



SALEM Digest

Autumn 2001 • Topics of interest to friends of Salem Christian Mental Health Association

FORGIVENESS

Judy Cook

“Father, forgive me when I have hurt you, as I forgive those who have hurt me.” Why did Jesus tie the receiving and the giving of forgiveness so securely together in The Lord’s Prayer? He knows that the harbouring of resentment, of anger at the injustices we might have suffered, will harm us emotionally in the same way a festering wound harms us physically. When a cut or scrape is infected we clean out the wound, often repeatedly, to counteract the infection and keep it from spreading. In the same way an emotional cleansing of anger and bitterness can bring great relief and a new sense of freedom and health.

It might be that the anger and hurt we feel are completely justified; we at times have been wronged, sometimes horribly so, by the very persons from whom we could expect nurture and love, rather than, say, abuse and neglect. Whether our anger and hurt are justified or not makes no difference. When Jesus asked his father to forgive those who were torturing him to death, he modelled for us what he had preached. Jesus had the same mind as his and our father, and to him forgiving came very naturally. God invites us also to learn to give up our hatred, resentment, need for justice, and desire for revenge, and instead to leave those who hurt us free to be judged or redeemed by God.



Betty Brouwer

Sonja's Story

Sonja was a 37 year old mother of two who struggled with unresolved feelings of bitterness and anger against her mother. When she discovered she had a difficult time expressing affection and experienced difficulty feeling close to her own daughter who was 10 years old, she sought help. Sonja described how her relationship with her mother had always been distant.

When she was a teenager, her mother tended to interpret Sonja’s behaviour in a predominantly negative light, being very critical and condemning. She would tell Sonja often what was wrong with her, which sometimes culminated in a violent outburst where Sonja’s

mother would hit her around the head while she hurled her complaints. Sonja also remembered that as a child she was very lonely. She remembered feeling starved for physical affection and attention from her mother, who never seemed to have time for her or her siblings.

Sonja learned that her own feelings of irritability with, and lack of closeness to her daughter were possibly signals of unforgiveness and anger toward her own mother. Once she clearly understood that she had been wronged by her mother, that she did not deserve the neglect and abuse she received, Sonja was in a better position to choose to let her mother be free from the resentment and judgment she continued to feel toward her.

But to forgive is not always easy. It is especially when others do not acknowledge guilt or remorse, or do not agree that we have been hurt by them, that we have a tendency to rehearse our grievance, dwell on it, and allow it to become bitterness, a festering wound.

Sonja contemplated talking to her mother to see if their relationship could change. However, she did not expect that her mother would understand or accept responsibility for having hurt her. Sonja therefore chose instead to take responsibility for her own bitter feelings and learn to forgive her mother without first

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Executive Corner

Rev. Al Dreise

What is Salem?

“Salem Christian Mental Health Association is an association of people committed to provide Christian treatment, care, and comfort to the mentally and emotionally distressed.”

(Charter, February 7, 1963)

The goal of this umbrella organization is to provide and support models of mental health care services in which the resources of the organization and of the Christian community are brought together to prevent and alleviate mental and emotional distress.

Salem has been involved with some exciting partnerships to fulfil that goal. These include partnerships with *Family Outreach Teams, Peel Halton District Counselling Services* in Brampton, and *Homestead Christian Care. Family Outreach Teams* provide support for those affected by alcohol or drug abuse. *Peel Halton District Counselling Services* opened in 1994 and is staffed by Mr. Tom Horlings.

This is the second year Salem is involved with *Homestead* in developing support and residential care for persons and families facing a major psychiatric illness. Some exciting developments toward that goal include the acquisition of a 34-unit apartment building in

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Rev. Al Dreise

“
**Thank
Jesus
for
taking all
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anger,
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bitter-
ness...**
”

SALEM Digest

Vol. 18, No. 2
Autumn 2001

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SALEM Digest

is a publication of Salem Christian Mental Health Association, a non-profit, charitable organization.

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Dreise,
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Forgiveness

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seeking and receiving an acknowledgment and apology from her.

Prayer Therapy

The following prayer therapy is based on principles of *TheoPhostic Counselling* developed by Dr. Ed Smith, and has been adapted to facilitate in a very concrete way the forgiving of anyone for whom we feel bitterness and resentment, anger, or hatred.

With the help of this therapy Sonja was able to shed her bitter feelings and embrace her mother with a new acceptance and love. Although Sonja did not tell her mother she had been forgiven, she noticed that her mother responded to her changed attitude with more warmth of her own. It seemed the relationship was changed once Sonja exchanged her own bitterness with an attitude of love.

Pattern to Follow

If you feel you harbour bitterness towards a person close to you, and you want to forgive that person, the pattern of forgiving prayer is as follows:

1. Close your eyes and envision the person you feel bitter towards. Think about how he/she has hurt you and then let your anger against him/her surface. Ask the Holy Spirit to bring to mind the most pertinent memories which relate to your pain and anger, and let the feelings of anger and resentment become as strong as possible. Stir them up by repeating phrases like: “It’s

not fair,” “he/she should have known better,” etc., until you can almost taste the bitterness you feel towards the other person.

2. Pray a version of this prayer: “Lord Jesus, I confess that I feel bitterness/resentment/hatred towards _____. I no longer want it. I ask that you will take it since I am helpless to get rid of it myself.”

