

23: “Of You It Is Required to Forgive”

Monte F. Shelley

Quotes

- When a woman says “What?”, it is not because she didn’t hear you. She’s giving you a chance to change what you said.
- And God promised men that good and obedient wives would be found in all corners of the world. ... Then He smiled, made the earth round ... and laughed and laughed.
- Some days I’m the pigeon; ... some days I’m the statue.
- God commanded us to love our neighbors and our enemies. ... Usually they are the same people!
- A woman who can’t forgive should never have more than a nodding acquaintance with a man.
- Do not judge or condemn others who choose to sin differently than you do.

1. Hating a false accuser (GAS)

In 1897, while still a young man, George Albert Smith enlisted in the Utah National Guard. ... [When] he ran for an elected office in the Guard, ... a rival guardsman began spreading false rumors accusing George Albert Smith of unethical practices. As a result, Sergeant Smith lost an election that he felt he should have won. ... The man who spread the false rumors had once been a friend. Though he tried to brush it off, the offense filled George Albert Smith’s heart with bitterness. He went to church the following Sunday, but he did not feel right about taking the sacrament. He prayed for help and realized that he needed to repent of the resentment he was feeling. He decided to seek out his friend and be reconciled with him.

George Albert Smith went directly to the man’s office and said in a soft voice, “My brother, I want you to forgive me for hating you the way I have for the last few weeks.” Immediately his friend’s heart softened. “Brother Smith, you have no need for forgiveness. It is I who need forgiveness from you.” They shook hands, and thereafter they remained good friends.

2. “If ye shall come unto me” (Jesus, Sermon on the Mount)

²² Whosoever is angry with his brother {NT ~~without a cause~~} shall be in danger of [God’s] judgment. And whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca [an insult], shall be in danger of the council [or Sanhedrin]; and whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. ²³ Therefore, if ye shall come unto me, or shall desire to come unto me, and rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee—²⁴ {Leave there thy gift before the altar, and } Go thy way unto thy brother, and first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come unto me with full purpose of heart {and offer thy gift}, and I will receive you. (3 Ne 12:22+; Mt 5:22+ in { })

3. Not forgiving is the greater sin

⁸ My disciples, in days of old, sought occasion against one another and forgave not one another in their hearts; and for this evil they were afflicted and sorely chastened. ⁹ Wherefore ... ye ought to forgive one another; for he that forgiveth not his brother his trespasses standeth condemned before the Lord; for there remaineth in him the greater sin. ¹⁰ I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men. ¹¹ And ye ought to say in your hearts—let God judge between me and thee, and reward thee according to thy deeds. (D&C 64:8–12)

4. If I forgive a person, ...

Will the person receive any consequences?

¹² And him that repenteth not of his sins, and confesseth them not, ye shall bring before the church, and do with him as the scripture saith ... either by commandment or by revelation. (D&C 64:12)

⁷⁹ If any persons among you shall kill they shall be delivered up and dealt with according to the laws of the land. ... ⁸⁰ If any man or woman shall commit adultery, he or she shall be tried before two elders of the church ... according to the law of God. ... ⁸⁴ If a man or woman shall rob, ... ⁸⁵ steal, ... ⁸⁶ lie, he or she shall be delivered up unto the law of the land. ⁸⁷ And if he or she do any manner of iniquity, he or she shall be delivered up unto the law ... of God. ⁸⁸ And if thy brother or sister offend thee, ... ⁸⁹ And if he or she confess not thou shalt deliver him or her up unto the church, not to the members, but to the elders. (D&C 42:79–89)

Am I responsible to see that justice is done?

Ye ought to say in your hearts—let God judge between me and thee, and reward thee according to thy deeds. (D&C 64:11)

Must I trust the person?

Must I forget?

Am I condoning wrong behavior?

Am I denying or minimizing my hurt?

Can I take precautions and set boundaries or limits?

Can I stop associating with the offender?

How does the Golden Rule apply?

What must I “give up”?

