



**NORTHPARK**  
*Community Church*

**SERMON STUDY GUIDE**

# **GREAT EXPECTATIONS**

**December 30, 2012-  
February 10, 2013**

**Northpark Community Church**

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**[www.NorthparkChurch.org](http://www.NorthparkChurch.org)**

**Thank you so much for picking up a sermon study guide!  
In this booklet you will find scriptures related to the Sunday talks here at Northpark Community Church and questions that will help you grow in your personal spiritual journey.**

**HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE:**

For each week of the series, there is a reading and reflection questions for Monday - Friday. These daily questions are designed for personal reflection and would also lend themselves toward family discussions.

**NEW IN THIS GUIDE:**

**Weekly questions, designed for further reflection in small groups can be found at the end of each week's readings.**

When discussing as a family or group, do not feel that **all** questions need to be answered. Choose the questions that you feel will generate the best discussion. Let others answer the questions without interruption—or criticism. This should be a safe time to speak honestly.

We hope this resource is useful to you. We would like to thank the individuals who took the time to put this together. If you have any feedback or questions, please contact Pastor Dave Raufman in the church office at 322-7200 or [David@NorthparkChurch.org](mailto:David@NorthparkChurch.org).

# December 30, 2012

## Starting The Year Out Right

### **MONDAY**

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#### **BACKGROUND**

Prayer and fasting was built into the calendars of both the Jews and the early Christian church. For the last several years, we at Northpark Community Church have begun the year with 21 days of fasting and prayer. We believe not only that God hears and responds to our prayers, but also that we are each affected positively by our communication with Him. We as the body of Christ to be effective must be tightly connected to Jesus, the head. As you pray, fast, and study, listen for what God may be saying to you individually and as part of His body in Fresno/Clovis.

#### **PRAY**

Father in Heaven, as I begin this time of prayer and fasting, I am asking that you will open my heart, mind and soul, to hear your message for me. Help me to trust you and obey.

#### **READ: Leviticus 16:29-31 (NIV) THE DAY OF ATONEMENT**

**29** “This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: On the tenth day of the seventh month you must deny yourselves \* and not do any work whether native-born or a foreigner residing among you **30** because on this day atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you. Then, before the LORD, you will be clean from all your sins.

**31** It is a day of sabbath rest, and you must deny yourselves; it is a lasting ordinance.

*\*or must fast* – also in verse 31 (NIV note)

#### **THINGS TO DO OR PONDER**

1. What are the must do specifics in the reading for this day?
2. What is the purpose of this day?
3. Why do you suppose that God wanted this to be a continuing observance?
4. Pray for the pastors. (Bob Willis, Dave, Nate, Ryan, Landon, Candi, Bob Fuller)

## TUESDAY

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### PRAY

Father, thank you for inventing prayer—no monthly fee, no wrong numbers, no computer voice, no lost connection or dead space—unbelievable! May I never take you or this privilege for granted. Help me as I process what you are saying through this study and your word.

### READ: Leviticus 16:29-31 (NIV)

**29** “This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: On the tenth day of the seventh month you must deny \* yourselves and not do any work whether native-born or a foreigner residing among you **30** because on this day atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you. Then, before the LORD, you will be clean from all your sins.

**31** It is a day of sabbath rest, and you must deny yourselves; it is a lasting ordinance.

*\*or must fast – also in verse 31 (NIV note)*

### Nehemiah 9:1

**1** On the twenty-fourth day of the same month, the Israelites gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth and putting dust on their heads.

### Ezra 8:21 (NIV)

**21** There, by the Ahava Canal, I proclaimed a fast, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask him for a safe journey for us and our children, with all our possessions.

### THINGS TO DO OR PONDER

1. What seems to be the attitude towards God communicated by fasting?
2. What is one of the greatest needs in your life at this time? What would you like from God? Have you talked to God about it?
3. Pray for the support staff at Northpark. (Dennis, Kerry, Nicole, Katie, and Eddie)

# WEDNESDAY

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## BACKGROUND

In the Leviticus reading you have probably noticed that to *deny oneself* in some translations was *to fast*. In Hebrew the word for fast also means “cover the mouth”. For the Jews fasting accompanied serious prayer and the Pharisees usually fasted on Mondays and Thursdays. The early church fasted on Wednesdays and especially Fridays. These days were half-fasts in that they did not eat meat. The purpose of these fasts was to focus on prayer not deprivation. Our purpose today at Northpark is to help us to focus on God. If fasting a meal, the time of the meal may be devoted to prayer. We are choosing to deny ourselves something we enjoy like food, electronic games, television or anything that will remind us of our focus.

