

Principles of Healing and Reconciliation in Rwanda

By Dr Rhiannon Lloyd

September 1998

During the past few years, it has been both a challenge and a great privilege to visit Rwanda on numerous occasions, working with African Enterprise to conduct seminars for Christian leaders on Healing, Forgiveness and Reconciliation. I would like to outline some of the principles involved in that work.

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

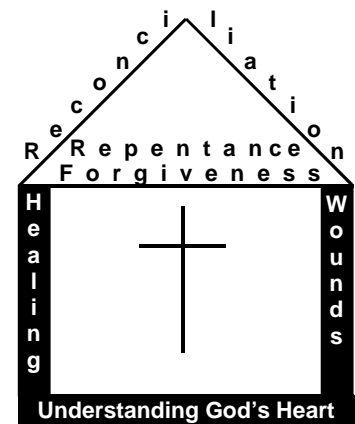
In every situation, God is the God of hope (Rom 15:13), and He places His hope in His people. Eph 3:10 - In every nation, His strategy is to use the Church (that is, those who truly love Him and are committed to Him, whatever their denomination). Col.1:27 - The hope of glory for any nation is Christ within His people in that nation. 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. 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 wanted to speak new hope into His church in Rwanda, especially to His faithful followers who had not betrayed their Lord, but who had persevered in the face of incredible suffering. They were now to be His agents of healing.¹

But first they needed to be healed themselves. That's why we began with the strategy of calling together Christian leaders from every denomination and ethnic group to spend three days together in God's presence where they could encounter His healing love.

Finding the right sequence for the seminar

I believe that understanding and experiencing God's heart is the foundation of all healing, and so we had to begin there. From there, we could 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 then to begin to think about reconciliation. To talk about forgiveness and reconciliation before discussing healing is similar to trying to put a roof on a house before building the walls.



Overcoming cultural barriers in expressing emotion

Having taken similar seminars in Liberia I was surprised to find that the culture of Rwanda regarding handling grief was very different from that of West Africa. Whereas in Liberia people express their emotions very freely, in Rwandese culture there is little expression of emotion, and no word for emotion in their language! Shedding tears is seen as a sign of weakness, and from an early age they are taught to always appear strong. For men especially, public expression of grief is unacceptable. They have a saying that a man's tears should flow into his stomach. They also believe that talking about traumatic experiences traumatises them even more. This was obviously a major obstacle to helping people towards healing! I wondered how to overcome this without in any way implying that my culture was superior. I found that the only acceptable way (as well as using medical evidence) was to focus on Jesus as the transcultural model of perfect humanity from whom all cultures could learn. Starting from this foundation we were then able to

¹ Copy right Dr. Rhiannon Lloyd (2000-©)– Mercy Ministries International™, Geneva Switzerland

have lively discussions examining our self-protective coping mechanism, and this resulted in taking steps towards giving each other permission to feel.

Finding God in the midst of suffering

I usually began my seminars by asking the questions that were agitating in most people's hearts. "Where was God in April 94? Did He send these troubles? Has God abandoned us?" I wanted to create a safe place where participants could own their doubts and voice their inner questions without fear of being condemned. Story telling is a well-received form of teaching in Rwanda, and so I often made use of personal testimony, telling them of my struggles and my own pilgrimage to find a God of love in the midst of my family's sufferings.

We tried to grapple honestly with the problem of human suffering, looking at the devastating consequences of the fall, the will of God vs. man's freedom of choice etc. I encouraged them as church leaders to allow people to ask their questions, and to be merciful with those who doubt, seeking a deeper understanding of God's ways and a new revelation of His heart. We focussed on God's pain when His will is not done on earth (Gen 6:5-6; Luke 13:34; 19:41-44), and how He suffers with us (Isa 63:9).