5. The unforgiving heart

When you feel hurt or angry, you get so trapped in the maze that you can’t move on. It is called the Maze because the deeper you get into it, the harder it is to escape. The person who has “wronged” you becomes your obsession. It’s as if they’ve taken up residence in your head and you can’t get them out. You curse them, you argue with them, you plot revenge. The other person becomes your jailer, trapping you in a maze of your own repetitive thoughts. When you are in the Maze, you literally forget everything good about the other person—all you can think about is the wrong he’s committed. When you are in the Maze, life passes you by. You can blame every failure to try or do on the person who wronged you. As long as you insist that life treat you fairly, when someone wrongs you, you will demand justice immediately. You will dig in your heels and refuse to budge until this happens. This is why the Maze almost always involves fantasies of revenge or restitution. You are engaged in a futile attempt to restore fairness to your world.

(Phil Stutz & Barry Michels, *The Tools*, based on ideas in chapter 3)

What are the cues that I need to forgive someone?

6. How do you forgive some who ... ? (GAS)

We have no hard feelings toward any of our fellowmen; we have no occasion to. If they misunderstand us, misquote us, and persecute us, we should remember they are in the hands of the Lord. ... So when we partake of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, ... let us purge from our hearts all feeling of unkindness toward one another and toward our brothers and sisters who are not of our faith. (GAS)

We have been taught to love our enemies, and to pray for those who spitefully use us and speak evil of us. ... When you are reviled, do not revile again. When others speak evil of you, pity them, and pray for them. (GAS)

Young mother at a red light: Some years ago, I saw an interview with a young lady in her early twenties who had been on her way to pick up her son from a daycare center. When she stopped at a red light, a man pulled up next to her and shot her in the face. They caught the man and he admitted that she had done nothing to him. He was just angry and wanted to hurt someone. The young lady was blinded. Her husband couldn't cope with a handicapped wife and divorced her. The parents of this newly handicapped, divorced, single mother wanted her to come back home where they could take care of her. However, she wanted to be independent.

The interviewer said, "You must really hate this man." ... She said, "This man intruded into my life absolutely uninvited, and exerted a great amount of control over me for one brief instant. If I hate him, resent him, or do anything but forgive him, he continues to exert control over me that he was never welcome to in the first place." (Don Fossum, "Dear Reader," BYU Bookstore News, Winter 2004)

⁴³ It is written ... thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy; ⁴⁴ But ... I say ..., love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them who despitefully use you, and persecute you; ⁴⁵ That ye may be the children of your Father who is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, {and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. ⁴⁶ For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?} (3 Ne 12; Mt 5)

"Love your enemies" is the way to get out of the maze of the past wrongs. This seems impossible for those who believe love is what you feel when someone is pleasing you. However, in the scriptures, love is a doing word that describes how you treat others (Golden Rule), not how you feel about them.

7. Offended by leader (GAS)

Sometimes a brother in authority has offended, in some way, one of the members of the Church, probably unknown to himself, and that child of our Father's silently continues to feel hurt, instead of doing as the Lord has commanded, going to the offending man and stating to him, in kindness, the feelings of his heart, and giving that brother an opportunity to say to him, "I am sorry I have offended you, and I desire that you shall forgive me." The result is that, in some instances, we find a resentful feeling existing that has been instigated by Satan. (GAS)

8. Pray for forgiveness ... or to be forgiving?

⁹ After this manner ... pray ye: Our Father ... ¹² forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. ¹³ ... Amen. ¹⁴ For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: ¹⁵ But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (3 Ne 13:9-15; Mt 6:9-15)

What precedes or creates circumstances for forgiveness?

