

New Year Retreat Guide

2018

"He is before all things..."



Happy New Year!

At the start of each year, our movement dedicates time to prayer and reflection. We invite our supporters and friends to join us in this as we seek the Lord and His guidance for the year ahead together.

This Retreat Guide will take you through Colossians 1:15-23, focusing on the person of Christ. You'll be using different activities and resources to help you think through the passage. The idea is to enjoy spending time with God, listening to him and being refreshed through his word and his presence.

There are five sections in total, and we'd recommend taking around 20 minutes on each activity. Before you start, make sure that you have access to the internet on either your mobile phone, tablet, or laptop, and speakers or headphones. Enjoy!

Follow the link below and watch the video. Then read the passage and highlight what stands out to you.

1

Colossians

1:15 - 23

He is the image of the invisible God,
the firstborn of all creation.

For by him all things were created,
in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible,
whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—
all things were created through him and for him.

And he is before all things,
and in him all things hold together.

And he is the head of the body, the church.

He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead,
that in everything he might be pre-eminent.

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,
and through him to reconcile to himself all things,
whether on earth or in heaven,
making peace by the blood of his cross.

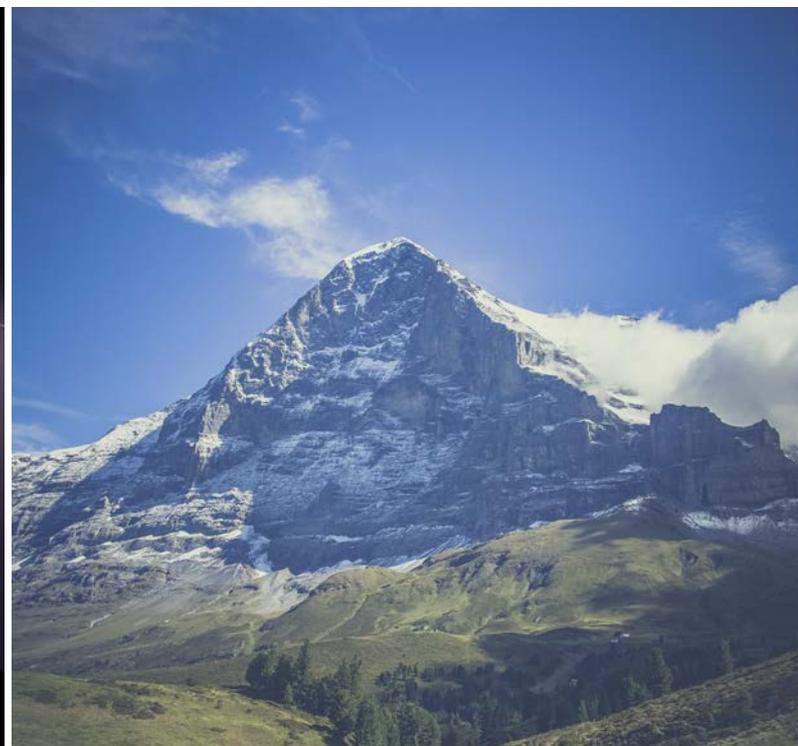
And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

