

Healing the Wounds of Ethnic Conflict

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February 2010

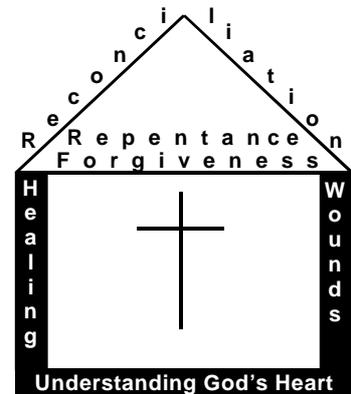
In 1994, generations of unresolved ethnic division and injustice erupted as a genocide in Rwanda. Within weeks of the end of the genocide, Rhiannon (from Wales) began a ministry to church leaders of healing the wounds of ethnic conflict, depending on the Holy Spirit to show the principles which would lead to healing the wounds and enabling the Hutu, Tutsi and Twa to begin to look at each other through new eyes. A workshop took shape which began to produce results that far exceeded all expectations, and with Anastase (Tutsi) this workshop was conducted in all the major towns of Rwanda, initially under the covering of African Enterprise. Joseph (Hutu) joined the team in 1997 after returning from exile in a refugee camp in Congo. The work continues to this day and we are still seeing amazing fruit as people encounter God's truth and healing love. Hundreds of thousands have been through the workshop or have heard the teachings in rallies or on radio, and as a result many thousands have experienced healing which has enabled them to forgive, be forgiven and be reconciled.

The ministry was then invited to South Africa in 1997, and to the north east of D.R.Congo in 2004. The results in Congo in particular have been astounding, the civil war in that region coming to an end in March 2007 after 24 regional chiefs went through the workshop together. Hundreds of demobilized militia have also had life-changing encounters with God and are now ambassadors for peace. By now teams have also been established in Burundi, Kenya, and Zimbabwe, and the ministry is beginning in Uganda and Sudan. As well as seeing reconciliation between ethnic groups within one country, we also began to see reconciliation take place between countries.

We would like to outline the principles which we are using:

Finding the right sequence for the seminar

We liken the workshop to building a house. No house will stand for long without a solid foundation. We believe that having a fresh revelation of God's heart is the foundation of all healing. It's only when we are reassured of God's intentions and feelings towards us that we can risk coming to Him with our pain. From there, we move on to find healing through the Cross for our inner wounds. By reading Isaiah 61 at the start of His ministry, Jesus made it clear that this was a priority for Him. It is very difficult to forgive while the heart is full of pain, but once we begin to experience healing, our hearts are free to forgive, and repent. Where there is forgiveness and repentance, reconciliation begins to happen. To talk about forgiveness and reconciliation before experiencing healing is like trying to put a roof on a house before building the walls.



Discovering God's original intention for human relationships.

We begin with the exploring the quality of relationship between the Trinity and discover that this is the perfect example of unity in diversity. There is perfect love with no-one feeling threatened or undervalued, and there is no competition amongst them. Each complements the other. This then is the model for all relationships. When God said, "Let Us make man in Our image," the Godhead was opening up the circle, inviting human beings to share the same quality of relationships that They had experienced throughout eternity. This gives us the goal of reconciliation – to return to God's original intention.

Different ethnic groups - a blessing or a curse?

The God who loves infinite variety has made His Divine nature clearly visible in creation (Rom 1:20). From one man He made all the different nations (Acts 17:26) for His pleasure and for the display of His glory. He delights in mankind (Prov 8:30-31)! He desires all the ethnic groups to bring their own glory and splendour into the New Jerusalem (Ps 86:9; Rev 7:9; 21:26). God's intention was that we would enrich and

bless one another through the variety of our cultural expressions. His glory is so vast that no one people group could adequately express His image. Rather we all help to form a multifaceted beautiful diamond.

The above is a new revelation for most participants, having experienced ethnicity only as a curse. Many testify afterwards that their perspectives were radically changed at this point. (Note: We need to explain here the unique situation in Rwanda and Burundi, where the 'tribal groupings' all share the same language, culture and geographical areas and therefore are not true ethnic groups. Because such divisions in these countries have only ever been used to oppress one or more of the groups, the governments have now eradicated the tribal names from the identity cards, stating that they are all Rwandans or Burundians. There is nothing of value to preserve, to distinguish any group from another. Because of this, we do not include this particular teaching in these countries.)

What went wrong – the awful power of prejudice.

We then explore God's pain as His plan from the beginning was destroyed, and ethnicity became a reason for wounding, rejection, injustice, pride, and even massacres to take place. One of the main roots of all this is prejudice, and we explore our prejudices and their consequences in our relationships.

