

Forgiving As We've Been Forgiven: Community Practices for Making Peace

Célestin Musekura

L. Gregory Jones

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"I forgive you" can be easy words to say. Actually forgiving someone, however, often proves to be more difficult. Célestin Musekura and L. Gregory Jones have teamed up to provide compelling examples of true forgiveness and the importance of cultivating it both personally and in community.

Musekura's life story and personal experience with forgiveness gives one pause. He has witnessed firsthand the devastation done to families and entire communities, having lost several family members during and after the 1994 Rwandan genocide, and eventually returned to Africa to begin a ministry based on forgiveness and reconciliation. When he discovers that some relatives of the people who murdered his family are sitting in his classes, he knows that, for him, the theory of forgiveness must become the practice of forgiveness. Realizing that these people are now fellow Christians, Musekura decides to ask them to forgive him for the intense hatred toward their families he has carried for so many years.

These real-life accounts of forgiveness are complemented by the theological material that Jones addresses. He states that there are six steps to embracing forgiveness: telling the truth; acknowledging anger; developing concern for others; recognizing, remembering, and repenting; committing to change; and conceiving hope for the future. Jones encourages the reader to pursue a path of giving and receiving forgiveness without expecting past events to be totally wiped from memory.

The strength of the book lies in the straightforward yet compassionate way Musekura and Jones present their information. They make no attempt to engender guilt about one's anger or reluctance to forgive, but instead offer help in turning even tragic events into opportunities to show Christian love and compassion. Further, they explain the powerful impact that occurs when an entire community embodies forgiveness. Musekura's stories of the community forgiveness being practiced in Africa underscore this powerful force.

Forgiving As We've Been Forgiven is a thoughtful biblical roadmap for anyone dealing with seemingly insurmountable past issues, such as divorce, abuse, or rejection. The authors do not diminish the effects of past wrongs or try to tell the reader to "just get over it." By presenting valuable insights on such a frequently misunderstood topic, they are providing important first steps to creating communities that really can achieve healing and reconciliation.

JEFF FRIEND (January / February 2011)

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