



EMERSON ON LOVE

—SHANN RAY FERCH

Mediocre people want to be loved.
True people are lovely.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

When I first discovered Emerson's two-part understanding I was caught short, thinking of the implications.

Mediocre people want to be loved.

Wait a minute, I thought. I want to be loved...does that mean I'm mediocre?

Yes, I have to admit I am often mediocre. When I'm needy or reactive, defensive or self-absorbed, when I live from basic anger or anxiety or fear, in effect I place the responsibility for my own existence in the hands of others, expecting them to fulfill the needs of life for me. I lose sight of my own responsibility to the concrete as well as the less tangible possibilities of love. I am unable to access an interior devoted to the service of others, life, or God.

True people are lovely.

The very words invoke quality of life. They hearken us toward vulnerability, humility, surrender, and a word so often hated in the present world: submission. But the submission Emerson calls us to is not of the groveling form. Rather, it is submission to love itself—the ultimate expression of legitimate greatness and power. In reading Emerson with my wife Jennifer, we were struck by the nuances of what it means to be lovely. Emerson gives of his own abounding loveliness and in so doing, leads us to a more precise and fearless appreciation of self-responsibility and collective responsibility for life together. In self-responsibility we recognize how we harmfully impact the body, heart, mind, and spirit of others. The idea of noticing our own weaknesses and moving away from the desire to name the faults of



others may be the very source of the capacity to heal disjointed and painful relational systems. Unfortunately, often what we discover when we descend into our own interior is a dangerous and pernicious tendency to hold the beloved other (family members, colleagues, other people in general, our leaders, humanity itself, and of course our enemies) in a dark light. By doing so, we hide ourselves and fail to notice the reach of our own shadow in the world.

In this, the sixth volume of the *International Journal of Servant-Leadership*, I hope you find the kind of understanding I've found in these wonderful works of science, social justice, and poetry. This understanding has shaken me, and led me to a deeper respect for the multiple complexities, difficulties, and grave harms that often seem to run rampant in individual and family life, organizational life, and in the global context. I want to thank the authors in this volume for giving so much thoughtfulness and such heart to the work of servant leadership around the world.

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY: FORGIVENESS, LOVE,
SERVANT LEADERSHIP, AND HEALING

As a systems psychologist, I often witness the pervasiveness of how we fortify and self-protect, and how this can feel inescapable. In my experience, unless they are presented with the idea, people rarely think of forgiveness. For most, forgiveness and the world of relationships in which forgiveness exists and finds its home is like an alternate universe behind an ever-hidden door. And even on the chance we find the door open and light sifting from the opening, our own anger, bitterness, fear, and shame often keep us from entering in. A unique progression asserts itself: (1) we don't often think of forgiveness; (2) when we do, we often resist the idea; (3) when we cease our resistance, we may think, *maybe I need to forgive someone*. Strangely, however, if the progression stops there life remains somewhat muted. The real essence of forgiveness can take us farther. When we reach beyond ourselves we come into a more revolutionary thought—the knowledge that *we need to ask forgiveness*. With this knowledge we go to others, humble ourselves, ask forgiveness, and change—and it is precisely this lifestyle of humble power and real change that draws others near and evokes in them their own desire to be responsible.

When we return to appropriate vulnerability and responsibility, the soulful life Robert Greenleaf envisioned opens to our awareness. After summoning the courage to surrender, to *ask* forgiveness and change in ways



our beloved ones find meaningful, the act of *granting* forgiveness becomes fluid and natural. We find our own human evil is connected to the darkness of all humanity, and we forgo the desire to “set others straight.” From here, philosophically and relationally, an earned ground develops in which we call on a way of life that reconciles relationships, ends injustice, and creates a reverberant systemic influence that generates healing, love, and power.

No one can doubt it is a difficult human task to move from a stance of resentment, bitterness, or hatred for another, toward a stance in which we are no longer focused on how we’ve been wronged but rather our central movement engages the disciplined life of self-responsibility that generates greater collective responsibility. Desmond Tutu helps us navigate the complexities. “Forgiving and being reconciled are not about pretending that things are other than they are...true reconciliation exposes the awfulness, the abuse, the pain, the degradation, the truth.”¹ To truly encounter the ultimacy of the idea that mercy triumphs over justice requires internal fortitude and the kind of human tenacity that brings the truth out in the open, not to criminalize or demonize the one who has harmed us, but to create greater ground for personal and collective integrity. In fact, as Tutu states, “in the act of forgiveness we are declaring our faith in the future of a relationship and in the capacity of the wrongdoer to make a new beginning on a course that will be different from the one that caused us the wrong.”²

