knew that he should not let his pride take control of him and the situation. “Am I in the place of God?” is a question that the offended one should always ask oneself in order not to abuse one’s power over the offender. Joseph, being a victim, did not feel self-justified to pay back. Taking revenge is sometimes a mask employed by the victims to
act as God’s instrument of justice and retribution. This incident shows that authentic forgiveness has two sides. For the offenders, they have to genuinely repent with remorse, restitution, and renewal. For the offended, they have to forgive and reconcile the broken relationship, sometimes with a scar of transformed meaning. Joseph forgave because he submitted to God’s sovereignty. He did not merely promise not to harm his brothers, given that he had all the power to seek revenge, but he also welcomed them to stay with him and provided for them and their families.

Authentic forgiveness is a process, and it could be as long and difficult as it was for Joseph. Remorse, restitution, and renewal are the three important dimensions of repentance for the offenders, which are Joseph’s brothers in this case. Reconciliation is necessary and biblical to complete authentic forgiveness. Augsburger states, “Joseph’s patience and leveling of the field make reconciliation possible. His restoration of love needed to be completely reviewed a second time after his father’s death and his brothers renewed anxiety about possible revenge. It demonstrates the process of forgiveness is not quick, clean, simple, but long, sometimes difficult and always complex.”

Leviticus 6, Matthew 5, 6 and 18, Luke 6 and 17, John 14-16 and 20, and Ephesians 4

In addition to what one can learn from Joseph’s story regarding the importance of authentic forgiveness, this section examines various Scriptures and draws several major principles from them regarding the practice of authentic forgiveness. The first principle relates to restitution, renewal, and reconciliation. In Leviticus 6:1-7, God shows that if one deceives or robs another, the guilty person does not only sin against the victim, but

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98 David Augsburger, email to the author, March 15, 2017.
also against God. Thus, one is also accountable to God. The guilty person “must make restitution in full, and add a fifth of the value to it” to the victim on the day the guilty person presents a guilt offering to the Lord. The additional amount would discourage the guilty person from stealing again in the future. Not repeating the offense represents a new behavior, or renewal. Unless one has righted one’s wrongs, one should not expect forgiveness from God or from others.

In Matthew 5:23-24, Jesus affirms this when he teaches his disciples that if a person is offering one’s gift at the altar and remembers that a brother has something against her, that person should not make the offering to God until she goes and reconciles with the brother. The person is the offender and the brother the offended. Jesus said the offender cannot bypass one’s fault and continue to worship God without justice and reconciliation being done for the offended.

Zacchaeus practiced what Scripture requires and even beyond (Luke 19:8). To integrate Leviticus 6:1-7 and Matthew 5:23-24, the offender should proactively seek reconciliation with God and the offended. First, he should approach the offended to discuss and confirm the details of misdeed, bear responsibility, make restitution as fully as possible, renew himself by not doing it again, reconstruct the relationship, and reopen the future. The offender should also go to God, being also accountable to God, to ask the

99 For the sake of using gender-inclusive language in a way that reads smoothly, this project alternates between “he/him” and “she/her” when posing hypothetical situations.
Holy Spirit to reveal one’s sin, confess, repent, and ask for God’s forgiveness and reconciliation (John 16:8).  

The second principle relates to remorse or contrition. Remorse is an essential element in the forgiving process, just as the palmist writes, “a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” (Psalm 51:17). All forgiveness, human or divine, proceeds from the same paradigm that there is mutual recognition by both parties that contrition and repentance is genuine and right relationships are restored or achieved. Genuine repentance is worth uncountable times of forgiveness, for Jesus encourages disciples by saying, “If your brother . . . repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, ‘I repent,’ forgive him” (Luke 17:3-4).

The third principle relates to the pursuit of justice. Every act of forgiveness enthrones justice. If the offender does not proactively seek restitution and reconciliation, the victim should go and reprove the offender. In Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus tells the disciples, “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault. . . . But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.” If the offender does not admit to the offense, there should be evidence by two or three witnesses to point out the fault of the offender. This demonstrates the importance of discussion by both parties of the issue in depth and, if necessary, with the help of others as witnesses to avoid self-centered emotion and one-sided accusation.

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100 R. Gane, Leviticus: The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 134-140.
Jesus then explains that if the offender “refuses to listen to them, [they should] tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, [they should] treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.” Jesus shows us that if the offender does not repent, there is a sequence of actions to confront the offender from a person, a group, and then ultimately the church. The church’s role is to help the victim to reprove the offender and pursue justice when needed. If the offender does not confess and repent in the end, the church has the right to treat the offender as an unbeliever and carry the will of the Father on earth to form judgement (Matthew 18:18-20).

The fourth principle relates to developing forgiving habits and discovering similarity. In Matthew 18:21-22, Peter asked Jesus how many times he should forgive if an offender repeatedly sins against him. Jesus replied that he should forgive “seventy-seven times,” meaning that our willingness to forgive should have no limit. This is further elaborated on in the parable of the merciful master and the unforgiving servant that follows (Matthew 18:23-35). The parable describes that a servant who owed his master 10,000 talents and could not repay the debt, and there was another man owing this servant 100 talents who also could not repay. The master “took pity on him [the servant], canceled the debt [of 10,000 talents] and let him go,” but the servant then refused to cancel the other man’s debt [of only 100 talents] and “he went off and had the man thrown into prison.” Then, the master called this unforgiving servant wicked and asked why he could not have mercy on the other man just as the master had on him; Jesus continues the story by saying, “In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed” (Matthew 18:24). The parable’s principle is shown in the last verse: “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless
you forgive your brother from your heart” (Matthew 18:35). Addressing the lesson of this parable, Patton writes, “The only proper response to [God’s forgiving our sins] is our forgiving.”101 A person who has experienced the mercy and grace of God should imitate this by giving mercy and grace to others who have done wrong.

A similar principle is stated by Jesus in the Lord’s Prayer and the subsequent passages on the Sermon on the Mount: “Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors,” and “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 6:12, 14-15). John Patton, in his book, Is Human Forgiveness Possible? interprets the Lord’s Prayer as an expression of the Kingdom, partly experienced now and fully experienced in the future. It affirms that Abba Father expresses forgiveness as a relationship between himself and his children, and that we should also express forgiveness in relationship with one another. In the eschatological sense, God’s forgiveness and ours may be tendered simultaneously. Some interpret this parallel forgiveness as human forgiveness being a reflection of the divine forgiveness, though there is a huge difference between God’s forgiveness and ours theologically, as people are not indebted to each other in the same manner and degree to which people are indebted to God.

Patton points out that the basic meaning of the word “forgiveness” in the New Testament is “releasing, surrendering, and letting go,”102 and every real disciple who

102 Ibid., 161.
follows Jesus should develop and embody a forgiving habit that can break away from the
cycle of revenge, release others from debt and bondage, while the disciple can also
experience the release of debt by God’s forgiveness. These Scriptures also imply that
when disciples are forgiven by God, they should discover that they are themselves
debtors too, similar to those who offend and owe them. As Elijah said, “I am no better
than my ancestors” (1 Kings 19:4). In the incident of the woman who committed
adultery, Jesus was asked if the woman should be stoned to death, and he responded, “If
any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her” (John 8:7). No
one dared to throw a stone, and this demonstrates that the people understood that no one
was without sin (John 8:2-11). Patton points out the importance of understanding human
forgiveness “not as doing something but as discovering something—that I am more like
those who have hurt me than different from them. I am able to forgive when I discover
that I am in no position to forgive.” Disciples are grace receivers, and they are grace
releasers too.

The fifth principle relates to the Holy Spirit guiding and empowering the
disciples. It is a mystery how one is awoken to repentance like the prodigal son. This
awakening is the turning point of a sinner to see one’s true self, which requires God’s
grace, the work of the Holy Spirit, and the sinner’s openness. At the last supper, Jesus
promised his disciples that he would not leave them alone, and he promised to send the
Counselor to teach and remind them everything he had said to them (John 14:16-26).

103 Ibid., 156-161.
104 Ibid., 176.
The Counselor is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, who comes from the Father, testifies for Jesus, and guides the disciples into all truth, disclosing to them what is to come (John 15:26-27; 16:12-14).

