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SAINT MARK'S  
CATHEDRAL

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# The Art of Forgiveness

## Week 2: Unpacking The Path to Forgiveness

# Overview of three-week series

- ▶ WHY FORGIVE? (the path of forgiveness is the way back to God)
- ▶ What forgiveness is; what it is not...
- ▶ A model to move away from “Revenge Cycle” into “Forgiveness Experience”
- ▶ How to approach the most difficult and challenging “opportunities” for forgiveness
- ▶ How to practice forgiveness of oneself
  
- ▶ Two presuppositions for the series (premised on our understanding of who God is)
  1. There is nothing that cannot be forgiven.
  2. There is no one who is inherently undeserving of forgiveness.

# Summary of Last Week

- ▶ Jeremiah: The way back to God is the way of forgiveness.
- ▶ Lament helps us be honest and protects us.
- ▶ We are all broken...and broken, we hurt others
- ▶ Forgiveness is the path to healing (the best self-interest)
- ▶ There is no future of peace without forgiveness
- ▶ The science of forgiveness demonstrates many positives in health.



First,  
forgiveness is  
not...

- ▶ An invitation to forget.
- ▶ An invitation to minimize the injury.
- ▶ An invitation to pretend the relationship is just fine.
- ▶ Weakness (actually the work of forgiveness is not for the faint of heart)
- ▶ Subversion of justice (people live with the consequences)
- ▶ Easy
- ▶ It is not about denying the truth of what has happened.

# Forgiveness is...



An invitation to acknowledge the perpetrator's humanity



An invitation to claim your shared humanity



An invitation to find healing and peace.



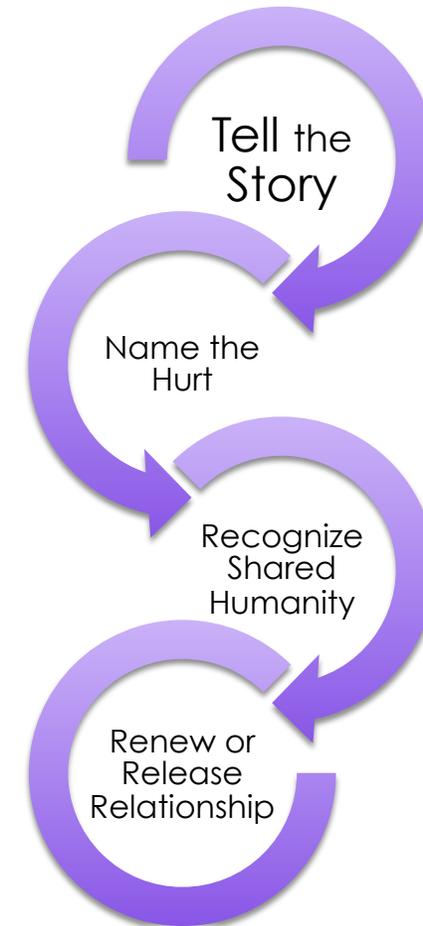
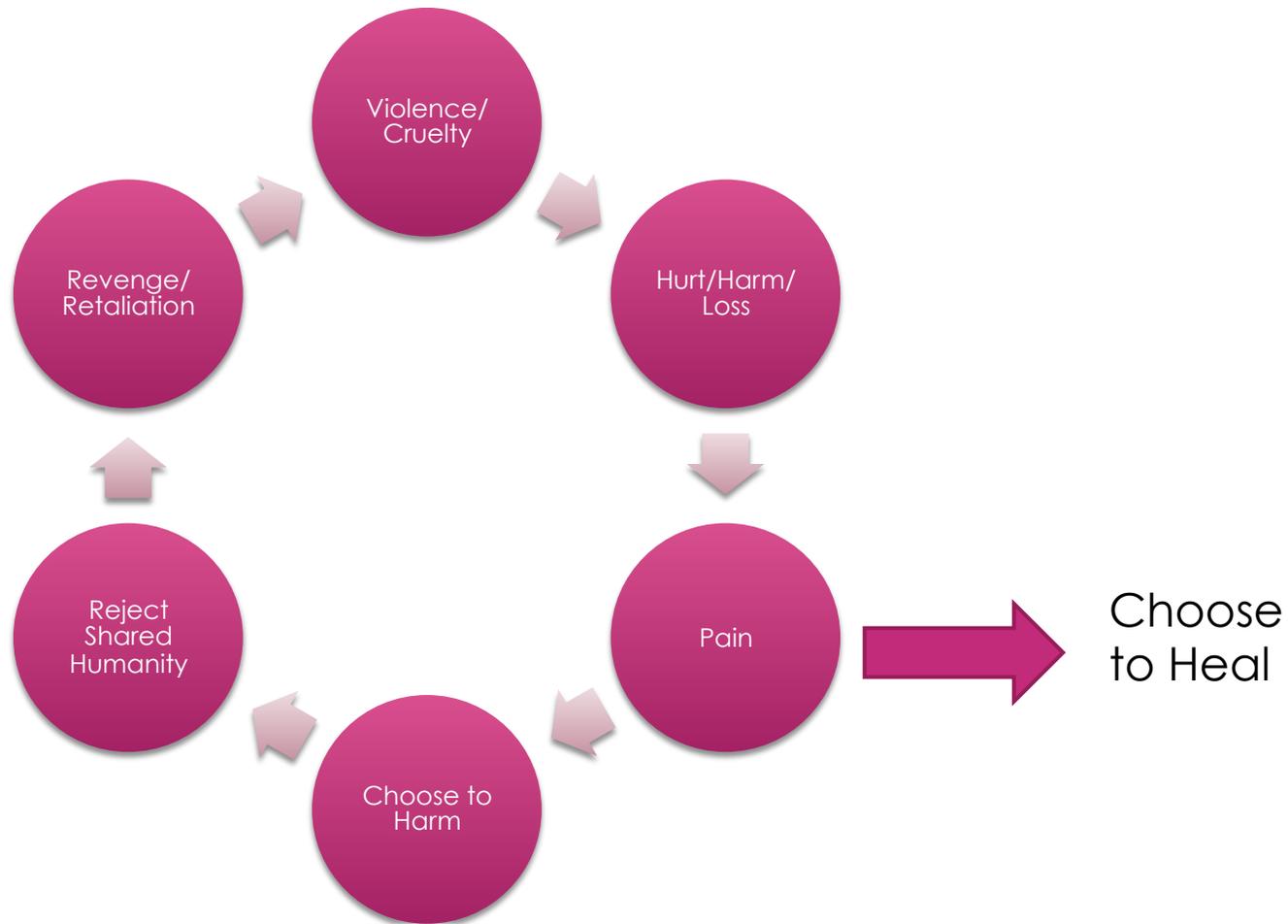
Tutu's dialect—Xhosa = peace

