



Amish Grace: How Forgiveness Transcended Tragedy

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On Monday morning, October 2, 2006, a gunman entered a one-room Amish school in Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania. In front of twenty-five horrified pupils, thirty-two-year-old Charles Roberts ordered the boys and the teacher to leave. After tying the legs of the ten remaining girls, Roberts prepared to shoot them execution with an automatic rifle and four hundred rounds of ammunition that he brought for the task. The oldest hostage, a thirteen-year-old, begged Roberts to "shoot me first and let the little ones go." Refusing her offer, he opened fire on all of them, killing five and leaving the others critically wounded. He then shot himself as police stormed the building. His motivation? "I'm angry at God for taking my little daughter," he told the children before the massacre. The story captured the attention of broadcast and print media in the United States and around the world. By Tuesday morning some fifty television crews had clogged the small village of Nickel Mines, staying for five days until the killer and the killed were buried. The blood was barely dry on the schoolhouse floor when Amish parents brought words of forgiveness to the family of the one who had slain their children.

The outside world was incredulous that such forgiveness could be offered so quickly for such a heinous crime. Of the hundreds of media queries that the authors received about the shooting, questions about forgiveness rose to the top. Forgiveness, in fact, eclipsed the tragic story, trumping the violence and arresting the world's attention.

Within a week of the murders, Amish forgiveness was a central theme in more than 2,400 news stories around the world. The Washington Post, The New York Times, USA Today, Newsweek, NBC Nightly News, CBS Morning News, Larry King Live, Fox News, Oprah, and dozens of other media outlets heralded the forgiving Amish. From the Khaleej Times (United Arab Emirates) to Australian television, international media were opining on Amish forgiveness. Three weeks after the shooting, "Amish forgiveness" had appeared in 2,900 news stories worldwide and on 534,000 web sites.

Fresh from the funerals where they had buried their own children, grieving Amish families accounted for half of the seventy-five people who attended the killer's burial. Roberts' widow was deeply moved by their presence as Amish families greeted her and her three children. The forgiveness went beyond talk and graveside presence: the Amish also supported a fund for the shooter's family.

AMISH GRACE explores the many questions this story raises about the religious beliefs and habits that led the Amish to forgive so quickly. It looks at the ties between forgiveness and membership in a cloistered communal society and ask if Amish practices parallel or diverge from other religious and secular notions of forgiveness. It will also address the matter of why forgiveness became news. "All the religions teach it," mused an observer, "but no one does it like the Amish." Regardless of the cultural seedbed that nourished this story, the surprising act of Amish forgiveness begs for a deeper exploration. How could the Amish do this? What did this act mean to them? And how might their witness prove useful to the rest of us?

Amish Grace: How Forgiveness Transcended Tragedy Details

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From Reader Review Amish Grace: How Forgiveness Transcended Tragedy for online ebook

Yibbie says

The first section of this book is so heart wrenching. As the author says, in some way we lost last safe place in America. What those families suffered is terrible. Then they shocked the nation with their ready offer of forgiveness. That part of the book was interesting, and I learned quite a bit.

It was the last two sections that were troubling. There the author delves into the philosophy, theology and psychology of forgiveness in general, and in the Amish communities in particular. Kraybill doesn't try to come to any conclusion, just explain what people believe.

The Amish beliefs are so sad. While they are correct that we must forgive those that hurt us because the Bible says so, they are wrong in tying their forgiveness of others to their salvation. The saddest part of this book is, as you go along, you start to realize just how works basted their theology is. Salvation for them is not in trusting Jesus' sacrifice. It's in submitting to men and man's rules. It's in their keeping unity at all costs. It's in their own efforts. What could be sadder than a group who has the Bible but chooses to add Man's rules to it.

Christ didn't die so we can continue to earn our salvation. He died so we can have the assurance that we are going to heaven. He has forgiven us our sins, and commands we show the same forgiveness to others. It's a way of showing His love to others, not a way of maintaining our salvation.

The author's conclusion is strange as well. Yes the Amish have been taught to forgive since they were born, and it is a tradition for them. His conclusion though is that they are the only ones that could forgive a tragedy such as that because of their traditions. The Biblical command applies to every Christian, and even if it's not their culture. The Lord will strengthen those that want to follow His commands, making it possible for anyone to forgive.

