

Notes from Group Presentation – Week 8

Week 8 Packet - Proceed with Caution

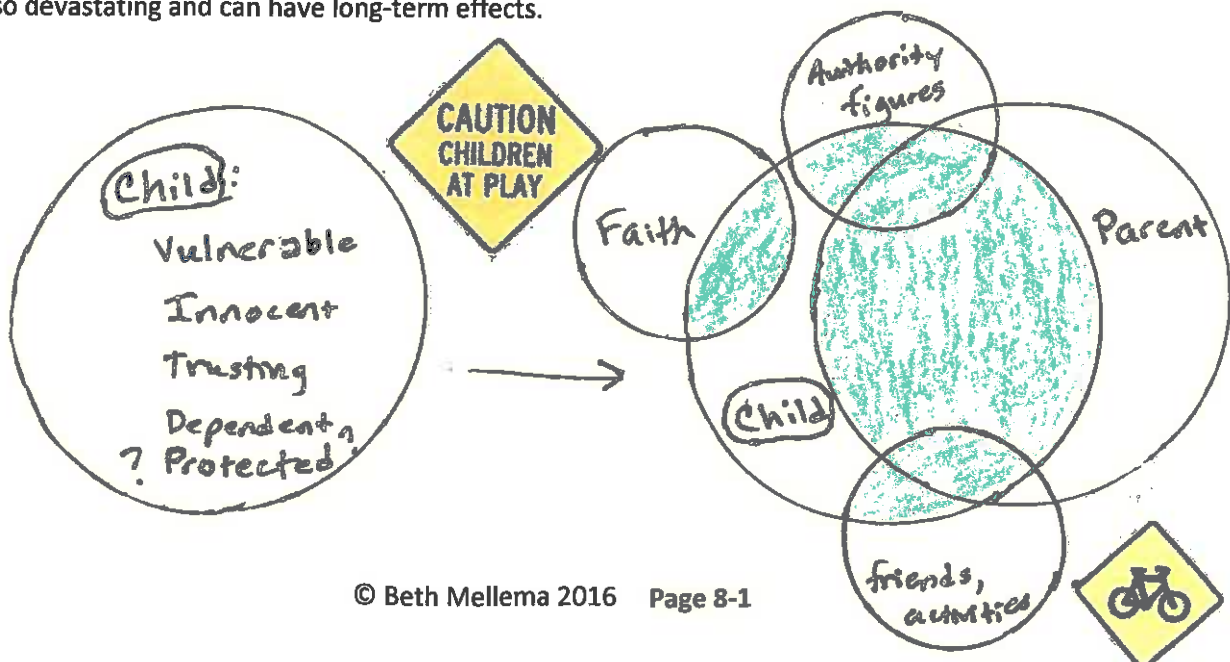
During our next class, we will hear a woman address her experience of being abused by her father and a pastor when she was a child. Unfortunately, such experiences are not rare. If you have encountered such exploitation yourself or if you know someone else who has, you are very aware of the deep hurt and confusion a child can experience. If this seems like a remote, unbelievable topic to you, pray to have your mind and heart opened so that you can be a supportive person to a child or friend in your life who might be struggling to deal with a hurtful history. The very idea of exploitation of children raises revulsion and dismay in our minds. The possibility of forgiveness seems so terribly remote; it would be at the extreme end of the range of hurts we have talked about – at opposite end of spectrum from simple things such as not being invited to a birthday party or having a misunderstanding with a friend.

As we look more at how God values children, an aside would be to remember that, hard as it is to accept, God also longs to extend forgiveness to a repentant perpetrator who confesses sin and seeks God's forgiveness. If any of you ignored a child's story or stood by and let abuse go on, you may feel intense guilt. God also wants to forgive you. And probably the child in question, maybe now an adult, longs for the same admission and repentance from you.

I. Special Vulnerability of Children

Recently you were asked to draw a diagram of intersecting circles illustrating the relative importance of things like family, job, etc. in your life (See pink Resource 2). We talked about how devastating the removal of a significant circle can be.

If you were to construct a similar diagram for a child, certain things would stand out in his or her limited experience and controlled environment. They do not have a lot of independence, and they depend on protection from trusted adults – parents, teachers, pastors, scout leaders, etc. When young, so much of a child's identity is found in its immediate environment and relationships with caregivers and authority figures. The example below gives a visual image of a child's world – and helps us see why childhood abuse is so devastating and can have long-term effects.



