

LIGHT

—
Finding Freedom in Christ
The Role of Forgiveness
—

A DEVOTIONAL

tutapona

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The Role of Forgiveness

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LIGHT

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The Role of Forgiveness

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TUTAPONA

AN INTRODUCTION



“Tutapona!” is a Swahili word that means “We will be healed!”. Not only is it the name of our organization, it is a phrase we hear resonating through refugee camps and through people’s lives. It’s a hope in our hearts and a bold declaration of things to come.

Tutapona began in 2008 when Julie and I, along with our daughters, moved from a small town in Wisconsin to Uganda. We both came from a background in Social Work and were trained psychotherapists. We had a normal life but we started feeling a restlessness in our hearts, knowing there was more that God was calling us to do.

Tutapona was started in an effort to address the emotional effects of war and conflict in northern Uganda as a result of the rebel group the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA). The LRA was known for attacking civilians, physically mutilating, raping, pillaging, abducting young children, and leaving orphans and widows in their wake.

The impact and lasting emotional effects were enormous, and as a result, millions of people were left without hope. Today, over a decade later, the LRA has been removed from the country and Uganda is now one of the top three refugee receiving nations in the world, and Tutapona is responding to that growing need. In 2016, we also made the decision to respond to the Syrian conflict in the Middle East which, to this day, is one of the largest ongoing humanitarian crises of our time.

We have now worked with internally displaced people and people living as refugees in both Uganda and Iraq for over 10 years, bringing our program of mental health and psychosocial support to address the emotional effects of their experiences. Since the start of Tutapona in 2008, our programs have impacted over 50,000 people. Participants often tell us how important the power of forgiveness has been in their healing process, so we are excited to share some of the lessons we have learned over the past decade—about forgiveness and hope—with you.

Our participants, who have endured unspeakable horrors, openly speak of THE LIGHT that forgiveness brings to their lives. They tell us that they were once angry and bitter, unable to process the experiences they had been through and unable to move forward. But through the process of forgiveness they now have hope, they are restored in community, and they can begin their lives again. After all these years, we are still continually blessed by the stories we hear about redemption and transformation.

And we wanted to share that with you. We believe that every person deserves to live in the peace and freedom through Christ that forgiveness brings. These lessons cross cultures, nations and experiences. They bring out the hope of the Gospel, and the principals written in scripture that take us on the journey to wholeness and restore us to who God created us to be.

What started when God called Julie and I to work alongside victims of war and conflict in northern Uganda has grown into more than we could have ever imagined. Tutapona is not us, or the Gaede family. Tutapona is a movement of people that have come together to say, “We see God changing lives, and we want to be part of that.” Thank you for joining us as part of this movement. We pray you will be blessed by the lessons we share and by the forgiveness that brings ultimate freedom in Christ.

Carl Gaede



|| SESSION 1 ||

HARD THINGS HAPPEN

Video opener: Hard things happen

Pray as a group for the start of this series and for the Congolese refugee population living in Uganda, or for a specific group of people living as refugees who are on your heart

Overview: Difficulties occur in life

All of us have experienced pain, difficulties and hardship. All of us have suffered. Life is full of challenges; pain and suffering are a part of life for every one of us. No human can escape pain.

Not only are we told in scripture that we can expect persecution, but we live in a broken world with an enemy who “prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Pet. 5:8 NLT). Even Jesus and His disciples experienced profound pain and were keenly aware of suffering. Centuries before Jesus even came to earth, the prophet Isaiah described him as “despised and rejected by mankind, **a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.** Like One from whom people hide their faces He was despised, and we held Him in low esteem” (Isa. 53:3). Jesus Himself went on to instruct us to expect persecution when He stated, “A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you also” (Jn. 15:20). The Apostle Paul agreed when he stated, “In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim. 3:11-12).

Even though we can expect persecution and hardship to happen because we live in a fallen world, it does not mean that those are good things. It is important to remember that God hates evil—“I abhor the assembly of evildoers and refuse to sit with the wicked” (Ps. 26:5). And God expects us to address injustice and oppression—“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit” (Ps. 34:18).

Responses

In the video introduction to this session, you heard the powerful story of the evil that Francine underwent. For most of us, that level of pain is unimaginable. When offenses wound deeply, we may experience overwhelming emotional devastation. The devastation can even feel paralyzing. Our reactions to those wounds are lived out in a variety of ways. Four of the most common ways we tend to respond to such circumstances are as follows:

1. Fixating

Fixating on our current problems and challenges reinforces our loss and pain. It is a natural tendency for us to focus our thoughts on the painful events we have experienced, but as we recreate the experience over and over again in our minds, our feelings become negatively influenced resulting in hopelessness and despair. We often feel justified in our anger, and retaliation can become our focus leading to insults, slander or physical harm. When we get trapped in fixating on our present problems and challenges, we lose sight of what a positive future could look like (2, p. 37).

EXAMPLE:

“How could this happen to me? I don’t deserve such treatment! I have a right to be outraged! She is going to find out the hard way, how it feels to hurt someone like this!”

2. Avoiding

“Not thinking about our present situation might sound like a reasonable way to prevent us from ‘fixating’ on our loss and pain. However, when we avoid facing the fears of our challenging reality, our fears don’t go away. In fact, whenever we avoid accepting and facing our fears, our fears have a tendency to grow. Fear paralyzes us from effectively responding to our present problems and challenges” (2, p. 37). It’s not uncommon that in our avoidance, we eventually blow up in rage over the situation.

