
JOURNEYS

Spiritual Formation Quarterly

Spring 2025



Teach Us to Forgive

“Forgiveness liberates the soul.” Nelson Mandela



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH FORT WORTH
Spiritual Formation



JOURNEYS

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MEDITATION

Teach Us to Forgive

by Robyn Michalove



In *The Book of Forgiving*, Archbishop Desmond Tutu writes, “In our own ways, we are all broken. Out of that brokenness, we hurt others. Forgiveness is the journey we take toward healing the broken parts. It is how we become whole again.” Sometimes that process is quicker or smoother than it is at other times. But the processes of seeking forgiveness and extending forgiveness are what keep us whole both as individuals and as communities.

Forgiveness is also the bedrock of our Christian faith as we trust in God’s strength to meet our own weaknesses. Forgiveness is a reciprocal process – as God in Christ has forgiven us, so we are also given the strength to forgive others. It’s the prayer we pray every Sunday: “forgive our debts as we forgive our debtors.” Humans are not flat characters; we have complexity and depth. We hurt people, and we are hurt by people. As followers of Christ, we seek to imitate the mind of Christ (Philippians 2.5), extending extravagant mercy that leads to the wholeness and flourishing of us and others. Forgiveness is akin to cleaning out the blockage of all that gets in the way of God’s free-flowing love in our lives.

Teach Us to Forgive

(continued)

And, forgiveness is a difficult process, both forgiving others and also working to receive forgiveness ourselves. Reconciliation takes time and is a spiritual practice of trusting God's Spirit to work and "pray with us with sighs too deep for words" (Romans 8.26). Our Creator longs for our reconciliation as we deepen our faithfulness and expand the gift of God's mercy and love.

To learn more, check out the PRACTICES described in the following pages, and keep an eye on The Penn Street Letter or Penn Street Online for Church School and School of Spiritual Formation course offerings.

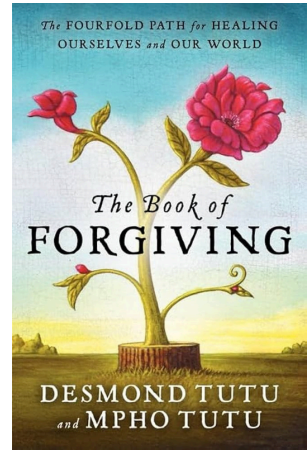


PRACTICES

A BOOK TO READ

*The Book of Forgiving:
The Fourfold Path for Healing
Ourselves and Our World*
By Desmond Tutu and Mpho Tutu
(HarperOne, Reprint edition April 7, 2015)

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Nobel Peace Prize winner, Chair of The Elders, and Chair of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, along with his daughter, the Reverend Mpho Tutu, offer a manual on the art of forgiveness—helping us to realize that we are all capable of healing and transformation.



Tutu's role as the Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission taught him much about forgiveness. If you asked anyone what they thought was going to happen to South Africa after apartheid, almost universally it was predicted that the country would be devastated by a comprehensive bloodbath. Yet, instead of revenge and retribution, this new nation chose to tread the difficult path of confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

Each of us has a deep need to forgive and to be forgiven. After much reflection on the process of forgiveness, Tutu has seen that there are four important steps to healing: admitting the wrong and acknowledging the harm; telling one's story and witnessing the anguish; asking for forgiveness and granting forgiveness; and renewing or releasing the relationship. Forgiveness is hard work. Sometimes it even feels like an impossible task. But it is only through walking this fourfold path that Tutu says we can free ourselves of the endless and unyielding cycle of pain and retribution. *The Book of Forgiving* is both a touchstone and a tool, offering Tutu's wise advice and showing the way to experience forgiveness. Ultimately, forgiving is the only means we have to heal ourselves and our aching world.

PRACTICES

WAYS TO PRACTICE FORGIVENESS: BREATH PRAYERS

As God breathed life into us at birth, we can use breath prayers to be close to God. They calm us, relax our bodies, and help us focus on God rather than our fear or anger. You can do this anywhere, whenever you need to breath prayers can also be a spiritual discipline.

Below are some breath prayers to face whatever challenges are ahead with forgiveness, mercy and strength. If you have a favorite Bible verse, you can turn it into a breath prayer (for example: “The Lord is my shepherd” on the inhale, and “I will not want” on the exhale).

Breathe deeply in and slowly out.