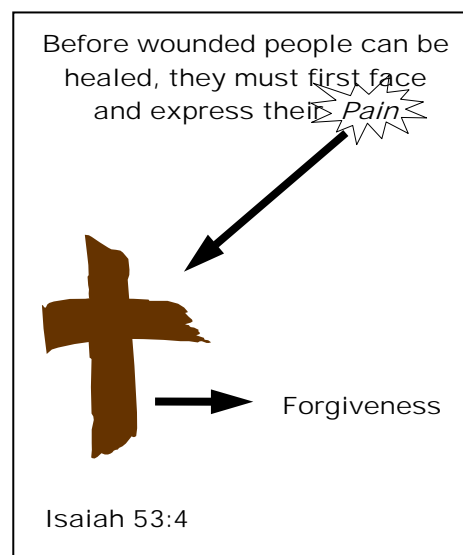
We also looked at God's Fatherheart. He is the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort (2 Cor. 1:3). Because of bad experiences with their earthly fathers, many find it difficult to receive a Father's love from God, so we included a ministry time where we asked the Holy Spirit to come and minister the Father's love to us. This became a crucial and precious part of the seminar.

The need to hear and be heard

Before pouring out their pain to the Lord, they also needed to listen to each other's hearts. We put people from different ethnic groups, and different denominations, into small groups ,together, and asked them to share their stories. They were not only to listen to the facts but also to listen to the pain in each other's hearts. Often there was resistance to doing this, but in the end the vast majority agreed, and we found that the dividing walls began to be demolished at this point. This willingness to listen to each other with compassion was especially important after the refugees returned to Rwanda from the camps in Zaire and Tanzania, when there was such fear, suspicion and hostility in the country.

Discovering Jesus as the Pain Bearer

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. Something that has transformed my own life and my counselling is discovering Jesus as Pain Bearer as well as 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 whole tragic human condition is there. The Cross deals with our woundedness as well as our sinfulness. In our seminars, we looked at the Lamb who is inviting us to offload our grief onto Him, saying, "Let Me do the hurting instead of you". They were able to grasp this concept, and here I witnessed pain being expressed, often in loud wails, as they brought their sorrow to Him. We would do this as a group experience, as individual counselling is not culturally understood, or even feasible given the scale of the trauma. The whole community is traumatised! To make the transfer of pain to Jesus more real, we used the symbolism of nailing their terrible stories to a large wooden cross which we transported around Rwanda. We would then take the cross outside and burn the papers. Afterwards I heard many encouraging testimonies. e.g. "I've been to many seminars, but this was different because I was able to leave my pain at the cross. My heart is so healed! Everyone in Rwanda needs to do this!"



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. As we discover and experience His heart in the place of our greatest darkness, He can then 'turn our trials into gold' as in Keith Green's song. Instead of working against us, God can even make these worst tragedies work for us, so that we can continue living having been enriched within. Holding on to the bigger picture of God being able to redeem everything gives us hope to face the future. Identifying the good things that had resulted from the suffering, and the Light that shone in the darkness was 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

We talked about the transfer of pain to Jesus as being a prerequisite to being able to forgive from the heart, as Scripture requires of us. All too often I heard people say, "I've forgiven - it's all past," as a means of avoiding facing the pain. Others opposed the church preaching forgiveness, thinking it meant condoning the wrong that had been committed. We needed to understand Biblical forgiveness, and its cost. I believe that our forgiving others requires the atoning sacrifice of the Lamb just as much as our receiving God's forgiveness. There's got to be Someone who can carry the sin sinned against us, bear our pain for us and take responsibility for ministering to our wounded hearts before we can truly forgive. It was only on the third day, after bringing their pain to the cross, that we would begin to teach on forgiveness, only to discover that a miracle had already taken place in the hearts of many the previous afternoon. So many testified of having left their hatred behind at the Cross and now being ready to forgive.

But what if there is no evidence of repentance on the part of the offender? Can there be forgiveness then? I believe 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. Our hearts will then be set free.