## READ: Leviticus 16:29-31 (NIV)

**29** “This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: On the tenth day of the seventh month you must deny \* yourselves and not do any work whether native-born or a foreigner residing among you **30** because on this day atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you. Then, before the LORD, you will be clean from all your sins.

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## Ezra 8:21 (NIV)

**21** There, by the Ahava Canal, I proclaimed a fast, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask him for a safe journey for us and our children, with all our possessions.

## THINGS TO DO OR PONDER

1. Do you think that if you fast then God is more obligated to answer your prayers? Explain.
2. Do you really think that God has the time to listen to and answer your prayers and the prayers of millions of others at the same time? Explain.
3. Pray for local leaders: (Mayor, council members, police, judges, and educational leaders)

# THURSDAY

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## BACKGROUND

The sun is the ultimate source of energy for all living organisms. Green plants convert sunlight into sugar (food), animals eat plants to get energy. A study of the food chain leads to the sun. Our physical life depends upon bread.

Our spiritual life depends not on the sun, but instead the Son. Our spirit is nourished through our connection with God. Through Jesus our Spirit life is born, nourished and becomes mature. Jesus is called the bread of life, the living water. We fast bread (sun energy) and pray to be fed (Son energy).

## PRAY

Lord I come to you for you are the source. Without you I will wither and die. I need you to live and have abundant life. I come to you for light, for without you, this is a world of absolute darkness. Feed me and give me light to see the next step that I am to take today.

## READ: Matthew 4:1-4 (NIV)

**1**Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

**2** After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. **3** The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

**4** Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

## THINGS TO DO OR PONDER

1. Why do you think Jesus fasted?
2. Do you think Jesus was tempted to turn the stones to bread? Explain.
3. What did Jesus mean in verse 4?
4. Pray for our state officials ( governor, legislators, judges)

## **FRIDAY**

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**PRAY** (your own prayer)

**READ** (read the scriptures for this week)

1. What is the main message you hear in these readings? Do you think God is saying anything to you? Explain
2. Are you left with any unanswered questions from this week? If so, seek out someone this weekend to discuss your question. (a pastor or mature believer)
3. Pray for someone who is spiritually lost.

## **WEEKLY QUESTIONS** For Small Group or Family Discussion

1. Where do you go when you have some serious praying to do?
2. Tell about an answer to prayer.
3. What is one of your biggest challenges in praying?
4. If God already knows what you need, why pray?

**JANUARY 6, 2013**

## When You... Fast and Pray (Part 1)

### **MONDAY**

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#### **BACKGROUND**

Gary McRee, a member of Northpark, had a dream about a party being held for Jesus. Jesus was there sitting in the middle while all around him the guests talked and laughed with one another, but no one even approached the guest of honor. In his dream, Gary viewed the party with sadness. God created us for relationship with Himself, and one another. God desires not only worship, but a closeness built on communication and time together. The disciples, who spent day and night with Jesus saw that he prayed (talked to the Father). One day (Luke 11) after Jesus had prayed, one of the disciples asked him to teach them to pray. He instructs them with a simple prayer, but follows it with an encouragement to persist in prayer.

#### **PRAY**

Lord, I want you to be in charge of every aspect of my life. Help me to hear what you are saying and be willing to trust you and obey you.

#### **READ: Luke 11:1-13 (NIV)**

**11** One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."

**2** He said to them, "When you pray, say:

"Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. **3** Give us each day our daily bread. **4** Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation."

**5** Then Jesus said to them, "Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; **6** a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.' **7** And suppose the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' **8** I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.

**9** "So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. **10** For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

**11** "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead?

**12** Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? **13** If you then, though you

are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

### **THINGS TO PONDER OR DO**

1. Why did the disciple ask Jesus to teach them to pray?
2. What do you think would be a wrong way to pray? Explain.
3. Pray for the children and youth of the church, and pray that the leaders and teachers would be inspired by the Holy Spirit.

## **TUESDAY**

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### **PRAY**

Lord, I know that prayer is talking to you. If there are aspects of our communication that you wish to talk to me about, I will be attentive. I still find it inconceivable that it is even possible for me to have this direct line to you. Thank you so much!