The abused child encounters deep disillusionment and gaps in his/her experience. In the case of sexual abuse, a child may be told



-You are very special to me.

-This is our secret

-You enjoy this.



-No one will believe you if you tell. Or

-You wouldn't want me to get in trouble and have to leave. That would be your fault.



The child can be confused by mixed emotions: this doesn't seem right; or maybe this is the way uncles express love; it sort of feels good; it must be my fault.

"Children are ideal candidates for exploitation by virtue of their complete dependence (emotional and material) on the adults in their lives....Children's tolerance for their parents knows no bounds...Children may be exploited, abused, and manipulated by adults and accept it without critical awareness of the injustices being perpetrated. Unable to react to the controlling adult, they internalize the behavior and its impact. They may repress or deny emotional reactions which can build up inside until adulthood, when they may finally be discharged, but not necessarily at the object that caused them..."
(Helping People Forgive by Augsburg, p. 91)

All of this impacts the challenge of forgiveness in many ways. If an adult has her own unexamined baggage from childhood, she can have difficulty seeing God as a loving father. It can leave her with rage, hurt, shame – a self that is identified by this bad experience. Certainly trying to forgive the perpetrator can seem undesired and impossible. The experience can interfere with setting up the "forms" we have talked about – such as community of believers, prayer, peaceful space and meditation. Suspicion, distrust, doubting the world offers a safe environment, taking on inappropriate blame and shame, feeling unworthy, self-blame, uncertain models for being an effective parent - can all develop and interfere with her own relationships with friends and family. With all this confusion, any suggestion she forgive a perpetrator can seem inappropriate and unfathomable. If some kind of reorganization of thinking, some kind of inner healing doesn't occur, moving forward is unlikely and being challenged to "forgive and let it go" can be cruel. The newspaper article on the next page illustrates the difficulty a child might face well into adulthood.

**Finding help is critical in situations like this. There are trained, licensed mental health professionals who can be helpful in navigating a course toward hope. There are Christians who work in this area, and it is important that they are skilled and experienced in this kind of trauma.



Willmar businessman gets prison

Judge grants longer sentence for sex acts with underage boys

BY ANNE POLTA
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WILLMAR — Willmar businessman Pete Hoagland, who pleaded guilty his fall to, was sentenced Monday to 18 1/2 years in prison.

Citing the severity of the cases and the harm done to the five victims, Judge Jennifer Fischer granted



Hoagland

the state's motion for an upward departure from state guidelines in the sentencing, including a rare triple upward departure on two

of the counts. Sentences are consecutive on four of the counts — sentences

for each must be served one after the other — and sentences are concurrent on the remaining four.

Hoagland, 68, also must register as a predatory offender.

He was charged and convicted on four counts of second-degree criminal sexual conduct and four counts of fourth-degree criminal sexual conduct.

According to the criminal complaint, Hoagland acted as a friend and father figure to the victims, gained their trust and then molested them.

The incidents, which took place in the late 1980s and early 1990s, came to light this past February when one of the victims contacted Willmar police.

PRISON | A2

PRISON: 'A wolf in sheep's clothing'

FROM A1

The sentencing hearing Monday morning lasted more than three hours, during which the court heard emotional testimony from the victims on the impact of Hoagland's actions.

One of the victims, now 35, tearfully described it as a betrayal that felt like a bullet to the heart.

"I want you to feel what I feel every day," he said.

The mother of two of the victims recounted how Hoagland befriended her sons, sat at their kitchen table and helped them with their homework.

"I trusted you with what was most precious to me — my boys," she said.

She called him "a wolf in sheep's clothing" who presented an outwardly respectable appearance while grooming vulnerable victims and then preying on them.

Statements written by two of the victims also were read aloud in the courtroom, asking for justice.

Hoagland bowed his head and covered his eyes during most of the testimony. At

one point he sobbed audibly.

In a brief statement, Hoagland said he felt "deep regret for what I've done."

"If I could do anything to take away the pain, I would," he said.

Courtroom arguments focused on whether an upward departure from state sentencing guidelines was warranted.

Hoagland's attorney, Daniel Mohs, sought concurrent sentences, noting that Hoagland agreed to plead guilty to all eight charges rather than go to trial.