Disciples today definitely need the Holy Spirit to guide and empower them to embody truth, forgiveness, and communion as initiated by Jesus. Upon his resurrection, Jesus linked the importance of the Holy Spirit with forgiveness when he said to the disciples, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. . . . Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven” (John 20:21-23). Members of Jachin Church need to listen and follow the Holy Spirit as he guides them to unlearn the habits of sin, then learn the Truth and embody forgiveness when facing conflict and hurt. Jones writes,

There is . . . an inextricable relation between receiving the Holy Spirit and engaging in practices of forgiveness. Indeed, the Spirit works both to turn and return people to the power of Christ’s forgiveness and to embody that forgiveness in relations with others. . . . The Spirit enables those who have been forgiven by Christ also to become those who forgive, seeking to restore communion with others in analogous fashion to the ways it has been restored to them. . . . It is the work of the Holy Spirit to guide people in learning how to embody Christ’s forgiveness in . . . people’s lives.

The sixth principle relates to a forgiving heart and love for one’s enemy. Mutual recognition by both parties of genuine confession and repentance is a crucial element leading to authentic forgiveness. Authentic forgiveness cannot happen without it, and God surely wants justice to be done. But a willingness to forgive demonstrates courage.


106 Ibid.
and the victim’s inner battle to overcome anger and let God bring healing.¹⁰⁷ This forgiving heart is the first step in Jesus’ teaching about forgiveness. It is “love of enemy” (Matthew 5:38-45 and Luke 6:27-28) and “love of neighbor” (Matthew 22:39).

Biblically, love for self and love for neighbor are not two loves, but one and the same love with two different aspects. One is equally as precious as the other, so in love, one loves oneself and the other equally. The same applies to forgiveness. “Forgive the other as you wish to be forgiven” (Matthew 6:14-15). And in service, “do unto others as you would have them do unto you” (Matthew 7:12). For Christians, nothing on earth is more precious than love. Jesus taught his followers to love their friendly neighbors as the first mile, and love their enemies as the second mile (Matthew 5:39-44).

Christian love, agape, is a decision to act beyond emotion. It is a choice beyond feeling, a volition beyond emotion, and a loving beyond liking. One can truly love others only by redefining love from worldly love to Christian agape. Christian agape is when one loves the unlovely in generous self-giving based on the goodness of the lover; it is willing obedience to the commandment to love; it is self-sacrificial and unconditional love that accepts the other regardless of the cost; and it is love in equal regard in that one prizes others as having equal worth.¹⁰⁸ The call to love our enemies is a call to faithful witness to God who has been refusing to abandon human beings as enemies but seeking to transform them into friends.¹⁰⁹ One’s enemy reflects that person’s inner conflicts and


¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 138-139.

the dark side of one’s soul. Indeed, one participates in the creation of one’s enemy. The more one knows oneself, the more one knows one’s enemy. Forgiving love has the power to include the enemy.

Nelson Mandela, the former South African president, “walked the talk” to love his enemy in practice. For example, Mandela invited one of his former jailers to a dinner commemorating the twentieth anniversary of his release from prison; he invited his former prison guard to his inauguration ceremony as South Africa president; and he had a meal with the man who tried to kill him. Hate cannot overcome hate. Evil never destroys evil. Only love defeats hate and goodness melts down evil.

Those Christians who follow and imitate Jesus refuse violence as Jesus said that only love can defeat hatred and violence (Matthew 5:39, 44-45). Christian agape is benevolence, which is also the primary and highest virtue of the Five Constant Virtues of Confucianism that traditional Chinese pursue. If an offender refuses to repent, members at Jachin Church shall be encouraged to strive for Christian agape, which is no stranger to the Chinese, to love one’s neighbor or even an enemy. The love resumed in them in the form of enemy love is the foundation and the first crucial step for authentic forgiveness.

The seventh principle relates to releasing anger and retelling one’s story. The Bible does not prohibit anger because Jesus himself experienced and demonstrated anger. On one occasion, for example, some wanted to accuse Jesus for healing on the Sabbath; Jesus “looked around at them in anger and [was] deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts” (Mark 3:5). Other examples include Matthew 18:6-9 and 23:13.

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There are two types of anger: constructive and destructive. Augsburger points out that “anger as an emotion is morally neutral, which can be good or bad, and helpful or harmful, depending on the reasons for the anger and how it is exercised. Destructive anger freezes the normal processes of grieving into pathological mourning. Constructive anger seeks to break through the walls, yearns to remove the barriers, presses to open communication, and mobilizes energy to work at injustices.”\(^{111}\) When Christians are angry about injustice, abuse, poverty, lies, hypocrisy, and the like, it is righteous anger. But when one is angry, one should be careful not to sin. In Ephesians 4:26, Paul does not teach against being angry, but he warns against sinning while being angry: “In your anger, do not sin.” While John Stott believes that Ephesians 4:26 promotes more Christian anger to uphold righteousness,\(^{112}\) one cannot ignore the danger of misusing anger to cause sin. Therefore, Paul encourages Christians to watch out and put away unrighteous and undisciplined wrath and anger (Ephesians 4:31). One must not let one’s anger persist, for Paul writes, “Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry” (Ephesians 4:26). In this way, one would not “give the devil a foothold” (Ephesians 4:27), meaning one would then not allow devil room in one’s life to operate.\(^{113}\) In the presence of the devil and our sinful nature, anger could be easily turned to a self-centered emotion that causes destructive results, both personally and communally.

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\(^{111}\) Ibid., 60-22.


\(^{113}\) Ibid., 249-250.
The important element is to make sure anger is constructive rather than destructive. Augsburger explains, “Anger and love are compatible. Love without anger is as worthless as anger without love.”\(^{114}\) Thus, it is possible to release anger in a proper and purposeful way with love and openness. This happens first by the person owning her feelings, meaning not denying the anger and pain. This is demonstrated throughout the Psalms; for example, the psalmist writes, “Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. . . . Many are my enemies without cause, those who seek to destroy me. . . . When I weep and fast, I must endure scorn” (Psalm 69: 1, 3, 4, 10).

In addition to releasing anger, it is also critical to tell one’s story. The victim first needs to retell his story of anger, pain, and hurt repeatedly to God by writing, praying, and by asking for his justice and deliverance (see Psalms 36, 40, 42, 43, 69, 80, and 139). Volf suggests that by placing one’s unattended anger, possibly vengeful self, and unjust enemy before God who loves and does justice, one’s heart can be nourished by the love of God and the light of justice, rather than by the devil.\(^{115}\) Next, a victim should examine and share her anger and her story with a community of faith, as this group of people can listen and help discern the matter (Romans 12:15; Ephesians 4:16: 6:18). Finally, with a forgiving heart (Matthew 5:38-45) and a mind to leave room for God’s vengeance (Romans 12:19-21), a victim should go to the person with whom he is angry and


\(^{115}\) Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 124.
straighten it out (Matthew 18:15-17). If the person does not listen, one or two should be brought along. If the person still refuses to listen, the victim should tell the church.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the theological and biblical foundations of authentic forgiveness and has drawn some major principles from these passages. These principles are used to develop and implement a ministry plan in the next chapter. The goal of this plan is to teach and guide members at Jachin Church to identify, practice, and embody authentic forgiveness as well as to confront any trivialization of it.

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PART THREE

PRACTICE
CHAPTER 4
MINISTRY PLAN

This chapter transitions from the theory discussed in the previous chapters to practice. It summarizes the key theological and biblical principles drawn from Chapter 3, explains some of the theological implications for the current ministry challenge, and discusses the preferred future for this ministry initiative. It then outlines a ministry plan to accomplish the preferred future by setting strategy goals and implementing strategy content to achieve such goals. The ministry plan targets pastors and lay leaders as a start, then the congregation at Jachin Church. Further, should it be proven effective with the initial target population, the chapter concludes with ideas about extending the ministry to other churches and seminaries in Hong Kong that are interested.

**Theological Implications and the Preferred Future for Jachin Church**

There are a few key theological and biblical principles drawn from Chapter 3. First, it is critical to know the importance of embodying forgiveness, as forgiveness is at the heart of Christian faith. Conflict, evil, and hurt are inevitable in human life, so disciples should follow Jesus by embodying forgiveness, as forgiveness is crucial to renew people’s minds and rebuild broken relationships. God wills communion and
forgiveness. Human beings are created in God’s image and likeness and thus are destined for loving communion with God and with one another. However, human beings are trapped in the cyclical habits of sin, violence, and revenge, thus they break away from God and from one another. The incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus, through which he initiated love and forgiveness for us restores communion. Augsburger writes, “The value of human beings lies in their created worth. The value is affirmed by grace and rooted in creation. No one is too low to be an object of God’s love. No one is excluded from the forgiveness of God, except one excludes himself by unrepentance.”

