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**Check your local Adventist Book Center
for the companion book to the Adult Sabbath
School Bible Study Guide.**

Prisoner and Oppressor

The prisoner, imprisoned for the same reason his entire family had been murdered—his race (nothing else)—was called into a hospital room where a soldier from among the oppressors lay, his life draining out from a war hole. Caked in crusted and rancid bandages, the oppressor sputtered this painful plea:

I was in an elite unit. A land mine killed thirty of our men. In revenge, we herded three hundred of your people into a building; men, women, children; doused it with gasoline; and set it on fire. Those who fled we shot. I remember specifically a mother, a father, and a small boy. The parents, covering the child's eyes, ran outside. All were screaming. I shot them dead. I can't get away from the sight and sound of that family and their screams. And now, as I am dying, I beg forgiveness from someone of your race. Without it, I cannot die in peace. Please, please, forgive me!

The prisoner stared at the heaving mass of hard bandage (in two spots damp with tears). No word dripped from his lips into the ears slowly dying before him. The only sounds were his feet shuffling toward the door and the cries squeaking out of the crusty bandages.

What would you, or *what should* you, have done? As a Christian, whose own sins have been forgiven—and who believes that, at the cross, Jesus had bore the sins of this oppressor (including his massacre of the men, women, and children)—were you not obligated to forgive? Though the Lord commands, even demands, that we forgive, does He mean to forgive even this? If He does demand it, is a forgiveness that comes only *because it is demanded* true forgiveness?

On the other hand, “Forgiveness to the injured does belong,” wrote poet John Dryden. Was it even the prisoner’s place to forgive what had been done to others? What made the prisoner the proxy for those who, even if they would have forgiven, *could not* because they were dead?

Whatever the answer, even in the best of situations, forgiveness doesn’t come easy. If it takes so much for us to forgive an unkind word, a rebuff, a cold shoulder, an insult, or curse, what did it take for God to forgive our lusts, our murders, our cruelty, our hatred, our crimes, our violence, and even, if need be, our mass murders?

The Cross, of course, is what it took—and if Christ bearing the sins of the world does not make us see what forgiveness costs, nothing will. Even more so, if the penalty for the world’s sin falling on the Sin Bearer does not help us see how crucial forgiveness is to this universe, what will?

This quarter’s Bible Study Guide, based on the work of Geoffrey Garne, examines the difficult but inescapable question that confronts us all every day: What does it mean to be (in a sense) both prisoner and oppressor; that is, both in need of getting and giving forgiveness?

Sandwiched

Forgiveness. Such a simple word. Such a basic word. Such a common word. Just a few syllables uttered from the tongue, a few scratches scrawled from the tip of a pen, that is all. Yet, how much power, how much potential, how much healing exists within those few sounds and scratches. How many lives would be so much different, so much better, so much happier and richer, were forgiveness written into the variables that made up the equations of their personal existence?

Forgiveness. It’s double-edged. Its force pushes in two directions, forward and backward. It impacts the subject (those who forgive) as well as the object (those who are forgiven). It radiates in all directions, reaching out and caressing those who, if nothing else, stand on the sidelines and see what forgiveness does to those on either end of this divine blessing.

Perhaps this whole quarter’s Bible Study Guide should be titled “Sandwiched.” Because as Christians, we are sandwiched in by forgiveness: the forgiveness that we have received from Christ and the forgiveness that we, having received, give to others. The attendant blessings are manifold: the blessings that we have received from God, the blessings that we give to others because of what we have received from God, and the blessings that we get back when we give to others. Not a bad wrap, all things considered.

This quarter, we will try to consider, if not all things about forgiveness (that will take eternity, and we have only three months), as much as limits of time and space allow. We will study forgiveness from two perspectives, that of subject and of object, because, as Christians, we become both. We are the object of God’s forgiveness, and because of that forgiveness, we become the subject, giving forgiveness to those who perhaps are as undeserving as we are.

First, we will look at what it means to be forgiven by God; what it means for us that, no matter what we’ve done, no matter how ugly our record, we can stand before our Creator forgiven, justified, pardoned, and cleansed by the blood of Jesus.

Second, we will look at what happens in the lives of those who have been forgiven.

What does that forgiveness do to us? How does it change us? What does it motivate us to do for others?

Forgiveness. It comes with such a heavy price tag: the blood of Christ of Christ. Yet, as we will see over the next few months, no one can afford to be without it.

Got Questions?

Sabbath School University has answers!

Sabbath School University is a 28-minute discussion of the *Adult Bible Study Guide*. SSU discusses the lesson content and strategies to enrich your Sabbath School with fellowship, outreach, Bible study, and missions. Sabbath School leaders, don't miss this weekly broadcast on the Adventist Television Network.



<http://Adventist.TV>
broadcast and program information

THE BIG CITY CAN BE A SCARY PLACE

For the Aborigines who come from small settlements, even attending school or getting medical care in the city can be a huge step. Your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will make it a little easier for these gentle people to get the education and medical services they need and bring them closer to Christ. The Aboriginal Outreach and Care Center in western Australia will minister to children of God who have been overlooked for too long.

MISSION 

The Thirteenth Sabbath Offering on June 29 supports projects in the South Pacific Division.