**READ: Luke 11:1-13 (NIV) – See Monday**

### **THINGS TO PONDER OR DO**

1. In this prayer what two concerns related to God come first? Why?
2. What personal concerns follow?
3. How do prayer and forgiveness relate?
4. Pray for the chaplains who work in the local jails and hospitals.

# WEDNESDAY

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## BACKGROUND

Matthew records during the Sermon on the Mount similar instructions about prayer. This time the instructions are to a crowd of people, but again the directions are about how to pray. Notice that these instructions include improper motives for praying.

**PRAY** (Your own prayer)

**READ: Matthew 6:5-18 (NIV)**

**5** “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. **6** But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. **7** And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. **8** Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. **9** “This, then, is how you should pray:  
“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, **10** your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. **11** Give us today our daily bread. **12** And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. **13** And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.’ **14** For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. **15** But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

## THINGS TO PONDER OR DO

1. Do you think prayer is more about the right words, or the right heart or motive? Explain.
2. What do you find yourself praying for most often?
3. What concerns of God come first in this prayer?
4. How important is it that you forgive others? Explain.
5. Pray for those who are involved in the MOPS (mothers of preschoolers) ministry.

# THURSDAY

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## PRAY

Father, as I study about prayer may I discover the issues that matter most to you. May I see your priorities, your values, and your objectives and somehow may these become my concerns, also. I am trying to remove my blinders and ear muffs as I spend this time with you.

**READ: Matthew 6:5-18 (NIV) – See Wednesday**

## THINGS TO PONDER OR DO

1. What is the reward of the hypocrites? (verse 5) When you do a good deed are you tempted to let others know? Explain?
2. How do you feel about being called on to pray aloud? Explain.
3. When you pray, do you ever babble? Explain.
4. Run this by; when you pray do you explain the situation to God, do you give Him reasons why He should answer in a certain way? Discuss.
5. Pray for the members of the church board at Northpark.

## **FRIDAY**

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**PRAY** (your own prayer)

**READ:** Re-read the scriptures for the week—looking for something that speaks to you.

### **THINGS TO PONDER OR DO**

1. What did you notice in your reading?
2. What does this week's readings have to do with you, if anything?
3. How would you evaluate your prayer life? Strengths? Weaknesses?
4. Pray for those who come to church searching for something this Sunday.

## **WEEKLY QUESTIONS** For Small Group or Family Discussion

1. What has been hard about forgiving others?
2. What do you do when you have forgiven someone, and then the painful memory comes up again?
3. Can you think of a time when you prayed for something---and you were glad later that God knew better and the prayer was not answered in the way you thought best?
4. Tell about an experience of fasting- candy, food, or anything.

# JANUARY 13, 2013

## When You... Fast and Pray (Part 2)

### MONDAY

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#### BACKGROUND

Northpark's mission statement is based in scripture. Our purpose for being is to love God, to love one another, and to love our neighbors as our selves—to encourage the lost to find a relationship with God. The message for this week focuses on our neighbors.

#### PRAY

Lord, I know that my bent is towards thinking about me. I know I need to be prodded in the direction of thinking about you and others. Build into my heart your love and burden for others.

#### READ: Luke 10:25-37 (NIV)

**25** On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" **26** "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" **27** He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

**28** "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

**29** But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

**30** In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. **31** A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. **32** So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

**33** But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. **34** He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. **35** The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

**36** "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" **37** The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

#### Leviticus 19:15-19 (NIV)

**15** "Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the

great, but judge your neighbor fairly. **16** “Do not go about spreading slander among your people. “Do not do anything that endangers your neighbor’s life. I am the Lord. **17** “Do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in their guilt. **18** “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.

### **THINGS TO PONDER OR DO**

1. Why does God care about everyone? Who does God love more, those who love and try to live for Him, or those who want nothing to do with Him? Explain.
2. Why do we need to be reminded about loving others—even our enemies?
3. Pray for at least three of your neighbors.

## **TUESDAY**

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### **PRAY**

Father, help me today to hear your words and put them into action. Make me a lover of your children, even those I really don’t like. Do a make-over on my heart.

**READ: Luke 10:25-37** (NIV) – See Monday

**Leviticus 19:15-19** (NIV) – See Monday

### **THINGS TO PONDER OR DO**

1. What are some of the practical ways in which we show love according to the readings?
2. How might even our driving habits demonstrate loving our neighbor?
3. How could a rebuke demonstrate love?
4. Pray for the most irritating person that you can think of, right now.