³⁶ Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. ³⁷ Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven: ³⁸ Give, and it shall be given unto you. (Luke 6:36-38)

9. Be a mediator (1 Sam 25)

David sent ten men to ask Nabal for supplies to help them continue protecting Nabal's men and possessions. Nabal refused and insulted David. When they told David, he had his men went to avenge this wrong by killing Nabal and his men. Meanwhile Nabal's servants had told his wife Abigail what happened. Without telling Nabal, she took food and drink to go meet David. When she saw David, she fell at his feet and said,

²⁵ Upon me... let this iniquity be: ... ²⁵ I thine handmaid saw not the young men of my lord, whom thou didst send. ... ²⁸ Forgive the trespass of thine handmaid: for the LORD will certainly make my lord a sure house; because ... evil hath not been found in thee *all* thy days. ³⁰ ... When the LORD ... shall have appointed thee ruler over Israel; ³¹ That this shall be no grief unto thee, nor offence of heart unto my lord, either that thou hast shed blood causeless, or that my lord hath avenged himself: but when the LORD shall have dealt well with my lord, then remember thine handmaid.

³² And David said to Abigail, Blessed *be* the LORD God ... which sent thee this day to meet me: ³³ And blessed *be* thy advice, and blessed *be* thou, which hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself. ... ³⁵ So David received ... *that* which she had brought him, and said unto her, Go up in peace. ... ³⁶ And Abigail came to Nabal ... ³⁷ and ... told him these things, that his heart died within him. ... ³⁸ About ten days *after*, that the Lord smote Nabal, that he died.

David later sent men for Abigail and married her.

The Peacegiver by James L. Ferrell uses this story to illustrate the atonement of Christ who takes upon himself the sins of others and pays the debts of others.

10. Spiritual first aid

When I was a scoutmaster, I knew that scouts could get hurt in wilderness settings. To help scouts be prepared, we taught them principles of safety and first aid so they could prevent or treat injuries. In life's wilderness, we need similar preparation. In life, "...many of us have been wounded. Some have received wounds... from the very people they should have been able to trust for help. This is a terrible but common paradox. By the abundance of wounds around us, it would seem that a major function of this earth life is to teach us what to do about wounds." (M. Catherine Thomas, *Spiritual Lightning*, 117)

Sometimes people get hurt by what another person says and they can never seem to let go of it. Holding grudges, like picking a scab, prevents wounds from healing. (Monte F. Shelley)

11. The healing power of forgiveness

In careful scientific studies, forgiveness training has been shown to reduce depression, increase hopefulness, decrease anger, improve spiritual connection, increase emotional self-confidence, and help heal relationships. Learning to forgive is good for both your mental and physical well-being and your relationships. ... I recently offered ... forgiveness training to groups of Catholic and Protestant people from Northern Ireland who had lost family members to the thirty years of political violence. After the ... training, ... the victims were less depressed, felt more physically healthy and energetic, and were less hurt by their loss. (Dr. Fred Luskin [a Stanford professor], *Forgive for Good*, xv-xvi)

Quotes

George Albert Smith: I would not knowingly wound the feeling of any, not even one who may have wronged me, but would seek to do him good and make him my friend. (GAS)

We have no hard feelings toward any of our fellowmen; we have no occasion to. If they misunderstand us, misquote us, and persecute us, we should remember they are in the hands of the Lord. ... So when we partake of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, ... let us purge from our hearts all feeling of unkindness toward one another and toward our brothers and sisters who are not of our faith. (GAS)

Anger and hatred in our hearts will not bring us peace and happiness. (GAS)

Brigham Young: Every calamity that can come upon mortal beings will be suffered to come upon the few, to prepare them to enjoy the presence of the Lord. ... Every trial and experience you have passed through is necessary for your salvation. (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, 345.)

Forgiveness Stories

Forgiveness Flour

When I went to the door, at the whisper of knocking, I saw Simeon Ganter's daughter, Kathleen standing there, in her shawl and her shame, sent to ask "Forgiveness Flour" for her bread. ... If one has erred, one is sent to ask for flour of his neighbors. If they loan it to him, that means he can stay, but if they refuse, he had best take himself off.

I looked at Kathleen. What a jewel of a daughter, though not much like her father. ... "I'll give you flour," I said, and went to measure it. Measuring was the rub. If I gave too much, neighbors would think I made sin easy, but if I gave too little, they would label me "Close." While I stood measuring, Joel, my husband came in from the mill, a great bag of flour on his shoulder, and seeing her there, shrinking in the doorway, he tossed the bag at her feet. "Here, take all of it." And so she had flour for many loaves, while I stood measuring. (Marguerite Stewart)

Get The Poison Out!