EXAMPLE:

“I’m just not going to talk about it. If I don’t bring attention to it or think about it, it will eventually go away. If I avoid walking down that street again, I won’t have to remember what happened.”

3. Denying

“To avoid the pain of facing our reality, we may try to pretend that things are different. But denying our present reality is refusal to accept the truth. It is commonly acknowledged that the truth can hurt. But the truth can also set us free! Denying the truth of our present reality, therefore, keeps us in bondage. Even if circumstances around us change, denial keeps us prisoner to our unhealthy thoughts and emotions” (2, p. 37).

EXAMPLE

“He couldn’t have meant to hurt me in that way. We have a wonderful relationship. He just loves me so much, he doesn’t want to think of me with another person. I’m sure it will never happen again.”

4. Accepting

The first three responses keep us isolated and in the dark. It is only through accepting that our pain can be brought into the light. As mentioned in the video, pain is extremely difficult, but hidden away from the light it deepens.


Jesus is the light.

He longs to walk us through our despair and into freedom.

“Accepting our current circumstances is an acknowledgment that we may not be able to control our present reality but we can control how we respond to it. When we learn to accept our loss and pain (with Jesus by our side), we discover these things have less control over us. Acceptance, therefore, is not merely the acknowledgment of problems and challenges but the determination to make the best of any situation we find ourselves in” (2, p. 37).

EXAMPLE

“I was wrong to handle my work situation that way. My coworker was right to report me, and I had better apologize and own up to it.”



Maybe my boss won't be happy, but at least I'll have done the right thing."

Application/Activity

ROCK ILLUSTRATION (EXPLAIN TO GROUP)

In your group, have everyone pick up an object (book, water bottle, or rock if you have one, etc). Using your strongest arm, hold the object outstretched to the side of you. Everyone should be holding their arms straight out. See who can hold the object outstretched the longest without dropping your arm.

IN YOUR GROUP, DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING POINTS:

1. Everyone at the start of this activity usually feels confident. Perhaps you felt that you were able to hold on to the object without problems, but it doesn't take long before the object becomes very heavy and you can no longer hold it. The object is just like the pain and bitterness that people hold on to when someone has hurt them. Over time, the burden of carrying this pain becomes overwhelming.
2. What would start happening to your body if you managed to hold on to the object with an outstretched arm for twenty minutes? Holding on to past hurts and dwelling on distressing memories causes you to experience terrible pain.
3. After one hour of holding on to the object with an outstretched arm, what do you think your arm would feel like? More than likely, your arm will feel ready to fall off.
4. Imagine what would happen if you were not able to let go of the object for days, weeks, months or years. You thought you could initially hold on without a problem, but eventually it will kill you. Holding on to our bitterness and hurt works in the same way as holding on to the object. Many think they are able to hold on to their pain, but it eventually becomes too much to bear.

5. Why do you think it is important to forgive and let go?
6. How did it feel to finally let your tired arm down and let go of the object? That is the same relief and peace we get when we learn how to forgive and let go of past hurts.

Scripture

- He was despised and rejected by mankind, **a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.** Like One from whom people hide their faces He was despised, and we held Him in low esteem (Isa. 53:3).
- Jesus said 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you also (Jn. 15:20).
- ...persecutions, and sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord rescued me! Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted (2 Tim. 3:11-12).

God hates evil...

- Let those who love the Lord hate evil, for He guards the lives of his faithful ones and delivers them from the hand of the wicked (Ps. 97:10).
- I abhor the assembly of evildoers and refuse to sit with the wicked (Ps. 26:5).
- The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit (Ps. 34:18).



Discussion questions

1. What does it mean to you, knowing that Jesus suffered in ways that you can relate to?
2. Share an occurrence where you've experienced the enemy's 'devouring' or meddling.
3. Have one or two people share an example of a time that he/she responded to a difficult experience using 'fixating,' 'avoiding' or 'denying.' How did that situation turn out?
4. Have one or two people share an example of a time when they responded with 'accepting.' How did that situation turn out?
5. Take a moment to meditate on the following passage:

“Now as they were eating Jesus took bread, and after blessing it, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body.’ And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you; for **this is My blood of the [new and better] covenant, which [ratifies the agreement and] is being poured out for many [as a substitutionary atonement] for the forgiveness of sins.**” (Matt. 26:26-28 AMP).

Discuss thoughts and understanding of the scripture. What does this mean for you?
6. Is suffering always bad? Why?

Summary

“Stay alert! Watch out!...” (1 Pet. 5:8 above). Satan loves to bring division and despair, and no one gets through this life without difficulties and pain. When difficulties arise, we have a choice about how we are going to respond. Of the four different response styles, only accepting provides a foundation for hope. Acceptance is not only the acknowledging of problems and challenges, but the determination to make the best of any

difficult situation we find ourselves in (2, p. 38). Accepting keeps us from remaining in darkness and brings our pain into the Light. We can now accept the present and look to the future with new expectations. We are not the only one who chooses to make the best of our difficulties. Our Heavenly Father is also at constant work on our behalf.

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28).

Conclusion / Pray specifically for one another.

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MELISSA

"I'm 29 years old. I have three children and another three which I take care of. One belonged to my husband from a previous relationship. The twins- their mother was a neighbor who died in childbirth, so I took them in. I love them each as though I am their mother. With my siblings and their children, we are 15 people. We all lived together in Congo.

"People were being killed in our area, and the bodies were going missing. People began to panic about what was going on. My husband went missing, and not even the police would help. Then, a government car arrived at my house. I thought maybe they were coming to tell me news about his disappearance. They asked, 'Can we go somewhere to talk?' I got into the car willingly, but they locked the door and covered my head. When we arrived, they took me out and tortured me. Because I was a nurse, they asked me about hospital issues, about the numbers of bodies and missing soldiers.