## WEDNESDAY

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**PRAY** (your own prayer)

**READ: James 4:12** (NIV)

**12** There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?

**Proverbs 14:21** (NIV)

**21** It is a sin to despise one's neighbor, but blessed is the one who is kind to the needy.

### THINGS TO PONDER

1. What exactly does it mean to judge your neighbor? If we take on the role of judge—who do we think we are? Is this a “no problem” for you, or an “ouch”? Explain.
2. What are some subtle ways in which we might “despise” our neighbor? Does ignoring fall into the realm of despising?
3. Pray for your neighborhood children (by name or face).

## THURSDAY

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**PRAY**

Lord, help me to become a loving neighbor. Prompt me at the times I need to be aware of an opportunity to demonstrate that I care for more than just myself. Help me to overcome my preoccupation with me and my own agenda, and share your agenda. Thanks for being patient.

**READ: Luke 10:25-37** (NIV)

**25** On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

**26** “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”

**27** He answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor

as yourself.”

**28** “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

**29** But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

**30** In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. **31** A priest happened to be going down the same

road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. **32** So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

**33** But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. **34** He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. **35** The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

**36** “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” **37** The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

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### THINGS TO PONDER

1. Why were the priest and Levite not neighbors? In your opinion, did they do anything wrong? Are sins of omission better than sins of commission? How does this story hit you?
2. What did this neighborly act cost the Samaritan? Why did the Samaritan stop? (speculate about his motives)
3. If you stopped and helped, what would be your motives?
4. Pray for the local judges.

## **FRIDAY**

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**PRAY** (your own prayer)

**READ:** Read the scriptures for the week.

### **THINGS TO DO OR PONDER**

1. Did you find any sensitive areas in the readings for this week? Discuss.
2. What are your strengths and weaknesses in this area?
3. Pray that God will lead you to someone who can use caring contact this weekend (be especially alert when you get to church).

## **WEEKLY QUESTIONS**

### **For Small Group or Family Discussion**

1. What are your most common motives for doing an act of kindness, or helping a neighbor? Does motive matter? Are mixed motives ok?
2. Do you tend to ignore people in your neighborhood (at work, school, etc.), or do you usually wave or greet them on sight? Discuss.
3. When someone has offended or hurt you, do you tend to distance yourself and become less friendly ( is that bearing a grudge?) How do you solve this kind of problem?
4. How does gossip fit into the topic of loving your neighbor?
5. When is it right to offer rebuke? How is it done with tact or wisdom? Is it wrong to just avoid the issue?

# JANUARY 20, 2013

## When You... Give (Part 1)

### MONDAY

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#### BACKGROUND

In the beginning of the Matthew 6 passage about prayer and fasting is instruction about giving. We will spend two weeks looking at biblical principles about giving. God is our model. He is a giver- giving His only son that we might be forgiven and be adopted into His family. We are to be givers. He has given to us life, time, abilities, assets, and a set of instructions on how to live life. God wants us to love Him and others, serving others, and being good stewards in every area of life including finances. For many of us, the area of money is difficult. Some of the readings are about finances, but the principles apply to everything we are given.

#### PRAY

Father in Heaven, there is no way I can ever repay you for what you have done for me. Remind me of this when I feel intruded upon, when I am self-absorbed, or even too busy to pay attention to the needs of others. Thank you for always having time for me.

#### READ: Matthew 6:1-5 (NIV)

**6** “Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

**2** “So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. **3** But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, **4** so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

#### THINGS TO DO OR PONDER

1. Why do we like or want the approval of others?
2. What is the benefit of keeping secret your acts of kindness to others?
3. Speculation: Why might God want us to keep secret our giving?
4. Try to picture a Sunday gathering at Northpark. Pray for those who come to mind.

# TUESDAY

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## PRAY

Father, thank you for what you have done, are doing, and will do in molding me to be more like you. Help me to submit, trust, and obey. Teach me now as I sit in your lap and listen for your voice. Being in your presence is the best of life.

## READ: Matthew 6:1-5 (NIV)

**6** “Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

**2** “So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. **3** But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, **4** so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

## James 5:16 (NIV)

**16** Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

## THINGS TO DO OR PONDER

1. How can your left hand not know what the right hand is doing? What does this mean to you?
2. James encourages us to confess our sins to each other and pray for each other. If we let out the bad things we do, and hide in our self the good we do, what might be happening?
3. Does it matter if we pray or don't pray?
4. Pray for the judges in the Supreme Court.