So really I won't recommend this book, unless your researching Amish beliefs. Even though the Bible is quoted as authoritative, it becomes quite clear that tradition carries just as much weight for them as it does.

Fionna says

I found this book to be very repetative and dull. While the concept is interesting, the execution left a lot to be desired. The first third of the book tells of the events leading up to, during and immediately after the Nickels Mines schoolhouse tragedy. The last 2/3 is where the authors discuss forgiveness as practised by the Amish. It had the potential to be interesting but just didn't deliver. It seemed as if I was reading the same things over and over again, just worded differently, or using a different example. Every once in a while I would read a paragraph or two that really made me think about forgiveness and my faith so it wasn't a complete loss, but still....

With more organization and many fewer pages this could have been an interesting book or article but just didn't do much for me as it was.

Karola Zambrano says

Amé este libro, me ayudó mucho a reflexionar sobre como vivimos nuestra vida actualmente: donde colocamos nuestras prioridades, a qué le dedicamos tiempo y en especial, nuestra falta de humildad muchas veces para acatar, perdonar y amar.

A simple vista es una comunidad que se restringe demasiado y no "disfruta" de la modernidad, sin embargo leyendo el libro pude entender mejor en dónde están sus valores y cómo el auto-restringirse ayuda a que sus familias y comunidades tengan bajos índices de violencia, de delitos, etc. Lleva mucha entrega a sus creencias (ellos viven separados del mundo, aunque tengan vecinos no amish) pero a ellos les funciona, muy pocos se alejan de su comunidad e incluso unos pocos que lo hacen, regresan.

Muy interesante y digno de leer, en estos párrafos no podría hacerle honor a lo complejo y hermoso de su comunidad, el libro lo hace mucho mejor, toma un estudio más profundo de sus costumbres y creencias el entender cómo fueron capaces de perdonar lo sucedido en el asesinato en su escuela, este libro lo explica muy bien.

Lo recomiendo mucho.

Cindey says

Okay, first big mistake was to pick this up at 9:30 p.m. "just to read the jacket." That led to opening the book, then to starting to read it, and now it is almost midnight and I haven't put it down. I've already highlighted a significant part of what I've read (for those who don't know me, I am an AVID highlighter -- which is why I have to BUY my books, not borrow them from a library). There is so much to learn from this book about REAL forgiveness and reconciliation...but lots of questions: Could we "English" really respond as the Amish did, since our culture seems justice with revenge or retribution? If the killer had lived, would the situation have been different? Lots more questions. Lots of things to think about. Can't rate the book, yet, because I haven't finished it, but so far, it gets 5 stars.

Heather says

I grew up near Lancaster, PA and when the shooting in Nickel Mines occurred in 2006 I was among the very, very shocked and very saddened. When I heard of the forgiveness bestowed by the Amish, I had disbelief and after reading this book, it became clearer to me that forgiveness wasn't really a choice, it's a way of life for the Amish. The book delves into the reasons behind the Amish practice of forgiveness when it comes to outsiders - and how the opposite occurs when a fellow Amish person chooses not to follow the Amish way of life.

I felt the book did keep going back to things it had already discussed, a lot of breaks in the flow, but there were very interesting historical components and explanations for why the Amish forgive those who commit horrific crimes.

The book made me think about my own life and how forgiveness is so hard for me. I will definitely try to be

more forgiving in the future and use the Amish way as an example.

Katrina says

Amazing discussion of forgiveness after a horrible community tragedy. I loved this book!

Jeff says

The first third of the book is utterly soul-shattering, in the best possible way. The calm, clear-eyed way the authors describe what happened in Nickel Mines (which takes up no more than a few pages), and then the beautiful succession of loving acts that transpired in its wake, will remind you that, despite all daily evidence to the contrary, sometimes people are good -- no, *wonderful* -- simply because they want to be.

The last two thirds of the book are quite a bit drier, and although they're interesting, they're sort of a hard landing after the way it begins; it becomes more of an academic look at the nature of forgiveness, and its roots in Amish tradition, than the spiritual experience explored in Part One. The whole thing is still well worth reading, but after landing with so much initial impact, it's a little disappointing to feel the book's energy fade.

