

# THE POWER OF GRACE

## SPACE FOR GRACE BULLETIN

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### Editorial: What's so amazing about grace?

We're often asked: 'What's different about space for grace in OD?' How is it distinct from good practice in secular OD? This bulletin tries to get to the heart of these questions in various ways.

We have come up with a one page outline of 'The Space for Grace Approach'. These are ten key principles distilled from a decade of practice that we believe can differentiate space for grace from 'normal' OD. It's not meant as a final answer, but simply a contribution to on-going thinking. What do you think is missing? How can it be improved? A number of facilitators use this list as we design and implement consultancy and training. We use it to hold ourselves accountable for integrating our faith into our work. How could you use these principles in your work?

### Grace in the midst of change

This issue explores grace in organisational change from two complementary perspectives:

1. Leading change with *Grace in the struggle for change* by Priya Raj Kumar and *Praying for Grace in change*

2. Facilitating with grace

a) *Six lessons for Pastoral OD* by Jon Johnson and

b) *Grace throughout the change process* by Victoria Mutiso of CORAT

One of our members from South Sudan, Bishop Isaiah Dau shares his challenging personal story 'But what about my brother's killers?' He shows how such a difficult act

is at the heart of all genuine transformation in communities, organisations and societies. He gives us a remarkable and inspiring example to follow.

### The changing face of the learning group

2015 is a time of change for the learning group. Not only do we have a new name, but we are taking our own medicine from the last bulletin on transition. We have broadened the leadership team to include Elaine (Philippines); Priya (India); Doreen (Uganda); and Victoria (Kenya). We also welcome DMCCD (Danish Mission Council) as a partner. The joint support from Swedish, Norwegian and Danish Mission Councils represents a ground-breaking achievement in practical collaboration.

In addition DMCCD's support has enabled us to commission an external evaluation of our contribution so far. Lisbet Fich the consultant may be in touch. We'll let you know what she finds and the implications for our future direction.

At times of change it's important to hold onto heritage - what makes us distinct, what our core contribution is. We hope that this bulletin's focus on grace helps do just that. May we inspire and stay inspired, bless and be a blessing, facilitate change and experience renewal as an expression of God's amazing grace.

Best wishes,

*Doreen, Elaine, Priya, Rick and Victoria*

## The 'space for grace' approach

Taking a 'space for grace' approach is explicitly integrating a spiritual dimension into professional organisational and individual change. We believe it is vital to build from extensive human wisdom about change. We follow recognised good OD practice principles<sup>1</sup> such as client ownership; experiential methods; emotionally engagement; contextual application and follow-through. We strive for professional excellence.

But we also believe that individual and therefore organisational change involves a spiritual dimension - as do many leading management writers<sup>2</sup>. For OD to be effective with Christian NGOs, churches and mission agencies any major change process should intentionally connect with their faith base. Faith clearly influences behaviour. The following principles distinguish a 'space for grace' approach from simply good OD. As space for grace facilitators we hold ourselves accountable to these principles:

**1. Discern how God is already at work and whether the timing is right.** This discernment can take a variety of forms, but a key indicator is the extent to which the leadership is open to change and genuinely owns the process. We may need to wait for the right time – God's timing.

**2. Pray for your client and get others to intercede for them.** Pray that they will hear God speak and ask God to give you genuine interest and love for them.

**3. Listen to God and to the people involved to discern what is really going in the context and under the surface - what are the core issues?** Ask for guidance in planning and facilitating the process. Seek to be in God's presence and consistently

ask what God wants you to do. Trust God to use you.

**4. Facilitate with grace by seeking to understand, empathise, support and appreciate.** Resist the temptation to judge, compare or take sides. Take a solution-oriented approach. Inspire hope that change is possible. Strive to live out the fruit of the Spirit throughout the process.

**5. Create safe spaces for more trusting relationships to develop.** Give people the opportunity to tell their stories without feeling judged, structure meaningful conversations and nurture healthy relationships. Create opportunities for people to pray for each other if appropriate.