Jesus’ disciples should imitate him to embody love, forgiveness, and communion with one another as a new habit of life.

Second, it is important to know what authentic forgiveness is. Authentic forgiveness should comprise both genuine repentance and reconciliation, where genuine repentance should consist of remorse, restitution, and renewal. One should achieve as close to this authentic forgiveness as possible so that God can heal, transform, and renew people as well as empower people to rebuild broken relationships. However, if the offender is unrepentant or inaccessible, the victim’s willingness to forgive is still genuine, though this could not complete the process of authentic forgiveness. In that case, the victim will, like King David, grieve the failure of the hope for reconciliation in order to experience an individual release, and the offended should reaffirm enemy love when applicable.

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Third, it is crucial to understand that every act of forgiveness entrones justice. If the offender does not admit his wrongdoings, the offended shall abate her passion for revenge and pursue justice by approaching the offender and seeking the confession and repentance of the offender. If the offender does not listen, two or three people from the Christian community should help talk to the offender. If he still does not acknowledge his wrongdoing, the church, meaning pastors and leaders, should go. In doing so, the offended is not merely seeking justice, but she is also working to rebuild a real community of faith from the broken relationship.

Fourth, there are important steps to take before pursuing justice. The offended should prayerfully plead for the Holy Spirit to reveal the truth, seek a biblical view, seek advice from godly people, retell the story by writing a letter to God and sharing it with godly people, pray for a forgiving heart and a love of his enemy, and pray and deal with the conflict, sin, and hurt biblically. Following these steps put the victim in a position to seek justice without seeking revenge.

There are several theological implications that follow these theological and biblical principles for the ministry challenge at Jachin Church. First, the church members at Jachin Church should be aware that authentic forgiveness is a requirement, not an option. When wronged, the offended should face the conflict and hurt with authentic forgiveness; only then can hurt become life-transforming.

Second, church members should believe that no matter how hard and hurtful it can be, they ought to imitate Jesus to learn, practice, and embody love and forgiveness as a new habit of life. They do not necessarily and helplessly fall into the cycle of sin, bitterness, hatred, and revenge with their hearts frozen, minds paralyzed, and emotions
destroyed. Instead, with the help of the Holy Spirit, the parties involved can see the created worth of the offenders and that they are precious and loved by God, regardless of what they have done wrong. They can also break away from the cycle of hopelessness and form a new cyclical habit of love, forgiveness, and communion with one another. Authentic forgiveness can turn the process and result of conflict and hurt from being life-destructive to being life-constructive.

Third, for the church members at Jachin Church who are traditional Chinese, and whose highest values include harmony, avoidance of conflict, and face-saving, they should learn that authentic forgiveness cannot be complete without confession, repentance, and reconciliation. This is to confront the tendency of many traditional Chinese Christians who practice forgiveness by overlooking misdeeds in order to maintain harmony on the surface. Deep in their hearts, however, conflicts are not resolved, hurts are aching, and relationships are decaying. As forgiveness enthrones justice, to make harmony genuine, both parties should discuss the issues in depth with one another, so that they can confess, repent, and reconcile with substance.

Fourth, for church members at Jachin Church whose practice of forgiveness is tainted by western individualistic culture, it is important for them not to trivialize forgiveness. It is not a unilateral act or a means of intraphysic release in which one does not seek repentance and reconciliation, nor is forgiveness impossible. These individuals should seek insight regarding biblical forgiveness in order to confront these fallacies.

Fifth, as authentic forgiveness requires reconciliation and genuine repentance of the parties involved, if the offender is unrepentant, the offended should develop Christian agape in order to love his enemy. To love one’s enemy is a call to faithful witness to
God, who refuses to abandon human beings as enemies but seeks to transform them into friends. Disciples should ask for God’s grace to imitate God by loving not only their neighbors, but also their enemies.

Based on the above, the preferred future of Jachin Church is that church members will be motivated to identify and practice authentic forgiveness, confront the tendency to trivialize forgiveness under cultural influences, and embody authentic forgiveness as a new habit of their lives. Further, as I have been collecting ideas from pastors and seminary professors while researching for this project, some have invited me to share at their churches, institutes, and seminaries about this topic in the coming year. The preferred future for other churches, institutes, and seminaries where I will share is to arouse their interest in exploring, identifying, and practicing authentic forgiveness within their own contexts.

**Strategy Goals**

There are six goals to accomplish that will usher in the preferred future of Jachin Church. The first goal is to help the congregation understand and accept the fact that conflict and hurt are unavoidable. Conflict and hurt are not instigated by God, but they come from human sin. Some sinful acts are unintentional, while others are deliberate. The consequences of sin make conflict and hurt inevitable. The way that members choose to respond to sinful acts determines if the process and result are life-constructive or life-destructive.

The second goal is to let the members at Jachin Church know that the best option to respond to sinful acts and hurt is forgiveness. A biblical response is not characterized
by revenge, hiding one’s hatred, or burying the bitterness. Believers are called to fight evil not by evil, negation, hatred, or revenge, but by good, affirmation, love, and forgiveness. “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that,” said Martin Luther King, Jr.³ By the light, love, and forgiveness of Jesus, human hostility and hurt can be mended by human forgiveness.⁴ Forgiving and being forgiven are two sides of a coin. Not only in forgiving is the offended released and renewed, but being forgiven also frees the offender from past guilt and brings reconciliation with the victim.

The third goal is to teach congregants what biblically based forgiveness truly is. Members shall learn that authentic forgiveness that is grounded in the Bible can turn conflict and hurt to a life-enriching experience because God uses authentic forgiveness as a divine tool to heal people’s hurt, release people from a painful past, correct their past actions, reopen a new future, and restore broken relationships. Various Scriptures examined in Chapter 3 are used to identify what authentic forgiveness is. Authentic forgiveness comprises both genuine repentance and reconciliation of the broken relationship, where genuine repentance consists of remorse, restitution, and renewal. Achieving anything less than authentic forgiveness is considered falling short of it, and people may not be able to benefit from the transforming power of authentic forgiveness to the full extent that God intends.

The fourth goal is to educate church members regarding the cultural influences of the Chinese tradition and western individualistic culture as they relate to forgiveness, and


to guide them to confront the tendency to trivialize authentic forgiveness. The characteristics of Chinese tradition rooted in Confucianism include such values as harmony, inexpressiveness, humility, avoidance of conflict, honor versus shame, and saving face. The characteristics of western individualistic culture include self-love and individual interests, over and above the interests of the community. The goal is to explain how these cultural influences affect how members at Jachin Church perceive and practice authentic forgiveness.

The fifth goal is to guide members at Jachin Church to practice authentic forgiveness with concrete steps so that they can experience how God uses this divine gift to renew them. Whether they are offenders or the offended, they are encouraged to open up the wounds encountered in the past and face them. They are led to prayerfully recall how they were wronged and what wrongs they have done to others. They will be motivated to practice authentic forgiveness, either as offenders or offended. Concrete steps for the offenders to repent or the offended to forgive are provided for them to follow and practice in the presence of the Holy Spirit. Finding out the details of the responsibility of each party is important in order that they can confess and repent, and the other can forgive and initiate reconciliation. At the end of the process of authentic forgiveness, the parties involved should reconnect with one another and work towards reconciliation, which will gradually heal the wounds. They will eventually experience the wounds becoming a scar, and this scar will have a transformed meaning of a deeper and stronger union than before. While it may not always be possible to achieve authentic forgiveness, one should move as far toward complete forgiveness as possible.
The sixth goal is to cultivate church members to embody authentic forgiveness as a new habit of their Christian lives. In order to imitate what Jesus does, church members shall learn to unlearn their past cyclical habits of blind retaliation or burying the conflict and pain within. They will develop a lifelong habit rather than one-time event as they learn to practice authentic forgiveness in their daily lives.

**Strategy Content**

The strategy content of this project involves five steps that are used to achieve the goals as discussed. Each step encompasses one or more of the goals. The strategy content will be used to refine the existing materials of forgiveness taught and practiced at Jachin Church.