Exploring God's way of dealing with ethnic conflict

We spent quite a lot of time looking at the roots of ethnic conflict, and where we learn our beliefs and prejudices. Because our ethnicity gives us a significant part of our identity, ethnic conflict is an attack on the core of our being. Here again I used my own testimony of growing up feeling like a second class citizen because I was Welsh. We focussed on two ways of coming to a place of reconciliation:

(1) Discovering a new identity in God's Holy Nation

We needed to discover our new identity as fellow citizens of God's Holy Nation (1 Pet. 2:9). This had been life changing for me - to hear for myself 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 was thrilling to see light dawn as they began to understand God's call to be clothed with a higher identity than their tribal (national) identity. They could then take their place as members of His nation, where there is equality, mutual respect for each other's cultures and joy in one another. I heard people say, "We Christians are no longer Hutu or Tutsi - we are all members of God's Holy Nation!"

(2) Standing in the gap with Identificational Repentance

I shared with them how God had disarmed my heart of resentment and prejudice against the English through the repentance of some English Christians on behalf of their forefathers. I have found that identificational repentance is a very powerful key to healing woundedness. (i.e. taking on the priestly role of repenting on behalf of our nation, people-group, forefathers, men, women, fathers, mothers, doctors etc. etc. It cannot absolve the guilt of the past, but it can release grace in the present for the offended to be able to forgive.)

Each time I taught on this, God said to me: “You start!” And time after time, God gave me a gift of repentance as a white European in Africa. I confessed the sins of our forefathers, asked for their forgiveness, and prayed for the healing of the African people. This often became the catalyst for heart change in them, opening up a whole new dimension in working towards reconciliation. Though it was completely uncultural for them, both Hutu and Tutsi began to stand in the gap, asking forgiveness on behalf of their people group as well as confessing their own sinful attitudes. In seminar after seminar we saw them weeping in each other's arms as God did a deep reconciling work amongst us.

God anointed a song by David Ruis, “We will break dividing walls”, translated into Kinyarwanda, as a further means of touching hearts deeply. They love singing, so music was often a powerful communicator.

Results of the Seminars

This has excelled anything I ever imagined! For the first two years, I worked with church leaders of all denominations and both ethnic groups inside Rwanda. God wonderfully answered the prayers of our many prayer partners as people left the seminars testifying that they had been healed and were now ready to forgive and be reconciled. Sceptics said, “You don't know the Rwandese people. They can play games.” “How do you know it wasn't just an emotional experience?” We decided to go back for a follow-up seminar 3 months later, and ask the questions, “Did anything change as a result of the seminar in you? - in your church? - in your neighbourhood?”

The testimonies started pouring in - of hearts set free to forgive and love their enemies, of churches that had been divided by ethnicity now finding a new unity, of local initiatives taking place to reach out to bring healing and reconciliation to their communities. We heard so often that “the workshop with the cross changed everything for me! I've been healed ever since!”

Skeptics still said, “Wait till the refugees come back! It's easy to say you forgive when your enemies are in a different country!” The follow-up seminars after the refugees returned were even more encouraging! (By God's sovereign grace, we had just completed taking the seminar to each town in Rwanda three weeks before the refugees started returning.) We heard of Christian leaders who had gone out to welcome those returning, and of wonderful reconciliations that had taken place. e.g. a lady who had lost 200 out of 250 of her extended family invited those involved in the killings to a meal at her home.

We began to hold new seminars with Christian leaders from the refugee camps joining with those from inside the country. This time it was much harder! The atmosphere was often charged with fear and suspicion, and sometimes hostility. But again and again, the workshop with the cross led to a breakthrough, as they listened to the pain in each other's hearts and then knelt side by side at the one cross. Although the seminars were much tougher on the first day, the work of the Spirit by the third day was deeper than anything we had seen until then. We saw both ethnic groups singing and dancing together often until the early hours of the morning! The repentance time at the end brought more tears than the time at the cross. Over and over we heard people say, “For the first time I now believe that reconciliation is possible!”