**6. Weave in reflective devotion and Bible study during the intervention in ways that fit the client's faith culture.** The aim is that people, individually and collectively, are intentionally listening to what God is saying to them about the situation through the Bible.

**7. Design the intervention based on a biblical process of change involving conviction, repentance, and forgiveness.** It is not just about learning new head knowledge and skills. Have the courage to catalyse transformative change at the level of heart (attitude and behaviour).

**8. Create and hold spaces for God's Spirit to inspire change - for example by giving people time to hear from God on their own: about their contribution to an issue; where they experienced God's presence or absence in a situation; or how to move forward.**

**9. Walk alongside the client after any intervention.** Support them to take responsibility. Provide on-going follow-through, whether practical, emotional or spiritual as they implement and adjust to change. Go the extra mile with them.

**10. Humbly recognise that we are only instruments in a change**

process. We are not in charge. Ultimately it is God's work and responsibility. We cannot take the credit.



Space for Grace is a network of people from all over the world who share a passionate interest in learning about Organisational Development with churches and Christian organisations.

[www.spaceforgrace.net](http://www.spaceforgrace.net)

<sup>1</sup>From INTRAC, CDRA, EASUN (international development); NTL, IODA, OD Network (commercial)

<sup>2</sup>Such as Jim Collins; Peter Senge; Steven Covey, Patrick Lencioni, Meg Wheatley and Ken Blanchard

## Grace in the struggle for change

Mure Memorial Hospital was founded in 1891 in Nagpur, in the heart of India. What began as a small dispensary grew into a thriving 165 bed hospital. A core group of medical and administrative mission and local staff passionately served the poor and needy in the surrounding communities.

### Reaching crisis

But over the years, the hospital deteriorated. Key doctors resigned and the new leadership and management did not have the competence to sustain the growth as well as raise resources. Staff morale declined and patient numbers dwindled - preferring the new health services springing up. The staff and patients often spoke of the 'glorious old days' when the hospital was bustling, filled with patients, patronized by eminent Nagpur citizens and supported by well-wishers from abroad who provided funds, equipment and medical expertise.

### Attempting to change

Seven years ago Mr. Vilas Shende took over as Director. He was full of enthusiasm: "I wanted to see a hospital filled with clients receiving quality health care services. I wanted people to experience health, wellness and healing through our services and experience God's grace in the process." He overflowed with good ideas for improving the situation. They recruited private medical consultants to strengthen medical services. They expanded and built on the hospital's wide ranging contacts within and outside Nagpur, particularly NGOs, political leaders, government organizations. They tried to raise funds from various sources. They mobilized community outreach services to increase inflow of patients and hospital...

But despite these efforts, the hospital still failed to thrive. Patient flow and staff morale remained low and they had very

little money. They could not find committed doctors and the hospital infrastructure was just getting worse. The medical staff were not ready to accept leadership of non-medical Director.

### Internal resistance

This was hard for Shende to take as he relates:

*I faced a lot of criticism from staff and other stakeholders for decisions taken, unexpected outcomes of events and management of the hospital. I have a pile of anonymous letters criticizing my work. At times there were false accusations, backbiting. This so disturbed me - and my family too. I was often discouraged when people spoke against me and my decisions, especially related to preparing for change.*

*But I drew strength from Hebrews where it says "I am with you... who can be against you?" I looked to the example of Jesus Christ. Though severely criticized and rejected, He continued to work for good and completed the work God had given him. And so I resolved to continue my efforts to bring change, knowing that unless I took the initiative there would be no change.*

Eventually the board and leadership realized that they needed outside help to move forward. A Christian organization with a strong evangelistic approach and access to financial and other resources offered to help raise resources assist in management of the hospital and expand the services. Still there was internal resistance from staff who had negative experiences of past partnerships with external stakeholders. Shende had to gradually convince them of the value of this. The first step was to contract in external consultants to make a preliminary assessment of the hospital. Later they would help prepare a feasibility plan to develop the hospital and plan for the change. But assessment is a sensitive process as Shende relates:

*"People always find assessments difficult since it uncovers issues*

*which we often do not want to face. During this process, God gave me the grace to face criticism positively. I knew that the assessment would be helpful in getting a full picture of the situation and also planning for change meaningfully. The professional approach of the consultants, their experience and sense of fairness also inspired trust and helped in strengthening my commitment for change".*

### Steps towards change

The consultants shared the findings of the assessment report with the hospital and the potential partner. The hospital is now at a crucial juncture. One option is to continue with the existing setup and work independently of external support. The other option is to open up to external support, new management structures, inflow of financial resources, further expansion and growth. The Board is on the brink of making the decision for change by developing a master plan towards expansion and development of the hospital.

### Learning about leading with grace

It has been a tough process - but a huge learning experience for Shende about leading with grace. He concludes that:

*"Change is spiritual. The whole of creation renews itself from time to time. God himself inspires change and does not favor stagnation. In my life and work, there were some periods of stagnation. Stagnation in the form of rigid norms, old ways of working and a closure to new ideas. When there was opportunity to change in the form of partnership, I took the opportunity, though some of my advisors and friends were not in favor. I thought of how salt penetrates, perseveres and purifies. It brings change and we are called upon to bring about change. It is only when we allow the salt to work that it brings about change. The very act of purification brings change. To experience life in all its fullness we need change - organizational change.*

*My advice to others is to not be afraid of criticism and negativity. Constructive criticism paves the way for change. Criticism should offer an alternative way out of the situation. Be open and transparent and conduct assessments periodically. When we are open and pray for God's grace to overcome our fears, He helps us to see the brighter side and we become hopeful. Then grace and blessings will multiply. Let us be confident, have clear intentions and draw inspiration from God to continue the good work without giving up. "*

## Praying for grace in change

I took over in the wake of a crisis. A well-established Christian organization had been almost destroyed by the respected Finance Manager. He stole 30% of its revenue. This meant that they immediately had to lay-off 30% of their staff and let a further 20% go over the next 6 months. Fear and insecurity abounded. Staff were hostile, resentful and suspicious of leadership. People were unsure who they could trust, so cliques formed. The CEO was encouraged to resign. The board approached me to take over, even though I had only been with the organization for three months.

I accepted as I believed I would get the support and cooperation of staff. After all I had not been part of the previous set up. I started by doing an initial rapid assessment of the organization. After having to lose so many staff, those remaining had been given new responsibilities - for which they had no experience and limited competence. When I opened the issue and asked people how best to address this, 'all hell broke loose!' I did not realise at the time that merely by asking the question the individuals concerned felt threatened. They thought they had been found wanting and would be replaced or re-assigned. At this point the cliques became even stronger, supporting their small group irrespective of what was best for the organization.

It was clear that I had not earned people's trust. They snubbed me as leader. I had to exercise considerable patience and humility. At that time, I sought counsel from Christian leaders I respected. Most were emphatic that I should not take any nonsense. "Make sure you put everything in writing..." and the aim here was so as to catch them in their craftiness. But I did not want to catch them in their craftiness; I wanted the craftiness to stop.

Daily I asked God for wisdom how to lead the team. I tried to squelch my negative reactions. Instead I tried immediately to pray about the circumstance to turn it around. I had to do this often in the face of open hostility, disrespect and even mildly masked insubordination. But I think this prayerful response helped stop insecurities and conflicts escalating. I made the same prayer request whichever group I was in: "Pray for unity of purpose for my team; that we can become a strong team". I prayed for individuals on the team.

I was preoccupied with one person in particular. I'll call her Margaret. She was the most difficult and uncooperative of them all. It was hard because she had lots of strengths. She often expressed a depth of insight on situations that the rest of us missed; she was humorous in a refreshing manner and quite resourceful. She had a good depth of understanding and clarity of the nuts and bolts of the ministry. But as Margaret's opposition grew, so these strengths disappeared. She became a militant gatekeeper; unrelenting in resisting all leadership at every turn. Even in our daily prayers she turned up with this sour look on her face. Her presence dampened everyone's spirit.