For many years, it seemed right to punish my children when they hurt each other. Then I listened to a conference talk.

Some years ago a group of teenagers... went on an all-day picnic into the desert [near] Phoenix.... These young people were picnicking and playing, and during their frolicking, one of the girls was bitten on the ankle by a rattlesnake.... They could immediately begin to extract the poison..., or they could search out the snake.... [T]he girl and her young friends pursued the snake. It... avoided them for fifteen or twenty minutes. Finally, they found it, and rocks and stones soon avenged the infliction.... Within another thirty minutes they were at the emergency room of the hospital. By then, the venom was well into its work of destruction. A couple of days later... it was found her leg would have to be amputated below the knee....

What will you do when hurt by another? ... The longer the poison of resentment and unforgiveness stays in a body, the greater and longer lasting is its destructive effect. (H. Burke Peterson, *Ensign*, Nov. 1983, 59)

As I listened to this story, the spirit helped me realize how many times I had chased snakes instead of getting the poison out. After that, when my children came to me crying because a brother or sister had hurt them, I no longer chased the snake. Instead, I snatched up the child and hurriedly began an "emergency operation" to get the poison out. "Doctor Shelley" would check the ticklish parts of the body to see how far the poison had spread. Soon we were both laughing. It was much more fun to get the poison out than to chase snakes.

If You Had Come Unto Me...

Concerned about her marriage, a woman read a self-help book and later wrote:

As the author described the intense need we each have for love, I began to feel more and more deprived.... I decided to write all of this down for my husband to read, and [to list] the many times I had felt emotionally deprived.... The longer I

wrote, the more I began to feel that what I was writing was false. "How could it be false?" ... "I saw and felt it...." But the feeling became so powerful.... [I] began to pray, saying, "If it is false, show me how...." And then a voice spoke to my mind and said, "If you had come unto Me, it all would have been different."

I was astounded. I went to Church. I read the scriptures..., I prayed..., I tried to obey the commandments. "What do you mean, 'Come unto You?'" I wondered. And then into my mind flashed pictures of me wanting to do things my own way, of holding grudges, of not forgiving, of not loving as God had loved us. I had wanted my husband to "pay" for my... suffering. I had not let go of the past and had not loved God with all my heart....

I... did not mention to my husband anything.... But I gave up blaming... I prayed more earnestly, and listened to His Spirit. I read my scriptures, and tried to come to know Him better. Two months passed, and one morning my husband... said, "...we find fault too much with each other. I am never going to find fault with [you] again." He did stop finding fault, and he began to compliment me.... Three years have passed.... We care deeply about one another, and share... thoughts and feelings, something we had not done for the first 16 years of marriage. (C. Terry Warner, *Honest, Simple, Solid, True*, BYU Devotional 1-16-96 [reworded somewhat for time and space])

When I catch myself finding fault with others, the spirit often whispers, "If you had come unto me, it all would have been different."

Hawaiian Father

In the early 1900s, a young father and his family joined the Church in Hawaii. He was enthused about his new-found religion, and after two years of membership both he and his eldest son held the priesthood. ... They ... looked forward to being sealed as a family for eternity in the temple soon to be completed in Laie.

Then, ...one of their daughters became ill with an unknown disease and was taken away to a strange hospital. People in Hawaii were ... wary of unknown diseases. ... The concerned family went to church the next Sunday. ... This young father and his son ... broke the bread ... [and] the young father began to kneel to offer the sacrament prayer. Suddenly the branch president, realizing who was at the sacred table, sprang to his feet. He ... cried, "Stop. You can't touch the sacrament. Your daughter has an unknown disease. Leave immediately while someone else fixes new sacrament bread. We can't have you here. Go." ...

How would you react? What would you do?

The stunned father slowly stood up. He searchingly looked at the branch president, then at the congregation. Then, sensing the depth of anxiety and embarrassment from all, he motioned to his family and they quietly filed out of the chapel.