By now the ministry has been handed over to Rwandese brothers from both ethnic groups ministering together, and God is greatly anointing them. Even local Government officials are recognising their powerfull message and inviting their help in local initiatives. The area in the north where hostilities and killings still continue has been the place where we have seen the greatest work of the Holy Spirit. There is much work still to do. At first, only Protestant leaders responded to the invitations to the seminars, but now, after much prayer, the doors are opening to share the same message with Catholic leaders.

I'm thrilled to report that there are now interdenominational, interethnic teams forming in most of the prefectures to take the message of healing and reconciliation through the Cross down to the grassroots. Our core team is visiting them to advise and encourage them in their local initiatives.

Our God truly is a God of hope! In the midst of the darkness, He is doing something very beautiful. I believe that Isaiah 60:1-3 will be true of Rwanda. The world's media has watched the horror. I believe the day is coming when God's glory is going to be clearly seen upon His children there, and nations will come to their light.

Principles of Healing in South Africa - Some Additional Thoughts

On the invitation of local South African Christians, I have begun a similar seminar in South Africa. At first, I wondered if the same basic format would also be anointed in a more sophisticated South Africa, but I am finding that the message of the Cross is just as powerful in bringing healing and reconciliation there!

There are however some differences in emphasis when ministering in South Africa. In Rwanda, the pain and division is uppermost in people's thinking, and so it is possible to move straight in and look for solutions. In South Africa, however, things are supposed to be all right now. Many think that since 1994 they are now reconciled and so there is not too much enthusiasm for attending a seminar on reconciliation. One does not have to look far beneath the surface, however, to discover that reconciliation is more needed than ever! Despair, fear, and judgmental attitudes abound, and (apart from some noteworthy exceptions) the various ethnic groups are retreating to their own ghettos. Sadly, the church appears to be particularly slow in discovering their brothers and sisters in the other ethnic groups.

Because of the above, and because of having more time through not needing to use translation, some more keypoints have been added:

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). The word 'culture' comes from the same root as the word 'cultivate' in Gen 1:28. 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 diamond.

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.

The above was clearly a new revelation for most participants! Many testified afterwards that their perspectives were radically changed at this point.

Cultural redemption in the Holy Nation

As each ethnic group rediscovers their value and significance as fellow citizens in God's Holy Nation (1 Pet 2:9), we are then able to treat each other as equals, and honour and enjoy one another. We need to bring our cultures to the light of God's Word. Then we can discern between the special treasure that God placed in every culture, and that which is a sinful, or even demonic, contamination. We are then able to have new faith for the redeeming of our culture, *in order to take its rightful place in, and enhance, the Holy Nation*. I believe it is crucial to keep this perspective, and that redeeming culture should never become an end in itself, for then it leads to idolatry.

(The above was not relevant for the Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda as there are no cultural or linguistic differences between them. Their ethnicity has only been a springboard for injustice, and plays no useful part in the life of the nation)

The thief- robbing us of seeing God's character

We look specifically at how the history of South Africa has distorted the truth about God's character for each of the different ethnic groups. The feedback has always been profoundly disturbing. "He is the God of the oppressor - He favours the whites. The churches had a notice: 'No dogs or blacks here'." (Zulus) "Did He want us to exist or are we a mistake?" (Coloureds i.e. mixed-race) "God doesn't like Indians - we have to become westernised to be acceptable to Him." (Indians) "He's the God of the Old Covenant and we are His chosen people. We obey Him, but He's harsh and distant from us." (Afrikaners) "God is an Englishman!" (English)

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

We examine the graphic imagery of the 'bruised reed' and the 'dimly burning wick' (Isa 42:3) to understand the wounded spirit. God wants to lift up those who are bowed down (Ps 145:14) and revives the spirit of the lowly (Isa 57:15). He is particularly close to those who are crushed in spirit Ps. 34:18).