A profound movement within the scientific literature is taking place, a movement that reflects Tutu’s call to transparency and real change. The experimental studies of Robert Enright have begun to call people back to the virtue of forgiveness by showing the robust connection between forgiveness and greater health. In studies involving randomized experimental and control groups, Enright’s findings declare that people who undergo a forgiveness process achieve significantly greater health than those who don’t. Specifically, he and his research team conducted studies across a broad range of groups, including incest survivors, drug users, cardiac patients, emotionally abused women, terminally ill elderly cancer patients, grade school students, and at risk middle school students. Data was gathered in the United States, Northern Ireland (Belfast), and Korea (Seoul). Within the groups and across nations, those who underwent a process of forgiveness experienced some astounding effects: less depression, less anxiety, less anger, less drug-seeking behaviors, less PTSD symptoms, greater hope, greater self-esteem and self-worth, greater academic achievement, greater forgiveness capacity, more efficiently functioning hearts, and greater overall emotional well-being.³



Researchers have discovered the healing powers of forgiveness are not only astonishing, but long lasting—people continue to experience greater emotional well-being at four-month and fourteen-month follow-ups, and on into the lifespan. Even more central to the human endeavor is not just forgiveness, but the will to ask forgiveness, the will to take responsibility and change. Yet this reversal of human nature, this quiet embrace of a more divine will, requires great courage. Who among us wants to admit we are at fault, let alone come to terms with the fact that sometimes we are the cause of awfulness...abuse...pain...degradation? “We do not usually rush to expose our vulnerability and our sinfulness,” Tutu writes, “but if the process of forgiveness and healing is to succeed, ultimately acknowledgement by the culprit is indispensable.”⁴ Engaging the bravery to admit our own darkness, along with the will to change our behaviors in order to honor others... this may characterize the primary gift of those who are truly human. With this bravery we become healthy, and when we are healthy we are a healing presence in the lives of those around us...we are healers.

A good test is to note how much time we spend talking about the faults of others. An appreciative measure of health, verified in Gottman’s⁵ research on mature relationships, is five to ten encounters of meaningful, sincere, and positive regard for the “other” to every one critique—and in the context of moving conflict from degenerative to life-affirming, this is done regardless of the perceived level of the “other’s” fault. In other words, a mature person is capable of turning relational deficit to relational potential, and this is generally done through actively choosing gratitude. Understandably, under heavy resistance the process may be realized late or never, but even so, the ground for true relationship is established and in a circular sense the potential for interpersonal integrity is unleashed. This is the unconditional forgiveness we see in South Africa, time after time, that eventually breaks the hard-heartedness of the offender and returns him or her whole to the human family; it is the echo of People Power from Ninoy and Corazon Aquino and the Philippines, one of the first nonviolent revolutions of the modern age; and it is the constant theme in Martin Luther King Jr.’s groundbreaking work to heal the center of American life.

In this light, though motive can be questioned, even one of the most rabid racists of the last century communicated at long last that the thought and life of Martin Luther King Jr. had gone to work on his interior and called him to do something he’d formerly set his whole life against. Near death, former governor of Alabama George Wallace, a man famous for personal



viciousness and race atrocity, sought forgiveness for the harms he'd caused African Americans.⁶ Martin Luther King Jr. effectively reached beyond death and spoke life, and such life endures and does not diminish.

EMERSON'S RESONANT CALL: TRUE PEOPLE ARE LOVELY

When we are lovely we consider what it means to understand our own weakness or personal darkness, whether in our homes or at our jobs or between nations. We begin to embrace our own brokenness. The natural tendency of humanity is to externalize blame for a given communal conflict—but the life of love sustains the truths that heal us and we begin to internalize self-responsibility for system health rather than externalize blame; in this context, in the family as well as in work, and even in the course of nations, resilience and moral power, infused by love, transform the system. We are lifted out of our own self-embeddedness and given a Martin Luther King Jr. sense of self-transcendence, a way of living that engages humanity's greatness:

Everybody can be great because everybody can serve...you only need a heart full of grace...a soul generated by love, and you can be that servant.
(Martin Luther King Jr.)⁷

People who are lovely, as well as communities that are lovely, have their own inherent power. They form a tapestry of servant-leadership whose threads reveal the art of emotional discipline and intellectual discernment as the centerpiece of spiritual love. In so doing, they call each of us toward vital responses to human suffering. Such responses are grounded in wisdom regarding human conflict, maturity in the face of oppression, and real answers—familial, societal, and global—that rise from the crucible of potential that is our humanity. One of the most striking people I know, intellectually, in her convictions, and in her physical way with the world, is an African American woman named Sharon Canda. She teaches young people physical education, and she is a woman of brilliance and ready engagement with the world. I've often wondered, as people of shared humanity, how do we overcome the great atrocities we've suffered? Her life speaks an answer that rings like a trumpet of justice. Consider the horrors and terrors faced by the millions who died terrible deaths during the North American slave trade. Consider the unmitigated suffering of those who were oppressed day and night in a common fight for freedom from slavery, here on American soil. And now consider the generations of children who have arisen from a



long line of former slaves to become leaders of this country, a powerful and undergirding force of wisdom, perseverance, and love in the face of a history of replete with violation suffered at the hands of those who not only enslaved them, but often sought to systematically destroy them.