**Step 1: Authentic Forgiveness Sermon Series**

The first step, the sermon series, is the primary way to communicate the importance of authentic forgiveness to the congregation. As Scripture has a continuing and transformative role in Christian lives, sermons about forgiveness at the pulpit are used as signposts pointing the congregation to God and his divine gift of authentic forgiveness as a tool to change lives. Various Scriptures will be used to describe God’s view of authentic forgiveness, as well as how to practice it. See Appendix A for a list of topics and accompanying Scripture verses.

During the teaching on the pulpit, the characteristics of Chinese tradition and western individualistic culture in relation to relationships and forgiveness will also be discussed. Some contrasting views that are norms of these two cultures will be brought
to light as the Scripture is preached. In particular, the sermon series will focus on confronting the tendency to trivialize authentic forgiveness.

Step 2: Identify the Members in Need and Interested in Learning

The pulpit is used to communicate the truth to the congregation so that they can be shaped and transformed by the Word of God. God, out of his love and mercy, chooses to reveal himself and his truth through his Word. However, as the adult congregation is very large and their backgrounds are broad, the in-depth explanation and practice of forgiveness will be held in various smaller platforms for people in need or for those interested in helping others forgive. Different smaller platforms, ranging ideally from ten to one hundred people, will be used to teach, guide, and walk with people through the process of forgiveness and/or repentance.

Currently, there are a few regular gatherings for smaller platforms held at Jachin Church, such as a biweekly pastoral cell group, a monthly cell leaders’ groups, weekly cell groups, and different church school classes. Throughout the past eighteen months, in order to gather the preliminary responses from others to refine this project and prepare the materials for the ministry plan, a small-scale pilot run was launched. This effort was incorporated into a few of these already-existing groups, including the pastoral cell group, the discipleship training group and church school class at Jachin Church, a seminary alumni group, and discussion groups comprised of seminary professors. The ministry plan will be implemented in a similar way, meaning that the comprehensive

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5 At Jachin Church, the congregation ranges from young adults in their early twenties to older adults in their eighties. Regarding level of education, some congregants have only a trade school degree while others have doctoral degrees.
material on authentic forgiveness will be continually taught interactively at various platforms for those who are interested.

Step 3: Practice Authentic Forgiveness

Having learned the theory in depth, those who are interested in practicing it will be guided step by step. Authentic forgiveness is not merely a single act or an attitude, but a process that requires one to go through a series of concrete steps. Based on the theological and biblical principles, there are several concrete steps to be taken by both the offenders and the offended.

For those who realize that they are offenders who need to be forgiven, there are seven steps. First, they must realize that they need to resolve the conflicts and hurt proactively. Second, they should recall what they have done to hurt others and write it down in detail. Guilt is a gift from God to awaken offenders, the content of which deserves to be explored, expressed, and released. If the guilt is genuine and based on biblical rather than worldly standards or a false inner critical self, the offenders are guided to know that the guilt can be “not undone, but redone through recognition and repentance.”

Third, offenders must confess to the offended what they have done wrong clearly and in detail. Confession should be made as public as the commission of the act. Much wisdom needs to be exercised here as how public it should be on a case by case basis that is appropriate to the offense. Care should be taken regarding its impact on the hearers. Fourth, offenders should have remorse with contrition. They need to show

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6 Augsburger, New Freedom of Forgiveness, 76.
genuine sorrow with an in-depth discussion of the details of the matter with the offended. Fifth, they need to restitute what was destroyed as much as possible. Sixth, offenders should renew themselves, meaning that they should make a change in life direction to disavow their old behavior and affirm a new principle of moral action. Finally, offenders must ask for forgiveness from the offended, while giving enough time and space for the offended to digest and respond. Forgiveness is the mutual recognition that repentance is genuine, intended, and embraced.

For those who realize that they are victims who need to offer forgiveness, there are eleven steps. First, the offended should bring the story, hurt, and pain to God. Like King David, the offended can write letters to God to share their hurt, and then grieve.

Second, the offended should retell the story repeatedly to God and, when ready, to those who are mature in Christ, such as a pastor, a lay leader, or a counselor. They shall retell the story repeatedly until they can separate themselves from anger, lament, or complaint, and can reframe the meaning of the matter. When they are able to discuss the matter with increasing distance from the injury, the practice of authentic forgiveness will become possible. Again, extra care needs to be exercised here by the mature hearers.

Third, with the presence and help of the Holy Spirit, the offended should grieve and seek to see the matter clearly, seeing that God’s hand is in the midst of their pain. God never leaves the offended alone, which brings comfort. The stories of Joseph, King David, and Jesus will be examined to see how God was with them in their suffering. For example, no matter how badly Joseph was treated, Scripture mentions many times that God was with Joseph: “The LORD was with Joseph . . . in the house of his Egyptian master. . . . His master saw that the LORD was with him. . . . The LORD blessed the
household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. . . . The LORD was with him . . . and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. . . . The LORD was with Joseph” (Genesis 39:2, 3, 5, 21, 23). By taking these first three steps, the meaning of the hurt and pain might possibly be reinterpreted. As Joseph says to his brothers upon their reconciliation, “Do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you” (Genesis 45:5).

Fourth, the offended should release the anger in a proper way by “owning” and “opening.” Owning the feelings means not denying them, but releasing them properly. Opening means opening up one’s story to God and those who are mature in Christ repeatedly, and later, when appropriate, to the offenders.

Fifth, the offended should discover similarity. As discussed, forgiveness is not something that the offended do, but something that takes place when the offended discover that they are more like the offenders than unlike them, more similar than different. The offended are able to forgive when they discover that they are also forgiven by grace. The offended are grace receivers, and they should also be grace releasers.

Sixth, the offended should resume value and love for the offenders. Even when the offender has done a terrible wrong, there is more to a person than a single misdeed. The offended should seek to view the offender through God’s eyes. The value of human beings lies in their created worth, which is affirmed by the grace of Jesus’ incarnation, death, and resurrection for every human being, no matter how bad a person is. No one is
too evil to be loved by God, and no one is excluded from the forgiveness of God, except those who exclude themselves by unrepentance.\textsuperscript{7}

Seventh, the offended should release their painful past. Like Joseph, King David, and Jesus, the offended must accept the reality that what was done by the offender cannot be undone. To accept the past as past is to come to terms with reality, so that one can proceed forward without continuing to look back. The offended need to believe that the offenders are able to repent, change, and turn away from past patterns of behavior. The offended also need to believe that they are equally able to change in the presence of the Holy Spirit. During the process of releasing the painful past, they shall revisit the past, rework the injury, and rebuild the loss through reframing and reinterpreting the meanings of the matter.\textsuperscript{8}

Eighth, the offended should let go and develop forgiving hearts, characterized by love of one’s enemy, especially if the offender is unrepentant. The offended ought to prayerfully let go of the matter to God and develop a forgiving heart. Forgiveness is conditional, but love is not.

Ninth, the offended should forgive and reconstruct the relationship. They ought to listen to confessions of the offenders. They should seek to recall and review the injury and the pain of offence, and work through the pain and anger together with the offenders. The repentance has to be genuine, honest, and as complete as possible. This is the central work of forgiveness (Matthew 18:15; Luke 17:3-4). When both parties recognize the

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., 38-43.

\textsuperscript{8} Augsburger, Helping People Forgive, 68-72.
genuine repentance and acceptance together, both parties shall then reconstruct the relationship together. Forgiving must come before any attempt is made to forget, otherwise forgetting is destructive because of the unhealed anger within one’s mind.

Tenth, the offended should reopen the future. The unhealed wound is transformed to a wound that has healing power within the soul. The reopening of the future can result in a friendly parting with mutual respect, a willingness to risk another journey, or a new level of friendship.

Finally, the offended should reaffirm the relationship. They ought to celebrate the reconciliation towards the end of the process of forgiveness and reconciliation. After the two parties touch each other as deeply as possible to release the pain, they shall mutually recognize and affirm that right relationship has been restored and will grow.9

During the practice of authentic forgiveness, if the offender is inaccessible, unrepentant, or deceased, the offended can only grieve in full and work through the first eight steps. In this case, working through these initial steps will bring healing and release from God. Though it is not a complete reconciliation, the offended have tried to practice authentic forgiveness. In that case, the offended, like King David, can begin their lives again in Christ.