3. Continuing with a prayerful attitude, envision your anger and bitterness appearing in some symbolic form on your hands as you hold them, palms up, in front of you. Some people will envision a hard rock. Others will see slime or tar. One person saw her hands fill with spiky, long nails. “See” with your mind’s eye the cross of Jesus in the distance. Some people actually see an image of Jesus as they remember him from Sunday School pictures. Bring the symbolic externalization of your anger/bitterness as you “see” it on your hands over to Jesus or his cross and hand it to him or place it at the foot of the cross.

4. With your eyes still closed, see yourself turn away from the externalized pain and anger and walk away. When you have walked “far enough,” turn around again, and notice that the externalized anger is gone. If it is still visible at the cross or in Jesus’ hands, distance yourself even further—as far as you need to, in order for it to be gone.

5. Thank Jesus for taking all the anger, pain, and bitterness you had. Once again, envision the person you felt bitterness towards, and

see whether those same bitter feelings against him/her are still there. If they are, ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand where that bitterness comes from, and see which memory comes to mind. There may be other roots of bitterness that still need to be pulled out and brought to Jesus' cross for release. If that is the case, repeat the process.

If you experience difficulty envisioning, or accessing memories, or feel stuck in this process without finding a release of intense feelings, don't despair; ask a therapist trained in inner healing prayer to walk these steps with you.

6. When the last hatred/pain/bitterness has been released to Jesus Christ you will notice a new feeling towards the person you formerly resented. That is not to say you will necessarily like him or her any better, but you will feel more compassion, more love, and perhaps more understanding and acceptance of the person for whom you formerly felt nothing but bitterness. You will also feel lighter and freer, and you will want to praise God for his goodness.

Emotional Health

Sonja was amazed to discover that not only had her attitude changed towards her mother, but she also felt differently towards her daughter. It was easier to embrace her daughter with real warmth, and she noticed she was less irritable and more tolerant of her children's behaviour in general.

It is amazing how we can combine God's gift of prayer with his gift of being able to envision dynamically to facilitate a new experience of emotional health. For Sonja, The Lord's Prayer became newly meaningful, as she learned to incorporate on a daily basis to forgive those who trespassed against her, even as God had forgiven her.

Judy Cook is on staff at Salem Christian Counselling Centre in Hamilton. She provides individual, couple and family counselling for people experiencing emotional or relational difficulties.



What Forgiving Is Not

- **Forgiving** does not eradicate the memory of the offence or hurt caused, although the bad feelings associated with the memory disappear.
- **Forgiving** does not automatically signal reconciliation. Reconciliation may require repentance and acknowledgement of wrongdoing.
- **Forgiveness** does not mean pardon. If a crime, such as the abuse of a child, has occurred, a person must accept societal retribution, willingly or unwillingly.
- **Forgiving** does not mean the person forgiven has become trustworthy by virtue of being forgiven. Hurtful tendencies may still exist and must be protected against.

The Board and Trustees of
Salem Christian Mental Health Association
invite you to the

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP DINNER MEETING

to be held on
Friday, November 9, 2001
at 6:30 p.m.

Second Christian Reformed Church
Brampton

(444 Steeles Road West at McLaughlin Road South)

After Dinner Speaker:

Diane Marshall, B.A. M.Ed.

Topic: Spirituality in Counselling

\$15.00 per person

\$25.00 per couple

Reservations required by November 5

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Executive Corner

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downtown Hamilton and the possibility of expanding service to psychiatric patients who require long-term residential care.

This year we were also involved in developing *Wellspring Christian Counselling Centre*, a new Christian counselling service for the Alliston-Barrie area. Cathy Kalverda, the therapist at Wellspring, provides counselling, and educational seminars and workshops.

Salem also financially supports

The Lighthouse in Toronto where Diane Marshal does staff consultation.

Salem is dependent on you the reader-donor for funding of these Partnership Programs.

Our target this year is \$27,000 to honour current commitments.

We are also in discussion with a number of churches in two other regions of Ontario with a view to developing new partnerships for Christian counselling and mental health support services. Two new projects could be developed next year provided adequate funds are received. All undesignated donations and church support

received from areas other than the Hamilton-Niagara area are earmarked for *Project Support* in Salem's Partnership Program.

Salem Christian Counselling Centre, Hamilton

The Hamilton Counselling Centre is the most comprehensive and ongoing project of Salem Christian Mental Health Association. It offers individual, couple, and family therapy. Our two therapists are Judy Cook and Betty Brouwer. Rev. Albert Dreise, our Executive Director, also does some pastoral counselling at the Counselling Centre.

The Counselling Centre has a good working relationship with Christian schools as we offer psycho-educational assessment, consultation, and counselling. Additional services include art and play therapy.

Common issues for Salem

We have gained a reputation in the wider Christian community for our special services: seminars on abuse awareness and prevention; interventions for families struggling with alcohol and/or drug abuse; crisis intervention; and support for families coping with mental illness.

Salem's Funding

As a registered Canadian charity (Charitable Registration Number: 13056-6011 RR0001), *Salem Christian Mental Health Association* depends largely on donations from individuals and supporting churches.

Fees for service do not cover the complete cost. There are also clients who sometimes cannot afford to pay the full amount. Salem established a *Fellowship Fund* to help these clients.

You can help by designating your donation for the *Fellowship Fund*.

Salem Fellowship Fund



Some people can't afford to pay fully for their counselling.

Please help by donating to the Salem Fellowship Fund.



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Christian Stewardship Services is a federally registered charity whose work is sponsored, funded and directed by 37 Christian causes from across Canada.