Not a word was said as ... they moved along the dusty trail to their small home. The young son noticed the firmness in his father's clenched fists and the tenseness of his set jaw. When they entered their home they all sat in a circle, and the father said, "We will be silent until I am ready to speak." ... This young boy ... envisioned his father coming up with many novel ways of getting revenge. Would they kill the branch president's pigs, or burn his house, or join another church? He could hardly wait to see what would happen. ... Twenty-five minutes—still nothing. Then he noticed a slight relaxing of his father's hands, a small tremor on his father's lips, then a barely perceptible sob. He looked at his

father—tears were trickling down his cheeks. ... Soon he noticed his mother was crying also ... and soon the whole family.

Finally, the father ... [said], "I love all of you and I want us to be together, forever, as a family. And the only way that can be is for all of us to be good members of ... [His Church] and be sealed ... in the temple. This is not the branch president's church. It is the Church of Jesus Christ. We will not let any man or any amount of hurt or embarrassment or pride keep us from being together forever. Next Sunday we will go back to church. We will stay by ourselves until our daughter's sickness is known." ...

The daughter's health problem was resolved; the family did go to the temple when it was completed. The children did remain faithful and were likewise sealed to their own families in the temple as time went on. Today over 100 souls in this family are active members of the Church. (John H. Groberg, "Writing Your Personal and Family History," *Ensign*, May 1980, 48)

Let It Go!

On Feb. 9, 2007, the Williams family was on their way home from a night out when 17-year-old Cameron White [17.75], driving from the other direction, slammed into the side of their car. It happened too fast for Williams, who was driving, to get out of the way. He stared out his shattered windshield at his overturned car. He said,

I had no idea who had just hit us, and my mind didn't think to consider if they were all right or not, or what circumstances might have caused them to cross the median and strike us. I simply looked at the car in silence. My thoughts went quiet, I felt at peace, and then I heard a voice that was not my own in my mind as clearly as if it had come from someone seated next to me. It wasn't a peaceful, whispered voice, nor was it the still, small prompting of the Spirit; it was straightforward and filled with power, and the voice said, "Let it go!"

I didn't turn my head toward where I perceived the voice to be coming from; I fixed my eyes on the overturned car. I immediately felt an enabling power beyond my own, healing and enlarging my crushed and receptive soul. I knew exactly what I had to do and exactly what those three words meant. Regardless of whoever had been driving the other car and regardless of whatever the circumstances behind this tragedy were, this was not my burden to carry. I was told in no uncertain terms not to try to pick it up. I understood that this was not an invitation to let it go, this was a direct command to let it go.

My soul had just been exposed to such pain that I knew in the brief feeling of utter nothingness I had been allowed to experience that I had no power to even try to take this burden at all. I committed as I sat in that driver's seat—looking at the car that had just killed my wife, Michelle; our baby, William; my son Benjamin [11]; and my daughter Anna [9]—to let it go, all of it, holding nothing back. This was not my burden to carry, and I would be crushed no more. I knew who would carry that burden: He who had already endured that soul-crushing press of the pains of all men, including this burden, so that I should not have to bear my infinitely minuscule portion of what He bore. In that instant of grace and revelation, I knew that my Savior lived, that He was immediately presents with me in my time of greatest need, with healing in His wings. (Chris Williams, *Let It Go!*, 28–29)

White would later plead guilty to four counts of second-degree felony automobile homicide (charges of driving under the

influence of alcohol and leaving the scene of an injury accident were dropped). At the trial, Williams challenged the boy to make something of his life and then turned judgment over to the judge asking only that he do what would be best for the boy. The judge tried the almost 18 year-old boy as a juvenile instead of an adult which meant that he would be out of the correctional facility when he turned 21. (from the book and Deseret News 1 Aug. 2012)

In One Blinding Moment (Max Ellerbusch, © 1962)

It was a busy Friday, six days before Christmas. I was in my instrument repair shop, working feverishly so that I could have all of the Christmas holiday at home with my family. Then the phone rang and a voice was saying that our five-year-old Craig had been hit by a car. There was a crowd standing around him by the time I got there, but they stepped back for me. Craig was lying in the middle of the road; his curly blond hair was not even ruffled. He died at Children's Hospital that afternoon.