"Soon after, armed men came and burned our house. They did terrible things to my sister, and my grandmother was killed. There were bullets everywhere and we all became separated. Thankfully, my children were at the church, so I ran to collect them. Then we fled."



After a terrifying journey, Melissa arrived in a refugee camp in Uganda. She continued to hope and pray that her lost family members would be found safe. Over months, one by one, Melissa found her brothers and sisters and their children scattered throughout the settlement.

Miraculously, they had all survived but were in various emotional states after having experienced such pain and loss. They moved in together but continued to suffer through what they had endured.

“We went to Tutapona because we needed help. My sister couldn’t talk after what those men did to her. But now she can talk and even start laughing. I never wanted to be around people, they made me so afraid. Before, something so small would happen and I would get so angry, so easily.

“Because of what we learned, there is now a big change in our lives. I can even tell this story. I see another life in front of me. In my whole family, this work has made such a difference. We are building our own house. We are working together because we are a family and I learned that nothing has happened to me that I can’t handle or heal from.

“I’ve learned to live through the challenges. When we learned about forgiveness, we used an example where they tied people together. I was one of those who was tied. We were challenged to try to detach ourselves from each other without letting go of rope, meaning, that if we don’t forgive then we will always have that luggage on us.

“If I didn’t forgive, I would end up carrying the burden of that person around with me forever. I didn’t want to spend the rest of my life attached to the people who had hurt me. I don’t want to be bound to what they did to us; I needed to forgive to be able to let go of that luggage. You have to forgive so that you can be free. I know I have forgiven because I can feel the change inside me. I am really free!”

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|| SESSION 2 ||

THE NEED FOR FORGIVENESS

Video opener: The need for forgiveness

Pray as a group for Session 2 and for the Yazidi people, who are displaced within Kurdistan, or for a specific group of refugees who are on your heart

Overview: What is forgiveness?

Forgiveness is giving up your right to hurt others when they've hurt you. It is trusting God to work justice on your behalf through accepting Jesus' payment on the cross to 'pay off' the obligation that the one who has hurt you, owes you (1).

Why do I need to be forgiven by God?

The first part of Romans 6:23 states, "For the wages of sin is death..." (See also Rom. 3:23).

God is Holy and every human is a sinner. Sin puts an impassable barrier between us and God (Isa. 59:2; Rom. 3:10; Rom. 6:23). There is no way around that barrier apart from the shedding of blood (Heb. 9:22).

God loves us so much and wants us to have access to Him. He provided a way for us to be forgiven, and that way was through Jesus' death on the cross. Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (Jn. 14:6). God's plan of salvation was to send Jesus, His only Son, into the world to make atonement for our sins. "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit" (1 Pet. 3:18). The rest of Romans 6:23 states, "...but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Hallelujah!

- "A great many people want to bring their faith, their works, their good deeds to Him for salvation. Bring your sins, and He will bear them away into the wilderness of forgetfulness, and you will never see them again." Dwight L. Moody
- "You have been forgiven, so act like it!" A.W. Tozer
- "I think if God forgives us we must forgive ourselves. Otherwise it is almost like setting up ourselves as a higher tribunal than Him." C.S. Lewis

Many participants in this study will already be followers of Christ and will have a good understanding of their need for forgiveness. However, the group leader should make sure this is well understood and if there are participants who are not yet followers of Christ, there should be more time devoted to this section and clarification given.

Why do I need to forgive and be forgiven by others?

Because of God's love for us and His love for His creation, He desires for us to be reconciled to Himself and to one another. He expects us to carry the very same attitude towards others that He carries toward us.

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Eph. 4:32).

And THIS is His attitude...

“The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will He harbor His anger forever; He does not treat us as our sins deserve nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His love for those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him...” (Ps. 103:8-13).

Forgiveness is a command

Jesus has commanded us to forgive others. It is not just a good idea or a recommendation; it is a command from God. If we do not forgive, we are not obeying God.

God is very willing and able to forgive us for our sins, and He asks us, in turn, to be willing to forgive others. “For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins” (Matt. 6:14-15).

“It is in pardoning that we are pardoned.” St. Francis of Assisi.

Jesus also states, “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift” (Matt. 5:23-24).

We receive the benefit

The good news is that when we obey the commands of God, we benefit. God does not give us any commands that are not for our good; the command to forgive is no exception.

“And you know, when you’ve experienced grace and you feel like you’ve been forgiven, you’re a lot more forgiving of other people. You’re a lot more gracious to others.” Rick Warren

This can feel like a great burden. It can feel like a significant sacrifice to forgive others for the ways they have hurt you. But it is actually a gift... to you!

As long as you refuse to let go of hurt, you have tied that other person to yourself. One person put it this way: “We’re giving that person free rent inside our heads.” Consider the cost of not forgiving- the energy and emotion you give that hurt throughout the day or the sleep you lose.

With unforgiveness, inner peace is impossible. Like the venom of a snakebite, when bitterness festers, the infection grows and damages our relationships with others. Forgiveness offers us freedom to move on so we can continue living” (3). When we forgive, we are able to let go of the hurt, pain and bitterness. Even though the other person may not deserve it, it is not about them. We can choose to obey Christ and give Him the hurt and pain. Forgiveness is a gift we give ourselves.

Scripture

We all need to be forgiven by God.

