

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

The Ministry of Reconciliation

Bringing Healing and Beauty to Wounded Relationships

1 - God reconciles individuals—and also groups—who are separated relationally. This is just the kind of person he is. God is healing fractured humanity.

2 - As we gradually mature toward Christlikeness, we become agents of reconciliation. This is just the kind of persons we are becoming.

3 - We become agents of reconciliation in our relational circles—family, church fellowship, neighborhood, among various social groups, between political factions.

4 - We serve to heal the wounds history has left behind which have alienated countries, cultures, religions, races and the various Christian traditions.

5 - What does the process of reconciliation look like? How does it start? Unfold? End? Its dynamics can be applied to both individuals and groups.

6 - The following steps are typically found in processes of reconciliation. Not all are found in every case, and they need not occur in this order. Use these as a guide:

7 - **Step 1—We pray.** We invite Jesus into the situation. We humble ourselves before him. We ask for spiritual protection. We seek his insight and guidance.

8 - **Step 2—We request the prayers of intercessors.** Hatred, bitterness, division are spiritual strongholds. Reconciliation involves spiritual battle.

9 - **Step 3—We listen to each other's stories.** We seek to “hear” the pain of the other person or group with respect and empathy. We don't evaluate or judge.

10 - **Step 4—We seek insight.** How have others been affected by us or by members of our group. We want to view our own history through their eyes.

11 - To listen to someone else with respect and compassion is an act of love. To understand how our history has affected them is to grow in wisdom.

12 - **Step 5—We tell our own stories.** We avoid defending ourselves, blaming or judging. This is not about who is right or wrong.

13 - God will decide right and wrong. Surely there is enough of both to go around. This is about respectfully growing in trust, understanding, compassion.

14 - **Step 6—We confess.** We acknowledge what we know to be true. Where we, or our family, culture, race or denomination have wronged others, we say so.

15 - It is appropriate for our confession to extend as far as the wrong has reached. Private wrong calls for private confession; public wrong for public confession.

16 - Hanna and I have been so blessed by the actions of many Germans who are taking public steps to acknowledge the historic evils of their Nazi past.

17 - All over Germany brass stones (Stolpersteine) are being laid in front of former homes of Holocaust victims giving their names and details of how they died.

18 - Plaques are being placed where synagogues formerly stood, acknowledging the burning of Jewish houses of worship during the night of November 9-10, 1938.

19 - All this is public telling of the truth. The subsequent effects are healing and the blessing of God. The spiritual atmosphere of a place can be changed.

20 - **Step 7—We ask for forgiveness.** The request comes from our heart with full integrity. We are sensitive and respectful. This may be painful for both sides.

21 - We give the other party the space they may need to decide how they will respond. They may be unable to forgive, or not yet ready. They may need time.

22 - It is our choice to ask for forgiveness. It is their choice whether or not to extend forgiveness. We honor their response.

23 - **Step 8—We extend forgiveness.** We feel no need to defend or justify ourselves or our group. God is Judge. We leave pay-back to him.

24 - Hanna read from her book, *A Garland for Ashes*, in a public meeting in the city of Bonn. She sat down. Unexpectedly, a German man came to the microphone.

25 - "Hanna, my grandfather was a Nazi. He was an SS Officer. He killed people. He was in Chelmno the same time your parents were gassed to death."

26 - "Hanna, I don't know what to do with that. I can only stand here and speak the words my grandfather never spoke. Will you forgive me?"

27 - Hanna rose. She approached him. "I forgive you." They embraced. He wept. The crowd was gripped—silent. Something broke in the spiritual atmosphere.

28 - Where we are unsure what is true and what is not, we wait for more clarity. Confessing and asking for forgiveness must be done in truth.

29 - The reality of reconciliation is more sacred than who is right or wrong. When Jesus unites two parties, right or wrong is no longer the issue. Love is.

30 - **Step 9—We practice representational repentance.** We follow Biblical examples of confession and repentance on behalf of our forefathers.

31 - The psalmist confessed and asked forgiveness for the sins of contemporaries and forefathers. (Psalm 106:6-7, and throughout the Psalm)

32 - The prophet Daniel identified with and asked forgiveness for the sins of his contemporaries, his forefathers and his people. (Daniel 9:4-19)

33 - Hanna and I belong to a Christian initiative in which Catholics and Protestants are confessing and repenting over how they have wronged each other historically.

34 - Catholics are acknowledging that the Reformation was a gift to the Body of Christ. Protestants are honoring their Catholic forefathers and mothers.

35 - Reconciliation, rooted in Jesus' teachings and birthed in the Spirit, broadens. Catholics and Protestants are now confessing centuries of "Christian" anti-Semitism.

36 - The initiative is expanding. We are now Messianic Jews, Catholics, Lutherans, Anglicans, Baptists, Pentecostals, non-denominational congregations and others.

37 - **Step 10—We bring our sins to Christ on the cross.** We do this in prayer. Where appropriate we also bring to him the sins of our forefathers and our people.

38 - We tell Jesus the truth about our sins. We ask him to forgive us. His cross has power to forgive, cleanse, heal and reconcile. (Ephesians 2:14,16)

39 - **Step 11—We seek opportunity to make restitution.** Where possible and appropriate we do so. In the case of historic wrongs there may be little we can do.

40 - A heart to make restitution where possible shows the sincerity of our repentance. Symbolic acts may be appropriate and very healing. Love always is.

41 - **Step 12—When two parties forgive each other, reconciliation can take place.** The kingdom of God becomes visible. All can see—God has done this!

42 - If the other party is not yet ready for reconciliation, we respect their decision. We treat them kindly. We prayerfully keep the door open.

43 - Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.... God is love. (1 John 4:7-8)

44 - Reconciliation is God's miracle. It is an expression of Christlikeness being formed in the inner life.