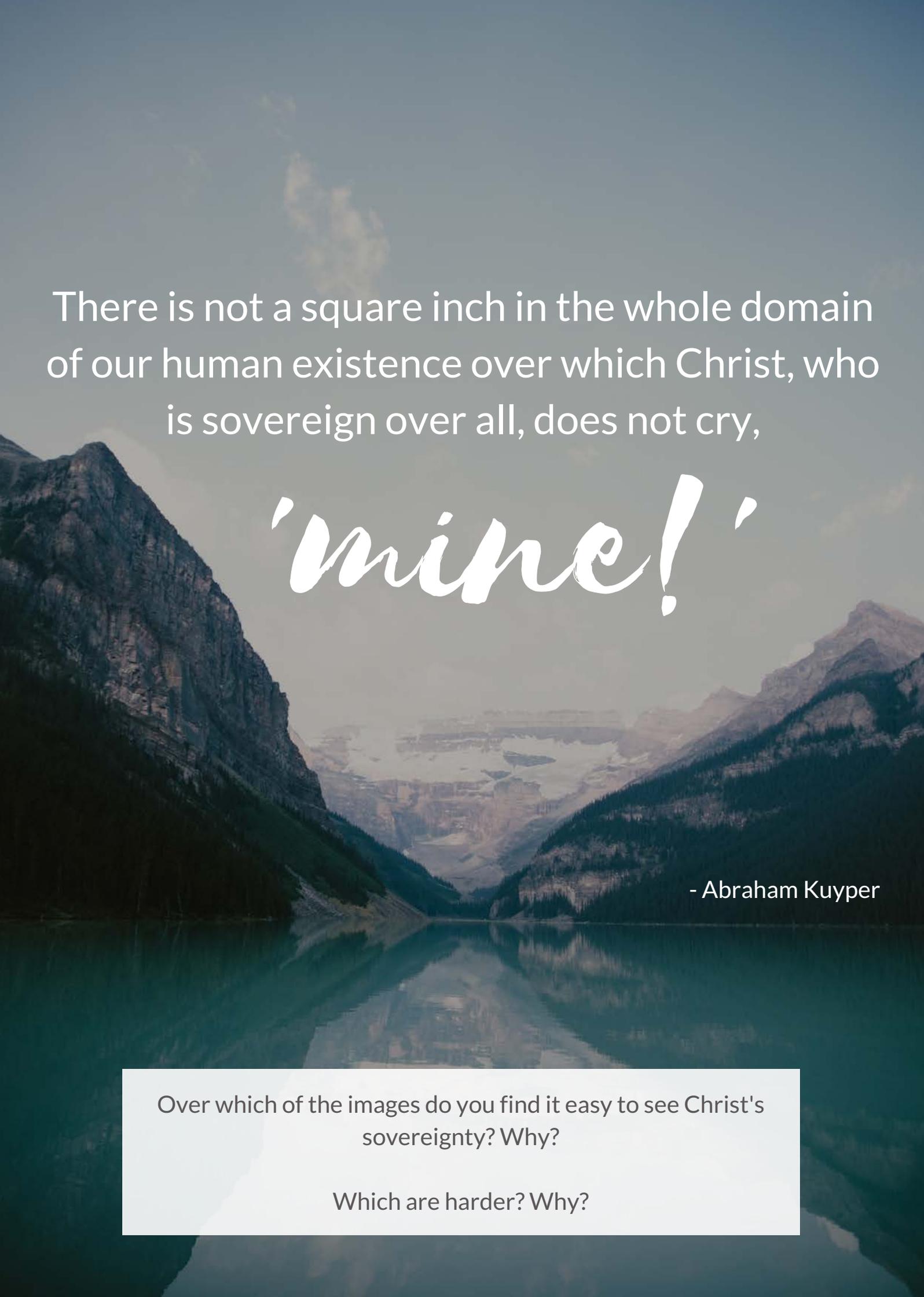
vimeo.com/72917810



Look through the set of images on the next two pages.
What connects these things?





A scenic landscape of a mountain valley. In the foreground, a calm lake reflects the surrounding mountains and sky. The middle ground shows a valley with a large glacier or snowfield. The background features rugged, rocky mountain peaks under a clear sky. The overall tone is serene and majestic.

There is not a square inch in the whole domain
of our human existence over which Christ, who
is sovereign over all, does not cry,

'mine!'

- Abraham Kuyper

Over which of the images do you find it easy to see Christ's
sovereignty? Why?

Which are harder? Why?

THE POWER OF *Reconciliation*

Read through the article on the following page, making note of any points which stand out to you or challenge you.

How have you seen this counter-cultural, supernatural reconciliation at work in your own life?

What can you do to "invite God to be present in the painful spaces in your life and the lives of others"?

Are there any areas of your life where the Lord is challenging you to lay down your rights and be "willing to love in the midst of conflict, disagreement and loss"? Where can you tell your story of forgiveness, repentance and reconciliation?

Now look at the diagram explaining the relationship between forgiveness, repentance, and reconciliation. How do they work together in our relationships with each other?

Is there anyone you need to forgive? Is there anyone you need to go to in repentance?

THE POWER OF Reconciliation

In 1957, two years after her husband and four other missionaries were murdered by Auca tribesman, Elisabeth Elliot reflected on her experience of reconciliation as, unfathomably, one of her husband's killers sat playing with her three-year-old daughter.

"How did this come to be? Only God who made iron swim, who caused the sun to stand still, in whose hand is the breath of every living thing – only this God, who is our God forever and ever, could have done it."*

Elliot and the other widows allowed the Holy Spirit to enable them to forgive and pursue reconciliation with their husbands' murderers. As a result, they saw the transformation of a whole people group. In the more than half century since those events, some 80 percent of the Waodani (Auca) have heard the gospel message, with between 25 and 40 percent professing Christian faith.

God with Us

Our own life stories may not include as dramatic a tale of forgiveness and reconciliation as Elisabeth Elliot. But each of our stories ARE peppered with strained relationships, angry

misunderstandings, broken trust and people who are difficult to forgive.

In my personal story of faith, it was my experience of suffering and the beauty of forgiveness and reconciled relationships that actually formed my missional view of the world. The idea that God wanted to redeem my pain by giving me a story that could comfort others was in itself life-giving; "...we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God" (2 Corinthians 1:3-7). But reconciliation is not an easy or natural process – everything within us wants to avoid conflict and pain and hold onto bitterness.