- “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23). The wages of sin is death and “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).
- Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (Jn. 14:6).
- “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Eph. 4:32).
- “The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will He harbor His anger forever; He does not treat us as our sins deserve nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His love for those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him” (Ps. 103:8-13).

We are commanded to forgive.

- “For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins” (Matt. 6:14-15).
- “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift” (Matt. 5:23-24).

Discussion questions

1. This session argued the point that we all need to forgive, no matter what the offense against us. Do you agree with that?
2. Does God really expect us to forgive everyone, no matter how serious their offense was against us?
3. What is the cost of NOT forgiving?
4. Do you agree that “forgiveness offers us freedom to move on so we can continue living”?

Summary

Christ died for us and paid the price for our sins. God offers us forgiveness. Even though we do not deserve to be forgiven for the sins we have committed and the ways we have strayed from God, He offers us forgiveness. He also expects us to forgive others. Not only does He expect it, He commands it. Forgiveness is not just a good idea or a suggestion; it is a command.

The good news is that, like all commands from God, it is in our best interest to obey. When we follow the command of God and forgive, we reap the benefits. We experience freedom and we experience intimacy with our Father.

However, it can still be extremely difficult to forgive. The next session we will discuss practical ways we can experience the freedom found in forgiveness.

Conclusion / Pray specifically for one another.

SAMI & SOLOMAN

Sami—“My life was so good before ISIS came. We had been living in Sinjar for 6 generations. Our home was our grandfather’s, grandfather’s home. I went to school and I would spend my days playing with my friends. I was 12 years old the day that ISIS came. It was a very hot day. We tried to flee. I was so afraid, it felt like I was frozen!”

Soloman—“The cars from ISIS were so fast. They made a circle around our village and threatened our lives. We lost everything in Sinjar—our houses and our livelihoods. My father’s shop was destroyed. They took the women to one side and the men to the other. They split up our family; some of us went in cars and vehicles, some of us had to move by foot. They took one of my uncles- we still don’t know where he is.

“We were afraid of what ISIS would do to us. Would they take our girls like so many other families? Kill the men? Make us slaves? We had to escape. At one point we saw only one ISIS man was guarding us. When he was distracted, we saw our chance. We left everything and ran for the mountains. We took no food, nothing. We just ran because it was the only opportunity to save our lives.”

After spending a week trekking through the mountains, they soon realized they desperately needed food and water. They decided to enter a village they passed along the way.

Soloman—“When we went to the village, there was a trap to capture those who had escaped. We hid in a house and saw them rounding everyone up into big vans and trucks. We stayed silent until the town was empty. ISIS took 136 people that day. When I remember all the things that happened, I feel so bad.”

Sami—“When we arrived in this camp, there was fear in my heart. I had so many things running through my mind. I heard about how Tutapona had helped others, so I decided to go. The program taught me many things I didn’t know! I learned about helping people and about showing kindness. But the most important thing I learned was forgiveness. I needed to forgive everything that had happened, but first I needed to forgive myself.

“The program was like a window for my heart and all of the fear, all that was not good inside my heart, went out through that window. After learning these things, I feel less stressed and life has been much better.

“Now I have a hope for my future. I want to finish school so I can complete my father’s work. I want to go back to Sinjar to join in rebuilding our village. That is our place, that is our country. We belong there. In the future, if the fighting stops, we will go back. Because of what I learned, the fire in my heart has gone down. I am healed.”

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|| SESSION 3 ||

HOW DO WE FORGIVE?

—

Video opener: How to forgive

Pray as a group for Session 3 and for the South Sudanese refugee population living in Uganda, or a for a specific group of refugees who are on your heart

Overview: How do we forgive?

Misunderstandings about forgiveness

Many Christians have heard the verses “Forgive as God forgave you” (Matt. 18:21-35) and have misinterpreted it to mean, “I just pray to God and tell Him that I forgive the person that hurt me, and everything will be right again.” Unfortunately, feelings of hurt as well as the desire to hold the hurtful person accountable remain.

Many counseling programs tell us that forgiveness comes when we understand the reasons the offender did what he/she did and also understand why we reacted the way we did to the offense. We are told that we are then able to let it go. However, the process for true forgiveness is more involved.

COMMON MIS-BELIEFS INCLUDE:

- Forgiveness means forgetting.
- Forgiveness means I must trust the person who hurt me.
- Forgiveness means that I must be reconciled to (restore friendly relations with) and relate to the hurtful person in the future.

But we cannot reconcile with that person, if

- The person who hurt you continues to deny or excuse their behavior.
- The person continues offending you in harmful ways (i.e. ongoing abuse).
- The person is unwilling to reconcile with you. It takes two for reconciliation to take place. “If we do not trust the sincerity of the person, the process of reconciliation is not going to happen” (1, p. 131).

Understanding forgiveness

In order for us to have peace with God, ourselves and others, it is



essential that we extend forgiveness. However, if we are to forgive life-altering sins against us effectively, we need to have a thorough understanding of forgiveness.

Richard and Connie Smith, in their manual “Seminar on Prayer Resolution: Methods and Theory,” offer a clearer, more complete understanding of Biblical forgiveness. Most of the following forgiveness concepts come from their Biblical model.

“God is holy and just. When His holiness is violated, His sense of justice must be satisfied (...) We are created in the image of God and therefore we too, have a sense of justice (...) When an offense or sin occurs, a debt is incurred. In order for that offense to be ‘taken off the books,’ it must be paid for. The sin must be paid for or the debt still stands (1, p. 57, some paraphrasing).