Inhale: *"When we hurt,"*

Exhale: *"God, you weep."*

Inhale: *"Our hurt is deep."*

Exhale: *"God, your healing is deeper."*

Inhale: *"Sometimes I am lost."*

Exhale: *"Spirit, guide me home."*

Inhale: *"God, grant me the courage."*

Exhale: *"To be kind."*

Inhale: *"God, help me forgive."*

Exhale: *"As you have forgiven me."*

Inhale: *"Lord, in your mercy."*

Exhale: *"Calm my fear."*

Inhale: *"Breathing in God's love."*

Exhale: *"I breathe out peace."*

Inhale: *"Fill my heart, Oh Lord."*

Exhale: *"With your love."*

The first four prayers are from *Everything Good About God Is True* by Bruce Reyes-Chow

PRACTICES

LAMENT

Lament is a process of expressing deep pain, grief, and even anger to God, and it can be an important step toward ultimately being able to forgive others or oneself.

In lament, we pour out our fears, frustrations, and sorrows, but lament is not the same thing as crying. It's different. And it's uniquely Christian.



Lament is different because lament is a form of prayer. Lament talks to God about PAIN, but it is more than just the expression of sorrow or the venting of emotion. Lament has a unique purpose: to strengthen our TRUST in God.

All lament includes four elements:

1. **Turning to God.** Address God by name: First, call to mind specific aspects of the Holy, such as “loving kindness,” “justice,” “righteousness,” “mercy”, etc. Then consider which of these aspects you need most to be reminded of as you make your petition. Address God by that name, i.e., “O Righteous One,” or “Loving God,” or “Merciful Presence.”

2. **Bringing your complaint.** Every lament features some kind of complaint: More than a simple rehearsing of our anger, biblical lament humbly and honestly identifies the pain, the questions, and the frustrations raging in our souls - and it does so in a no-holes-barred fashion. God can hold anything and everything that we bring to him and not hold it against us. Think Jacob wrestling with God’s angel.

PRACTICES

3. **Asking boldly for help.** It is okay to be specific in asking for what you need or hope for. Seeking God’s help while in pain is an act of faith: Unremitting sorrow can create a deadly silence as we give in to despair (“there’s no hope”) or denial (“everything’s fine”). But lament invites us to dare to hope in God’s promises as we ask for his help.

4. **Choosing to trust.** Recite to yourself instances of God’s faithfulness, both throughout scripture and in your own life. Taking time to remember these things renews our commitment to trust in God as we navigate the brokenness of life.

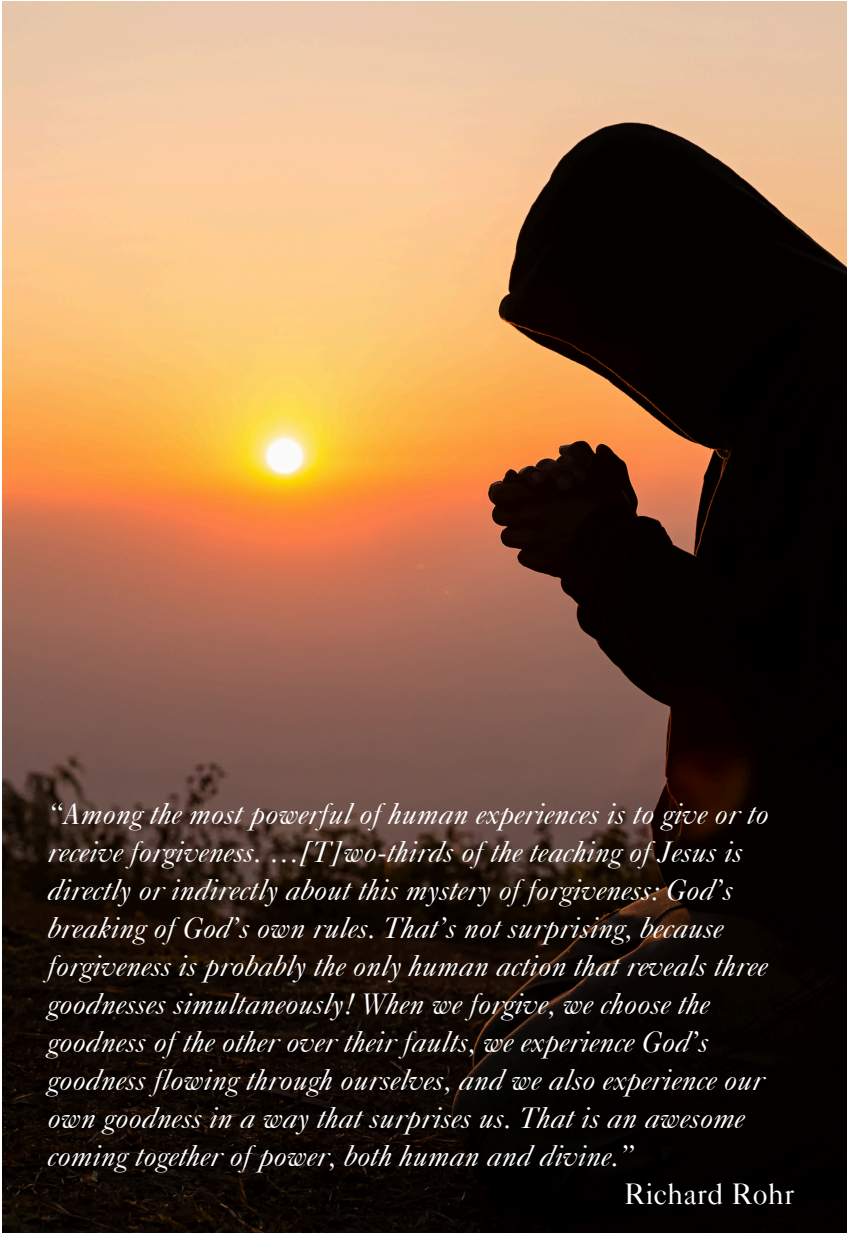
To cry is human, but to lament is Christian. The practice of lament is one of the most theologically informed actions a person can take. While crying is fundamental to humanity, Christians lament because they know God is sovereign and good. Christians know God’s promises in the Scriptures. We believe in God’s power to deliver. We know the tomb is empty, and Jesus is alive.