Jo says

This is an incredibly sad story but also incredibly moving. I'm not sure I would of been able to forgive such an unspeakable act. This book was a lesson in forgiveness and selflessness. Inspiring.

Glenn says

Forgiveness is at the core of Christianity, yet I suspect it is many times one of our least-practiced virtues. It is certainly among the most difficult, and flies in the face of human nature and modern society, both of which typically tells us to revenge wrongs. This book examines the concept of forgiveness in the context of the infamous and horrific Nickel Mines school shooting. Along the way, the authors, all professors in Amish history and culture, provide insights into both the Lancaster PA.-area Amish, and the Anabaptists in America as a whole. It also examines how difficult or easy it is to forgive, looks at the difference between forgiveness (exchanging hate for love) and pardon (releasing someone from obligation for an offense), and whether or not extending forgiveness in the wake of something as repugnant as the Nickel Mines shooting is even desirable.

After reading this book, I am even more convinced of the necessity for forgiveness. Definitely recommended.

Owlseyes says

The facts are these: on the 2nd of October, 2006, in Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania USA, a man got inside a school (belonging to an Amish community), shot 10 school girls and then killed himself. Five children got killed.

I've watched the movie (Amish Grace) based on the book... and those facts.

Obviously, it was a tragedy for both the children's parents and to the wife of the shooter, namely. The story has an high point, because it revolves around the notion of forgiveness (a very distinct trait of the Amish community). Still, on the facts domain, I would refer the mother of the shooter who, some years on, said there are "no words to describe what it felt like...70 Amish people encircling us" (at funeral's day). The wife of the shooter spoke of "redemption". Defying logic and human common sense, the Amish community followed the way of forgiveness.

The fictionalized story talks about a man ruminating upon a baby child he'd lost; he's preparing the assault on the school, telling no one about that. When it happens (the tragedy) some of the parents of the children involved follow the way of forgiveness.

But there's one mother --Ida--who dares to "hate the man who took our daughter's [Mary Beth] life"; she thinks about leaving the community; grief-therapy sessions won't work. Her sister had been shunned in the past from the community.

During those sessions, it's easy to spot strong, opposing currents of feelings; on one side some mothers who point the way of forgiving, but Ida being very reluctant, facing the troubled wife of the shooter, unmercifully. Also, a reporter who wonders repeatedly throughout the movie: how genuine the forgiveness had been.

The movie will surely make you wonder about those common terms (and dilemmas) such as "forgetting and forgiving", "justice by man versus divine justice"; pardon or.... forgiving.

Meanwhile, one of the children (Rebecca) who had been in a coma, in hospital, recovers and tells about the brave attitude of Mary Beth before being killed. MB asked to be shot first and nevertheless would pray for the shooter. Upon knowing these details Ida changes her attitude and affirms: "before she died ...MB had forgiveness in her heart, I cannot do no less".

The story results great because it challenges one to see the difference between an world-view [check on the reporter] and the Amish community very uncommon way of life; one of humility, kindness ...the community above the individual.

Dawn Livingston says

The first 50 pages detailing a horrific incident and its aftermath are worth reading the book alone. And I think the book is worth owning, not just borrowing from the library. And it's worth reading (at least the first 50 pages) more than once. It's heartbreaking, uplifting, beautiful. I had to keep putting the book down because the tears in my eyes made me unable to see the pages clearly.

The touching comments and views remind me of a poem by a 17th century Puritan poet Anne Bradstreet called *In Memory of My Dear Grandchild Elizabeth Bradstreet*. It's a touching poem that shares the Amish view of life as fleeting and being grateful for what one has.

"Farewell dear babe, my heart's too much content,
Farewell sweet babe, the pleasure of mine eye,
Farewell fair flower that for a space was lent,
Then ta'en away unto eternity.
Blest babe, why should I once bewail thy fate,
Or sigh thy days so soon were terminate,
Sith thou art settled in an everlasting state."

The rest of the book after the first 50 pages talks about the culture of forgiveness in the Amish community and the difference between forgiveness, reconciliation and pardon. It also touches on Amish history here and there back when they were called Anabaptists (rebaptizers) in the 1500's.

I highly recommend this book to anyone. If you're not a Christian I'm not sure what you might think of this book considering it focuses on faith, forgiveness in relation to Christianity. I think some might still find it beautiful.