"We are not suggesting that Mr. Hoagland should not be punished," he said.

But he said the defendant voluntarily stopped his behavior in the late 1990s and has been "a pillar of the community" since then.

"He's just not the same person that did those crimes decades ago," he said.

Mohs brought in an expert witness, forensic psychologist Peter Marston, who testified that Hoagland is at low risk of reoffending and is amenable to treatment.

Stephen Wentzell, first assistant Kandiyohi County

attorney, countered that the multiple acts and the vulnerability of the boys called for an upward departure.

"The defendant has escaped justice too long," he said.

Before handing down the sentence, the judge directed her first remarks to the victims.

"You are not responsible. You were children," Fischer told them. "This was not consensual. He took from you. He identified you as vulnerable. He identified your needs. He made himself your buddy, your father, your big brother, your cool friend. ... He bought and paid for your loyalty and then he used you."

Telling them they were "very, very brave" to come forward with their stories, she urged them to find healing.

"This is part of you, but it doesn't have to be you," she said.

The judge had harsh words for Hoagland, calling his actions "egregious."

"They were multiple. They were done with particular cruelty to victims who were particularly vulnera-

ble," she said.

One of the victims reportedly was molested at least 200 times; another victim reportedly was molested 500 to 1,500 times.

The long-term psychological harm has included suicide attempts, drug use and depression, Fischer said. One of the victims now resides in a group home and has severe post-traumatic stress disorder, she said.

"You have left a wake of destruction," Fischer said as she pronounced sentence.

"This sentence will in no way restore your victims, but it does send a message to them that the court cares that your punishment means something," she told Hoagland.

A lawsuit by some of the victims also is pending.

Mohs told the media after the sentencing that he believes there may have been some errors in how the sentencing guidelines were applied.

"We anticipate filing an appeal," he said. If an appeal is successful, it could potentially shave six to seven years off Hoagland's sentence, he said.

Deep hurts to children: a very complicated forgiveness challenge (See Jeremiah 6:14) 83

II. References in Bible about Value of Children in God's Eyes



Abuse may have started before the child has had the opportunity to hear and understand another concept we have talked about: Christ in me and me in Christ. The idea of God being there, loving, somehow watching over and sorrowing over what is happening – is an evasive concept for even us as adults. We object – saying, God, if you are there surrounding us in all things in our lives, how can this kind of trauma occur? Yet, when we look in Scripture, we find that God DOES value children and that He has stern warnings for anyone who misuses them.

1. How are children described in Psalm 127:2-3? (If a couple encounters fertility issues, however, it does NOT mean they are being punished.)
2. How did Jesus describe a child's faith and how it should be viewed? (Read Luke 10:21; Matthew 18:2-4)
3. Did Jesus have affection for children, time for them? (See Matthew 18:1-5; Mark 9:36-37; Mark 10:13-16) Give examples from these texts.
4. What does Matthew 18:10 say about children?
5. The writers of three of the four Gospels all quote the same warning given by Jesus. God takes mistreatment of children VERY seriously. (Again, remember that perpetrators can be forgiven by God – but they are not off the hook from consequences; what they did is never justifiable; strict boundaries need to be enforced after discovery; and reconciliation or restored relationship is unlikely.) Summarize the words of Jesus in the following passages.

Matthew 18:1-6

Luke 17:2-3

Mark 9:42

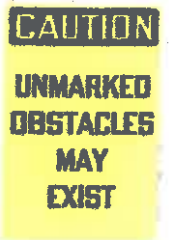




III. Bumps Ahead

There are all kinds of road signs that warn of us of things we will encounter as we drive down a highway. They help us avoid wrong turns, collisions, etc. If we benefit from such warnings as we drive our cars, certainly we can benefit from cautions as we travel the journey of forgiveness.

Triggers. Even if the offense you have experienced is not severe, you may still need to deal with triggers – things like songs, meeting a person in the hall, going back to a location associated with bad memories – that make you feel like a forgiven offense is totally real again. You may have thought you have successfully “put it on the shelf” or filed it away as old business, when it suddenly pops into your thoughts as though it just happened.