Discovering a healed identity in God's Holy Nation

Wherever there is ethnic conflict, our identity is wounded. We need to discover a healed identity as fellow citizens of God's Holy Nation (1 Pe 2:9). This is life changing for many - to hear God's call to every child of Abraham – "Leave your country, your people, and your father's household and go to the land I will show you." It is thrilling to see light dawn as people begin to understand God's call to be clothed with a higher identity than their ethnic identity. They can then take their place as members of His Holy nation – the new nation He is forming out of believers from every tribe and tongue, where there is equality, mutual respect for each other's cultures and joy in one another. Here their natural identity is redeemed and comes into the fullness of what God intended from the beginning.

Recognising the church as God's agent of healing and reconciliation

Although God created us in His image to experience unity in diversity, few have understood His intentions for us to honour and complement one another, even in the church. There are many mono-ethnic churches where people of other ethnic groups are not made to feel welcome. Even in churches where different ethnic groups co-exist, leaders and other office-bearers are often selected according to their ethnic group and not according to their gifting. Inter-marriage between different ethnic groups is often frowned upon, or even openly opposed. In times of ethnic conflict within the country, the church is often part of the problem instead of being part of the solution, with the same divisions and hatred existing within the church as in the community. And most people don't see anything wrong in this!

But in every situation, God is the God of hope (Rom 15:13), and He places His hope in His people. Eph 3:10. In every nation, His strategy is to use the Church (that is, those who truly love Him and are committed to Him, whatever their denomination). Col 1:27 - The hope of glory for any country is Christ within His people in that country. Jesus said we are the light of the world Matt 5:14-16; Php 2:14-16). We are to shine like lights in the darkness because we are different, and what makes us different is that we think differently. Our lives have been transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom 12:1-2; Php 2:5; Eph 4:22-24). We are not conformed to the surrounding society.

Satan seeks to extinguish the light, and so attacks the church. Sadly, the church does not know how to handle ethnicity. In Rwanda, the church failed to speak out and oppose the terrible injustices, and so became part of the problem. But God still believes in His church! After the resurrection, Jesus returned to a defeated group of disciples that were full of fear and had lost their vision. Yet Jesus believed in them! When He appeared behind the locked doors, He said, "Peace be with you! As the Father sent me, so send I you." God wants to speak new hope into His church so that they can become His agents of healing. But first they need to be healed themselves.

Finding a just, loving God in the midst of suffering and injustice

When we experience suffering and injustice, our hearts can easily begin to doubt God's love and accuse Him of not caring for us and our ethnic groups. We try to grapple honestly with the problem of human suffering, looking at the devastating consequences of the fall, and the will of God vs. man's freedom of choice. We conclude that God is not the author of any injustice because he hates it. (Pr 6:16-19; Zech 8:16-17). Rather He grieves over injustice (Gen 6:6) and suffers with us (Is 63:9).

Discovering Jesus as Redeemer

Another key was to discover Jesus as the Redeemer, - not only of our sins but also of all our lives' tragedies. Instead of working against us, God can even make the worst tragedies work for us, so that we can continue living having been enriched within. The Bible is full of examples of God redeeming suffering. Holding on to the bigger picture of God being able to redeem everything gives us hope to face the future.

Knowing God as a loving father

We also need to discover God as our loving father, the father of compassion and the God of all comfort (2 Co 1:3). Because of bad experiences with earthly fathers, many find it difficult to approach God as father, so we include a ministry time where we ask the Holy Spirit to come and minister the Father's love to us. This has become a crucial and precious part of the workshop. They also began to realise that those who grew up without parental love were much more likely to pick up a weapon against their neighbour. Healing the country has to begin with healing the family.

The thief - robbing us of God's intentions

John 10:10 describes a thief who is seeking to rob humanity of all that God intended. He robs us as continents, countries, ethnic groups, families as well as personally. In our workshops we take time to identify the losses of each ethnic group, looking at it especially from God's perspective. We also identify the false beliefs we have developed in the midst of the conflict: about God, ourselves and others. This not only helps us own our losses, but also to begin to understand the losses of others. It is helpful to see that the Thief (Jn 10:10) has been at work in all sections of the community, robbing everyone of the true character of God. There are no winners in this situation. We all need to rebuild the foundation by having a revelation of God's heart.

Understanding the wounded spirit

As a result of the Thief's activities we are all wounded people. In every country where we have worked, we have identified unhealed wounds and unresolved conflict, often going back several generations. This is serious because unhealed wounds fester, eventually poisoning the whole body. God takes our wounds as seriously as our sin and promises to restore health to us. (Jer 30:17)

We look at various different behaviour patterns demonstrated by people who have a wounded spirit, and then spend some time looking at the fruits of passing judgements. We note, sombrely, that the oppressed often become the oppressors, unless the grace of God intervenes.