I realized that I had to instantly ask God to bless her and bring cheer into her life. During one morning devotions she said God showed her she needed to respect authority before quickly looking away. I have seen a change in her attitude. She now consults me freely. Her smile around the office has returned. It's important for me

thank God for the smiles as part of me half expects her to revert back again and her work performance still leaves something to be desired.

But it was not just about Margaret. I also prayed for all the others on the team. I encouraged everyone to express their anxieties and frustrations. I let them know that their questions were important. I used opportunities in weekly staff meetings and annual reviews to affirm individuals. We did quite a lot of team building activities. In the first year alone we had three separate Personality Systems analysis. Initially people were resistant, looking for a hidden agenda, assuming that this was just 'opium' to dull them to their perceived injustices by leadership. But over time they softened. They became more responsive and positive. Some who only attended staff prayers erratically have become more regular.

It has been a tough time for me in leading change. I've learnt that making space for grace means:

As a leader you may even have to be walked on. What the world sees as a point of weakness is what the Lord has chosen to make the point of greatest strength. Humility. To serve effectively, you may have to allow yourself to become a doormat. It is not about what you can do, but about what God can do through you.

You have to take risks with people. This may be different to what others advise or is conventional. You may even feel you are being irresponsible.

You have to pray relentlessly for your staff. You can only sustain such a position if you are continually connected with the Father. He is the one who helps you to keep the focus. He loves people more than anything and He wants to change them and make them agents of transformation he can use. Even if you do not see the fruit during your term of service or even lifetime, it will happen because God never fails - and he won't start now.

## Six lessons for pastoral OD

Healthy relationships of trust are critical in facilitating organisational change. I've seen this in commercial businesses as well as in church. To help any organisation that is badly stuck, I find I often have to work on trust issues first. And interestingly healthier relationships are also the usual outcome of any transformative change process. This focus on trust and relationship goes beyond what is normally expected of a consultant. It includes what I would call a pastoral role. I believe to be effective in secular business or a church context, OD practitioners have to play this pastoral role.

But how do you do it? Here are six tips I have found useful in practising pastoral OD:

### 1. Go deeper than the problem presented to you

Usually a client will ask me to look at standard challenges of structure or growth. They rarely come asking me to address the underlying health of internal relationships. But I have found time and again that people issues are at the heart of most organisational issues. For example one CEO came to me because his proposed changes to organisational design (in response to their success) had been met by considerable resistance from staff. The company had grown, but at the cost of internal relationships. Trust was missing. This proved unsustainable.

OD practitioners need to look beyond the perceived problem and the assumed solution already in the client's mind. They need to reach deeper, to the relational 'soul' of the organisation. I find it helpful to ask questions like: Why has the client approached us in the first place? How was this decision made and by whom? And why now? Sometimes I find it's the spill over effects of mounting work pressures

on family life or marriages that have actually prompted a call for help. Or sometimes the CEO is overcome with a crippling loneliness. He or she is shouldering the burden of responsibility for leading change without the benefit of a sounding board.

### 2. Understand what makes individuals tick

To enhance the effectiveness of OD initiatives, take time to understand people, especially the leader. People determine the climate and culture of the organization. I'm sometimes tempted to get engrossed in the task (assignment) too quickly, missing the opportunity to get to know people at a personal level. We obviously understand people better if we take a genuine interest in them. Any individual's professional life is influenced by their family, their likes, dislikes and even their spiritual life.

But we cannot necessarily do this 'cold'. We have to earn people's trust (and explain our approach to the client). And yet in reality I find it is not as intrusive as it sounds. Most people quite like talking about themselves and are touched by your genuine interest.

### 3. Understand the relational dynamics

As well as individuals, we need to understand the relationships between them. Relational dynamics often block or promote change. To use the dynamics of relationships positively and overcome the blockages we need to understand how the leader relates to the staff and vice versa, as well as how staff relate to each other. You can learn only so much about such dynamics having formal discussions with the senior management team in a closed room. It's important to spend quality time with staff, earning their confidences. Spending too much time locked away with the leader or senior management will be grist to the rumour mill.

