

Michael Tate Reed has done it again. Nearly three years after he was arrested for the destruction of Oklahoma's Ten Commandments monument at its state capitol, Reed, late last month, drove his car into a newly erected Ten Commandments monument on the grounds of the Arkansas capitol, making him, in the words of an Arkansas authority, a serial destroyer of Ten Commandments monuments. Reed, who was diagnosed with a mental disorder following the Oklahoma incident, professes belief in Jesus Christ but also says he supports separation of church and state, which seems to have been his motive in the current monument destruction.

For purposes of this lesson, we are not going to wade into a discussion of church and state (we've had other lessons on that topic), but are going to use this news to consider what are the repercussions of breaking, in the moral sense, the commandments of God. So that will be subject of this installment of *The Wired Word*.

If you'd prefer a different topic, look at our second lesson, which reviews a letter-writing campaign launched in Colombia to encourage former enemy combatants as they lay down arms and seek to re-enter society in peace. We explore the process of reconciliation with God and with other human beings.

You are now able to email the student version of either the first lesson or the second lesson to your class members, depending on which lesson you prefer to use for your class time. To do so, [click here](#).

May God bless you as you teach the scriptures this week.

The Editorial Team of *The Wired Word*



Man Breaks All Ten Commandments at Once, Using His Car

The Wired Word for the Week of July 9, 2017

In the News

In the early morning hours of June 28, Michael Tate Reed, 32, rammed his car into a monument of the Ten Commandments on the grounds of the Arkansas state capitol, smashing it to pieces, all the while filming his action with his cell phone and streaming it live on Facebook. He can be heard exclaiming "Freedom" as he accelerates into the three-ton granite statue, which had been installed less than 24 hours previously.

Reed was arrested at the scene by state capitol police and charged with criminal trespass, first-degree criminal mischief and defacing objects of public interest.

Reed has a history of mental issues dating back at least to the Oklahoma monument attack, when he was diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder and required to continue treatment. Following that incident, his mother Crystal Tucker described her son's mind as "broken."

In a Facebook post prior to the current incident, Reed appears to allude to the Oklahoma episode, saying, "I'm a firm believer that for our salvation we not only have faith in Jesus Christ, but we

also obey the commands of God and that we confess Jesus as Lord. But one thing I do not support is the violation of our constitutional right to have the freedom that's guaranteed to us, that guarantees us the separation of church and state, because no one religion should the government represent."

Reed continued, "So ... back at it again... so if you're in support of this, you can talk about it using the hashtag checkmate, and also I'm using my own car that I paid for." He indicated he was going to start a GoFundMe campaign to repair or replace his car, which, in fact, was damaged in the Arkansas monument ramming.

In the past, Reed has also posted threats against various U.S. presidents, including President Trump, President Obama and both Presidents Bush.

After the attack on the Arkansas monument, former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee tweeted about it, saying "Some idiot in my home state broke all 10 commandments at the same time. He wasn't Moses and it wasn't Mt. Sinai."

Money has already been raised to replace the monument, but there's likely to be one or more lawsuits brought about its placement on public property. Such suits have been promised by the ACLU, The Satanic Temple, and the Arkansas Society of Freethinkers. At the moment, however, all lawsuits are on hold, since, with the monument down, there's nothing to sue over.

In the Oklahoma case, the monument was replaced, but that state's Supreme Court ultimately ruled that it had to be removed from public grounds. It was moved to the private property of Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs, where it is on display.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[Why One Man Keeps Ramming His Car Into Ten Commandments Statues on Government Property. *The Washington Post*](#)
[Michael Tate Reed: 5 Fast Facts You Need to Know. *Heavy*](#)

Applying the News Story

This is not the first time a representation of the Ten Commandments has been vandalized. While Reed has been involved in the two incidents described in the news story, there have been other cases, with other attackers. Here, for example, is a previous attack on a monument, from 2013, and probably not involving Reed: [10 Commandments Monument Toppled by Vandals in Washington. *Fox News*](#)

But how should we view such episodes? It's easy to dismiss Reed's actions because of his mental history -- and perhaps we do it too lightly -- but there are no grounds to attribute all such attacks to someone's mental derangement. In the wake of the Arkansas incident, we read [one commentator](#) who interpreted Reed's action as emblematic of a widespread attitude in the United States that we as a citizenry don't want to be bound by God's laws or any moral principles. We

think that commentator overstated that claim, however, and we also questioned his motivation in that he was using the column to promote his book about a "sick" America.