“When we try to carry out justice ourselves, then vengeance takes over as we seek to pay back the one who hurt us. God has told us however “Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord” (Rom. 12:19). Carrying out what justice demands is God’s job; He did not equip us to carry it out nor to live with it unpaid. When we carry the burden of vengeance, we do it in our own strength and it often ends up bringing us emotional, spiritual, and physical harm” (1, p. 57, some paraphrasing).

The process

The “Elements of Forgiveness” mentioned below are NOT intended for you to do alone. God designed the Church for this reason and expects us to work through our circumstances together.

- “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective” (James 5:16).
- “Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in Heaven” (Matt. 18:19).

Before your next session, it will be **IMPORTANT** for you to find a safe and trusted brother or sister in Christ to pray through the elements of forgiveness with you. This process is not meant to be done alone. Your safe friend will be able to provide perspective, witness and agree with you through these elements, as well as bear the burden alongside of you.

Together with this safe person, ask the Heavenly Father to be your Guide as you walk through the elements of forgiveness. Ask that the Holy Spirit would bring to mind the necessary aspects of the hurt, the confession, etc. In addition, pray a prayer of protection over your time—that the enemy would not be allowed to interfere with, interrupt or even hear what is being discussed.


Again, have your trusted friend pray, witness and add spiritual authority in between each of the following steps.

The elements of forgiveness

1. Share Your Hurts with God—“Accuse”

The process of getting the debt, or hurt “out on the table”, is called “accusing.”

- a. When someone sins against you, it is important enough to God that it will not be overlooked or belittled. It will be paid for to the extent that justice is done. In other words, Jesus does not want to let your offender off the hook.
- b. With your trusted friend, pray aloud and tell the Heavenly Father your hurt—piece by piece.
- c. Accuse the person who hurt you for what you perceive he/she did to you.
- d. Ask the Father to bring justice to that person for what they did and to see that justice is done on your behalf.
- e. Choose to forgive.



Choosing forgiveness means that you are trusting God to see that payment is made and you are assured that justice will be done on your behalf to the point that “even your sense of justice will be satisfied” (1, p. 24). It also means that you give up your rights as an accuser of the offense ever again. It means you believe that the blood of Christ is enough to make full payment for the offense against you. It means you trust Christ to bring freedom from the burden. Decide here to either hang on to the offense and seek vengeance or to forgive him/her, giving it completely to God with the statement, “I forgive ___ for the sin done against me” (1, p. 58, paraphrased).

2. Confess

Oftentimes, there are ways that we respond to the hurts/offenses against us that are also sinful. They may include things such as slander, bitterness, acts of revenge, viewing oneself contrary to how God sees us and modeling your sin/hurt to others. 1 John 1:9 states, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins...” Christ’s sacrifice pays completely for your sin.

- a. Ask yourself what ways you acted out in sin because of the offenses against you. There may be several; there may be none. In silent prayer, ask God to show you if there is anything you may be missing and to bring it to light.
- b. Then, acknowledge your sin(s) before God. Note: there may not be any sin that you have committed.

3. Ask for Forgiveness and Cleansing from Unrighteousness

- a. Trust that you are forgiven and free of guilt and shame when you confess to God with a repentant heart because of 1 John 1:9 (see above).

4. Ask God to Break Ties with the Enemy

1. Ask your Heavenly Father to keep the enemy from having access to this hurt any longer and that the enemy will no longer be able to lie to you about it.

2. Ask your Heavenly Father to break the unhealthy patterns of the way we have related to the one who hurt us.

5. Ask God to Hang on to the Hurtful Memories and Emotions

1. Hand your emotions one by one to God, and ask Him to take the sting away from them and to bring them to a neutral place, hanging onto them and keeping them safe, unless He wants to use them for our good or His glory in the future knowing that it would be done with any pain attached.

NOTE: If harm done to you was significant and impairing, it may be necessary for you to meet with a Prayer Resolution Counselor who uses these methods, or a trained professional counselor.

Scripture

- “Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. At this the servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

“But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded. His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.’ But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.

“When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

“Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart” (Matt. 18:23-35).

Since Jesus applied this story as a picture of God’s response to people who withhold forgiveness, we can draw some conclusions:

God releases us from debt when we do not deserve such treatment.

1. *Forgiveness is an act of the will.*
 2. *God expects us to imitate Him in forgiveness.*
 3. *God is angered by an unforgiving spirit.*
- “Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord” (Rom. 12:19).
 - “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective” (James 5:16).
 - “Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in Heaven” (Matt. 18:19).
 - “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins...” (1 Jn. 1:9).

Discussion questions

1. Do you believe that God is able to bring complete justice to your hurtful situation?
2. Can you trust God’s justice over your vengeance?

3. Does trusting God's justice mean you are letting your offender "off the hook"?
4. What did you learn about forgiveness today?
5. What did you decide—to hang on to the offense and seek vengeance or to forgive him/her, giving it completely to God?

Summary

In God's economy, no debt is actually canceled or merely 'erased'; instead the payment is paid in full by the person—or by Christ at the cross.

The conclusion is this: When an offense or sin occurs, a debt is incurred. In order for that offense to be 'taken off the books,' it must be paid for. The sin must be paid for or the debt still stands. It must be paid for in order for justice to be satisfied. However, when we try to carry out justice ourselves, then vengeance takes over as we seek to pay back the one who hurt us. Carrying out what justice demands is God's job; He did not equip us to carry it out nor to live with it unpaid. When we carry the burden of vengeance, we do it in our own strength and it often ends up bringing us emotional, spiritual, and physical harm. Jesus pays that debt through His perfect justice, when we choose to forgive our offender and allow Him to "right" the wrongs against us (1).