To practice steps nine, ten, and eleven above, sometimes both sides are responsible for the offense, but in different degrees and ratio of responsibility. In this case, to say “I forgive you” with an element of self-righteousness may not be appropriate, as it is tainted with superiority and a hidden judgment. Therefore, a mutual and

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reciprocal phrase, such as, “I want to accept and to be accepted,” “I want to be close again,” or “I would like to forgive and to be forgiven,” would be better to restore right relationships. Acceptance does not carry a sense of a superior-to-inferior relationship, so if it is expressed with actions of love, it is a very powerful reconciliation and restoration of relationship (Matthew 7:12).

In the case of marriage, which is a two-way matter, forgiveness in marriage is often bilateral. Thus, neither person should be totally blamed nor the other held completely innocent. Nevertheless, one should not assume blame or responsibility of each party to be always fifty-fifty. Authentic forgiveness happens when both are changed, both come to meet the other, both work to reconstruct their relationship, and both seek to give and receive genuine repentance for the issue in dispute. The result of forgiveness in marriage is to set the other free so that each can live spontaneously, joyfully, fully, openly, and honestly. If one side is willing to forgive, repent, and reconcile, but the other side is unresponsive, the willing side is still genuinely doing one’s part biblically and extending an invitation of reconciliation to the other side, though this does not complete authentic forgiveness at that moment. For traditional Chinese families, many often avoid conflicts and bury the issues in their minds, so they are encouraged to discuss the issues openly and honestly, meet with each other and work mutually to reconstruct their relationship should issues arise. In marriage, the goal is to achieve unconditional familial love and respect with five basic freedoms: freedom to “see what
one sees”; freedom to “think one’s own thoughts”; freedom to “feel one’s own feelings”; freedom to “choose what one wants”; and freedom to “act, speak, risk and to be real.”

Step 4: Small Focus Group and Story-Telling

Small focus groups will be set up to follow up with people who have learned about authentic forgiveness and practiced it (Steps 1, 2, and 3 above), but still need help. Each small focus group shall consist of six to eight members at the most. Pastors, with the help of lay leaders, will lead the small focus groups to guide the participants to practice authentic forgiveness, either to forgive or to be forgiven. Five two-hour sessions will be provided for this purpose. In each session, pastors will also worship with, pray for, and administer Holy Communion for those in need, so that they can experience and be embraced by the love and forgiveness of God, which in turn will empower them to go through the tough process of forgiving others. In our postmodern times, David Fitch, in his book, The Great Giveaway, points out that people pursue experiences of all kinds. Postmoderns learn and engage with truth differently than do those of previous generations. They do not merely want to see how truth is talked about intellectually as information; instead, they want to experience and engage truth. They demand a living truth they can participate in. Those in need can experience how worship, prayer, and Holy Communion connect them to God as God becomes present in a real way in the mystery of the Lord’s supper, services of healing, and the power of joint worship.11

10 Ibid., 86-89, 110-111.

In the small focus group, apart from leading and guiding, the pastors will encourage participants to tell stories of their experiences of forgiving others, so as to support and encourage each other to continue trying. Storytelling is very effective in the postmodern era as people like to participate in others’ stories. They might be suspicious of truth known to them only in words, but they respect truth that can be seen, lived, and experienced in life. McClendon indicates that truth is narrative dependent, and it is to be probed, experienced and lived out rather than by talking it out. The power of stories, the wisdom of narrative, and the truth of human experience, told in the accounts of encounter between people and God and between one person and another, can break down walls. By listening to and participating in the stories, the self of an individual is awakened.

As one’s own story is inadequate, one is hungry for a wider story to complete it and a greater story to overcome one’s persistent self-deceit and redeem one’s common life. Ultimately, the Bible is full of wider and greater stories that are character shaping when people participate in them. To inspire the members at Jachin Church to practice authentic forgiveness, pastors will share the stories of Joseph and his brothers and the prodigal son and will encourage members to share their real stories of forgiveness. In doing so, those in need may be awakened and begin to practice it.

During the small-scale pilot run that took place recently, there was a woman at Jachin Church named Agnes who disclosed her deep hurt. Forty years ago, Agnes came

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13 Ibid., 77-78, 345-348.

14 Ibid., 349-351.
to Hong Kong with her mother and two younger siblings from Mainland China to seek and reunite with her father, who had come to Hong Kong few years earlier to work and prepare a home for them. The three siblings were between eight and twelve years of age at that time.

When they arrived in Hong Kong, however, her father avoided seeing them. They then found out that their father had another family. At that time, the four of them did not know Cantonese, the language spoken in Hong Kong, and they were left alone in Hong Kong without money and accommodation. The whole family was very hurt by her father’s misdeed. The hurt and subsequent divorce made her mother fall into serious depression. Over the past forty years, Agnes and her mother and siblings seldom met with her father.

During the small-scale pilot run, Agnes followed what she learned and decided to approach her father, confront him, and seek reconciliation. By the grace of God, her father at age eighty-five expressed to her that he was grateful for the opportunity to meet with Agnes and explain and confess his wrongful act to the family. Her father explained the hardships he faced when coming to Hong Kong in 1970s, and in tears, he apologized deeply for what he had done to hurt them. Having struggled for weeks, she decided to forgive her father and reconcile with him. The, she evangelized to him. In the end, her father was amazed by the love that his daughter imitated Jesus to give to him, and he decided to give his life to follow Jesus. When the other group participants heard Agnes’s story, they were all shocked and encouraged to try to forgive in their own cases.
Step 5: Evaluating the Result

The project and ministry plan focus on two aspects: cognitive learning and practice. For those who attend any portion, they would be provided with questionnaires to evaluate the content in regards to both aspects. They would respond on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the least satisfied and 5 being the most satisfied. The questionnaire includes eighteen responses, such as, “The content provides sufficient theological and biblical foundation”; “The content can be practiced in daily life”; and “The class has inspired and motivated me to reflect and practice authentic forgiveness.” Participants would also be asked if they would recommend others to attend and learn authentic forgiveness next time the church offers such an opportunity. Those who participate in a small focus group would be surveyed regarding whether they found the experience helpful. If so, they would be prompted to share how the experience has impacted their lives in terms of their body, spirit, and emotion, as well as their relationship with God and others.

For the small-scale pilot run this past year with over one hundred participants in different platforms, similar questionnaires were given to them. The responses received were very positive. Over 90 percent of the participants selected 4 or 5. Most indicated that they would recommend this learning experience to others. Some have even begun to practice it and reconcile with others. However, as the small-scale pilot run held in different platforms lasted only for two to five hours, the participants commented that they are interested in a more comprehensive course with a longer duration, since it is a difficult topic that requires time to digest and practice. The responses and comments
received so far have proven valuable as the content of the ministry plan has been refined for the pilot run, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

**Initial Target Population**

Invitations to learn and practice authentic forgiveness deeply through smaller platforms will be sent to pastors first, then lay leaders, and finally to the entire congregation at Jachin Church. The pastors and lay leaders are targeted as potential leaders for the ministry, although of course they will benefit as well if they have forgiveness and/or reconciliation issues to work through in their own lives. The congregation is targeted as participants in the ministry, especially those who have past hurt and conflict that needs to be addressed. If it is effective, the same ministry will be offered to different churches and seminaries that are interested.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has provided a brief outline of the ministry plan which motivates the members of Jachin Church to identify and practice authentic forgiveness as well as to confront the tendency to trivialize authentic forgiveness under cultural influence. It highlighted the key theological and biblical principles, the theological implications for the current ministry challenge, the preferred future for this ministry initiative, and the strategy goals and strategy content to achieve such goals. A comprehensive ministry plan is a work in progress, but the feedback from the small-scale pilot run has vastly helped frame this initiative to help those who are paralyzed by bitterness, hurt, or guilt.
CHAPTER 5

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

This chapter describes a timeline to implement the new ministry initiative for three groups of people: pastors first, then lay leaders, and subsequently the entire congregation of Jachin Church. The implementation phase begins with a pilot project which extends over one year. The small-scale pilot run done throughout the past eighteen months, as mentioned in Chapter 4, collected comments and responses from various participants, which have been and will continually be incorporated into the pilot project. This chapter also discusses the physical and human resources needed and how pastors and lay leaders will be selected, recruited, and trained to help others forgive. Finally, it suggests means to assess the effectiveness of the pilot project. Based on the assessment, adjustments will be made continually to the ministry initiative prior to a full launch by the end of 2018 to both Jachin Church and other churches and seminaries in Hong Kong.