Memory is one of the amazing capacities of the brain. It

- Allows us to benefit from experience
- Allows us to recall material that we can build on in future learning; We don't have to go back to ground zero each time we approach a situation.
- Gives us the benefit of remembering answered prayers, kindnesses, experiences that build faith
- Stores warm memories of special occasions and special people

HOWEVER, unfortunately, this capacity to remember doesn't just switch off when we face a hurtful or traumatic event – just as the law of gravity is not suspended just because we might be slipping off a roof. God set up a world with predictable laws that we can depend on. The same capacity that stores joys also registers hurts. Our brain is an organ – like our skin. Skin is not suddenly impermeable if it comes in contact with a hot stove burner or a sharp knife. Stitches, antibiotics, and dressings are forms God uses to heal these wounds over time. Yet scars may remain. We have to deal with things we wish could just be erased.

Sometimes we feel like we have been blind-sided by reawakened images and feelings.

Some suggestions for handling such moments:

1. Ask God to reveal to you whether there are things He still wants you to deal with – or whether this is just an occasion of your fickle emotions threatening to be in control. Remember our earlier discussions about the necessity of leaning on Him, of asking the Holy Spirit living in us to control our thoughts, emotions, and will (the Soul part of us)



If we honestly ask for His help with the intention to obey what He shows, we are in a position to trust what comes to our minds. Another check – does the impression or prompting we receive fit with Scripture?

2. Let God minister to you through the “FORMS” you have set up including reading His word, prayer, the counsel of a trusted Christian friend or leader, quiet time away reflecting and meditating. Think of comforting images of safety and protection in Christ such as a burden or backpack we can lay at His feet and ask Him to bear for us. Remember the familiar illustration of two sets of footprints merging into one as He carries us through a rough time.

In next week’s assignment, we will look at verses that remind us that God offers us a place of safety. For now, look up and write out Psalm 107:29-30.

3. **Focus on FACTS and NOT EMOTIONS.** Remember our train illustration:



4. Use skills we have discussed:

- a. **Thought stoppage** (use your stop sign!) (II Corinthians 10:5 - “... take every thought captive)
- b. **Thought Substitution** - looking at alternate options; focusing on good, remembering how God has delivered us before (II Corinthians 1:8-11)
- c. **Reframing** – acknowledging that others have feet of clay just as we do; may not have intended hurt; revisiting our expectations of forgiveness (for example, forgiving does not mean forgetting – so we shouldn’t be caught so off guard). Look at history through your adult eyes now and contrast how you can view it now versus how you might have as a child.



5. Remember the distinction between **true guilt** and **false guilt**. If you are the person who has asked for forgiveness from God and from a person you have hurt, true guilt is removed. You still

have the history of committing an offence, need to take ownership of that, and do not necessarily escape consequences, such as legal requirements or the need to make amends. BUT biblical guilt (true guilt) that the Holy Spirit brings to our spirit to convict us of sin and drive us toward repentance has done its work. False guilt is continuing to beat yourself up over something that has happened but that you have dealt with. It can also be aroused when the person you have wronged refuses contact or won't accept your apology. The offended person has the choice on how to receive your changed heart; we have discussed the wisdom of that person asking for God's help in extending forgiveness when asked, but ultimately that person is in the driver's seat. In our fallen world, we may have to grapple with that person's inability or unwillingness to forgive – and ask God to remove the ball and chain that attaches us to that person's approval or acceptance. "Forgiving ourselves" is often a futile effort; we need to rest in God's forgiveness and His strength to go forward in spite of past sin.



6. Remember that forgiveness is a process, a journey - sometimes life long, - not necessarily a single moment in time. Review your list of what forgiveness is and is not. Perhaps your definition and expectations need to be adjusted. You may need to be prepared for living with situations that cannot be tied up neatly in little bows. This world has much unfinished business.

7. Remember that the Christian walk is a DAILY walk. Just as we can't eat once and then forget food for a month, we can't thrive spiritually with only episodic contact with our Father.



*"I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. **They are new every morning; Great is your faithfulness.** I say to myself, 'The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.' The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him. It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord."*

Lamentations 3:19-23

**PROCEED
WITH
CAUTION**

8. Often certain people and places associated with bad memories will continue to be in your life. Gradual, short exposure may help you gradually be able to encounter them without problematic emotions.

On the other hand, if certain triggers recur frequently and are problematic in your daily functioning, it might be wise to minimize exposure to them. Try to backtrack and figure out what triggers your reaction. Some triggers may be too strong for now and may need to be avoided until you are better able to deal with them.