On the other hand, some have seen the attacks on Ten Commandments displays as a kind of Christian persecution, which we also see as overstating the case. See [here](#) for one example of this view. Talk to Christians attacked by ISIS for some *real* examples of persecution of Christians.

Still others view the matter simply as an issue of church-state separation. That apparently was part of Reed's motivation, even if his thinking was unclear. For an example of that viewpoint from someone else, see [here](#).

For one more perspective, consider this, from TWW editorial team member Frank Ramirez. He said, "Although this story no doubt inspires outrage, I can't help but think how insignificant it is. It's certainly annoying, but the number of people who might commit such an act must be vanishingly small, because it doesn't happen very often. Was anyone hurt? Was anyone killed? The real damage done is when our outrage gives this event more attention than it deserves."

Ramirez continued, "More to the point: The most effective response would be living the Ten Commandments. In no way can the significance of God's love for us by giving us such commandments be altered by an act like this. The commandments themselves are not eradicated -- living the Ten Commandments is the appropriate response, or better yet, the two commandments that Jesus distilled them to: Love God and love neighbor."

For purposes of this lesson, however, it seems sufficient simply to think of what it means to break God's commandments personally, and that is our topic today.

The Big Questions

1. In what ways have the Ten Commandments helped shape who you are today? Some of the Ten Commandments are couched as negatives -- "Thou shalt not" In what way are they positives? What situations in your life do the Ten Commandments not address?
2. Thinking of your own efforts to follow Jesus, are there any commandments you wish God had not included in the "Big Ten"? Why? Are there any rules not in the Ten Commandments that you wish were there? Why?
3. What does "Christian freedom" mean? What does it mean for you to be "not under law but under grace"? How should you regard the Ten Commandments in relation to your freedom in Christ? in relation to the two summary commands Christ gave -- to love God and love your neighbor?
4. What if anything has happened when you knowingly broke one of the commandments? What lesson, if any, did you learn? When has knowingly keeping one of the commandments helped you?

5. Is it necessary for Christians to "protect" the Ten Commandments and the Bible in which they are contained? Why or why not?

6. As a nation, the United State has no official or de facto religion claimed. Does one have to be Jewish (Old Testament believer) or Christian (Old and New Testament believer) to use the Ten Commandments as a value system in our country? Why or why not? How would a non-believer view the Ten Commandments as a position on values rather than on faith? Is it possible to live a Christian life without being Christian?

Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

Exodus 15:26

If you will listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God, and do what is right in his sight, and give heed to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will not bring upon you any of the diseases that I brought upon the Egyptians; for I am the LORD who heals you. (For context, read 15:22-26.)

This verse comes from the time when Israel was in the wilderness. The people had come to Marah, where the only water they found was bitter and undrinkable. But at God's instruction, Moses tossed a piece of wood into the water, which made it sweet and potable. This "healing" of the waters was the opposite of the plagues God had brought upon the Egyptians. God then made the statement above, which linked obeying his commandments to avoiding the plagues the Egyptians had experienced.

Questions: What "plagues" might keeping the Ten Commandments help you avoid today? What actual illness might keeping the commandments keep you from? What societal ills would everyone obeying the Ten Commandments alleviate?

Can our faith be reduced to a simple if-then statement such as this scripture seems to suggest? Since none of us is perfect in keeping any set of commandments, including the two part "Greatest Commandment" of Jesus, what hope does any of us have?

Deuteronomy 9:15-17

So I turned and went down from the mountain, while the mountain was ablaze; the two tablets of the covenant were in my two hands. Then I saw that you had indeed sinned against the LORD your God, by casting for yourselves an image of a calf; you had been quick to turn from the way that the LORD had commanded you. So I took hold of the two tablets and flung them from my two hands, smashing them before your eyes. (For context, read 9:8-21.)