Summary of the Pilot Project

After incorporating all the comments and responses from the small-scale pilot run, the content of the new ministry initiative is determined. The pilot project will be used as a tool to help achieve it. The pastors of Jachin Church will be targeted initially, and
subsequently the lay leaders. The pilot project will include both teaching on authentic forgiveness as well as practicing it with concrete steps.

At the end of the teaching and practice, invitations will be sent to those pastors and lay leaders who have embraced the process to become caring mentors and helpers for the small focus groups, which will help guide people to face and deal with the hurt and conflict in their lives. Once the caring mentors and helpers are identified, recruited, and trained, the new ministry initiative will be launched to the entire congregation of Jachin Church, tentatively in August 2018. Small focus groups will be set up to assist those members who need special care during the process of their learning and practice of authentic forgiveness. The caring mentors and helpers will facilitate, motivate, and guide the church members to practice forgiveness whether they are the offenders or the offended.

Assessment to measure the effectiveness of the pilot project for different groups will be done on an ongoing basis. The effectiveness of the ministry plan will be assessed on two aspects: cognitive learning and practice. The assessment will measure whether the participants can understand what authentic forgiveness is, confront the trivialization of it under cultural influence, and practice it step by step.

**Implementation Timeline**

The implementation timeline outlines three phases of the pilot project and assigns estimated completion dates to each phase. The implementation timeline is sensitive to the church calendar, so as not to disrupt the existing ministries and programs, such as
gospel events during the Mid-Autumn Festival, Christmas and Advent services, family events during Lunar New Year, and services related to Lent and Easter.

Pastors (August 2017 to January 2018)

There is a regular pastoral cell gathering at Jachin Church that is held twice a month; each gathering lasts for two hours. As the senior pastor of Jachin Church, I am responsible for nourishing, mentoring, and caring for my pastoral team. The pastoral cell gathering is a very blessed platform where pastors can come together regularly, putting aside their workload to come close to God and support each other. During the pastoral cell gathering, the pastors study Scripture together to be shaped by his word; read, share, and reflect on books from scholars and pastors;¹ share their joy and pain; and pray for and support one another. Most of the pastors have known one another for more than ten years and they trust each other deeply. The pastoral team is open and transparent, and they are ready to learn and share new initiatives, as this has been the culture of the group.

At the time of writing, all the pastors are well informed about the pilot project and have indicated their support. There is consensus among the group that there is a deep need for this new ministry initiative at Jachin Church. Although there is concern that the process of revisiting wounds may bring fresh hurt and pain, the pastoral team agrees on the importance and significance of this ministry.

During the period between August and November 2017, the content of the new ministry initiative would be continually shared in depth with the pastors, so that they can

¹ For example, books read in the past include Dissident Discipleship by David Augsburger, The Making of a Leader by Robert Clinton, and The Gift of Being Yourself by David Benner.
identify what authentic forgiveness is and be motivated to practice it. During the process, they will be encouraged to identify their own unaddressed hurts and go through the steps of practicing authentic forgiveness as described in Chapter 4 with close support and care from one another. Apart from the support and care among the pastoral team, my mentor, Dr. David Augsburger, will continue to give advice if any issues arise that require his counsel. In addition, a Christian clinical psychologist who is now practicing in Hong Kong would assist and advise Jachin Church during the launch of this initiative.

In December 2017, there will be a thorough assessment on the effectiveness of the new ministry initiative, the details of which will be discussed in the “Assessment” section below. Based on the assessment, the materials and content of the ministry plan will be further revised. In January 2018, caring mentors among the pastoral team will be selected, recruited, and trained to help others forgive when the pilot project is extended to the lay leaders and the entire congregation of Jachin Church. Details regarding the selection and recruitment of caring mentors will be discussed in the “Development of Caring mentors and Caring helpers” section below.

Core Lay Leaders (February to June 2018)

The next group to be served in the pilot project will be the sixty lay leaders, or cell leaders, of Jachin Church. The pastors are responsible for nourishing the cell leaders, caring for and discipling them, and giving them direction. The cell leaders, in turn, are responsible for nourishing and caring for cell members. Every week, the cell leaders hold cell group gatherings where they worship with the cell members, study the Bible with them, and teach, guide, and pray for them, so that they can be more like Jesus. Not
everyone attending adult services at Jachin Church participates in cell groups. There are now approximately 550 adults who are attending adult cell groups. As conflict and hurt are inevitable in daily life, it is of paramount importance to let the cell leaders experience the blessing and power of authentic forgiveness and equip them to guide the cell members to properly perceive and practice forgiveness.

During February 2018 to May 2018, there will be two stages to teach and guide the cell leaders about authentic forgiveness. The first stage includes five two-hour sessions. Based on the experience of the small-scale pilot run this past year, the participants commented that the content was too condensed, and they suggested that there should be at least five two-hour lessons to introduce what authentic forgiveness is and to take some time to practice it. The first stage is mainly for them to understand and identify the theological and biblical foundation of forgiveness, so that they can confront the tendency to trivialize it under cultural influence. There will be some practice in this stage, but the group is too big for going deeply into the hearts of those who have deep pain and hurt.

Thus, those who want to deal with their hurt will be invited to the second stage to participate in the small focus group, where the caring mentors will be there to assist. Each small focus group will have one caring mentor to lead a maximum of six to eight cell leaders who seek help. As mentioned in the Strategy Content, in the small focus group session, there will be worship, prayer time, Holy Communion, and storytelling each time to connect them with Jesus who embodies love, forgiveness, and communion. They are reminded that they are grace receivers, so they are empowered by Jesus to be grace releasers. These small focus groups will be held biweekly with a maximum of five
sessions. During these five sessions, participants are encouraged to go through the concrete steps of authentic forgiveness as stated in Chapter 4.

In June 2018, there will be a thorough assessment to measure the effectiveness of the new ministry initiative, emphasizing both quantitative and qualitative means. The details of this assessment will be discussed under the “Assessment” section below. Based on the assessment, the materials and content of the ministry plan will be further revised and refined. In July 2018, caring helpers among the core lay leaders will be selected, recruited, and trained to help others forgive when the new ministry initiative is extended to the entire congregation in August 2018. Those cell leaders who embody the content of the ministry plan will be considered to be selected, recruited, and trained as caring helpers who will serve alongside the caring mentors. The caring helpers are primarily facilitators to assist the caring mentors.

Entire Congregation (August to November 2018)

Implementation of the project within the congregation will begin with a four-week sermon series about authentic forgiveness in the pulpit of the adult services in August 2018. The sermon series will be narrative based, covering the stories of Joseph and his brothers, the prodigal son, together with relevant Scriptures stated in Chapter 4. This sermon series to be held in August is sensitive to the church calendar, so as not to interfere with the existing ministries and festivals.

After the four-week sermon series, the entire congregation should have a basic idea of the importance of practicing authentic forgiveness and an understanding of what it is. To follow up on the sermon series, the church school of Jachin Church will promote
and offer a course in September to those in the congregation who want to learn more about authentic forgiveness and to practice it. First, there will be classroom teaching. Five two-hour lessons in the classroom setting will be offered as a start in order to provide a deeper understanding of what authentic forgiveness is theologically and biblically and confront any trivialization of it. In the classroom, participants are also motivated to follow the concrete steps as stated in Chapter 4, whether they are offenders or offended. The course will go much deeper into this topic than the four-week sermon series because each Sunday service allows only forty minutes of preaching, and the diversity of backgrounds and needs within the church require sermons to be broadly outlined. In this smaller classroom setting, the course content can specifically target those in need.

Upon the completion of classroom teaching, those participants who feel the need to practice forgiveness or repentance can sign up to join a small focus group session. Similar to how it is operated for the cell leaders, there will be five sessions for each small focus group with a maximum of six to eight people in each group. As church members may not be as spiritually mature as cell leaders, more care is needed in the small focus group. Therefore, each small focus group will have one caring mentor and one caring helper to listen to their stories, facilitate them to share and support one another, motivate them to deal with the hurt and conflict, and encourage them either to forgive or to seek forgiveness as well as to reconstruct the broken relationship. During the five sessions, the caring mentor will also observe and decide if there is need to refer some severe cases to seek help from outside counselors.
Resources

The resources needed include both material resources and human resources. Regarding material resources, the primary resources are the sermon notes and classroom teaching notes that will be used for the preaching and teaching portions of the project. These are currently being prepared and revised in anticipation of the pilot project launch. Other material resources include rooms of various sizes to cater to large group learning as well as small focus groups, a sound system for worship and teaching, a visual system such as a computer, projector, and screen, and the bread and cup required for administering Holy Communion. All of these other material resources are readily available at Jachin Church.