And yet we still experience pain and sorrow. Lament is the language for living between the poles of a hard life and trusting in God’s sovereignty.

*Adapted from “Dare to Hope in God: How to Lament Well,” an article by Rev. Mark Vroegop in *Desiring God*.



PRACTICES



“Among the most powerful of human experiences is to give or to receive forgiveness. ...[T]wo-thirds of the teaching of Jesus is directly or indirectly about this mystery of forgiveness: God’s breaking of God’s own rules. That’s not surprising, because forgiveness is probably the only human action that reveals three goodnesses simultaneously! When we forgive, we choose the goodness of the other over their faults, we experience God’s goodness flowing through ourselves, and we also experience our own goodness in a way that surprises us. That is an awesome coming together of power, both human and divine.”

Richard Rohr

RETREATS & ACTIVITIES

MONTSERRAT JESUIT RETREAT HOUSE: SATURDAYS OF REFLECTION

Monthly (visit website for details)

600 N. Shady Shores Drive, Lake Dallas, TX 75065

Montserrat's Saturdays of Reflection provide opportunities for prayer and reflection. The morning's activity often consists of two talks on Ignatian Spirituality. In between the talks is time for silent reflection. The morning is also concluded with Mass. Saturday of Reflection sessions are offered monthly with exception of the months of January and July. The event always starts at 9 a.m. and ends by noon. Checking-in starts at 8:30 a.m.

Learn more at: montserratretreat.org/days-of-reflection



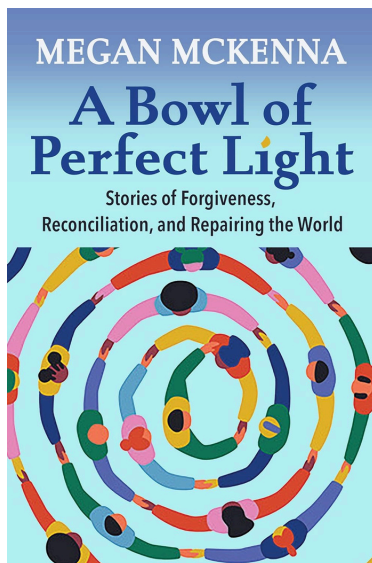
OPPORTUNITIES FOR EXPLORATION

SPIRITUAL FORMATION COURSE OFFERINGS

LENTEN COVENANT GROUPS

Watch *The Penn Street Letter* or *Penn Street Online* for dates and times for the 2025 Lenten Covenant Groups. This year groups will be based on Megan McKenna's book, *A Bowl of Perfect Light: Stories of Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Repairing the World*, a subject especially pertinent to where we find ourselves today. McKenna shares stories from any number of traditions—from Native American, to Jewish, to Islamic, to our own Christian tradition and scriptures—all of which point to our oneness and our need to be in community and in communion with one another. She provides questions to ponder and daily practices to incorporate throughout the week designed to grow our ability to forgive, to ask forgiveness, to reconcile, and to repair. Groups will meet for six weeks, beginning Ash Wednesday and ending on Holy Week.

Watch for more details at fpcfw.org/spiritualformation



“And the journey [to restore a devastated world] begins with forgiveness: Being forgiven, asking for, giving, and sharing forgiveness with all.”

from *A Bowl of Perfect Light* by Megan McKenna

A GIFT FOR YOU...

In each issue of Journeys, the back cover will include a visual of a scriptural verse or an encouraging quote for reflection as our gift to you. Cut it out and post it somewhere you'll see it often.



*Be kind to one
another,
tenderhearted,
forgiving
one another,
as God
in Christ
has forgiven
you.*

Ephesians 4.32