Finally, consider Sharon Canda, a woman who speaks with such intensity of focus, and such attention to the compassion housed in the human heart, just to be in her presence is to be given a new view of life. Listen to her words:

Forgiveness is the way out of self-damnation: to ask forgiveness and to grant forgiveness...these things change you—and if forgiveness is the way out of self-damnation, then redemption keeps one from crawling back in. I have been as a wanderer on the face of this earth; looking for truth and goodness. I have learned to allow others to love me and have learned to love in return; herein is the tension and the balance. My family's investment in me is priceless; for without that, how could I know where I've come from or to whom I am connected with?

My mother and father were born in Vicksburg, Mississippi in the mid to late 1930's. I was born in Vicksburg, Mississippi in 1957. We moved from there in 1958. Did you know that black families were frequently hung from the Mississippi bridge?

My students have been the best teachers of true worth and integrity. Their love and acceptance is simple. Their purity of heart allowed me rest, healing, and courage.

I've been counted out. I've been made fun of, and beaten up. I've been thought of as a loser.

But one day, the Lord spoke these words into my heart: "You are a thoroughbred."

William Wilberforce is an excellent example of honor. From him, I've learned the importance of standing one's ground; to never concede that which is good and right. Ironically while Wilberforce fought to abolish the slave trade in Great Britain in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Roger B. Taney, the United States chief justice proclaimed that blacks were an inferior race and not worthy to be counted as citizens.

Who stood up for me? Who will stand up for the children and people everywhere who suffer? No longer do I count myself as insignificant. We all have an important role to play in this life, for oppression is the bully who hits you and dares you to get up. Within my heart is recorded every



single injury and insult. Also within my heart is the audacity to get up and keep on moving. I see it more clearly now through Paulo Freire's lenses. He would say, yes you've been oppressed and it is through you that your oppressors will be taught. He would tell me that freedom is mine only if and when I take the initiative to teach, love, and lead with integrity; as I recall Freire's mandate, my heart leaps within me.

If I chose to hate and persecute others, Freire would tell me that I've ceased to be a worthy guide and have instead become an oppressor. Oppressors cannot liberate others because the sheer nature of an oppressor is to deny and destroy the rights of others. It is not difficult to hate and blame others, the more difficult thing is to humble oneself, find out what is the right thing to do and go do it with reckless abandon. I don't need permission to help; the fact that I'm breathing is my light and right upon this path.

I stand in excellent company with those who have understood ridicule, poverty, and loneliness. Their courage and sacrifice is my badge of honor. Their persistence leads me along narrow paths. I see the devastation. I hear the torment of the soul, for it once was mine. But now simplicity, forgiveness, and love guide my steps.

In dialogues with people like Sharon Canda the reality of love and power is revealed as so crucial not only in personal life, but also in business, politics, the arts, philosophy, theology, and all forms of human endeavor; from a true sense of love an underlying and very potent will emerges and points toward restorative justice. Historically, economics, race, and gender, as well as sexual and religious preference have often conferred on a select few in society an undue amount of power. We see this both in the slavery policies in early America as well as in the Native American genocide. Atrocities as severe and grievous as the Nazi crimes against humanity are harbored in U.S. history as well.

Consider the KKK, the lynch mobs, individuals and groups who hanged, tortured, and killed African Americans in the dark, yet went to church on Sunday in the light. Consider the Sand Creek Massacre just more than a hundred years past, in which U.S. Cavalry troops killed Cheyenne women and children, disgracing and mutilating their bodies. Consider a more present echo: the My Lai massacre U.S military personnel perpetrated in Vietnam. Today, this shadow extends in generally more subtle but still pernicious forms of economic, race, gender, sexual, and religious oppression. Command and control leadership is another remnant: the idea that in conflict (or even during peace) we consciously or unconsciously establish



our own view by dominating or violating the humanity of the other. Peggy McIntosh's work on unveiling white privilege⁸ orients us toward thought in critical theory, and Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy,⁹ education that frees others from oppression and moves us to greater perception and more true living. Bell hooks¹⁰ provides a resonant look at patriarchy, white supremacy, and male privilege, and is a gorgeous and equally deep imprint of the ethos found in McIntosh and Freire.

