

Challenges and Gifts of Love and Forgiveness

by Clara Carter

I've been reflecting about Lent—abstinence from certain foods and different rituals used for penance and repentance of past wrongdoings, and maybe some current ones too.

I cannot help but think that try as we might, all our endeavors and efforts have not allowed us to reach the pinnacle of perfection as Jesus did during his life on earth. Jesus's life and death prepared a way through God's love and forgiveness. In a perfect world it would be great to eliminate personal and racial and national agendas where the craving for power at any cost creates chaos among us all. In a perfect world, a community of love, respect, and forgiveness emerges as we seek to live in harmony with each other. There would be no inclination to withhold certain unalienable rights and privileges from people in order to dominate them. Respect (love) paves the way.



I understand from scriptures that on earth Jesus lived a perfect life of love and forgiveness, and at the end, gave his life that everyone should be saved from sin. Yet we are free to continue to exercise the gift of choice. I want to believe that most of the time we choose to do the right thing.

Reading about Jesus shows me the love and compassion he demonstrated throughout his life with those who hated him and the ones who love him. Jesus did not meet some peoples' expectations of how a king would act nor was he dressed in royal attire as a king. The Pharisees and Scribes constantly criticized Jesus while others loved and followed Him because of the teachings and healing; and His disciples too followed and loved Him. Looking at it from another angle, we all need to be healed, not only from sin, but from hurts and anguish we have repressed due to actions committed against us that were beyond our control.

Is it possible to heal emotions associated with past histories of cruelty? How do we handle living in the present and resolve those emotions in order to forgive,

to love? How does one forgive him or herself, another person, a race, a nation? We can become willing to demonstrate love and forgiveness in all things.

But when I am confronted with or see acts of unkindness, even when subtly expressed, a sadness tinged with an anger creeps in. Take for instance the book that we are discussing at Tuesday night Bible study, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* by James H. Cone. He proposes an interesting way of looking at the cross and the lynching tree. It was difficult for me to envision myself forgiving the lynching. I felt sad and a sense of hopelessness that had I been there, I could have done nothing to prevent it from happening.

I pray that in time everyone is willing to heal our past histories and practice respect, love, and forgiveness, creating a new history of respect for individual and cultural differences across all races and cultures without the propensity to dominate others.

I thank God that through Jesus Christ, His Son who died on the cross, God demonstrated love and forgiveness for our sins.