Conclusion / Pray specifically for one another.

Overview: Hope

Once we decide to forgive, we can move forward. This act of forgiveness produces hope that the future will be better. The basis for our hope is faith, not evidence. In other words, despite our past experiences, or even our present situation, hope is the

LORENZO

“My name is Lorenzo and I am South Sudanese. The first time I came to Uganda was in 1996, I was 52 then and 72 when I returned in 2016 for the second time. I’m still collecting more years; Jesus is adding them on for me!

“The first time I came, it was because of the war. There was killing and violence, it wasn’t safe anywhere. We stayed until the peace agreement was signed in 2005; South Sudan became independent and we returned home! It felt good to be in my own country, but before long more fighting came and we had to run for the second time. When the peace left, I was so sad. Even now I can feel sad about it, we had held so much hope.

“This time, I was an old man; my eyes do not see and I walk with a stick. We walked for two days to the border, and from there we were taken to this camp. I thought this time it would be temporary and that we would all return to our lives.

“I thought that our young children would be able to start school in South Sudan. But the war has prolonged and we are still here.

“Tutapona’s program really benefited me. They started their teaching with the snakebite story, and even if I forget, I have their book and my daughter reads it to me.



“We continue to learn from it and it brings us much joy! What I learned is that trauma is like a snake bite. When someone has done something very wrong to you, they put poison inside you. When you have that trauma, it’s up to you to remove the poison so that you can continue to live. This taught me so much about forgiveness.

“Forgiveness, I learned, is very important. If you don’t forgive, you are the one who will suffer because it is you who is carrying that pain. When you forgive, you just let go of that bitterness. You know, our grudges were big—we’ve had people killing us. It was hard to accept at first, but we learned that we could still forgive the people who had killed our loved ones, and we could still let go of all of that bitterness. It doesn’t make what happened right, but if we hold onto these things, the hurt comes back most on us.

“When I forgave them, it was my own decision. I could feel that pain inside myself, so I chose in my heart to let it go. If possible, I think I would also love to shake the hand of the person who has hurt me. But I know that forgiveness is not only about that.

“Now, I feel reconnected. I feel free in my heart. I can live a normal life. To forgive makes all the difference. We can stay together and live together—it has changed my attitude towards everyone around me.”

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|| SESSION 4 ||

HOPE FOR HURTING HEARTS

Video opener: Relationships

Pray as a group for Session 4 and for the Syrian refugee population living in Kurdistan Iraq, or a for a specific group of refugees who are on your heart

belief that peace and wellbeing in Jesus awaits us even if we can't see it yet.

However, the enemy seeks to destroy hope by questioning our forgiveness. The enemy wants to keep us in bondage by suggesting we have not truly forgiven the people who have hurt us. The enemy tempts us to believe we are still bound to the pain and that our forgiveness was not complete.

The understanding that Christ has forgiven us brings freedom to extend forgiveness to others. The realization that Christ has empowered us to do what otherwise felt impossible, to forgive others for the pain they have caused us, brings hope. This hope clears the clouds away and allows the brilliant light of Christ to shine forth, illuminating a bright future. The experience of Christ's forgiveness toward us, and our forgiveness of others, brings freedom. And that freedom brings hope for a better tomorrow!

My response

Why do I still feel hurt, pain, anger and defilement from the harm that was committed against me, even though I forgave the person that hurt me? Did I truly forgive? Did I do something wrong? Doesn't God care to free me? How do relationships heal and recover?

Trust

Left to ourselves, we cannot overcome our inability to fully trust when our heart is experiencing pain. We are not called to carry the burden alone, but rather to allow God to carry it for us (Isa. 53:4).

- "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding" (Prov. 3:5).
- "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is the Lord" (Jer. 17:7 NKJV).

- “When I am afraid, I put my trust in You” (Ps. 56:3).
- “I will say of the Lord, ‘He is my refuge and my fortress, My God in whom I trust!’” (Ps. 91:2).

Further, we are not called to walk here alone but rather in community with one another. Caring for, encouraging, loving one another and holding each other accountable. We all crave being in community, and to belong to something bigger than ourselves. We need each other. We need to trust, rely and depend on one another. God has called us to this type of community to carry each other’s burdens, care for each other’s practical needs, and rejoice with each other.

- “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2).
- “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” (1 Cor. 12:26-27).

Grow in faith

With our willingness to extend and accept forgiveness, our faith in Jesus will only grow stronger. As we seek to know God more clearly and more intimately, we will find that we will grow in faith. Jesus commands us to love over and over throughout His teachings. We can’t forgive another person, or even ourselves, apart from the love that Jesus has to offer. The more we express our love for Him, and more importantly the love He has for us, the easier it will become to embrace forgiveness.

- “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1 NKJV).
- “Knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance” (James 1:3).
- “And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13:13 NKJV).

- “So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love...” (Eph. 3:17).

Grow in relationship

Restored relationships with those who have offended us is sometimes possible but not always. “Forgiveness is a choice; to trust is a process. To really trust another, we must feel confident that they will not hurt or betray us again” (1, p. 131).

God intends for us to be in healthy relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds” (Heb. 10:24).

“As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another” (Prov. 27:17).

Scripture

- “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding” (Prov. 3:5).
- “Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is the Lord” (Jer. 17:7 NKJV).
- “When I am afraid, I put my trust in You” (Ps. 56:3).
- “I will say of the Lord, ‘He is my refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust!’” (Ps. 91:2).
- “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1 NKJV).
- “Knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance” (James 1:3).
- “And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13:13 NKJV).