# WEDNESDAY

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**PRAY** (pray your own prayer)

**READ: Luke 6:38** (NIV)

**38** Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

**2 Corinthians 9:7** (NIV)

**7** Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

## **THINGS TO DO OR PONDER**

1. From these two readings, what is to be our mode and attitude about giving? How are you doing in this area? Discuss.
  
2. According to Luke 6:38, what should follow from
  - a. No giving –
  - b. Generous giving –
  
3. Which statement is most consistent with 2 Corinthians 9:7
  - a. It is your duty as a Christian to give
  - b. Giving is a privilege
  - c. Giving should be a joy

# THURSDAY

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## BACKGROUND

God is the source of all good gifts. Each day of life, our talents, our jobs, all we have are from Him. He expects us to be good stewards of what we are given. We are expected to make use of what He has supplied to meet our own needs, but what about the rest. The Bible contains principles to help us to be good stewards of our time, talents and finances. We are looking at some of these principles.

## PRAY

Lord, thank you for all I have received. Help me learn how to be a good and faithful steward in every way.

## READ: Proverbs 28:26-27 (NIV)

**26** Those who trust in themselves are fools, but those who walk in wisdom are kept safe. **27** Those who give to the poor will lack nothing, but those who close their eyes to them receive many curses.

## Deuteronomy 14:22 (NIV)

**22** Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year.

## Numbers 18:26 (NIV)

**26** “Speak to the Levites and say to them: ‘When you receive from the Israelites the tithe I give you as your inheritance, you must present a tenth of that tithe as the Lord’s offering.

## THINGS TO DO OR PONDER

1. Are the statements in Proverbs 28 really true? How does that work?
2. Do you give a tenth to the Lord? Why or why not?
3. How has it worked for you (tithing or not tithing)?
4. What is your giving plan for the following? (or if not a plan what do you do)
  - Church –
  - Missions-
  - Charities like Heart, Food Bank, March of Dimes, and etc. –
  - Phone and mail solicitors-

## **FRIDAY**

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**PRAY** (your own prayer)

**READ** (read again the readings for this week)

### **THINGS TO DO OR PONDER**

1. What in this week's study has given you something to think about?
2. Reflecting over your life's experiences, what has been one of the biggest changes in how you handle the stewardship of all your resources and assets?

## **WEEKLY QUESTIONS**

### **For Small Group or Family Discussion**

1. What is something you give to others that they can use or need? (time, work, talent or ability, money, attention, prayer) Give an example if you can think of a time that you gave.)
2. What has God given to you? (One thing for which you are thankful.)
3. Tell about a time when someone gave to you something that you needed like time, attention, their skill, or money.
4. What is something that you have learned about giving?
5. Does giving encouragement, a compliment, or even a warm smile count for anything? Explain.

# JANUARY 27, 2013

## When You... Give (Part 2)

### MONDAY

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#### BACKGROUND

From the the first family, Cain and Abel, brought a portion of their produce as an offering to God. The books of Moses, the Law, gave many specifics about the content and amount appropriate for each kind of offering. At the time of Jesus, the Pharisees were proud that they were careful to dutifully tithe on everything, even spices. Jesus got on their case for making a show of giving.

Jesus, concerned about the inner man and motive, praised a poor widow who gave a tiny amount that was a huge percentage of what she had. God wants us to give, not to impress others, or to feel proud, but to give out of gratefulness, realizing all we have is from God. Again, this week the message is about giving, and what we are trying to discern is what God is saying to each of us individually.

#### PRAY

Lord, Provider, thank you for all we receive from you. Thank you for your word that gives direction, the Holy Spirit, who enlightens and prompts obedience. Talk to me through this lesson, and enable me to hear what you have to say.

#### READ: Deuteronomy 14:22 (NIV)

**22** Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year.

#### Numbers 18:26

New International Version (NIV)

**26** “Speak to the Levites and say to them: ‘When you receive from the Israelites the tithe I give you as your inheritance, you must present a tenth of that tithe as the Lord’s offering.’”

#### THINGS TO PONDER

1. What are these readings saying about giving?
2. Do you think that these principles or guidelines apply to giving today? Explain.
3. What are your principles or guidelines for giving and for saving?