I recommend this book in particular to: Christians; people interested in the idea of faith, forgiveness, crime and punishment and the Amish.

Eric Piotrowski says

Like many people, I was profoundly moved by the spirit of forgiveness that radiated out of Nickel Mines after the school shooting in 2006. When I learned about this book, I dropped everything and ran to read it. I was not disappointed with the in-depth exploration of forgiveness and the Amish culture that made it possible.

The authors do a superb job providing important detail of the incident and its impact on the community, without watering down the severity of the atrocity or resorting to caricature -- either with the Amish community or the man who committed the crime.

This book taught me important things about Amish life, their religious perspective, and how we can all learn from their example. (And, perhaps even more importantly, why we're not all poised to react to things in exactly the same way.) There's a bit of repetition, and some delving into the arcane backstory of Amish

traditions, but those are minor critiques. Highly recommended.

Maggie says

excellent and balance account of "how" the amish live out of a center of forgiveness and consequently were quick to forgive the man who took the lives of their young school girls. it is difficult to wrap one's mind around such rapid and unconditional forgiveness and this book goes the distance in explaining the context of how such a thing can be done. it is balanced because those few in the media who criticized this act of instant forgiveness (even as most of us stood in stunned silence and awe) had their points fairly represented also.

even though 98% of this book is about that dreadful event of murder and its aftermath of forgiveness, the book can be read as a serious treatise on what forgiveness means, both in the causes/reasons for it as well as the consequences of offering forgiveness even to those who obviously do not "deserve" forgiveness

it is a christian centered theology explained through a practical dynamic of how they could have been so gracious and what it means to do so.

Annie says

Read because I grew up not too far from the highest concentration of Amish in the world: Holmes County, Ohio, and because I didn't know much about the Nickel Mines shooting.

This book first goes over the Nickel Mines school shooting incident itself, then the aftermath, focusing on the victims' families extending friendship to the shooter's family and forgiveness to the dead shooter. Next, it briefly traces the history of the Amish faith, and then it analyzes how that history affects the practice of Amish faith (including forgiveness). The authors examine other incidences where the Amish extended forgiveness in unusual circumstances to support their assertion that the Amish response to the school shooting was not unusual for Amish people.

A decent overview and analysis of Amish culture and religion in the context of the tragedy.

Chase says

This book takes a look at the tragic shooting in a school house in the Amish community in Lancaster, PA. Parents lost five children in the shooting yet amazed the world by forgiving the man almost immediately after it happened. This book asks the question why and how were they able to forgive so quickly and "easily." I never really knew much about the theology of the Amish until I read this book. I would not say that this book is an extensive systematic theology of what they believe (for in fact the Amish do not have a systematic theology in the 300 years of their existence according the authors). But it does give us their motivation. These people basically believe that, "granting forgiveness to one's debtors is an act that God requires of those who seek divine forgiveness." The Amish see divine forgiveness very very closely

intertwined with human forgiveness. If the Amish do not show grace to others how can God? In my opinion this makes logical sense but to me has a serious error. I feel that they could fall into a trap of a works based faith. The Amish clearly understand that Jesus came and died for the forgiveness of sins but at the same time they feel they have to do so something (i.e. a work) to keep this forgiveness. Also, "this understanding of salvation reflects the Amish focus on practice rather than doctrine..." The Amish have an emphasis on orthopraxy over orthodoxy. I think this can be seen in their view of salvation. This is an inspiring story and clearly a model of forgiveness but we must remember it is not the model of forgiveness. For THE model is of Christ coming to this earth and dying for a people he did not need to save. Dying for totally broken and depraved sinners like you and like me. When we realize that we never deserved any of the grace the we receive daily then and only then will be able to start to see how amazing that grace is. So, would I recommend this book...sure (but read it with an eye of discernment) because it is inspiring but we must keep in mind THE model of forgiveness, the gospel.

Debnance says

In 2006, a gunman went into a one-room Amish schoolhouse and shot ten girls, killing five of them, and then killed himself. What is the immediate response of the Amish community? The Amish instantly voice their forgiveness of this man and his actions. They visit his widow and children and go to the killer's funeral. It almost feels superhuman. The authors investigate this incident and the forgiveness that followed and look into the origins of Amish forgiveness in the Amish culture, how it is cultivated in young children, and how forgiveness works to heal.