### 4. Mediate reconciliation

When deep rooted relationship problems prevent change, the pastoral OD practitioner may play a reconciling role. Staff resistance to change may be an indicator of poor leadership or a legacy of previous disappointments. To oil the change process, the OD practitioner may need to address scepticism, restore trust and even help heal broken relationships.

One time I was facilitating a process and people objected to the changes proposed. It turned out that their concerns were not really about the changes themselves. One staff member was objecting because he had been hurt some months previously when he felt his opinion had been ignored. Others were sceptical of the leader's intention of delivering what had been promised. A history of hurt lay beneath the surface. I listened to the concerns of all those involved, which opened opportunities for confession, forgiveness and finally reconciliation. To mediate in such a situation, I had to spend enough time with the people involved on both sides and made special efforts to understand them. This process helped to rebuild trust that had been eroded over a number of years.

### 5. Encourage

One of the key roles of an OD practitioner playing a pastoral role is simply to encourage. Clients usually have the capacity to solve their own problems. In one assignment, the senior director was clear about the changes to be made in his roles and responsibilities, both necessary for himself and for the organization to grow. He also knew how to get his fellow directors on board. He was really looking for an opportunity to share with someone his struggles in the present role and its wider implications on the entire organization. He was aware of his strengths and gifts which could benefit the organization, but needed assurance and the confidence to move ahead. We

prayed together and I encouraged him. This process helped to affirm his sense of personal identity and provided a space to talk about his work, family and spiritual life. We developed a timeframe to plan and be accountable for his decisions. When I met him after two months, I could see that the change had already happened. I simply encouraged and affirmed him, listening to him with empathy.

## 6. Get out of the office

As a pastoral OD practitioner, I find I need to get out of the office. Formal discussion around the desk, writing on the white board, producing numerous sticky notes has its limitations. Personal

informal interaction with individuals or a team gives insight. I've found some of my best consultancy work has taken place on a walk, climbing a hill or having a coffee together. Such occasions are precious and help develop friendship. Retreating from a busy, distracting workplace has a powerful effect. It helps lift our eyes to a wider perspective; it can result in fresh inspiration and vision for change; it can bring clarity of thought and new ideas.

## Pastoral role in OD

As OD practitioners we need to really care about people. We need to be committed that each lives up to their God-given potential. Our

clients may have a job or role to play but they are human beings first and foremost. Our role as OD practitioners does not confine us to formal interventions. To make a 'professional' difference we need to also understand and even influence the 'personal' dimensions of people's lives. It requires clean intentions, genuine interest in people and mutual trust. In organisations, it is not just about structures and systems, but personal relationships. If these relationships improve, the organisation will improve. Our role as Christian OD practitioners is to heal and reconcile relationships. Pastoral OD is surely a calling and a gift from God.

## Grace throughout the change process

We find grace throughout the Bible. The word grace is mentioned 170 times. This shows us how much we need grace in our daily lives including our organizational lives. God's grace gives us the ability to lead and manage organizational change at a time when we need it more than ever. Globalization has brought new opportunities and also escalating needs, expectations and challenges. Organizations have to adapt or die. But adapting to change needs grace.

This article takes the model of change (described in Inspiring Change<sup>3</sup>) and analyses the part that grace plays at every stage of the change process. We see that grace is central in every stage of change.

### 1. Ensuring commitment

*A tertiary education institution approached CORAT Africa for help with an OD process. It was planning to become a university. The board and senior management had requested for the change process. The staffs were enthusiastic about the proposals. In the first meeting, the leadership was open and honest in discussing sensitive issues. They assured us of their commitment. My colleague and I also prayed for them and the process. We prayed for wisdom, understanding and God's guidance. We prayed with them every time an opportunity arose.*

Commitment particularly from top management is a key success factor to any major change. Leaders must strongly desire change. But change is costly. It also affects their own leadership behavior. Leaders must be really up for change as it calls

for intense personal involvement. So much is about timing. As it says in Habakkuk 2:3; "For still the vision awaits its appointed time, it hastens to the end - it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it, it will surely come, it will not delay".<sup>4</sup> Facilitators must be patient.