## TUESDAY

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### PRAY

Lord, obviously you are wiser and smarter than I am. You have my best interests in mind, help me to listen, trust and obey, and help me not to try to rationalize away what you are saying to me even if it is something I don't want to hear or do.

### READ: Malachi 3:6-12 (NIV)

**6** "I the Lord do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed.

**7** Ever since the time of your ancestors you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you," says the Lord Almighty. "But you ask, 'How are we to return?'

**8** "Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. "But you ask, 'How are we robbing you?'

"In tithes and offerings. **9** You are under a curse your whole nation—because you are robbing me. **10** Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it. **11** I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe," says the Lord Almighty. **12** "Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land," says the Lord Almighty.

### THINGS TO PONDER

1. What is God saying about Himself in verse 6? Why does He remind the reader of this fact?
2. What is God asking in verse 7? Why?
3. What are the conditions for returning to God?

# WEDNESDAY

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## BACKGROUND

God created this universe and all that it contains. God is unlimited in His resources and does not have a need for your money. God knows your heart, your every motive and what you value most of all. His desire is that He be number one, even ahead of your money, car, house, and 401. He wants you to trust Him and obey Him in everything. For almost everyone, trusting and obeying God with their finances is one of the ultimate tests. We often aren't certain that God really has my good high on His chart –so we want to control our finances our selves. How are you doing in this area of trust?

**PRAY** (your own prayer)

**READ: Malachi 3:6-12** (NIV) – See Tuesday

## THINGS TO PONDER

1. Why were things not working out well for Malachi's peers?
2. What is God telling the people to do?
3. What is God's challenge, and what is His promise?
4. Does this promise apply to us today? Explain your opinion.

# THURSDAY

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## BACKGROUND

Good stewardship involves not only our financial assets which ultimately come from God, but also, all our assets. God gives us talents, abilities, time, opportunities, skills, and even our personality. How do I steward these somewhat intangibles? The following parable of Jesus gives us clues of what God expects.

## PRAY

Lord, I am thankful that you are absolutely truthful, and that you don't beat around the bush. You are direct. Help me to be more like you. Help me to hear, trust and obey you.

## READ: Matthew 25:14-21 (NIV)

**14** “Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. **15** To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. **16** The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. **17** So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. **18** But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. **19** “After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. **20** The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.’ **21** “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!’ **22** “The man with two bags of gold also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.’ **23** “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!’ **24** “Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. **25** So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’ **26** “His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? **27** Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. **28** ““So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. **29** For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. **30** And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be

weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

### **THINGS TO PONDER**

1. What were the Master's expectations of his servants while he was away?
2. What happens to the good stewards and to the poor stewards?
3. How does that apply to you?
4. What do you see as the main message of this parable?

## **FRIDAY**

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### **PRAY**

Father, I am so glad that you are patient with me. I am sometimes slow to trust and obey, and often so self-absorbed that I miss opportunities to care for others. Help me to pay attention to even the small and seemingly unimportant today, and hear your voice as I walk the walk, today.

**READ** (read again this week's readings)

### **THINGS TO PONDER**

1. What stood out to you?
2. What would you tell a new Christian who asked you about giving?
3. Do you have any suggestions of how the church should handle the issue of giving?

# WEEKLY QUESTIONS

## For Small Group or Family Discussion

1. How do you like being in a relationship with a God who does not change?
2. Is there any area like time, talents or finances that you think that you might be robbing God? Explain.
3. Have you ever tested God in giving? What was the result? If you haven't tested God in this area, why not?
4. What is your savings goal or plan?
5. In the parable of the bags of gold or talents, with whom do you identify most?

**FEBRUARY 3, 2013**

**When You... Forgive**

## **MONDAY**

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### **BACKGROUND**

Forgiveness is a difficult issue for many. For the next two weeks we will focus on the blessing of forgiveness and our response. God does not forgive us just because He loves us. That would demean His holiness. God forgives us because Jesus' death on the cross pays the penalty for sin. When Jesus said, "It is finished!" and breathed his last, man's sin was covered. God does love us, but it was the death of His Son, that made forgiveness possible.

### **PRAY**

Father, I thank you for sending your Son to die in my place. Teach me to love and forgive. Walk with me through this study and help me apply what I am learning as I interact with the people in my world—especially the difficult ones.

### **READ: Matthew 6:12-15 (NIV)**

**12** And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

**13** And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.'

**14** For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. **15** But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

### **THINGS TO DO OR PONDER**

1. What is our incentive to forgive others?
2. What kind of offense or hurt is hard for you to forgive?
3. How does the evil one try to make life as a Christian difficult?
4. Who is the speaker, and what does he know about forgiveness?

