

The Forgiveness Project

Forgiving the Unforgivable

Lesson 3 of 3 - Justice and forgiveness in Rwanda

Name: _____

Tutor group: _____



The
FORGIVENESS
PROJECT

Read the following passage and highlight any words you are unsure of or that you would like to discuss further.

The Rwandan Genocide



Rwanda was colonized by Germany in 1884. Belgian forces took control of Rwanda during WWI, beginning a period of more direct Colonial rule. To ensure the native population of Rwanda did not rise up against the government, they imposed a number of strategies to try and divide and rule the population, which was made up of two main tribes the Hutus and the Tutsis. One of these strategies was to impose mandatory ID cards for everyone, which people had to carry at all times. Although Rwanda gained independence in 1962, such strategies left deep rooted divisions within the Rwandan population. Tensions between the two groups continued to increase following independence.

From around 1990 onwards, radio stations and newspapers in Rwanda steadily increased the pace at which they incited racial hatred against the Tutsi population through media and radio broadcasts. Some people, including the Belgian ambassador and aid agencies recognised the danger of such widespread anti-Tutsi propaganda and asked for international help in shutting down broadcasts, but they were ignored. UN troops were present in Rwanda as they had been supporting various governmental transitions and peacekeeping in Uganda and Rwanda, however there were relatively small numbers of troops.

On April 6, 1994, a plane carrying the Rwandan President and the Burundian President was shot down over the Rwandan capital, Kigali. This kind of violence against prominent political figures is often used to inflame existing tensions, and the following day, orders went out from senior Hutu officials in the Rwandan army and government-backed militias, via radio and other media to kill Tutsis. Key Tutsi political and military leaders were killed straight away to ensure that there was no opposition to the wave of killings that was being ordered by the Hutu leaders.

The genocide in Rwanda was organised and led by a collective of people including politicians, military leaders, businessmen, local mayors and police, but quickly thousands of ordinary people - shopkeepers, teachers and farmers - were encouraged or harassed into joining the killing. The Government radio told Tutsis to take refuge in safe places such as schools and churches, but in reality they were being rounded up to be killed in large groups. Many Hutu who attempted to hide or defend Tutsis and those who opposed the genocide were also targeted and killed.

The UN managed to keep a few locations safe for a limited time, however the vast majority of troops were withdrawn from the country leaving the Tutsi population exposed and completely unprotected by international peacekeepers. Over the next three months an estimated 1 million Tutsis and moderate Hutus in Rwanda were systematically killed.

In mid-July 1994, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), a predominantly Tutsi rebel group defeated the Rwandan army and government. As they took over the country, RPF troops killed thousands of predominantly Hutu civilians. The RPF then took on the long task of rebuilding the country.

Source: <http://www.rwandanstories.org/index.html>

JUSTICE AND FORGIVENESS

In pairs, read the following statement below and discuss using the prompt questions.

"In the context of Rwanda and myself, forgiveness has no place at all. Reconciliation would only be there if there was justice and there hasn't been justice, therefore reconciliation and forgiveness for me is a cliché.

If you are a Christian, which is what I am, you know the values of forgiveness as a Christian, but in Rwanda I can't see how I can forgive anyone. Living next door to people who killed your family, given amnesty. They have their family, they have their aspirations, what do I have?

Justice is paramount for reconciliation, even for forgiveness, because there is no way we can forgive somebody until they are responsible for their actions. Until they are held responsible for their actions, I can't forgive anyone. I can't forgive for my family." - Mary Blewitt



Discuss Mary's point of view in your pair:

- **Do you agree with Mary?**
- **Do you think justice is important for people to feel they can forgive? If so, why?**
- **Get ready to discuss with the class.**

Read the passage in the booklet.

Justice in Rwanda

Due to the scale of the genocide in Rwanda, the government, charities and grassroots organisations have had a huge job on their hands trying to bring justice for victims. A severe lack of infrastructure following the end of the genocide, plus the killing of many of the country's judges and lawyers meant the Rwandan courts were unable to process the huge number of cases required.

This led to the revival of Gacaca courts, which are community based, and led by a community leader with no prior legal training. Over two million cases were processed this way and whilst some provided an opportunity for survivors to find out the truth many others resulted in unfair trials through intimidation and corruption.

Even though many Rwandans feel there is still a lack of justice for victims of the genocide the progress that the country has made is impressive and the people are starting to rebuild communities following this atrocity. The government, universities and charities are working together to address the roots of violence and find new ways to move forward, often through models which support reconciliation and forgiveness.

The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) was established to prosecute persons responsible for the genocide and they tried a small number of suspects – primarily those who played a leading role in the genocide, including the conviction of the former prime minister.

Very few RPF members (who led to the end of the genocide) have been held to account for the war crimes and crimes against humanity they committed in 1994.

One important legacy of the genocide in Rwanda was the creation in 1998 of the permanent International Criminal Court (ICC) which holds responsibility for trying individuals for genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Split into small groups. Spend five minutes discussing each question and make notes below. Get ready to feed back to the class.

1

If Mary had received an apology from the people that killed her family do you think she would feel differently about forgiveness? Please give your reasons.

2

If the people that killed Mary's family were tried and convicted for war crimes and crimes against humanity and imprisoned do you think she would feel differently about forgiveness? Please give your reasons.
