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Reflection

## **WORLDVIEW, PAIN AND BROKENNESS**

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“The great spiritual call of the Beloved Children of God is to pull their brokenness away from the shadow of the curse and put it under the light of the blessing.” Henry Nouwen

“It takes moral courage to grieve; it takes religious courage to rejoice.” Søren Kierkegaard

A common thread that runs through the human experience is that we all encounter pain, whether it comes from someone we love, either intentionally or unintentionally, or as a result of unexpected and unwelcome seasons such as financial difficulties, loss, or disappointment. The realities of our broken world often challenge our ability to feel gratitude. Scripture provides wisdom on life and interpersonal conflicts that challenge our gratitude. It encourages a God-centered worldview and the practice of forgiveness, leading to blessings and happiness.

A significant challenge to gratitude our survey identified is the ebbs and flow of life. Old Testament wisdom literature, like Ecclesiastes, highlights the seasons of life and unavoidable frustrations. This wisdom also indicates that life cannot be self-fulfilled. Instead of seeking answers to why things happen, we should enjoy the good things in life as gifts from God (Hill et al., 454).



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Jonathan Sacks' academic lecture on the meaning and measure of happiness in Jewish tradition at Emory University explores how the book of Ecclesiastes serves as a profound reflection on the inherent vulnerability of life. It is misguided to seek happiness in material possessions, which outlive us. We must confront our mortality.

The narrator in Ecclesiastes 1-2, often referred to as "the Preacher," is a man who possesses everything—horses, vineyards, gardens, parks, pools, servants, and immense wealth—and yet he discovers that these possessions hold no real significance (Sacks, 2014). Attempts to find happiness in earthly pleasures will inevitably fall short; we must first understand that only God embodies the eternal happiness we seek. This understanding should be rooted in a God-centered worldview, recognizing that the things we believe lead to happiness are merely substitutes for it. This teaches us to cultivate gratitude by embracing and practicing Biblical wisdom and the simplicities of life (Sacks, 2014).

A key term for happiness in Ecclesiastes is the noun "simchah" and the verb "sm-ch." These terms convey joy, rejoicing, elation, and celebration, highlighting a state of being that emphasizes living in thankfulness. Sacks points out that this joy only truly exists when shared, making it a form of social happiness (Sacks, 2014). This leads to the second cultivating factor of gratitude—practicing forgiveness among the people with whom we share our lives, highlighting the second significant challenge to gratitude identified in our gratitude survey: the dynamics of our relationships. But what exactly is forgiveness?

According to Webster's Dictionary, forgiveness is the action or process of forgiving or being forgiven. Forgiveness involves releasing the person who has wronged you and choosing not to hold their wrongdoing against them. It is also a process that requires acknowledging and bringing to light the wrong that was done.



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God's love and mercy are evident in Scripture—He forgives our sins because of Jesus's death and resurrection; we no longer bear the penalty for sin if we are in Christ (John 3:16; Rom. 3:24-26). Forgiveness is both given and received and in extending forgiveness to those who have hurt us, there is a process involved.

Henry Nouwen (1932-1996) was a Dutch-born Catholic priest/pastor, professor, and writer. In his book *The Living Reminder*, he explores themes of wounds, healing, and the Healer, emphasizing that our wounds are connected to our memories. He argues that our pains and joys shape our entire story. He writes, "It is not surprising... that most of our human emotions are closely related to our memory. Remorse is a biting memory, guilt is an accusing memory, gratitude is a joyful memory, and all such emotions are deeply influenced by the way we have integrated past events into our way of being in the world" (Nouwen, 19). This leads us to ponder: how do we heal?

Instead of forgetting the pain, we choose to talk about it and bring our struggles into the light. In confronting painful memories, we invite the Master Physician to heal our hearts (Mark 2:17). Nouwen explains that allowing God's power and presence to transform our pain is essential. He writes, "We have inherited a story which needs to be told in such a way that the many painful wounds about which we hear day after day can be liberated from their isolation and be revealed as part of God's relationship with us...by lifting our painful forgotten memories out of the egocentric, individualistic, private sphere, Jesus Christ heals our pains. He connects them with the pain of all humanity, a pain he took upon himself and transformed" (Nouwen, 25).

Paul wrote a tender letter to the Corinthians after his first trip, which ended in relational conflicts and grief:



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“So I made up my mind not to make another visit that causes you grief. For if I cause you grief, who is there to make me glad but the one whom I have grieved?...for I wrote you out of much distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you grief but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you” (2 Cor. 2:1-2, 4).

Paul encourages the community to forgive the individual who opposed him and caused him shame and distress, highlighting the importance of forgiveness (2 Cor. 2:5-11). In his sermon "Pain and Forgiveness," Jonathan Pennington stresses the need to process our wounds and sins that cause pain. Like Paul, Pennington sees forgiveness as the starting point for healing from pain. He reminds us that we live in a broken world: “Our lives are marked by grief and pain from others, we are broken people living in a broken world...the deepest and longest-lasting pains and griefs we experience as humans are those that come from other people, especially those we’re closest with.” Pennington makes a notable yet often overlooked statement: “To be human is to live in community, and to live in community with other imperfect and sinful people is to be hurt by them and to hurt them as well.”

Pennington describes forgiveness as a means of healing and finding true life, contrasting it with more common reactions we often resort to, such as ignoring or escaping, attacking, denying, internalizing, shifting blame, or justifying our actions. He reminds us that it is the vertical forgiveness from God that models the need for horizontal forgiveness in our relationships (Col 3:13).

A dear professor once told his students that when we study God’s Word, we must remember that the Bible is not the object; instead, we are the ones receiving nourishment and being transformed. The soil of a seed must be plowed so that the nourishment of water and sunlight is received. Likewise, embracing God’s worldview and receiving and giving forgiveness cultivates gratitude.



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Forgiveness is the starting point for healing from pain. As you conclude your journey of gratitude, take some time to be alone with God. Ask the Lord to help you forgive someone who has caused you significant pain. Release that person who has wronged you, and choose not to hold their wrongdoing against them (Eph 4:32). And if you carry the burden of pain, bring your struggles into the light of Jesus (Mark 2:17; Isaiah 61:3).

## References

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