Why listen to a song that raises conflict in your heart? Why go to a place that only brings back troubling memories? Why beg for something that is out of your reach? I am not talking about total avoidance but rather wisdom in evoking false guilt, false accusation, or renewed hard feelings



We have talked briefly about Post Traumatic Stress. Below is a review.

Post-Traumatic Stress (A Brief Overview)

This is a complicated area with much written. It cannot be adequately addressed in **this class**, but I do want you to be aware of it – both to be compassionate to others who might experience it AND to be alert to a difficulty you might have faced but not labeled.

Post-traumatic stress is a normal **response to trauma**. Trauma in this sense includes things such as threat to life or limb, severe physical harm or injury, receiving intentional hurt or injury, the violent, sudden death of a loved one; causing death or severe harm to another; or witnessing or learning of violence to a loved one. If symptoms meet certain criteria, persist, and interfere with functioning in relationships, work, or other aspects of life, the stress response is called **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**.

Post-traumatic stress symptoms include much of what we have come to understand as the body's "fight or flight" response: arousal, hypervigilance (always being on the alert for environmental cues), flashbacks, a sense of current or persistent threat, nightmares, insomnia, insecurity and generalized distrust. It is important to understand that PTSD is a very real diagnosis. Remember how we have talked about the brain being different from a muscular-skeletal part of our body such as an arm which we can pretty much move at will. It is an amazing mass of tissue with biochemical bathing its parts and with electrical discharges occurring constantly. It directs the function of our physical body and is also the organ that is involved in thinking, remembering, planning, feeling. With trauma, stress hormones and various structures can be impacted and cause ongoing symptoms over which a person has little voluntary control.

Cues in a person's environment can trigger or reactivate memory of a traumatic event. A woman can feel like she is reliving the event or right back where she started in terms of coping with it. If she is trying to put her arms around forgiveness during this time, she can feel back at square one. ***It is not wise or kind to ask a person to simply "Forgive" or "Let go" when these intense emotions may have been reactivated.*** She possibly needs professional help with these symptoms and their cause before she can proceed in the journey of forgiveness. It has been noted that "Person-perpetrated" stressors such as rape, incest, abuse, criminal assault, and war are more devastating than accidents or "acts of God" or "natural occurrences" such as hurricanes, earthquakes, floods. All are outside the range of usual human experience, and all can bring on post-traumatic stress – but the issues of identity and personal threat tend to be more significant when a fellow human being has caused the traumatic event. In either case, at least temporarily, "the sense of the world as a safe, predictable, rational place is lost. For a believer, it is another time to acknowledge our weakness and dependence – and to lean on God for strength He will provide through His words, through supportive people, and through counseling.

Coping: The ideal, of course, is the prevention of exposure to overwhelming events. This would be an example of **primary intervention**. Second best is brief, immediate help after the event such as is offered in debriefing after disasters to offer coping techniques and hopefully forestall long term difficulty; this is **secondary intervention**. Unfortunately, people often don't have access to this early intervention or don't recognize the long term ramifications of an event. After time has passed with traumatic experiences not being processed, the risk of post-traumatic stress problems is very real. At this point, **tertiary intervention**

such as counseling over time is indicated. A person can learn to identify and cope with triggers, increase her ability to tolerate strong emotions, gradually be desensitized to alarming triggers, and enlarge and utilize support systems. When applied to our study of forgiveness, it is critical to recognize trauma responses as a complicating factor that needs to be addressed. We go back to Jeremiah 6:14 and make sure we are not pressuring ourselves or others into “easy” fixes:

“They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious.

‘Peace, peace’ they say when there is no peace.”

9. Spend some time thinking of difficult history you or others you know may have experienced – and how it might be impacting how you or they interpret new stresses. How might that history affect current coping ability? What kind of work might need to be done? When do we need to extend special grace? None of this is meant to justify inappropriate behavior; rather it is meant to broaden our understanding and ability to act and react in a godly manner as Christ compensates for us in our weak condition and experiences of hurt.

IV. Do No Harm

The final section of your assignment for next week is to review **Primary Prevention**: how will we refrain from causing harm to others that puts them in the position of having to forgive us? We have spent weeks focusing on the nuances of forgiveness – of dealing with harm we have experienced or inflicted. How refreshing it would be to spend less time on this and more on doing good! Living as fallen, but redeemed people, in a fallen world, we will face these hard situations until Christ returns. However, as we are being sanctified and molded more into Christ’s image, we should see a change in our behavior.