The actual incident where Moses smashed the tablets containing God's laws is recorded in Exodus 32:15-20, at the time the people of Israel worshiped the golden calf. This passage from Deuteronomy is where Moses reminds his hearers of that incident.

But Moses' breaking of the tablets was different from what Reed did. In Moses' case, his flinging of the tablets down mirrored God's anger and showed that by their actions, the Israelites had abrogated the divine covenant.

Questions: Does breaking God's commandments today -- breaking in the moral sense -- still result in anger from God? How can we know? What does your own experience tell you? With whom can you check that impression?

Have you ever broken a religious object in your home or at church, such as a statue, a picture or knocked over a Bible, and worried about what the spiritual consequences might be? Why or why not?

Matthew 5:19

Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (For context, read 5:17-20.)

These are Jesus' words, spoken as part of the Sermon on the Mount. In that sermon, Jesus comments on several of the commandments, and the passage portrays Jesus as a true interpreter of the Mosaic Law. In expounding on the commandments, Jesus said that he did not come to abolish the law or the prophets, but to fulfill them (v.17). Thus, he shows that while Christians live under the New Covenant, that covenant is informed by God's commandments, and the commandments are not overridden by our salvation in Christ.

Questions: When it comes to deciding how to act in situations to which the commandments do not directly speak, how can the commandments guide you? In what ways does Jesus fulfill the Law?

1 John 2:3-4 (The Message)

Here's how we can be sure that we know God in the right way: Keep his commandments. If someone claims, "I know him well!" but doesn't keep his commandments, he's obviously a liar. His life doesn't match his words. (For context, read 2:3-11.)

The logic of this passage is clear: Keeping God's commandments is better evidence that a person knows God than is a verbal claim of the same.

Questions: How do you feel when someone's actions betray their words? How do you feel when your actions betray your words? What do you need to say to God when that happens? What do you need to say to others who witnessed the inconsistency between your words and your actions? Why?

When someone cuts you off in traffic, drives dangerously, yet displays Christian bumper stickers, do you see a disconnect? Are you better behaved if your bumper stickers are proclaiming your faith. How about folks wearing Christian T-shirts or displaying the cross or other Christian jewelry? Do you hold them to a higher standard? Have you ever called someone out for their behavior in these circumstances? Why or why not?

Other verses to consider

- *If you love me, you will keep my commandments.* John 14:15
- *For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.* James 2:10
- *For Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.* Romans 10:4
- *Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring would come to whom the promise had been made; and it was ordained through angels by a mediator. Now a mediator involves more than one party; but God is one.*

Is the law then opposed to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could make alive, then righteousness would indeed come through the law. But the scripture has imprisoned all things under the power of sin, so that what was promised through faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. Galatians 3:19-26

For Further Discussion

1. How have the Ten Commandments influenced the history of our secular and civic laws?

2. In the present environment of church-state separation, in what ways can the Ten Commandments effectively offer guidance to the general population? to our legislators? to the courts?

3. Respond to this, from TWW team member Stan Purdum's sermon "Life Together": "The Ten Commandments. Ten rules from God. Four that tell us how to relate to him, and six that tell us how to live with one another. They are the reminder of who God is and the bare-minimum rules for our life together. They are not 10 suggestions, nor 10 recommendations, nor 10 guidelines, but 10 *commandments* from God. Upon them is built the entire system of Christian ethics. Whatever else we do in life, let us live by these, for God gave them to us that we might live together in human society without destroying our lives or those of any others.

"Let us drum them into our minds and hearts. Let us read them to our children and discuss with them what they mean. Let us encourage them to memorize them and be so familiar with them they can tell others what they mean. Let us make sure our kids have at least these basic but life-preserving rules to guide them when they are smarting from a putdown from classmates or dealing with the very real emotions of childhood romances. They may have emotions they don't know how to handle, but at least they'll know what *not* to do."