Benjamin Shurance says

Although I had no foreknowledge of the Nickel Mines schoolhouse shooting when my aunt sent me this book, I was immediately intrigued, and got so caught up in it that I had read the entire tome within twenty-four hours of receiving the package in the mail. These Anabaptist kinfolk have an awful lot to teach us about life, especially about the countercultural values of simplicity and nonviolence. Included below are two quotations that I found especially convicting:

“Rather than making their own way alone, Amish people must yield to the authority of the church community and ultimately to God. These sentiments pervade Amish religious life in was that many outsiders find puzzling. For instance, verbal expressions of personal faith in public settings are seen as prideful, as if one were showing off one's religious knowledge. Reciting Bible verses publicly signals a ‘proud heart,’ and individual interpretations of the Bible and personal testimonies in a church service are seen as exemplifying haughtiness rather than genuine faith. For the Amish, genuine spirituality is quiet, reserved, and clothed in humility, expressing itself in actions rather than words. Wisdom is tested by the community, not by an individual's feelings, eloquence, or persuasion.” (page 93-94)

“Interestingly, the Amish apply the same humility to their own eternal destiny that they applied to Roberts's eternal fate. They are loathe to speculate on both salvation and damnation, and unwilling to insist either that they are saved or that Charles Roberts went to hell. Amish people speak of having a ‘living hope’ of salvation. Unlike many evangelical Christians who openly pronounce assurance of salvation, the Amish resist declaring that they are saved. Such proclamations of human certainty are, in the Amish mind, an offense to God, for only God knows the mysteries of salvation. Our task, they would say, is to follow

faithfully the way of Jesus in daily life and not to pressure to know the mind of God. Nevertheless, they have hope and confidence that God will be a just and merciful judge.” (page 168)

Laurel Kooiman says

I first thought very highly (and I guess I still do) of the Amish's ability and willingness to forgive and reach to the families of offenders. But, now in light of knowing that the Amish believe that if they do not forgive then they will not be forgiven by God. The book talked about how important and how much they emphasize forgiveness in the Amish culture. Sometimes to their own peril. In cases of domestic abuse, sexual abuse ect. It was interesting to read the history of the Amish culture and how of course this has been the first of MANY times that the Amish forgave the people who were their enemies and were out to cause them harm.

I guess it got me thinking about people or things that have occurred in my life that I need to let go or forgive. Its hard for me because I am not sure if they did anything to merit my forgiveness but I know that I am letting the hurt feeling control some aspects of my life. Its a interesting book ---probably alot of theology behind things but I find that interesting.

David says

On October 2, 2006, a disturbed and heavily armed man entered an Amish school in Pennsylvania and took the children hostage. He eventually sent everyone but 10 young girls away, and as police surrounded the school, shot the children and then committed suicide. Five of the girls died, and the others suffered critical injuries.

The first section of the book gives background on the Amish and their beliefs, and then recounts the tragic events of that day. The authors then turn to the response of the Amish people, which they describe as "Amish grace" - the almost immediate forgiveness, lack of bitterness or anger or desire for retaliation. The families of the victims and others in the community not only openly expressed forgiveness for the shooter, but embraced his family with love and support (including attending his funeral). The book analyzes this response carefully, including the culture and teachings and habits that created it. The final section tries to give some insights into the place of forgiveness in modern Christianity and society.

The book suffers a little from repetition, which may have been the result of multiple authors contributing. But I very much enjoyed the insights into Amish culture and teachings. In some ways, they are more Christian than most of us in their careful attempts to follow the teachings of Jesus. At the end of this book, I was ready to try harder.

David Rough says

This powerful book was written as a result of the school shooting in Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania on October 2, 2006. The focus of the book is not Charles Roberts, the shooter, but rather on the amazing forgiveness that flowed from the Amish community to the shooter's family. The depth of the book takes its readers to a better

understanding of the religious beliefs and habits of the Amish and the foundation stones that led the Amish to forgive so quickly. The book really challenged me on many fronts from the practical ways I need to forgive to the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation to the essential separation of the Christ-follower to the world. This well-written book provided a solid explanation and scriptural basis for much of the Amish lifestyle.