Ndicel xholo: "I ask for peace" is said when engaging the work of forgiveness.



What does it mean to "let go?"

# From Left to Right...(resist habituated reaction)



# Fourfold Path—Some general statements

- ▶ It is not always linear
- ▶ Not always predictable in speed with which you can work through the path
- ▶ Some parts may come easily; others very difficult
- ▶ It's okay to say "I need more time" or "I'm not there yet"
- ▶ "I am sorry" are very difficult words if we really mean them

# 1. Telling the Story

- ▶ We tend to think that being honest about painful experiences is problematic and even frowned upon
  - ▶ Caution: It can be risky (retraumatize, victimize the one listening, suffering can become consumptive)
- ▶ It can also be liberating
- ▶ There's a cost to not telling the story
  - ▶ Carry burden alone
  - ▶ Stumbling block to healing

# Truth-telling with Our Children

- ▶ Emory University research: the more children know of their family history (good and bad), the more resilient they are.
  - ▶ Knowing their family stories is the "best single predictor of children's emotional health and happiness" (Marshall Duke, Emory U.)
- ▶ Children after 9/11—the more they knew of family history (including the trauma), the more resilient they were
- ▶ Dan Siegel: the more clear and coherent story parents share about lives, including traumas, the more positive, loving relationships children have with their parents
- ▶ Inference from the research: children can intuit when something is awry

# Telling the Story

- ▶ Two types of memory
  - ▶ Explicit memory—we are aware of the experience of remembering
  - ▶ Implicit memory—we are unaware of the memory but it is still there and has bearing in our lives
- ▶ Work is to remember honestly
- ▶ Summary of process
  - ▶ Speak the truth
  - ▶ Start with facts
  - ▶ First tell a friend, loved one, trusted person
  - ▶ Consider then telling the person who wronged you (or write a letter)
  - ▶ Accept what happened cannot be changed or undone (grief work important)

## 2. Naming the Hurt

- ▶ The hurt will always find expression; shame, resentment, misery, fear, anger, feeling excluded, etc.
- ▶ Neurobiology: psychological wound activates same part of brain that physical wounds do
- ▶ Grief: always occurs after loss—not just physical loss, but also loss of trust, faith, innocence, etc.
  - ▶ Caution: Kubler Ross' Stages of Grief (Denial, anger, bargain, depression, acceptance)--not linear or sequential
  - ▶ Speak the truth about the hurt (back to step one)
- ▶ Be aware of your own vulnerability—move ahead only when you are ready

# Active Listening Technique

1. Listen
2. Do not try to fix anything
3. Do not offer advice
4. Do not respond with your own loss or grief
5. Keep confidentiality (it's not your story)
6. Offer love and care
7. Empathize and offer comfort

# 3. Granting Forgiveness

- ▶ Must be conscious work—forgiveness is a choice
- ▶ Recognize the humanity you share with the other
  - ▶ The Dalai Lama's meditation: "Giving and Taking"
- ▶ Only say it if you mean it—true forgiveness lends healing; false or tentative will not
- ▶ Reframe the Story (Telling a New Story)
  - ▶ Move from a narrative of victimhood to something new (agency, compassion, new joy)
  - ▶ Often will become a deeper relationship (this is the work of spiritual growth, hard as it is)

## 4. Renew or Release Relationship

### ▶ Renewing

- ▶ Is not restoring the rel. to the way it was before (we don't go back to former place)
- ▶ New relationship is always informed by the suffering and the forgiveness
- ▶ Often becomes deeper rel. because there is more honesty
- ▶ Acknowledges shared humanity
- ▶ Tell the new story in relationship, but be truthful (not forgetting, or pretending)

# Releasing the Relationship

- ▶ When further engagement may cause more harm
- ▶ If you don't know who harmed you
- ▶ The person who harmed you has died
- ▶ Be intentional in releasing it—allows for healing, release from victimhood and trauma

Next Week:

When We Need  
Forgiveness

# Homework assignment

Try practicing the Dalai Lama's exercise of "Giving and Taking"

Journal about an experience for which you've not been able to forgive the other.

# Selected Bibliography

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