Servant-leaders are attuned to the individual and collective paradox of liberty and responsibility. Some time ago in the Philippines I was given the opportunity to do collaborative work with Filipino leaders on servant-leadership and nation building. A groundswell of care was imparted to me and my family from my Filipino colleagues and their families. The bravery that shines throughout the Filipino culture won me over: from the Spanish execution of José Rizal, which led to the Philippine Revolution of 1898, to the brutality endured by Filipino and American troops in the Bataan Death March of World War II, all the way to more recent history and the assassination of Ninoy Aquino under the Marcos regime. Ninoy's death became the seed for a nonviolent revolution that was globally evocative, unseating the despot Marcos and leading to the democratic election of Ninoy's wife, Corazon Aquino, as president. Just as South Africa would do some years later, those in positions of power in government made a bold move. Corazon Aquino and her cabinet wrote love, yes *love*, directly into their new national constitution. Corazon Aquino and her own "beloved community" preceded and heralded an inspired zeitgeist of nonviolent revolutions the world over: the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia, the fall of Communism, the forgiveness-based revolution in South Africa. Because of love, her husband made the ultimate sacrifice. He chose to live and die for his people.

Because of love, Corazon Aquino chose to lead her nation with dignity and honor.

When she died her people remembered her legacy with an outpouring of love, sentiment, and song.

The servant-leader aspires to a lovely way of life, one that inspires the dreaming of great dreams, even when such dreams are confronted by seemingly insurmountable losses. In the midst of such losses, the life of the servant as leader is true.

The life of the servant leader is lovely.

Emerson's discernment draws near to the heart of the world as if to whisper, do not be afraid...true people are lovely.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

As a poet and prose writer Shann Ray Ferch's work has appeared in some of the nation's leading literary venues including *McSweeney's*, *Poetry International*, *The William and Mary Review*, *StoryQuarterly*, *Northwest Review*, and *Narrative Magazine*. He serves as Professor of Leadership with the internationally recognized PhD Program in Leadership Studies at Gonzaga University where he teaches leadership and forgiveness studies, with an emphasis on how servant-leadership honors personal and collective responsibility, and self-transcendence across the disciplines. His anthology of essays, *The Spirit of Servant Leadership*, edited with Larry C. Spears, is published with Paulist Press. *American Masculine*, his collection of short stories, won the Breadloaf Writers' Conference Bakeless Prize and appears with Graywolf Press. He is the Editor of *The International Journal of Servant-Leadership*.

NOTES

1. Tutu, D. M. (1997) *No future without forgiveness*, p. 270.
2. Ibid., p. 273.
3. The work of Robert Enright and his co-researchers is compelling. I've included a reference list of some of their recent research here for those who want to pursue further understanding:
Baskin, T. W., & Enright, R. D. (2004). Intervention studies on forgiveness: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 82, 79–90.
Coyle, C. T., & Enright, R. D. (1997). Forgiveness intervention with post-abortion men. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 65(6), 1042–1046.
Enright, R. D. (2001). *Forgiveness is a choice*. Washington, DC: APA Books. (This book is for the general public.) Book also has been translated into Complex Chinese, Japanese, Korean, German, and Romanian.
Enright, R. D. (2004). *Rising above the storm clouds*. Washington, DC: Magination Press (an imprint of the American Psychological Association; this is a children's picture book on forgiveness with notes for parents). Book has also been translated into Egyptian Arabic and Korean.
Enright, R. D. (2004) *Enright Forgiveness Inventory*. Redwood City, CA: Mind Garden.
Enright, R. D., & Fitzgibbons, R. (2000). Helping clients forgive: An empirical guide for resolving anger and restoring hope. Washington, DC: APA Books. (This book is for helping professionals in psychology, psychiatry and related disciplines.) Book also has been translated into Complex Chinese.
Enright, R. D., Gassin, E. A., & Knutson, J. A. (2003). Waging peace through forgiveness in Belfast, Northern Ireland: A review and proposal for mental health improvement of children. *Journal of Research in Education*, 13, 51–61.



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4. Tutu, D. M. (1997) *No future without forgiveness*, p 270.
 5. For Gottman's research see Gottman, J. and Declaire, J. (2002). *The relationship cure: A five-step guide to strengthening your marriage, family, and friendships*. Random House. Also see Gottman, J. (1995). *Why marriages succeed or fail: And how you can make yours last*. Simon and Schuster.
 6. See Thomas Healey (1996), *The two deaths of George Wallace: The question of forgiveness*, Black Belt Press.
 7. This quote comes from MLK's speech "The Drum Major Instinct," and can be found in *A testament of hope: The essential writings and speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.* Enjoy the unforgettable voice of MLK as he delivers this quote at www.thekingcenter.com.
 8. See Peggy McIntosh's forerunning essay "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" in *White privilege: Essential readings on the other side of racism*, edited by Paula S. Rothenberg, (2007), W. H. Freeman.
 9. Freire, P. (1990). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*.
 10. hooks, b. (1984). *Feminist theory: From margin to center*.