- “So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love...” (Eph. 3:17).
- “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds” (Heb. 10:24).
- “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2).
- “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” (1 Cor. 12:26-27).
- “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another” (Prov. 27:17).

Discussion questions

1. If I have truly forgiven through the process described in Session 3, is it possible that I will still feel hurt or angry at times?
2. In order to have hope for the future, is it necessary to be part of a healthy community? Has God called us to live in isolation or in community?
3. What was helpful for you in your process of forgiveness? How have you been able to move forward in one area of your life?
4. What precautions do you need to put in place to prevent unforgiveness from sneaking back in?
5. How has this study given you an increased hope for the future? Is there one area of your life where you feel more hopeful?

Summary

Even though we have decided to forgive and give it completely over to God rather than hanging on to the offense and seeking vengeance, there may be times when we are tempted to feel

bound to the pain and believe our forgiveness was not complete. We may be tempted to lose sight of the understanding that Christ has forgiven us, and through that forgiveness, we have been empowered to extend forgiveness to others. The experience of Christ's forgiveness toward us, and our forgiveness of others, brings freedom. This new freedom brings hope for a brighter future.

Conclusion / Pray specifically for one another.

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NOTE: If harm done to you continues to be significant and impairing, it's understandable and may be necessary for you to meet with a Prayer Resolution Counselor who uses these methods, or a trained professional counselor.

AGNES

“I came here with my 5 children from South Sudan, and I had to leave my husband behind. Not long after I left, I heard that he had died; he had been slaughtered by an opposing tribe. They cut off his head and left him there like that.

“Then, in November, my son was killed at school. He fought with a boy from another tribe, and he died. Sometimes at night when I was supposed to be sleeping I would lie awake wondering if it would be better if I had stayed in South Sudan. Would these bad things have happened if I hadn’t fled? It was too painful.

“After my son died, all I wanted was for the child who had killed him to remain in prison forever and ever. My boy was gone, and I wanted the other family to lose someone too. When my relatives heard the news, they set fire to the houses of the tribe who had killed him. But I remembered what I learned from Tutapona- that revenge would only hurt more. This type of fighting could not go on- no more violence.



“I asked my parents to take action to call the tribes together for a meeting so that we could say, “Let not that fighting continue; let them stop fighting.” We told them that violence was not necessary and that the issue should be resolved another way.

“What I learned from Tutapona was how to cope with my loss. They gave me the knowledge of the power of forgiveness because before, I could never forget what happened. But now I can let go, I can forgive that person. Now, if you insult me, I know that I don’t need to answer to that.

“My life has changed a lot. Now I’m a councilwoman and I’ve started a group called The Peace Makers. If people are quarreling or fighting, we will sit together, talk about it and tell stories. We pray together; no more violence. We can be in peace only when we come together.”



|| SESSION 5 ||

LIVING IN THE LIGHT

Video opener: Breaking ground

Pray as a group for Session 5 and the close of this series, and for the Somali refugee population seeking refuge in Uganda, or for a specific group of refugees who are on your heart

Overview: Moving forward

Now that we have experienced the power of forgiveness in our lives, it is time to move forward with boldness and freedom. We no longer have to be bound by the pain. However, we cannot understand and live out true forgiveness without Jesus Christ. He is the source of all peace. We can try our very best, but without Him we will never be able to truly walk in complete freedom. Freedom is only found in Jesus Christ.

Discussion topics

LIVE IN PEACE

Ultimate peace can only be found in Jesus (Jn. 16:33). Jesus is called the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6) and the Lord of Peace (2 Thes. 3:16). Jesus has told us that He has left His peace for us (Jn. 14:27). Apart from Christ, there can be a superficial peace, but it is not real peace (Jer. 6:14).

ACKNOWLEDGE OUR PAST

We are called to look back and remember our past (Isa. 46:9) not just to see the pain, but to see how God was present with us in the trying circumstances and how He works in them. Remembering the past for what it truly was allows us to see and remember God's hand in our lives.

While it is productive to acknowledge our past, it is not helpful to stay stuck there. As we acknowledge the pain we have endured and experience the healing of Christ, the memory will no longer carry the same painful emotions.

Hope for your future

REFLECTION

1. What action steps have you taken throughout the course of this devotional?
2. What safeguards have you put in place to prevent unforgiveness?

Scripture

- “Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me” (Isa. 46:9).
- “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (Jn. 16:33).
- “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6).
- “Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you” (2 Thes. 3:16).
- “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (Jn. 14:27).
- “They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. ‘Peace, peace,’ they say, when there is no peace” (Jer. 6:14).

Discussion questions

1. Do you believe that God is able to bring complete justice to your hurtful situation?
2. Can you trust God’s justice over your vengeance?
3. Does trusting God’s justice mean you are letting your offender “off the hook?”
4. What did you learn about forgiveness today?

Summary

Freedom can be scary.

Even though healing has occurred, and the freedom of Jesus Christ has been experienced, it can be scary to walk forward in that freedom. We get used to bondage; we become comfortable with it. **Letting go of the pain of the past is one thing but moving forward in new found freedom is another.**

Acknowledging our past can be an important step, but the enemy loves to keep us stuck in the past and get us to question the healing that has taken place.

It is only through Jesus Christ that we are able to truly experience peace, and it is only through Jesus that we can then walk in that peace moving forward.

Conclusion / Pray specifically for one another.