“The idea that God wanted to redeem my pain by giving me a story that could comfort others was in itself life-giving.”

The question is, will we invite God to be present in these painful spaces in our lives and in the lives of others? And what will God do in our families and communities if we do?

The way we forgive, repent and reconcile with others gives more than language to the gospel – it is a physical demonstration, a powerful witness, an invitation to participate in gospel goodness and a signpost to a future hope. Reconciliation is the cornerstone of our hope in Christ. It is not merely an activity, but a way of life.

The Gospel of Peace

In Paul's writings, reconciliation with God through Christ IS the gospel. "... We were God's enemies ... reconciled to him through the death of his son"

(Romans 5:9-11). Remember, Paul too was a murderer. He was then forgiven, reconciled with and welcomed into the very community he had attacked. Because of this experience of making peace with God AND his people, there is great power and resonance in his words (Colossians 1:19-20).

Like Paul, we have been reconciled to God and we too are conscripted into God's work of reconciling the whole world – it is woven into the very fabric of new identities in Christ. In our world of 'unfriending' and echo chambers, we often see our own rights, comfort and views as paramount. We unconsciously buy into a gospel of fairness rather than a gospel of grace.

Restoring Humanity

But God's kingdom is upside down and his kind of reconciliation flips fairness on its head. In his book *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality & Strategies*, Robert Schreiter wrote:

We would expect reconciliation to begin with the repentance of the wrongdoers. God begins with the victim, restoring them to the humanity that the wrongdoer has tried to wrest away or destroy. The restoration of humanity might be considered the very heart of reconciliation. The experience of reconciliation is the experience of grace.

Just as supernatural forgiveness fuelled transformation through the example of the Auca widows, the world needs to see and experience more believers laying down their rights, willing to love in the midst of conflict, disagreement and loss. This is a physical representation of the truth of the gospel. As believers, we need to tell more stories and be open about our journeys through forgiveness, repentance and reconciliation. It is the counter-cultural nature of reconciliation that is at once repellent and attractive to the world.



DANIELLE WILSON

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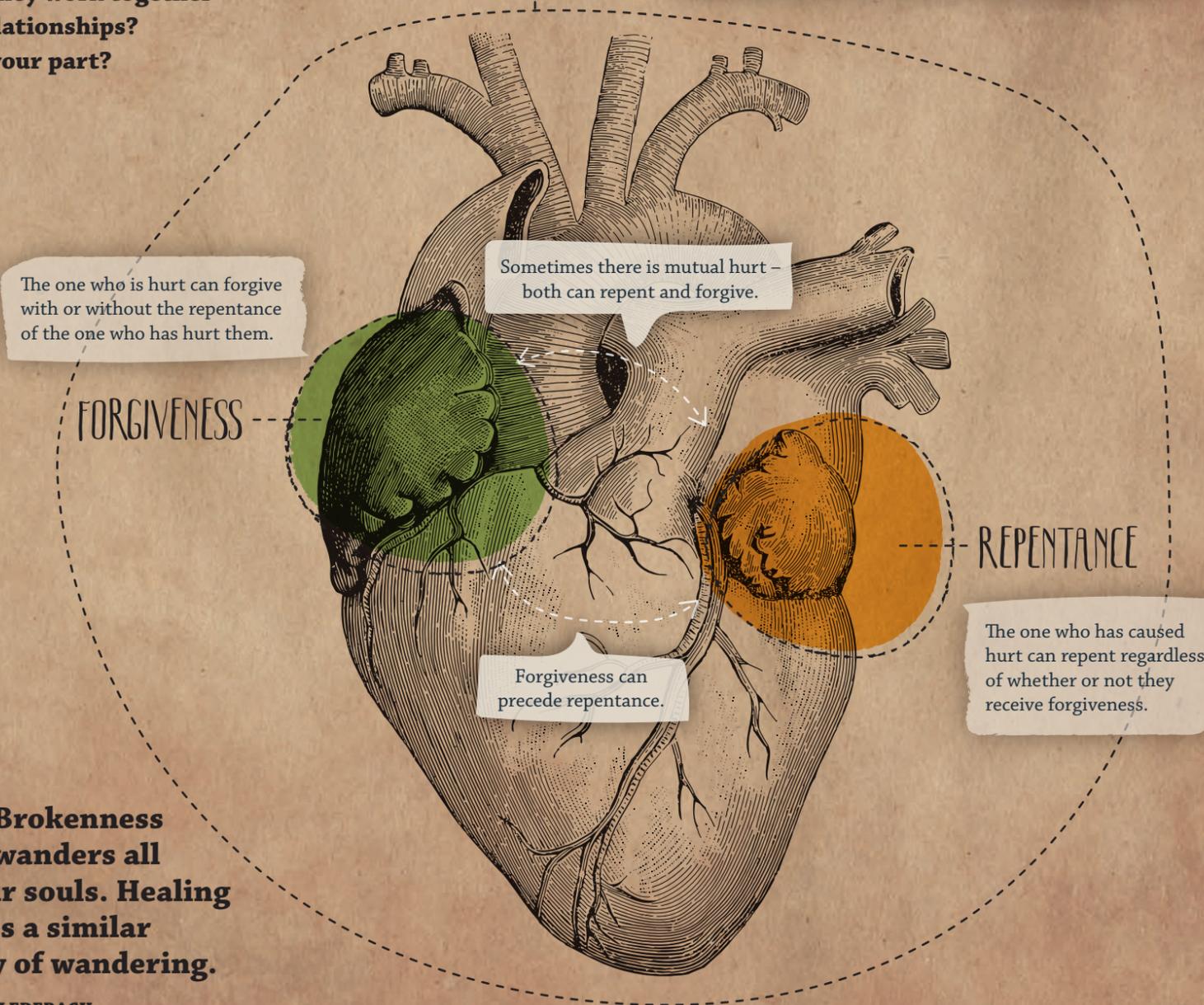
* Elliot, Elisabeth, 1981. *Through Gates of Splendour* (25th Anniversary Edition), Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, p. 257.