Leaders and facilitators need to depend on God's grace at the start of such complex and painful processes. They must feel sure that it is God's will and that they are responding to a greater being than themselves. As they surrender to God, what looks too difficult in their eyes may become possible. As God told Paul; "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9 - NIV).

### 2. Gaining understanding

*We took time to study documents from the tertiary education institution. We interviewed various stakeholders and tried to get a feel for their context and culture. It helped that it was clear where the institution was coming from; where it was at the moment; and where it wanted to go. We continued to seek God's wisdom and guidance.*

A leader or facilitator needs a good understanding of the organization - always a complex mix of different people. The culture and context influences how they behave and what will provoke them to change. Facilitators have to try and find out what makes organizations tick, what is really going on under the surface. Facilitators must listen deeply; facilitate rather than prescribe. A change agent needs to pray for wisdom and understanding to be able to see beyond what is obvious. God instructs us in James 1:5, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him".

### 3. Letting go

*In order to change, the organization had to let go a number of things.*

- 1) Funding from the parent ministry. The institution had therefore to identify ways of becoming self-reliant.
- 2) Lax enforcement of discipline due to bureaucratic civil service procedures.
- 3) Mistrust and lack of openness. People had become comfortable with their isolation.
- 4) Poor academic quality control.

Organizations, like human beings, like to hold onto the familiar. A change agent may need to assist people to let go of past ways of behaving and thinking. This will only happen if the leader or facilitator has established trust. We see the same in the story of Jesus and the Samaritan Woman at the well (John 4:4-30). The Samaritan woman was very apprehensive about Jesus being a Jew and did not want to talk to him. However, Jesus slowly created an environment of trust until the woman trusted him enough to open up and let go.

### 4. Energising hope

*We constantly shared with the leadership our thoughts, the emerging issues and their implications. This enhanced their confidence and trust in us. But as they discussed the picture of the emerging future, the leadership and board became ever more excited about new possibilities. There was light at the end of the tunnel. They were ready to plan for change.*

At this stage, the decision to let go presents a new picture to the organization. People become energized and excited about new

<sup>3</sup> James, Rick (2012) Inspiring Change - Creating More Space for Grace in Organisations. Digni, Oslo. ([www.digni.no](http://www.digni.no))

<sup>4</sup> All Bible quotes are from the English Standard Version

possibilities. Leaders and facilitators who are seeking to be guided by God's grace can be encouraged by the scripture: "What is impossible with men is possible with God" (Luke 18:27).

## 5. Planning for change

*The leadership had now a clear picture of the desired outcomes from the change process. They wanted to become financially self-reliant and competitive; display a more positive attitude to work, embed quality control measures. The board and management agreed on the critical areas of change and developed an implementation plan. A task force comprising board members and management planned for the change and ensured that efforts were focused on desired changes. Regular reviews on progress on implementation ensured that efforts were focused on desired changes.*

Leaders or facilitators now need to channel and shape the energy and maintain the momentum. It helps to clarify the desired outcomes from the change process at this stage. For instance, what is the change that we want to see? What does it look like? How will we know when we have changed? How will we measure the difference? Change is about choices; and choices have consequences. This calls for critical analysis of the existing choices, prioritization and rigorous planning to focus efforts on making the desired changes. Planning for change is a collective responsibility. It is not just our responsibility. It requires discernment and dependence on God: "For I know the plans I have for you, to give you a future and a hope" (Jer. 29:11).

## 6. Making it happen

*The institution established an internal change task force. They identified a champion to lead this team. The task force was committed to reaching the desired change. Plans were implemented. The institution is now a fully-fledged university. Today the leadership excitedly talks about the change process it went through and how far it has come.*

Planned change must be implemented for actual change to take place. It may be valuable to establish internal change task force or hire an external facilitator. This is arguably the most crucial step in the change process. Change agents will need to systematically ensure that plans are implemented. This can identify gaps that need corrective action. Grace is still central to this stage: "Now, faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1).