## TUESDAY

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### PRAY

Father, I am looking forward to this time with you and how you will help me to live it out in my relationships. Help me to make a difference in the world where I rub shoulders with people who know you, and lots who do not have a clue about the difference that you can make in a person's life. Shine through me in a way that brings glory to you.

### READ: Matthew 6:12-15 (NIV)

**12** And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

**13** And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.'

**14** For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. **15** But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

### THINGS TO PONDER OR DO

1. Do we really have to forgive everyone who wrongs us? Explain.
2. Do you have to forgive someone who has done the same hurtful thing over and over? Discuss.
3. Who is our model for forgiveness? What did he forgive? (at what cost?)

# WEDNESDAY

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## BACKGROUND

It is almost impossible to interact with others without being offended, mistreated, misunderstood, betrayed, treated unfairly, or hurt in some way. And it is possible, that you intentionally or unintentionally are an offender. No matter who offends the result is a disruption in the flow of love and good will.

Forgiveness is needed to restore the relationship.

In some cultures vengeance or retaliation is the normal mode of handling offense. This usually perpetuates the hurt. God modeled and commanded that offense be handled by forgiveness. God not only modeled forgiveness, but commands that we forgive one another

**PRAY** (your own prayer)

**READ: Colossians 3:13** (NIV)

**13** Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

**Ephesians 4:32** (NIV)

**32** Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

**Luke 17:3-4** (NIV)

**3** So watch yourselves.

“If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. **4** Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying ‘I repent,’ you must forgive them.”

## THINGS TO PONDER OR DO

1. Should you tell someone if they have offended or hurt you? Explain.
2. What if the offender when confronted refuses to repent? Do you still forgive them? Discuss
3. Does God forgive the unrepentant? Explain.

# THURSDAY

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**PRAY** (Your own prayer)

**READ: Genesis 50:15-21** (NIV)

**15** When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?" **16** So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: **17** 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept.

**18** His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said. **19** But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? **20** You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. **21** So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

## THINGS TO PONDER OR DO

1. Did Joseph forgive his brothers? Explain.
2. What had God done with the brothers' cruel behavior to Joseph?
3. Joseph forgave his brothers. Do you think the forgiveness in this case was a process or instantaneous? Discuss.

## **FRIDAY**

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### **PRAY**

Thank you Lord, for what I am understanding about forgiveness. Thank you for grace, for love, which I don't deserve, but you have given freely. Help me to pass along grace to those in my own life. Help me to grow up to become more like you.

**READ:** (re-read the readings for this week)

### **THINGS TO PONDER OR DO**

1. What in the readings speak to you? Why?
2. What question(s) do you still have about forgiveness?
3. Do you have any unfinished business that needs forgiveness? Explain.

## **WEEKLY QUESTIONS**

### **For Small Group or Family Discussion**

1. What if there was no provision for forgiveness?
2. Can you forgive someone, but not trust that person? Discuss.
3. What if the offender is not sorry, and doesn't care? Do you forgive? Explain.
4. Are you supposed to forget when you forgive? Discuss.

# FEBRUARY 10, 2013

## When You... Forgive and Forget

### MONDAY

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#### BACKGROUND

Forgiving is love's toughest task. Forgiving seems almost unnatural. Our sense of fairness almost demands that there be a payback for a wrong done. An eye for an eye seems so much more just. That idea sounds good, but it has resulted in feuds lasting for ages. Gandhi said that an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth ends up in a blind and toothless society. Jesus said the way to end the cycle of retribution is to turn the other cheek.

God is our model for forgiveness. Man sinned and the only remedy of sin was death. For several thousand years, the Jewish people made sacrifices of animals to make atonement for their sins. God finished the blood sacrifices by Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross – the innocent lamb dying for our sins providing forgiveness for sin for all who would repent and receive Him as Lord and Savior. Jesus came not only to die a sacrificial death, but also to give us instructions how to live in relationship with God and others. We are to forgive as we are forgiven. Sounds simple, right? Forgiveness sometimes seems impossible, but forgiveness frees both the offender and the offended. Forgiveness restores relationship and makes possible the flow of love.

#### PRAY

Lord, I want to please you. I am your child and you are conforming me to your image---making me more like you. Help me to become a good forgiver. Help me to put into practice the principles that you are showing me. Thanks!