Discovering Jesus as both Sin and Pain Bearer

Jesus is not only our Sin bearer. Isaiah 53:4 tells us that He bore our griefs and sorrows. It's not only our sins that are on the Cross, but all the consequences of sin. (The Hebrew word '*avon*' for wickedness includes all the consequences of sin.) The whole tragic human condition is there. The Cross deals with our woundedness as well as our sinfulness. As well as taking the responsibility for all the sin of the world on the Cross, Jesus offers to do the hurting instead of us.

The central part of this workshop is practically taking this pain to the cross. We record our pain on pieces of paper and share our experiences in small ethnically-mixed groups, seeking to listen to each other with compassion. We then pour our pain into the heart of God. Symbolically we take our papers and nail them to a cross, following this with a burning ceremony. Flowers are placed in the ashes to express our faith that God is able to redeem our suffering.

Identifying the good things that results from the suffering, and the Light that shines in the darkness is always a cause for much rejoicing. Jn 1:5 tells us that, “The light shines in the darkness but the darkness could not comprehend it”. A better translation says, “The darkness could not overpower it”, and it never will! Jesus always has the last word!

Understanding real forgiveness

Forgiveness may well be the most misunderstood concept both within the church and outside. For this reason, we can easily feel that it is unfair of God to ask us to forgive, even cruel. So it is important to realise that forgiveness is not condoning, is not denying our pain and anger, is not forgetting etc. Rather it is giving an undeserved gift to the offender, laying down our right to take revenge and choosing mercy instead of judgement.

We look at the seriousness of unforgiveness, how it blocks us from being able to receive God’s free gift of forgiveness for our own sins and also blocks us from receiving our healing and living in freedom. It also gives Satan a foothold in our lives. Far from working against us, forgiveness works for us, enabling us to move forward in our lives.



So how do we find the grace to forgive? One of the great discoveries we have made in this ministry is that facing and owning our pain and pouring it into God’s heart frees our hearts to forgive. The Cross is central to forgiveness, both God’s ability to forgive us and our ability to forgive one another. We give the crucified Jesus the responsibility for all the sins committed against us, and trust Him for our healing. Realising how much we ourselves need God’s forgiveness is crucial.

But what if there is no evidence of repentance on the part of the offender? Can there be forgiveness then? The key is found in 1 Peter 2:23. Jesus could forgive the unrepentant by committing his case into the hands of a Just Judge. There will be a day of judgement, and the unrepentant will be judged, but those who repent will find mercy. We can safely entrust our case into the hands of this Judge, and refuse to be the judge ourselves.

Understanding the transforming power of repentance

True repentance is a change of mind leading to changed behaviour and is God’s gracious gift. It’s taking full responsibility, facing the consequences and making restitution where possible. Repentance is beneficial to the offender, the offender and the whole community, but lack of repentance is a slow death. There can be no reconciliation without repentance. Forgiveness may be one-sided but reconciliation always has to include repentance.

Understanding our role as part of the Royal Priesthood (1 Pe 2:9)

a) Standing in the gap with Identificational Confession

Biblical repentance is both personal and corporate, something which Western culture finds hard to understand. The Lord’s Prayer says, “Forgive us our sins....” Lev 26:40 speaks of confessing our sins and the sins of our forefathers. Ezra, Daniel and Nehemiah were well aware of this.

For wounded people to hear someone apologise is very healing, but most ethnic crimes are committed by governments, institutions, ethnic groups etc and no-one is willing to take responsibility. Also what if the offender is dead or has no intention of repenting? Ezek speaks of the need for someone to stand in the gap (Ezek 22:30). As part of the royal priesthood we can choose, like Jesus, to be ‘numbered with the

transgressors.' (Is 53:12) and confess the sins of whichever group we represent. Like it or not, we all represent someone.

Standing in the gap has become one of our most effective tools to disarm even the hardest heart. We believe it is one of the unconventional weapons described in 2 Co 10:. Thousands owe their healing to some who was willing to make themselves vulnerable and, with a broken heart, confess the sins of their group, asking for forgiveness. It cannot absolve the guilt of the past, but it can release grace in the present for the offended to be able to forgive.

b) Pronouncing blessings (Deut 10:8) - Rediscovering each other at the King's Table

The workshop ends with a celebration of unity in diversity in the Holy Nation. After reminding ourselves of the story of Mephibosheth, and Mat 8:11, everyone is invited to eat at the King's Table. Each is asked to take a golden (card) crown and place it on the head of someone from a different ethnic group, saying, "Welcome to the King's table, fellow-citizen of God's Holy Nation!" After serving one another and praying for each other, we invite each ethnic group in turn into the centre. The rest then affirm them, saying what is particularly appreciated about that ethnic group. As members of the royal priesthood, we then pronounce blessings on them, and invite them to demonstrate worship in their distinctive culture way. Often the other ethnic groups are very happy to join them in the singing and dancing. Each 'feast' is an amazing time of healing, reconciliation and celebration! Participants keep saying, "I'm *so happy!* I'll *never* forget this day!" (For the same reasons as mentioned above, it was not possible to do this in Rwanda and Burundi).