There were many witnesses. It had happened at the school crossing. They told us that Craig had waited on the curb until the safety-patrol boy signaled him to cross. ... The car came so fast no one had seen it. The patrol boy shouted, waved, had to jump for his own life. The car never stopped.

Grace and I drove home from the hospital through the Christmas-lighted streets, not believing what had happened to us. It wasn't until the night, passing the unused bed, that I knew. Suddenly I was crying, not just for that empty bed but for the emptiness, the seeming senselessness of it. All night long, with Grace awake beside me, I searched what I knew of life for some hint of a loving God at work in it, and found none.

As a child I certainly had been led to expect none. ... It was Craig ... who seemed to lay low my childhood pessimism, to tell me that the world was a wonderful purposeful place. As a baby he would smile so delightedly at everyone he saw that there was always a little group around his carriage. When we went visiting it was Craig, three years old, who would run to the hostess to say, "You have a lovely house!" If he received a gift he was touched to tears, and then gave it away to the first child who envied it. Sunday morning when Grace dressed to sing in the choir, it was Craig who never forgot to say, "You're beautiful."

And if such a child can die, I thought as I struggled, lying in my bed that Friday night, *if such a life can be snuffed out in a minute, then life is meaningless and faith in God is self-delusion*. By morning my hopelessness and helplessness had found a target, a blinding hatred for the person who had done this to us. That morning police picked him up in Tennessee: George Williams. Fifteen years old.

He came from a broken home, police learned. His mother worked a night shift and slept during the day. Friday he had cut school, taken her car keys while she was asleep, sped down a street. ... All my rage at a senseless universe seemed to focus on the name George Williams. I phoned our lawyer and begged him to prosecute Williams to the limit. "Get him tried as an adult. Juvenile court's not tough enough."

So this was my frame of mind when the thing occurred which changed my life. I cannot explain it; I can only describe it.

It happened in the space of time that it takes to walk two steps. It was late Saturday night. I was pacing the hall outside our bedroom, my head in my hands. I felt sick and dizzy, and tired, so tired. "Oh God," I prayed, "show me why!"

Right then, between that step and the next, my life was changed. The breath went out of me in a great sigh—and with it all my

sickness. In its place was a feeling of love and joy so strong it was almost pain. Other men have called it the “the presence of Christ.” I’d known the phrase, of course, but I’d thought it was some abstract, theological idea. I never dreamed it was Someone, an actual Person, filling that narrow hall with love.

It was the suddenness of it that dazed me. It was like a lightning stroke that turned out to be the dawn. I stood blinking in an unfamiliar light. Vengefulness, grief, hate, anger—it was not that I struggled to be rid of them—like goblins imagined in the dark, in the morning’s light they simply were not there. ... In that instant I knew why Craig had to leave us. Though I had no visual sensation, I knew afterward that I had met him, and he was wiser than I, so that I was the little boy and he the man. And he was so busy. Craig has so much to do, unimaginably important things into which I must not inquire. My concerns were still on earth.

In the clarity of the moment, it came to me: This life is a simple thing! ... “Life is a grade in school. In this grade we must learn only one lesson: We must establish relationships of love.” ... I thought. *Little Craig, in your five short years how fast you learned, how quickly you progressed, how soon you graduated!*

I don’t know how long I stood there in the hall. ... Grace was sitting up in bed when I reached the door of our room. Not reading, not doing anything, just looking straight ahead of her as she had much of the time since Friday afternoon.

Even my appearance must have changed, because as she turned her eyes slowly to me she gave a little gasp and sat up straighter. I started to talk, words tumbling over each other, laughing, eager, trying to say that the world was not an accident, that life meant something, that earthly tragedy was not the end, that all around our incompleteness was a universe of purpose, that the purpose was good beyond our furthest hopes.

“Tonight,” I told her, “Craig is beyond needing us. Someone else needs us. George Williams. It’s almost Christmas. Maybe, at the Juvenile Detention Home, there’ll be no Christmas gift for him unless we send it.”