#### READ: Matthew 18:21-35 (NIV)

**21** Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?"

**22** Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

**23** "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. **24** As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. **25** Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

**26** "At this the servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' **27** The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

**28** "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who

owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded.

**29** "His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.'

**30** "But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. **31** When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

**32** "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. **33** Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' **34** In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. **35** "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

### **THINGS TO PONDER OR DO**

1. Do you tend to be quick or slow to forgive?
2. According to the notes in the NIV Study Bible, offenders in Jesus' day were given three chances, the fourth offense did not need to be forgiven. What does Jesus' answer tell you about forgiveness in the kingdom?
3. In some cultures forgiveness is really a sign of weakness. It is like you do not stand up for yourself? What would you answer to the charge of weakness?

## TUESDAY

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### PRAY

Lord, help me to be an intentional forgiver, not a doormat, but one committed to being like you. You have not only forgiven me, but you don't even remember my offense. Help me to forgive and be committed to not rehashing the offense. Thank you, Lord!

**READ: Matthew 18:21-35 (NIV) – See Monday**

### THINGS TO PONDER OR DO

1. How does this parable relate to Jesus' teaching about forgiveness?
2. What is the comparison of the two servants' debts?
3. How do you usually handle it when someone has wronged you? (confront, ignore, look to get even, hold a grudge, forgive and forget) Discuss.

## WEDNESDAY

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**PRAY** (your own prayer)

**READ: Luke 15:11-32 (NIV)**

**11** Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. **12** The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

**13** "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. **14** After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. **15** So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. **16** He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

**17** "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! **18** I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. **19** I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' **20** So he got up and went to his father.

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. **21** “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ **22** “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. **23** Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. **24** For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate. **25** “Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. **26** So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. **27** ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’ **28** “The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. **29** But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. **30** But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’ **31** “‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. **32** But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”

### **THINGS TO PONDER OR DO**

1. What was the younger son’s sin? And to whom did he need to ask forgiveness?
2. What motivated the son to ask for forgiveness? Can you relate to this parable in any way? Explain
3. What was the father’s response to the younger son? Would you be as quick to forgive? Explain.

# THURSDAY

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## BACKGROUND

You may already have a good handle on forgiveness. For many, this is a tough subject. Confrontation for some seems almost impossible. The pain of the offense may seem overwhelming. God is patient, but insistent. He wants us to be free from guilt, anger, hurt, and resentment. These are negative emotions that cripple us and keep us from wholeness. You may find that you want to deal deeper with this issue. One resource is *Forgive and Forget* by Lewis Smedes, or you may wish to talk to a pastor for other suggestions or advice.

## PRAY

Thank you, Lord for forgiving me. Help me to remember that when I am tempted to retaliate, withdraw, or hold a grudge. Continue to teach me your ways, and help me to look to you and not my surroundings for answers.

**READ: Luke 15:11-32 (NIV) – See Wednesday**

## THINGS TO PONDER OR DO

1. Who do you relate to most in this parable- the father, younger son, or older son? Explain.
2. In what ways does this parable deal with forgiveness?
3. How receptive was the father? How much persuasion was necessary? Were the son's motives in seeking forgiveness totally pure and unselfish?
4. What do you learn about the Father in Heaven from the father in this parable?
5. As you have studied forgiveness, has anyone or any incident come to mind that needs attention? Pray now for wisdom and courage to deal with it. There are some quite difficult issues and you may wish to seek the wisdom of one of the pastors or a spiritual mentor.

## **FRIDAY**

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**PRAY** (your own prayer)

**READ** (re-read the readings for this week)

### **THINGS TO PONDER OR DO**

1. What in these readings is the most meaningful for you? Why?
2. Where do you see yourself as almost there, and where do you see yourself as having the most growth potential in the area of forgiveness?
3. We don't really need God's help to be selfish and vengeful. Forgiveness is not natural, and asking supernatural help is pretty smart. Ask for help right now if there is a need in area of forgiveness.

## **WEEKLY QUESTIONS**

### For Small Group or Family Discussion

1. What would you do if suddenly all your debts were canceled?
2. To whom do you have to say, "I'm sorry" the most?
3. Which is the hardest for you to do?
  - a. ask for forgiveness
  - b. give forgiveness
  - c. forgive over and over
  - d. forgive and forget
4. What do you think is the connection between forgiveness, health and wholeness?