Throughout life there is nothing that creates more unrest, tension, inner conflict, and anxiety than an unforgiving heart. Forgiveness releases the control our past has on our present. Forgiveness is soothing balm to our spirits. Forgiveness facilitates inner healing. Forgiveness is an integral part of one of God’s great commandments and its importance is underlined by being mentioned at least 139 times in the Bible. How can we love our neighbors let alone our enemies, if we are unwilling to forgive? The famous quotation by the English poet Alexander Pope says it all: To err is human. To forgive is divine.

If we believe that Christ gave his very life for us and for all humanity in order that we may be reconciled with God, who are we to hold a grudge? The author and distinguished professor of theology Henry Nouwen spoke of the importance of reconciliation and its benefits, particularly before we have to face death. In "Bread for the Journey: A Daybook of Wisdom and Faith", he writes:

“How can we be prepared to die? By not having any unfinished relational business. The question is have I forgiven those who have hurt me and asked forgiveness from those I have hurt? When I feel at peace with all the people who are part of my life, my death might cause great grief, but it will not cause guilt or anger. It will be easier for our family and friends to remember us with joy and peace if we have said a grateful good-bye than if we die with bitter and disillusioned hearts. The greatest gift we can offer our families and friends is the gift of gratitude. Gratitude sets them free to continue living without bitterness or self-recriminations.”

Mental health professionals tell us that the number one inhibitor to finding peace is our inability to forgive. The longer and tighter we hold on to anger, resentment, pride or our need to be right, the more difficult it is to reconcile. More than anyone else, Jesus had legitimate reasons for not forgiving those who hurt him, even
They were reconciled at last.

and his family all these years and he

on’s apology for “making sport”of her

the pastor tenderly delivered Camer-

ceived the response to her letter when

On the day of his funeral, Ellen re-

and died.

was hospitalized again the next day

this would be his final turn. Cameron

decision to turn his life around. Sadly,

Cameron was able to reconcile with

edge of Ellen’s unconditional love,

surrogate, strengthened by the knowl-

family friend, a retired pastor he knew

sister’s letter that he called for an old

He was so moved when he read his

love, forgiveness, and encouragement

Ellen wrote her big brother a letter of

collateral damage this disease caused.

They had been estranged for years

cause physical death. A lack of forgive-

of the toxic gas we cannot see that can

Many homes are equipped with a

waters, and the unclean air we breathe

The diligence we take in get-

ing rid of hazardous waste, polluted

spirit. The diligence we take in get-

ing an unforgiving heart. Think of how

many times you have prayed, “...And

forgive us our trespasses [or debts], as

we forgive those who trespass against

us.” Be careful what you pray for, you

just might get it.

Forgiveness and reconciliation are
closely related, but are not the same. You

may forgive or be forgiven, but it requires both parties to restore the

relationship. A bumper sticker I saw

recently said:

"Prayer doesn’t change things: it

changes people."

Reconciliation happens when

you work at rebuilding trust, and it can be done

unilaterally by acknowledging the role

you played in whatever caused the rift in the relationship—and by making

every effort to change your behavior.

Whether or not the other party makes

the same commitment is irrelevant.

You will benefit from the exercise re-

gardless. Pray the “Prayer of Abandon-

ment” and feel a sense of relief when

you finally let go of the situation.

If both parties work at it, lines of

communication are restored and reconc-

iliation is possible. Alternatively,

harboring negative feelings can result

in a toxic situation. We cannot survive

for long in a toxic environment with-

out becoming sick in body, mind, and

spirit. The diligence we take in get-

ting rid of hazardous waste, polluted

waters, and the unclean air we breathe

is out of proportion to time we should

spend cleaning up our relationships

with family and friends.

Many homes are equipped with a

carbon monoxide detector to warn us

of the toxic gas we cannot see that can

cause physical death. A lack of forgive-

ness and an unwillingness to reconcile

are our internal detectors warning us

of hidden dangers that poison our

spirit and our soul. If left unchecked,

we are drawn closer to an emotional

or spiritual death from a heart that is

turning to stone.

It’s a bittersweet moment when

someone waits until they are on their

deathbed to restore a broken relation-

ship. The sweetness comes from the

beautiful release of a burden carried

for so long. The bitterness results from

the fact that you cannot recapture

the past. Most people who reconcile

after long periods of time are usually

heard saying, “If only we had done

this sooner.” “We should have...would

have... and could have...”

Don’t waste time fostering a fester-

ing anger. Make the choice to forgive

and reconcile now. The six most chal-

lenging words in the English language

are, “I admit I made a mistake.” Use

Pray this prayer for yourself, your

loved ones, and any situation over

which you have lost control,

“and the peace that passes all under-

standing will guard your heart and

mind in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 4:7

The Prayer of Abandonment

by Charles de Foucauld

Father, I abandon myself into your

hands.

Do with me what you will.

Whatever you may do, I thank you.

I am ready for all. I accept all.

Let only Your will be done in me,

and in all your creatures.

I wish no more than this, O Lord.

Into your hands I commend my soul;

I offer it to you with all the love of my

heart,

For I love you, Lord, and so need to

give myself,

To surrender myself into your Hands,

Without reserve, and with boundless

confidence, for you are my Father.

Amen.
them. Forgive if only in your heart. Reconcile when possible. Then, leaving the past behind, enjoy the moment, the inner healing and peace that will surely come. I’ve watched many people grow stronger physically, emotionally and spiritually when they made the choice to work through disappointing relationships, hardships, and grief rather than turning away. When forgiveness, reconciliation and love reign, the fear of death disappears.

If you were not able to reconcile with a loved one before they died, inner healing is still possible. Your loved one is no longer angry with you, and from where they sit, they would want you to be happy. Write a letter to them and say what you would have wanted to say in person, or use a surrogate to talk to them. Be open and honest with your feelings. Accept your part of the problem with your past relationship, ask for forgiveness, and tell them that you have forgiven them, unconditionally. Do not wait any longer to reconcile and be at peace in the here and now.

One final note on this subject: we must remember to forgive ourselves. God has. Psalm 103:12 says, “As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.” Do you know how far the east is from the west? Scripture says that when we repent, God remembers our sin no more. So, there is no reason to keep beating ourselves up over the past if we have a penitent heart. If we are harder on ourselves than God, we will be stuck in the past and unable to enjoy life to the full. With the advice we have been given, we can do better.

This article is an excerpt from the book “A Sacred Walk: Dispelling the Fear of Death and Caring for the Dying” and is reprinted with permission.

Donna is an OSL member who has a passion for sharing the love of God and His word with hurting people. Since her mother’s miraculous cure of an advanced stage of osteoporosis in 1979, Donna has witnessed repeatedly that God truly heals today. After retiring in 1992 from a successful business career in sales and marketing management, Donna assumed leadership roles in her church with an emphasis on pastoral care. The many stories of faith, healing, reconciliation and lessons learned from those coping with a life-threatening illness are captured in her book, “A Sacred Walk”, which is on the OSL required reading list. She is regularly invited to speak at churches around the country and led workshops at OSL regional conferences and the 2013 North American Conference. To learn more about Donna and her work visit www.asacredwalk.com.