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All scriptures are referenced in New International Version (NIV), unless otherwise noted.



TAKING
FORGIVENESS
FURTHER...

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It's been a privilege to walk alongside you through this life-changing journey of forgiveness. We would like to take a moment to invite you to now walk alongside others who are seeking hope and healing.

Tutapona is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, bringing mental health services to those living as refugees and victims of war around the world. Our heart is to be present with those who have suffered horrendous experiences and unimaginable injustice as they embark on a journey to forgiveness and ultimately hope for a better future. But we can't do it alone. We need your help. We need you, your family, your small group and your church to get involved in helping people find their freedom in Christ.

Would you consider partnering with Tutapona to help bring freedom and hope to people living as refugees? Would you become a monthly donor, ensuring that our trauma rehabilitation and mental health services reach those who desperately need it?

Visit Tutapona.com to discover ways you can get involved, and help us provide Christ-centered mental health care to our brothers and sisters in East Africa, the Middle East and other regions affected by war and conflict.

As with the thousands of refugees and victims of war who have travelled this same road, our prayer is that you have new-found healing and freedom through Christ's forgiveness. Jesus is our ultimate healer, and He's with us every step of the way. He paid the price for our forgiveness; therefore, we can extend forgiveness to others.

Thank you for accepting this opportunity to explore more about forgiveness through our ministry around the world. We hope this series has been a blessing to you!

Sincerely,
Carl & Julie Gaede

WHY WE WORK IN KURDISTAN, IRAQ

5.6 million Syrians are currently living as refugees, with another 6.2 million displaced since the conflict in Syria began in 2011. At least half of those affected are children. The war on ISIS from 2014-2016, combined with the attempted systematic wipeout of the Yazidi people, meant that 6 million people were displaced, with 1.8 million of those still seeking refuge away from their homes. These two recent crises, paired with the slaughter of 50,000 Kurds in the eighties under the regime of Saddam Hussein, have created long-term displacements and fears, leaving people increasingly vulnerable and with a high severity of trauma-related needs in the region.

- Population of Kurdistan: 5,796,000
- Total Refugee and Internally Displaced People Population: 1.5 Million
- Number of Syrian Refugees: Approx. 250,000
- Number of IDPS (Internally Displaced People residing inside and outside of camps): Approximately 1.25 million
 - 450,000 Yazidi
 - 600,00 Arab
 - 150,000 Christian Minorities
- Number of Refugee and Internally Displaced People (IDP) camps in Kurdistan: 38

Where we work in Kurdistan

ESYAN CAMP

Hosts **14,823 refugees and IDPs**, all from the Yazidi population.

Number of people assisted in Esyan Camp (GROW attendees, one-on-ones): 787

KHANKE CAMP

Hosts **15,253 refugees and IDPs**, with approximately the same number of displaced people living outside the camp borders, all from the Yazidi population.

Number of people assisted in Khanke Camp (GROW attendees, projected one-on-ones): 1,336

SORAN DISTRICT

Hosts **approximately 4,957 refugees and IDPs**, mainly Yazidi, Shabak, Syrian and Kurdish.

Number of people assisted in Soran (GROW attendees, one-on-ones): 328

KABERTO

Hosts **13,481 refugees and IDPs**, all from the Yazidi population.

Number of people assisted in Kaberto (GROW attendees, one-on-ones): 157

Number of cumulative graduations Nov 2016-Jan 2020: 2,489 (GROW + Follow Up)

Number of cumulative one-on-ones Nov 2016-Jan 2020: 441 TOTAL

Average percent reduction of trauma symptomology and PTSD rate: 46.9%



WHY WE WORK IN UGANDA

1.4 million people currently seek refuge from war and conflict in Uganda from neighboring countries such as South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo, both whose ongoing civil wars and inter-tribal fighting has caused displacement and loss of life not seen since the World Wars. These two major humanitarian crises, paired with a civil war that a generation here is still recovering from, harbors long-term trauma and emotional wounds that run deep. Uganda has been commended worldwide on its open-door policy for people living as refugees, even though it is still a country in the process of development.

- Population of Uganda: 42 Million
- Total Refugee & Asylum Seeker Population: 1.4 Million
 - South Sudanese Refugees: 870,000
 - D.R Congolese Refugees: 403,000
 - Burundian Refugees: 47,000
 - Somali Refugees: 40,000
 - Refugees from other Conflict Areas (Burundi, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Rwanda, Sudan): 39,000

- Refugee Settlements in Uganda: 31
- Percent of Total Population who are refugees: 3.4%
- Percentage Who Are Women & Children: 82%
- Percentage Under 18 Years Old: 59%
- Number of Children without Parents or Guardians: 38,000
- Number of Unassisted Refugees (Due to resources and restrictions): 73,000

Where we work in Uganda

ADJUMANI

Hosts **213,000 refugees**, mostly from South Sudan.

Number of Refugees Assisted in our Adjumani Office: Over 10,000 (GROW, Empower, Heroes Journey & One-On-Ones): 10,032 as of Jan 2020.

NAKIVALE

Hosts **125,000 refugees**, mainly from D.R Congo, Burundi, Rwanda, and Somalia.

Number of Refugees Assisted in our Nakivale Office: 10,000 (GROW, EMPOWER, HJ & One-On-Ones).

(Actual number: 9881 as at Jan 2020—10,000 accounts for at least 119 enrolled between Jan-April).

Average percent reduction of trauma symptomology and PTSD rate: 47.8%



TUTAPONA.COM

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Tutapona is a 501(c)3 charitable organization (EIN 26-2480207)

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