Regarding human resources, the caring mentors and caring helpers will guide and walk with those in need to go through the process of authentic forgiveness. In my role as senior pastor of Jachin Church, I will be heavily involved in the pilot project to teach, guide, and walk with the participants and train and supervise caring mentors and caring helpers. Other than that, there will be outside help from my mentor and the clinical psychologist if and when needed.

Development of Caring Mentors and Caring Helpers

The new ministry initiative requires caring mentors and caring helpers to guide and walk with those who need help to face their hurts and practice authentic forgiveness. The caring mentors are recruited from among the pastoral staff, whereas the caring helpers are recruited from the cell leaders. After participating in the pilot project, those pastors and cell leaders embodying forgiveness taught and experienced in the class and
the small focus group are considered to become the caring mentors and caring helpers if they meet certain criteria.

The criteria to select caring mentors and caring helpers comprises three aspects, namely “HAM”: hospitality, availability, and maturity. Regarding hospitality, as the caring mentors are required to lead people to share openly and deeply their hurts and pain, they have to be patient and caring, and speak with a tone that encourages participants to lay their hearts bare. The caring mentors will take the lead and the caring helpers will assist.

In relation to availability, as there are only six pastors looking after one thousand people at Jachin Church, the duties of each pastor are already very heavy. Therefore, those who are called to become caring mentors have to set aside extra time in order to take up extra work to serve those in need. Forgiveness is difficult and complex, and there requires a lot of space in the pastors’ minds to digest, care for, and guide those in need to seek healing, forgive, and reconcile. Though the caring helpers will serve much less intensively than the caring mentors, they are also required to consider whether they can set aside time to assist.

In terms of maturity, the caring mentors need to be mature not only spiritually, but also emotionally. Most of the pastors have already had training in pastoral care; nevertheless, their emotions have to be mature, stable, and healthy as well because they would need to listen to others’ painful stories. The caring helpers should also be mature spiritually and emotionally as they will assist the caring mentors. When they listen to the stories of those in need, facilitate, and encourage them to take further steps to let go, be healed by God, reconnect with the offenders with forgiving hearts, seek the offenders to
repent, forgive and release the offenders, and reconcile with one another, there may be a lot of hiccups during the process. Reconciliation involves a lot of complexities, such as struggles, false inner selves, lies, fear, false guilty feelings, anger, shame, and grief. The caring mentors and caring helpers must be healthy and mature enough to guide, give advice, or facilitate.

If the caring mentors or caring helpers themselves have experienced divine and human forgiveness in their past, they are encouraged to share their stories. As discussed, storytelling is a healing narrative and is one of the most powerful ways to invite others to practice authentic forgiveness as well. As people extend themselves to practice authentic forgiveness, they experience the divine gift of true reconciliation.

**Assessment**

Assessment to measure the effectiveness of the pilot project will be made in each of the three phases of outreach: to pastors, lay leaders, and the entire congregation. There will be quantitative and qualitative measurement. In relation to quantitative measurement, the number of participants and attendance will be recorded to see if the sermon series and the course offering about authentic forgiveness are well received. Regarding qualitative measurement, as the new ministry initiative focuses on two aspects—cognitive learning and practice—those who have attended will be provided with questionnaires in addition to being asked personally to evaluate the content on both aspects. See Appendix B for a sample of the questions in the questionnaire.

Based on the results received from the assessment of each stage, adjustments will be made to the ministry plan to improve it. There will be a full launch from the end of
2018 onward, and the ministry will be offered again every year for new pastors, new lay leaders, and new church members of Jachin Church.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has provided a brief timeline to implement the new ministry initiative for three groups of people: pastors first, then lay leaders, and subsequently the entire congregation of Jachin Church. The implementation phase begins with a pilot project which extends over one year. Should it be proven effective at Jachin Church, the identification and practice of authentic forgiveness will be introduced to other churches, Christian institutes, and seminaries that have shown interest.
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

There are two questions addressed in this project: what truly forgiveness is and how true forgiveness can be achieved. No one can avoid conflict, sin, and evil in one’s life, and these often cause hurt and brokenness. To overcome the hurt, brokenness, bitterness, and hatred, one should practice forgiveness, as it is a divine gift offered by God for humanity to release people from their past, reopen the future, and empower them to risk further relationship.

There are people who are unwilling to live as forgiven and forgiving people and unwilling to live as people who seek to live in the light of God’s reconciliation. There are people who seek vengeance rather than forgiveness, domination and abuse rather than repentance and reconciliation, and repayment of violence with violence rather than with love.¹ The decision is in each person’s hand. Though it is countercultural for one to choose to love one’s enemy and forgive the repentant rather than to fight and seek revenge, we as Jesus’ disciples are called to follow Jesus to love and forgive. Forgiveness is costly, but we deeply need it. Those who live under the shadow of deep pain and bitterness from the past can be renewed by forgiving instead of unforgiving.

The goal of this project is to motivate members at Jachin Church to identify and practice authentic forgiveness that is theologically and biblically based. Authentic forgiveness should comprise two aspects: mutual recognition that repentance is genuine and reconciliation of the impaired relationship. Practicing authentic forgiveness brings about transformation both personally and communally to the full extent that God intends.

¹ Jones, Embodying Forgiveness, 262.
However, forgiveness carries different meanings and expressions in different cultures. Some forgive by overlooking, some forgive by forgetting, some forgive to avoid conflict without discussing in depth of each party’s responsibility, and some forgive to be self-healed without dealing with the impaired relationship. These kinds of forgiveness deviate from biblically based authentic forgiveness and cannot fully renew people and empower them to break away from the cycles of blind retaliation and brokenness. The way members at Jachin Church practice forgiveness deviates from authentic forgiveness in various aspects because their perception and practice of it are tainted by the cultural influences of Chinese tradition and western individualism.

Chinese tradition pursues harmony as one of its core values, and while harmony is generally good, its negative aspect is that when people forgive, they tend to avoid discussing the details of the conflict and hurt in order to maintain harmony. This often results in decay of relationship in the long run if it involves injustice and deep hurt. Authentic forgiveness is not merely about harmony; it requires discussion of the issues in depth, genuine confession and repentance of one side or both sides, and reconciliation.

Western individualistic culture upholds individual dignity and self-worth, and while these also are generally good, their negative aspects are that they promote individual self-care as the central value. The needs of the individual are more important than the needs of the community. Due to the individualistic task of self-care, forgiveness in an individualistic culture has turned from an interpersonal bridge to an intra-personal process of self-healing unrelated to the community. Authentic forgiveness is not merely about an individual’s own need and self-healing, but it is a social transaction restoring and reconciling broken relationships between both parties.
As a deacon and pastor for almost twenty years, I have made a lot of mistakes to mislead others to forgive without taking sufficient care of their inner hurts, their need to pursue the offender’s repentance, and their deep desire to reconcile the broken relationship with the offender. As a Chinese Christian in Hong Kong who has studied in North America, I understand why many Christians in Hong Kong have an unbiblical view of forgiveness. When practicing forgiveness, one needs to confront the tendency to trivialize authentic forgiveness in order to receive the full blessedness that God intends to give to humanity both personally and communally. Authentic forgiveness is a divine means for humanity to break the cycles of bitterness, violence, and revenge. It is an act to correct previous wrong actions and to release people on both sides from the consequences of these actions. Authentic forgiveness is a complex, long, and difficult process, but it is worthwhile for believers to try their best to identify and practice this invaluable gift offered by God.

To end this project, a story of authentic forgiveness is worthy of mention. Andrew is a fifty-year-old father and a member of Jachin Church. When Andrew was born, he was regarded as infelicitous because following his birth, his family almost went broke and his father had an extramarital affair. Traditional Chinese are superstitious and his parents believed that he brought bad luck to their marriage and financial situation. Andrew was neglected and not well taken care of during his childhood.

