

THE GOOD NEWS

OF RECONCILIATION






Everyone says that they want peace but few are willing to do the arduous, sacrificial work to see it happen. Yet, there are examples of when this has happened even against all odds. The Christian relief organization World Vision records the following example on their website:

On the night of April 6, 1994, the plane carrying Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana, a Hutu, was shot down near the airport in Kigali, Rwanda's capital. It triggered a mass hysteria such as the world has rarely seen. In the next 100 days, nearly 20 percent of Rwanda's population would die — many by machete, blow by blow, hacking away at peace, friendships, families, and communities.

The mass killing stopped when the Rwandan Patriotic Front, an army of Tutsis and moderate Hutus (led by current President Paul Kagame), seized the capital and took power in July 1994.

There were too many genocide perpetrators for the courts to try, so the government instituted gacaca courts in the villages, based on traditional Rwandan judicial principles. Villagers stepped forward to implicate the people they had seen participating in the killings. The prisons filled up with those convicted in the gacaca courts.

Immediately, World Vision focused on vulnerable children — an estimated 100,000 were separated from their parents.



Heather MacLeod, a New Zealand nurse, worked in centers for unaccompanied children. “They weren’t playing much,” she says. “They weren’t acting like children. I have very clear memories in Nyamata of children sweeping blood out of buildings.”

It was clear the children needed more than physical help. “Healing work started right in 1994, when children were showing signs of deep trauma,” says Josephine Munyeli, World Vision’s specialist for healing, peacebuilding, and reconciliation.

“World Vision was assisting traumatized children who were affected by the loss of their parents.”

In 1996, when thousands of families began to return to their villages in Rwanda, World Vision started a reconciliation and peacebuilding department. Reconciliation was necessary and a foundation for every initiative,” says Josephine. “If we were to do development work straightaway when people had not yet dealt with their painful past, we would be heading nowhere. People carrying deep pain cannot be productive.”

World Vision developed a reconciliation model that endures today: a two-week program of sharing intensely personal memories of the genocide, learning new tools to manage deeply painful emotions, and embarking on a path to forgiveness. The approach was replicated all over the country and embraced by the new government.

“Thousands of people went through the process,” says Josephine. “More than 200 trainers were trained. Two thousand survivors and perpetrators went through healing training. In addition, 2,000 youth went through PRAY – Promotion of Reconciliation Among Youth – which used dance, drama, poetry, and artwork to help traumatized children express their feelings.”



In 2000, World Vision began the Nyamagabe development project, supported by U.S. sponsors. (Today, U.S. supporters sponsor more than 26,000 children in Rwanda.) Sponsorship funds continued the important work of healing the psychological wounds left by the genocide. The funding also provided projects to rebuild Nyamagabe through education, water, sanitation and health, economic development, and peacebuilding.

Villagers were given cows to raise for milk and fertilizer. The fertilizer was used to grow coffee plants. Villagers combined their plots to create bigger farms on which to grow the coffee. In every group were genocide perpetrators and survivors so that World Vision would continue to talk through the issues of healing and reconciliation.

Since that time those at opposite sides of the conflict attend the same churches and work together on improving their communities.¹



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A WORLD-WIDE LONGING

Like the story we just read, we know that forgiveness is just a part of reconciliation. This rebuilding encompasses the pursuit of justice, training people in new ways of living, and embracing a comprehensive approach to human flourishing. There is not a place on our planet where the longing for these things does not exist.

Why do we want this? The Gospel answer to that question is that we have an ancient echo in our souls due to a universal loss that humans have experienced. Where does this come from? When humanity's first parents, Adam and Eve, rebelled against God (even though they lived in a disease-free, death-free, perfect environment) they were cast out of paradise and started experiencing various forms of brokenness.

We now live in that broken world, but all of us want to recapture that which for which we deeply desire. This desire to personally be made whole and see our world restored to its former glory is a common theme found all over our planet. How can this happen? First, every person needs to be reconciled to God. Colossians 1:21-22 says,

“And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him.”

We cannot have peace within until we admit we are a mess and that we need help outside ourselves. That help has come through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. To be reconciled here is to be counted as holy, blameless, and above reproach before God. In other words, we are made completely right before God through the work of Jesus. Romans 5:9-11 connects peace and reconciliation in the following manner:

“For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”



Christ died for us when we were his enemies and when we had no ability to live a righteous life. Even if we did want to be righteous, we could not obtain it on our own because we are dead in our sins. When we repent of our sins and believe in Jesus we are reconciled to God, which brings the assurance of forgiveness, deliverance from judgment, and a life of gratitude and joy.



But this is not all. Even our world longs for restoration. Think of a place free of pollution, wars, violence, and every kind of evil imaginable. What if the world we live in now is just a shadow of what it will be one day? Romans 8:20-22 speaks to this:

“For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.”

What a picture! Think of our world in a groaning state, looking towards a time of complete restoration, and then finally finding it. We know a little about this. A woman who is very pregnant wants her baby to come as soon as possible. Even through unbearable pain she hopes to push through her anguish in order to see the face of her child that has been growing within her for almost a year.

In similar fashion, the entirety of creation leans into the hope of being recreated. This will happen when Jesus returns and finally brings heaven and earth together.



John sees it this way in Revelation 21:1-3:

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people and God himself will be with them as their God.”

Contrary to the opinion of some, this world will not ultimately be destroyed. It will be re-clothed with the glory of heaven and become the permanent dwelling place of God and his redeemed. This is good news indeed.

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questions



1.

What part of the story from World Vision about the work of reconciliation in Rwanda intrigued or inspired you? Why do you think you feel that way?

How does this article define reconciliation?

Why does this involve more than just forgiveness?

2.



3.

How are we reconciled to God? How does this movement of reconciliation extend to all of creation? Why is that good news?

How does reconciliation effect how we interact with others?

4.



REFERENCES:

1. Costanza, Kari. "Rwanda: 20 Years Later." World Vision.
<https://www.worldvision.org/disaster-relief-news-stories/rwanda-20-years-later>