It is always difficult to facilitate change. This is because change is costly and it is about people's lives. It is important to have clarity on the desired outcomes. Willingness to change, to let go and make it happen are paramount to getting to one's destination. We need to draw from God's grace for wisdom, understanding and guidance. We would not be able to accomplish much without God's grace. Grace is central in every stage of the change process.

## What about my brother's killers? Forgiveness in South Sudan

“Not forgiving someone is like drinking poison yourself and expecting the other person to die” according to Bishop Isaiah Dau from South Sudan. “It will slow you down and hinder everything you do”.

Isaiah should know about this better than most of us. A few years ago his younger brother was murdered by members of his own clan - people Isaiah knows well. The only appropriate cultural response was revenge. “I really struggled with this. He was my younger brother. How could I stand aside? I was so so angry. But with great difficulty I decided to let the law take its own course instead. By choosing to forgive and not revenge, peace was able to grow between our families”.

“As a Christian I have no other option, but to forgive” according to Isaiah. It is pretty black and white - not much room for different interpretations. “I take strength from the Lord's prayer where Jesus commands us to forgive others as Christ forgives us”.

Isaiah continues, “As a leader I cannot afford to hold grudges... even when they are so wrong. Sometimes as a leader I'm desperate to show them whose boss. But I know that if I remain bitter it will harm me more than the person I'm angry with. It gets in the way of my leadership. When I'm bitter I cannot respond reasonably to day-to-day issues. It cuts me off from God and cuts me off from other people. It only slows me down”.

Forgiveness is hard work. You are dealing with a reality of pain and loss that cannot be pretended away. “I've discovered it takes time to let go and forgive. It keeps coming back. It is a daily struggle. I have to go on forgiving these people”. Isaiah has found it helps if you:

- Acknowledge the reality of what has happened. You can be angry. But you cannot go on living in that. You have to deal with it for your own good. You have to move on, however difficult.
- Do not wait for an apology. “If they ask for forgiveness, you forgive. If they don't ask for forgiveness, you still forgive.”
- Reinforce your decision to forgive with actions – “Find opportunities to act graciously. As you back up your decisions with actions your feelings will change.”
- Make it a habit. Forgiveness is not just about the big things. It is also the mundane issues too. As Isaiah says of his own church: “Forgiveness is a daily thing with the people we work with. If you speak the truth, some people will take offence”

As Christian leader himself, Isaiah realises he has to ask for forgiveness too. He is not always right and must make painful apologies too. “One time we had a serious crisis with a fellow church leader. He started it, but the way I reacted was even more wrong. I was so angry I wanted to slap him. I so nearly resorted to violence. Fortunately before I did, I thought about the consequences of my action - a church leader who has always spoken about forgiveness hitting another Christian. The whole community would see. So instead, I said to the man ‘I'm sorry. The way I reacted was wrong’. I left it at that and did not blame him for starting it. He, in turn, apologised. A deeper friendship was born.”

Such experiences stand him in good stead for his current role as a mediator in the South Sudan peace talks. Isaiah believes that forgiveness in such a context of conflict is not an optional extra, or the icing on the cake, but is absolutely fundamental. He relates: “Throughout the process very, very wrong things have been done, to people, to communities, to the nation. Not everyone will see forgiveness the way we do. But if

we do not deal with it and publicly forgive, there may be genocide.”

The conflict in South Sudan may seem a long way from our day-to-day office reality. In our contexts, the consequences of a lack of forgiveness will rarely be so extreme. Yet the underlying principles are always the same.

It is only forgiveness that can truly transform any conflict whether in the office or in Sudan. Genuine forgiveness is not easy or superficial. It is usually incredibly painful and costly. Just as with the peace talks, forgiveness is all about thinking beyond your self-interest (or clan interest). As Isaiah points out “It is about genuinely putting the interests of others before your own”. It sounds pretty close to what Jesus meant when he said: ‘Love your enemies’.