

Ready to Forgive: An African Story of Grace

Mosaic Television User's Guide Summer 2007

This is an African story of God's amazing grace. Northern Uganda is at war. Those most affected, the Acholi people, endure rape, torture and child abduction. Thousands have died, others are missing. Despite all this, the Acholi people are ready to forgive.



The video examines war, conflict and forgiveness in northern Uganda. Questions:

- What would reconciliation look like in Uganda?
- Why are the Acholi people ready to forgive?
- What questions does this story raise for Lutherans in the United States?

Explore what reconciliation means in this context. Viewers will:

- journey to northern Uganda to see the Spirit at work in the Church of Uganda;
- witness powerful stories of loss, death and disease told by young and old; and
- see and hear songs and affirmations of faith among the Acholi people.

Discussion questions:

1. In the video, several Ugandans offer powerful reflections on the nature and reality of forgiveness. Have a member of your group read one quote and then discuss.

Dennis, a young boy, said that forgiveness involves “praying and telling the truth.” He said, “I have forgiven you (rebels) with all my life. Put God first, forgive one another. Even if rebels want to kill you, first pray to God.”

Adule Joyce, a woman who lost her uncle to the Lord's Resistance Army, said, “Yes, I can forgive on the grounds that I want the children who will come after me and myself to live in peace. To really enjoy that I am on this earth, I should have the peace that is required.”

Bishop Ochola, who lost his wife to the rebels, said, “Forgiveness is very, very, very ... actually it is invaluable. The cost of it cannot be paid. But God forgives and it is too costly, because it demands God himself to come down, to offer his own child for our sin.”

2. The Acholi people offer a model of reconciliation and forgiveness to the world. If the Acholi can forgive the wrongs committed by the LRS, what does this mean for each of us? Can we learn to forgive each other? How could this impact marriage, church conflict, sibling rivalry, etc.?

Rituals and forgiveness

3. *Mato Oput*: Bishop Ochola described Mato Oput, a ritual of reconciliation practiced among the Acholi people in Uganda. Mato Oput contains six principles: truth, mercy, justice, peace, restoration and transformation.
 - Write out these principles and discuss which one(s) are hardest to put into action.
 - What rituals do you have in your family (immediate or extended), your congregation, or your community to mark reconciliation? When was the last time such a ritual took place?

4. *Confession and forgiveness*: Reconciliation is woven into the biblical narrative and is enacted each time the Christian assembly gathers for worship.
 - What parts of the liturgy/weekly service deal with forgiveness and reconciliation?
 - Confession and forgiveness can be performed as a group (corporately) or individually. What is your preferred form of expressing confession and forgiveness?

Biblical reflection on forgiveness and reconciliation

5. In Matthew 18:22, Jesus tells his followers that they should forgive 77 times— in other words, more than enough times. What does this tell you about forgiveness?
6. “Forgive our debtors/trespases/sins as we forgive our debtors/those who trespass/sin against us.” This line from the Lord’s Prayer deals with the heart of forgiveness.
 - Which version of this line in the prayer do you prefer? Why?
 - What are the implications of connecting our forgiveness of others with our need for forgiveness? How does this apply to your own life?
7. Catholic theologian Robert Schreier has written, “Reconciliation is more spirituality than a strategy. It is not “a hasty peace” or a managed process. Rather, reconciliation is a process initiated by God; when the gift of reconciliation is received by both victim and oppressor, it truly results in “a new creation.”
 - What are some examples of “incomplete” reconciliation? How do you see true reconciliation as a gift of God?

Additional Resources:

WEB

Stand With Africa is a cooperative world hunger campaign that focuses on peacemaking, AIDS prevention and education involving ELCA Lutheran World Relief and the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. Visit www.standwithafrica.org for congregational resources, games, statistics and a special section devoted to HIV/AIDS at www.elca.org/AIDS

Lutheran World Federation provides funds for the IDP (internally displaced persons) camps featured in the video. Lutheran funds provide clean water and sanitation in the camps. Learn more about LWF projects in Uganda: www.lutheranworld.org/What_We_Do/DWS/Country_Programs/DWS-Uganda.html

Action by Churches Together International (ACT) is an ecumenical organization that provides relief and development support among the IDP camps as well: act-intl.org

VIDEO

Forgiving the Unforgivable: Restorative Justice. Summer 1999 Mosaic video and users’ guide. This 10-minute video segment shows the painful encounter between a convicted offender who reached out to his victim’s parents and asked for forgiveness. With the help of the church, the parents were able to grant it. Available on DVD or VHS for \$19.99 at www.elca.org/mosaic

Living with Slim: Kids Talk about HIV/AIDS, directed by Sam Kauffmann. This 28-minute DVD follows seven children in Africa who have HIV/AIDS. Through heart-rending interviews and everyday scenes, the AIDS pandemic and its effects on children is brought into sharp focus. \$26.95, available online at www.nationalfilmnetwork.com

BOOKS

Reconciliation, Robert J. Schreiter, Orbis Books, 1992. 84 pages paperback. \$13, available online at www.amazon.com ISBN 0-88344-809-2.

No Future without Forgiveness, Desmond Tutu, Image Publishers, 2000. 304 pages paperback. \$14.95, available online at www.amazon.com ISBN 978-0385496902.

The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness, Simon Wiesenthal, Schocken, 1998. 304 pages paperback. \$14, available online at www.amazon.com ISBN 978-0805210606.

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Mosaic on the Web

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