Andrew has two brothers, and they were both abused physically and mentally. Approximately twenty-five years ago, when they could become independent, both his brothers left Hong Kong for good because they had suffered deep pain and hurt during their childhood and wanted to cut off the memories of their past and the relationship with
their parents. Andrew’s eldest brother was the most severely abused; at the age of four, he was beaten and left alone on the street for hours as a punishment for his disobedience.

Andrew’s father did not have a stable job for many years, and he gambled and often lost lots of money. Their parents often quarreled, were drunk, and even fought each other from time to time. During Andrew’s childhood, his father had several affairs and at times even brought his mistresses home. His mother had no one to turn to and left home a few times. Each time, Andrew said the siblings were in great fear and distress, and they begged their mother to come back home. In the end, she returned home, partially because of her need to take care of the children and partially because of the Chinese customary moral standard on marriage. At that time, no matter how bad a marriage’s relationship became, it was customary that the couple remained silent or inexpressive to sustain the marriage and the wholeness of the family, and to avoid losing face in front of others. However, the parents’ relationship was estranged and the relationship between the father and the sons was estranged too.

Things began to change when Andrew came to know Jesus thirty years ago. He hated his father, but God’s love for and forgiveness toward Andrew has gradually transformed him. It took him four years to let go and be healed by God, and thus, he decided not to repay hatred with hatred but to forgive, though at that time he did not fully understand what biblical forgiveness involved. Andrew practiced love for his enemy. He also prayed for God’s strength to love his parents and evangelize to them as he believed God’s healing on him should not merely a unilateral act, but that there should be reconciliation among the family members. For the following fifteen years, he led all family members to Christ and he encouraged all the family members to resume love
towards each other and to reconcile. He awaited genuine repentance and forgiveness to come. The relationship among family members has gradually improved over the past ten years. God’s word has been shaping them and the Holy Spirit has been transforming them. Andrew’s parents began to soften and change their attitude toward each other and toward Andrew.

A few years ago, his mother amazingly confessed and apologized to Andrew’s wife of the wrongful acts done to Andrew in his childhood. As it is very difficult for traditional Chinese to apologize to their children, she did not talk to Andrew directly, but she talked to Andrew’s wife. Six years ago, his father, who never cared for Andrew’s growth and never remembered his birthday, unexpectedly sent him a birthday card. In the recent family gathering during Lunar New Year, against the Chinese culture, his parents openly appreciated Andrew and expressed that Andrew was their good son in front of relatives and friends. All these were against the traditional Chinese way of inexpresiveness of parents towards sons and daughters, as the children are considered lower in status than the parents in the view of the Three Cardinal Guides.

Regarding forgiveness and reconciliation, a major breakthrough occurred approximately one year ago after they were encouraged, through teaching and storytelling at Jachin Church, to face the misdeeds seriously. Andrew’s mother, in tears, asked for prayer fervently for God’s strength to give her a forgiving heart to forgive her husband due to his irresponsibility to run the family and the mistresses he had. His father became serious in his faith in Christ and proclaimed in front of pastors that he would repent from his past misdeeds and follow Jesus.
At the sixtieth wedding anniversary of his parents, an amazing thing happened. Andrew arranged a feast and invited some close relatives to celebrate it. One of Andrew’s brothers came back to Hong Kong to attend the feast. In the beginning, Andrew prayed for his parents and thanked God for the food, provisions, and his blessings. Unexpectedly, his mother said she wanted to pray too. It is unbelievable that she thanked God for the family, children, and grandchildren that had walked with them and loved them, and she said she was blessed with many close relatives to support her.

To everyone’s surprise, Andrew’s father said that he also wanted to pray after his mother finished praying. Andrew was nervous as his father had never prayed in public. His father suddenly began to cry and pray loudly. He thanked God for his wife, and confessed that for so many years in the past, he had done a lot of wrongful acts against his wife and the family. He said he was an irresponsible person and yet his wife still supported him and his children still loved him. He also thanked God for the close relatives who supported them in times of their financial difficulties.

Chinese seldom openly confess their failures in public and deliberately lose face. It was incredible that his father confessed and apologized openly to both those he hurt and to God in his prayer. All the hearts of those who were there were melted, and almost all cried with joy, love, forgiveness, and acceptance in response to the sincere apology. Then they hugged each other. Andrew and his wife and children were distributing tissues during the prayer. Andrew said they were tears of gratefulness.

Andrew said that since his father has genuinely followed Jesus, he has transformed to be a more caring father and husband. There may still be many difficulties as they seek to reconstruct their relationships within the family. But the way the parents
dealt with hurts openly and sincerely in front of one another and in front of God, which is countercultural, has blessed all the family members with healing, trust, mutual respect, and reconciliation.

Authentic forgiveness with genuine repentance and reconciliation has occurred in this deep, personal, and enduring pain. Authentic forgiveness is a long and complex process, but it is one of the most valuable gifts God offers to humanity. It is hoped that this project leads to more stories like Andrew’s, as God has gifts of deep healing for those who are willing to pursue it.
APPENDIX A

SERMON SERIES TOPICS AND SCRIPTURES

Inevitability of conflict, sin, and hurt: *Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Joseph and his brothers, David and Bathsheba, Prodigal Son*

Reconciliation with one another before worshipping God: *Matthew 5:23-24*


Retelling of the story to God and to godly people: *Psalms 36; 42; 43; 69; 139; Romans 12:15; Ephesians 4:16*

Proper way to release anger: *Ephesians 4:26-27*

 Forgiveness is not an option: *Matthew 6:12; 14-15*

Forgiveness is a complex process rather than a single act: *Joseph and his brothers*

Repentance is a must for authentic forgiveness: *Joseph and his brothers, Prodigal son with lost sheep and lost coin*

Repentance brings real change and reconciliation: *Joseph and his brothers*

Confession and Remorse: *Joseph and his brothers and Prodigal Son*

Restitution: *Leviticus 6:1-7*

Renewal: *Joseph and his brothers*

Discovery of Similarity: *1 Kings 19:4; Matthew 6:12-15; Matthew 18:23-35; John 8:2-11*

Resume value and love for others: *Genesis 1:26-27; 1 John 4:20*

Forgiving habit (uncountable times of forgiveness): *Luke 17:3-4; Matthew 18:21-22*

Love your enemy if the offender does not repent: *Matthew 5:38-45; Luke 6:27-28*

Justice and redemption to be done by confrontation if needed: *Matthew 18:15-17*
APPENDIX B

AUTHENTIC FORGIVENESS QUESTIONNAIRE: SAMPLE QUESTIONS

Using a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the least satisfied and 5 being the most satisfied, please circle:

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<th>Least satisfied</th>
<th>Most satisfied</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The content is consistent with the topic of authentic forgiveness</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>The content provides sufficient theological and biblical foundation</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The content can be practiced in daily life</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>The content has helped you to grow spiritually when dealing with hurt, conflict and forgiveness</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>The teacher has sufficient knowledge of the topic</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>The teacher has adequate presentation skill to clearly present the content and arouse your interest in learning and practicing</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>The teacher has inspired and motivated you to reflect on what authentic forgiveness is and practice it</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>The class has sufficient time for the participants to ask questions and has sufficient time to address such questions</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The class explains well what authentic forgiveness is</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>The class explains well the trivialization of authentic forgiveness under the cultural influence of Chinese tradition and Western individualistic culture and motivates you to confront such trivialization</td>
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11. The class clearly explains the steps to practice authentic forgiveness

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12. The class encourages you to embody authentic forgiveness in your daily life

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13. If you have practiced the steps for authentic forgiveness in the past few weeks, you think the steps are helpful

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14. If you have joined small focus group, you think the small focus group is helpful

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15. You will recommend others to attend this class next time the church offers it:
   Yes  No

   Reason:

16. Suggest ways for the church to improve:

If you have joined small focus group, please answer the following questions:

17. Has your hurt and pain been addressed?

18. Does it help you to be healed, repent and / or reconcile with one another?

   a. If yes, how? Please describe your hurt and how you have experienced authentic forgiveness with healing, repentance and reconciliation.

   b. If no, why?

19. How does the experience of authentic forgiveness impact your life? How does it impact your relationship with God and one another?

20. How can the church improve the small focus group?

21. Do you need further follow-up by the church? If so, please give us your name and contact, and also describe below your hurt and pain and the way you hope the church can help?

   Others:

22. We shall use your story on a no-name basis to encourage others to practice the same. Please indicate and circle if you are fine with it: Yes  No
BIBLIOGRAPHY