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. I find that each ethnic group had judged the other ethnic groups, and these judgements have to be renounced to be set free of the 'sowing and reaping' principle. (Gal 6:7)

We note, sombrely, that the oppressed often become the oppressors, unless the grace of God intervenes. The response to doing this has been very positive as participants gain insight into each other's woundedness, and the judgements they have made.

Rediscovering each other at the King's Table

In Rwanda, we end the seminar with the repentance time, both personal and identificational. In South Africa, however, I felt the need to add something else. During the last break, we quickly and secretly set up a lavish table of bread, wine, exotic fruits, nuts, candies, candles, and flowers. After reminding ourselves of the story of Mephibosheth, and Mat 8:11, they would be invited to eat at the King's Table. Each was 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 finished by inviting each ethnic group in turn into the centre. The rest of us would then affirm them, and say what we particularly appreciated about that ethnic group. We then pronounced blessings on them, sharing any prophetic words we felt God was giving us. Each 'feast' has been an amazing time of healing and celebration! Participants kept saying, "I'm so happy! I'll *never* forget this day!"

The testimonies we are now receiving are stating that they left the seminar looking at the other ethnic groups with new eyes. "I've been transformed deep inside - life can never be the same again!"

In spite of being aware of the intense spiritual opposition to this ministry, the few that attended the seminars are on fire to put it into practice. Already, participants have started taking initiatives to spread the message of reconciliation, and have led multiethnic meetings and camps where they are seeing the same results. A multiethnic team has come together in KwaZulu-Natal to perpetuate the ministry. To God be all the glory!

SUMMARY:

Key Concept	Theological Underpinning	Example of what happened	Reflection – why did it make such a difference?
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!	The church too often has been part of the problem, not part of the answer. Seeing how much God was entrusting into their hands brought new courage.
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 prepared by receiving God’s healing.
Overcoming cultural barriers with the Scriptures	Gal 3:28	Participants realised that if Jesus was free to show emotion, they could be too.	Cultural taboos were preventing the Rwandese from being able to grieve in their great loss, but then they were set free to express their pain.
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 sent the genocide, it was hard for them to come to Him for healing, and to trust His love.
Discovering Jesus as pain bearer	Isa 53:4	People were able to pour out their pain to Jesus, believing He had already carried it on the Cross.	Because people were holding on to their pain, it was a major block to reconciliation
The need to hear and be heard	Jas 1:13; Gal 6:2	Listening to each other’s pain brought down the dividing walls of suspicion and enabled them to have compassion one for another.	Each ethnic group was locked into its own pain, and had not considered the suffering of the other(s).
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, but after they gave their pain to Jesus, they forgave freely from the heart.
Discovering Jesus as Redeemer	Rom 8:28; Gen 41:52	People began to identify good things that had resulted from their sufferings.	Instead of seeing everything negatively, they were able to start celebrating the Light shining in the darkness – a Light which can never be extinguished

Key Concept	Theological Underpinning	Example of what happened	Reflection – why did it make such a difference?
Discovering a new 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.	Whereas the natural identity was a source of pain and division, being fellow-citizens of the Holy Nation brought a new confidence and a new unity.
The need for identificational repentance to cleanse the festering wounds	Isa 53:12 (he was numbered with the transgressors); Dan 9; Ezra 9; Neh 9	Members of the different ethnic groups began to confess the sins of their people.	Through this, people were able to release the judgements they had made, and forgive the offending people group.
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 work of the Thief – robbing us from seeing God as He really is	Jn 10:10	All the ethnic groups realised they had a distorted view of God.	It released everyone to ask for a true revelation of God, so that the foundations could be re-laid
Understanding the wounded spirit	Prov 18:14	People were able to renounce their judgements and understand the woundedness of the other ethnic groups.	This led to a new compassion and willingness to understand the behaviour patterns arising out of woundedness. It also highlighted the danger of leaving conflicts unresolved.
Inviting one another to the King's table	Mat 8:11	At the King's table we affirmed and blessed one another.	Ethnic groups who had hated and devalued one another could see each other as people of destiny, vital to God's redemptive purposes for the world.