Grace listened, silent, unmoving, staring at me. Suddenly she burst into tears. “Yes,” she said. “That’s right, that’s right. It’s the first thing that’s been right since Craig died.”

And it has been right. George turned out to be an intelligent, confused, desperately lonely boy, needing a father as much as I needed a son. He got his gift, Christmas Day, and his mother got a box of Grace’s good Christmas cookies. We asked for and got his release, a few days later, and this house became his second home. He works with me in the shop after school, joins us for meals around the kitchen table, is a big brother for Diane and Michael and Ruth Carol.

But more was changed, in that moment when I met Christ, than just my feeling about George. That meeting has affected every phase of my life, my approach to business, to friends, to strangers. I don’t mean I’ve been able to sustain the ecstasy of that moment; I doubt that the human body could contain such a joy for very many days. But I know with the infinite sureness that no matter what life does to us in the future, I will never again touch the rock bottom of despair. No matter how ultimate the blow seems, I glimpsed an even more ultimate joy that blinding moment when the door swung wide.

Amish

In the beautiful hills of Pennsylvania, a devout group of Christian people live a simple life without automobiles, electricity, or modern machinery. They work hard and live quiet, peaceful lives

separate from the world. Most of their food comes from their own farms. The women sew and knit and weave their clothing, which is modest and plain. They are known as the Amish people.

A 32-year-old milk truck driver lived with his family in their Nickel Mines community. He was not Amish, but his pickup route took him to many Amish dairy farms, where he became known as the quiet milkman. Last October he suddenly lost all reason and control. In his tormented mind he blamed God for the death of his first child and some unsubstantiated memories. He stormed into the Amish school without any provocation, released the boys and adults, and tied up the 10 girls. He shot the girls, killing five and wounding five. Then he took his own life.

This shocking violence caused great anguish among the Amish but no anger. There was hurt but no hate. Their forgiveness was immediate. Collectively they began to reach out to the milkman’s suffering family. As the milkman’s family gathered in his home the day after the shootings, an Amish neighbor came over, wrapped his arms around the father of the dead gunman, and said, “We will forgive you.” Amish leaders visited the milkman’s wife and children to extend their sympathy, their forgiveness, their help, and their love. About half of the mourners at the milkman’s funeral were Amish. In turn, the Amish invited the milkman’s family to attend the funeral services of the girls who had been killed. A remarkable peace settled on the Amish as their faith sustained them during this crisis.

One local resident ... said, “We were all speaking the same language, and not just English, but a language of caring, a language of community, [and] a language of service. And, yes, a language of forgiveness.” It was an amazing outpouring of their complete faith in the Lord’s teachings ...: “Do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you.”

The family of the milkman who killed the five girls released the following statement to the public:

“To our Amish friends, neighbors, and local community: Our family wants each of you to know that we are overwhelmed by the forgiveness, grace, and mercy that you’ve extended to us. Your love for our family has helped to provide the healing we so desperately need. The prayers, flowers, cards, and gifts you’ve given have touched our hearts in a way no words can describe. Your compassion has reached beyond our family, beyond our community, and is changing our world, and for this we sincerely thank you. Please know that our hearts have been broken by all that has happened. We are filled with sorrow for all of our Amish neighbors whom we have loved and continue to love. We know that there are many hard days ahead for all the families who lost loved ones, and so we will continue to put our hope and trust in the God of all comfort, as we all seek to rebuild our lives.”

How could the whole Amish group manifest such an expression of forgiveness? It was because of their faith in God and trust in His word, which is part of their inner beings. They see themselves as disciples of Christ and want to follow His example.

Hearing of this tragedy, many people sent money to the Amish to pay for the health care of the five surviving girls and for the burial expenses of the five who were killed. ... The Amish decided to share some of the money with the widow of the milkman and her three children because they too were victims of this terrible tragedy. (James E. Faust, *Ensign*, May 2007)

Sources:

- GAS = George Albert Smith, chapter 23 of lesson manual