A foundational principle is given in what we refer to as the “**Golden Rule**”, found in Matthew 7:12:

“So in everything, do unto others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”

Note that it does NOT say “do unto others as they do unto you” (tit for tat, retaliation, etc.) BUT rather give to others, do to them, as you wish they would do for you. As you see your own needs, anticipate that others also have them – and provide for them what you long for. If we asked God to help us do this moment by moment, there would be significantly less struggle with forgiveness.

1. **The Tongue** – spend time reflecting on familiar passages and principles that are so clear in our heads but so often not applied in our daily behavior. The books of **Proverbs** and **James** have numerous references to the tongue. Maybe later you could carefully go through each and write

down everything said about the tongue. We can praise and encourage others with our tongue; we can also cut them down, criticize, and hurt.

A. Look up James chapter 1 and fill in the following blanks:



In Chapter 1, verse 18, we are instructed to be quick to _____, slow to _____, and slow to become _____.

In Chapter 3, verses 1-11, the tongue is compared to three other small items that have great control. What are they?

B. Numerous verses in Proverbs advise us about our words. Look up as many of the following as you have time for. For sure, look up the starred ones! Write out any that you want to be sure to remember and to apply in your life.

- 11:13
- ****16:23,28**

- 18:8
- 20:19
- ****24:26, 28-29**

- ****25:11-15,18, 20**

- 26:4
- ****26:17-22**

- 28:13
- ****29: 8, 11,22**

- ****30: 32-33**

Other Verses

1. Ecclesiastes 10:12
2. II Corinthians 12:20

2. Actions, Attitudes: Read and write out I John 3:18; also refer to passages listed in the How section (#4)

Be careful of shaming, of breaking confidentiality or dishonoring privacy of someone who has shared with you. Refer back to Leah's Diagram, which was handed out October 14th as a resource. It illustrates one person's recollection of how sharing got out of hand and caused hurt to the person sharing and shame to the offender. It is a good reminder of the need to choose your confidants carefully and to limit their number.

3. Be an Example: don't be a stumbling block; Read Romans 14:13-15; 19-20

I Corinthians 8:9-13, 10:31-33

I John 2:10

As far as is in your power, do not provoke or do things to trip someone else up. Can you think of an area where your behavior could be a stumbling block to friends, relatives, observers? This is not meant to drive you into legalistic behavior – never do this or that – but to be sensitive to others as we seek to avoid doing harm.

4. HOW? There are two things we need to focus on: **God's power/ our weakness AND cooperating with the work He wants to do in and through us by putting the FORMS in place that we have discussed several times.**

A. Review passages that we have looked at before on Putting on/ putting off, clothing self, etc.

1. Galatians 5:16-26

2. ****Galatians 6:9 – write out**

3. ****Ephesians 4:20-5:2**

4. Philippians 2:1-4

5. Colossians 3:12-17



Which things do you specifically identify with in these passages when you look at your personality and your patterns of behavior?

Note them on your application page way back on 1-3!! Maybe you need to update that page or start another one!

B. Slowdown in your responses – the old count to 10 (Proverbs 17:27-28) Use your stop sign and yield sign that you made in class.

C. Listen for God's prompting, Write out Isaiah 30:21.



D. Ask God to help you with over sensitivity and to increase your tolerance of others, learning to let certain smaller things go by if there is no real need to pursue. Your attitude will be more positive; you will be better at giving people the benefit of the doubt. (Proverbs 1:33, 3:5, and 9:11; Ecclesiastes 7:21; Proverbs 19:11)

E. Keep short accounts – avoid letting an offense escalate. Write out Matthew 5:23-24.

Have you ever done that or seen it done?

F. Focus on what you can do to encourage – let it be a daily goal and desire. Look back at pages 6-10 and 6-11 and be reminded of not provoking our children. We can apply the same principle to others in our world.

G. Consider what amends you may need to make. This is not penance to earn forgiveness nor something you would do just to make yourself feel better. Rather it could be a sign of good will. You can ask the person you might have offended what they need from you. Twelve step programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous find the step of making amends to be very healing.

“I shall pass this way but once; any good that I can do or any kindness I can show to any human being, let me do it now. Let me not defer nor neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again.”

-Etienne de Grellet, a Quaker