The testimonies we are now receiving state that people really are leaving the workshop healed and looking at the other ethnic groups with new eyes. "I've been transformed deep inside - life can never be the same again!"

SUMMARY:

Key Concept	Theological Underpinning	Example of what happened	Reflection – why did it make such a difference?
The seminar has to be conducted in the right sequence	1 Co 14:40; Ps 11:3	It was not difficult to progress from one point to another – each step prepared them for the next.	Teaching on forgiveness and reconciliation generally provoked an anger reaction, because their hearts were not ready for this
Discovering God’s original intention for human relationships	Gen 1:26	People got excited about why they were created – and realised how far they had fallen	People come to a workshop with their own agendas, ready for debate to prove their enemies wrong.
Different ethnic groups – a blessing not a curse	Acts 17:26; Rev 21:26	People began to look at each other through new eyes.	Up until then they had only seen differences in ethnicity as a problem.
The awful power of prejudice	Jn 1:46; Jn 4:9	People began to own their prejudices, realising that it was the root of most ethnic conflict	People state all kinds of reasons for ethnic conflict but rarely mention the awful power of prejudice..
Discovering a healed identity in God’s Holy Nation	1 Pet 2:9	They were able to grasp that their identity as citizens of God’s Holy Nation transcends their natural ethnic identity and believe that their ethnicity could be redeemed.	Wherever there is ethnic conflict, our identity is wounded. This is true for both the oppressed and the oppressor.
The church – God’s agent of healing and reconciliation	Eph 3:10; 2 Co 5:18-19.	Christian leaders received new hope – that God still believed in them! This brought new courage.	The church too often has been part of the problem, not part of the answer, as ethnic discrimination is often perpetuated even within the church.
Finding God in the midst of the suffering	Gen 6:6; Ex 3:7; Isa 63:9	Many realised that God was not the author of their suffering, but that He had grieved for them, and suffered with them.	Because many thought that God had willed or didn’t care about their suffering, it was hard for them to come to Him for healing, and to trust His love.
Knowing God as a loving father	2 Co 1:3; 2 Co 6:18	People owned their childhood lacks and wounds and opened their hearts to receive the love of God as their perfect father. They also began to see that healing the country begins with healing the family.	Because of childhood hurts, many could not believe in God as a good and loving father, and this blocked them from coming to God for healing their ethnic wounds.

The Thief – robbing us of God’s intentions	Jn 10:10	People were able to own their losses and begin to understand the losses of other ethnic groups. They also began to receive hope of restoration.	They were only focussing on their own pain and had not considered the suffering of other groups.
Understanding the wounded spirit	Prov 18:14	People were able to own their wounds, identify sinful responses to life’s hurts and find hope for healing .	Unhealed wounds fester, and the resulting bitterness grows in intensity as it is passed down the generations.
Discovering Jesus as both sin and pain bearer.	2 Co 5:21, Is 53:3-5	People realised that God is concerned about their wounds as well as their sin and that Jesus went to the Cross to deal with both. They were able to pour their pain into God’s heart.	Some believed God was only interested in sin, and that being wounded was a sin.
Discovering Jesus as Redeemer	Rom 8:28; Gen 41:52	People began to identify good things that had resulted from their sufferings.	Many believe that going through bad experiences will damage them for the rest of their lives and they will always live with a sense of loss.
Understanding real forgiveness – it is not possible without the Cross	Isa 53:12; Col 3:13b; 1 Pet 2:23	As people nailed to the cross the sin that was committed against them and their families, they then found that their hearts were free to forgive	Many were trying hard to forgive and fearing God’s judgement because they were unable to do so. Others were resentful that God should even ask them to forgive at all.
The transforming power of repentance	Ps 32:1-5; I Jn 1:9; Lk 19:8	People could repent of their sins and have some compassion towards those who don’t repent because of fear.	Many refuse to repent because their hearts are hardened, or fear to repent because of the consequences
The need for identificational confession to cleanse the festering wounds	Isa 53:12; Dan 9; Ezra 9; Neh 9	Members of the different ethnic groups began to confess the sins of their people with the result that the offended ones were able to find the grace to forgive.	Many have never had the opportunity to hear anyone say ‘Sorry!’
Inviting one another to the King’s table	Mat 8:11	At the King’s table the different ethnic groups affirmed and blessed one another. Everyone felt accepted could see each other as people of destiny, vital to God’s redemptive purposes for the world.	Each ethnic group was feeling judged, and harbouring bitterness and mistrust towards the other ethnic groups. They had not seen the other ethnic groups as a source of blessing.