FORGIVENESS, REPENTANCE & RECONCILIATION

How do they work together in our relationships? What is your part?

RECONCILIATION
Fuelled by the Holy Spirit

Both the one who has been hurt and the one who has caused hurt are called to pursue reconciliation. But reconciliation can only happen when forgiveness and repentance take place. Neither forgiveness nor repentance negate justice, eliminate consequences or de-value suffering.



“Brokenness wanders all over our souls. Healing requires a similar journey of wandering.”

JOHN PAUL LEDERACH
The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace

Read over the poem, which addresses the depth and breadth of the reconciliation available in Christ.

What strikes you?

Make a note of anything that stands out.

4

Reconciliation

Here, under tropical sun,
naked, she weeps for lost parents
under the shadow of AIDS.
The parched earth grieves.
But the arm of love reaches out
to touch the lost. The Word is spread.
Jesus is there. He has made a friend of her,
redeeming the past; by his cross making peace;
visible likeness of the invisible God.

Here, a man in a kimono
sitting on the tatami floor
greeted the coming down in silence;
pours tea; spreads the Word
and worships. The living Christ,
visible likeness of the invisible God,
is there. Beside the ikebana
a cross stands. East and West are reconciled,
holy, pure and faultless in his sight.

continues overleaf

Here in the dirty bedsit,
lonely among millions, the migrant sits
and spreads the Word. Light breaks through.
The things that matter are made clear. Jesus comes,
visible likeness of the invisible God.
Once far away, alien, now brought near,
reconciled. Nothing else matters. Life begins again
on a sure foundation. Hope is the one truth.
God has made peace. Let the heart sing.

Here at the checkout, the overweight victim
of affluenza piles the trolley, cursing
the price of petrol, the weight of six-packs;
grumbling at immigration, Europe, the weather.
The gospel has been preached to everybody –
said Paul. Can the shadow of the cross
fall even here, reconciliation be real,
love be at work? Even here he stands
waiting, loving, patient;
visible likeness of the invisible God.

Here in my room, waiting,
alone but not alone,
I spread the Word.
Come to me, Lord Jesus,
first-born Son, creative power,
raised from death, head of the body,
visible likeness of the invisible God.
Make peace in me.
Make me your friend.

Simon Baynes

<https://www.wordlive.org/Session/Classic/2008-08-27/Colossians-1-15>, accessed 31st Oct 2017

Creation sings the Father's song...

<http://bit.ly/2yVy9et>

Listen to the song at the link above. Close your eyes and listen to the words. Then listen to the song again, reading the words below. Highlight any words or phrases which stand out to you. Reflect on them and give thanks.

Creation sings the Father's song

He calls the sun to wake the dawn
And run the course of day,
'Til evening falls in crimson rays.
His fingerprints in flakes of snow
His breath upon the spinning globe,
He charts the eagle's flight,
Commands the newborn baby's cry.

Hallelujah!
Let all creation stand and sing:
Hallelujah!
Fill the earth with songs of worship,
Tell the wonders of creation's King.

Creation gazed upon his face;

The ageless one in time's embrace,
Unveiled the Father's plan
Of reconciling God and man.
A second Adam walked the earth,
Whose blameless life would break the curse,
Whose death would set us free
To live with him eternally.

Creation longs for his return,

When Christ shall reign upon the earth;
The bitter wars that rage
Are birth pains of a coming age.
When he renews the land and sky,
All heaven will sing and earth reply
With one resplendent theme:
The glories of our God and King.

*Words and music by Keith & Kristyn
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