4. Discuss this: Regarding teaching the Ten Commandments to children, we might wonder how to speak about the "don't commit adultery" command to children for whom the instruction is not age-appropriate. One educator suggests pointing out the word "adult" in "adultery" and

explaining to the kids that the command means not to break the rules of being an adult. That explanation might do the grownups some good, too.

5. Realization that the Constitution is not uniquely protecting the Christian religion, how does that affect your thinking about the act of vandalizing the Arkansas stone?

6. Comment on this, from TWW team member Frank Ramirez: "God does not need protecting by us. When Babylon conquered Judah it did not mean, as was often thought in the ancient world, that Babylon's gods were more powerful than the real God. Come to think of it, when the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant it did not mean that the power of the Ark could be used by the Philistines for their benefit. Indeed, the Philistines suffered so much from the presence of the Ark in their midst that they gave it back. God can take care of God."

7. Regarding the Ten Commandments, different religious traditions divide the 17 verses of Exodus 20:1–17 and their parallels at Deuteronomy 5:4–21 into 10 "commandments" or "sayings" in different ways, as shown [here](#), under the subhead "Traditions for numbering." Discuss whether any of the numbering schemes substantially change the intent of the commandments.

Responding to the News

The Ten Commandments are found in Exodus 20:1-17 and Deuteronomy 5:4-21. Read them together and discuss how you might teach them to the children of your church.

Prayer

Thank you, O Lord, for the Ten Commandments, the larger statement of your law in scripture, the Sermon on the Mount and other teachings that help us to understand what you expect from us. And thank you for your grace, which grants us righteousness when we turn to Christ. In his name. Amen

Other News This Week

Colombians on Opposing Sides of Conflict Exchange Letters to Build Trust and Work for Peace

In the News

"Welcome." "I affirm that you are loved. You were born to be happy and free. I love you, I really love you!" "I am glad that we can count on you once more as part of our society." These are some of the messages Colombian ex-guerrilla fighters received recently to give them hope that they can successfully adjust to civilian life after over half a century of war.

Residents of Bogotá, Cali, Medellin, Manizales, Barranquilla and other cities have written more than 2,000 love letters and hand-delivered 765 along with paper-white roses to former rebels so

far. The goal is to write 6,900 notes, one for each former combatant, in the hope of changing "the discourse from a narrative of war to a collective story of peace," according to organizers of the peace initiative.

In February, two Colombian youth activists heard 2014 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Kailash Satyarthi say how sad it was that people send many messages of love to people they care about on Valentine's Day, but ignore those who may need love the most. That remark inspired Leonardo Párraga and Cristian Palacios to found *Cartas por la Reconciliación* (Letters for Reconciliation) so that young Colombians could write letters to ex-guerrillas of the FARC (the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) to encourage them not to give up their dream of peacefully rejoining society.

The youth of Colombia have never known a time when their country was not at war with itself. The conflict between government forces and the FARC that cost millions of lives lasted more than 50 years, longer than they have been alive. When the Colombian congress finally ratified a peace accord last November, the hard work of integrating demobilized rebels into society began.

"My father was assassinated at the Santander massacre in Quilichao," wrote one young woman. "Crying over him is not going to bring him back, but I want to tell [his killers] that I forgive them, because it is useless to hold on to bad feelings."

"I never thought there was anyone willing to forgive me for my mistakes, but now I know that there is a society waiting for us with open arms," marveled one former rebel.

Some 40 university students from Cali were among those who personally delivered the first batch of letters to those in transitional camps.

"One of the things that makes me proud and happy is knowing that we are not alone; we are accompanied by you, the students ...," said Bladimir, who joined the FARC 19 years ago.

Camila Robayo said she participated in the letter exchange to work actively for peace and reconciliation. "I had never spoken to a guerrilla before," she said. After getting a thank-you note from former combatant Leidy Vélez, stating "We must leave hate and rancor behind. All of us deserve a new opportunity," Robayo felt hopeful that many Colombians do want "to give peace a chance."

"You see a lot of toughness in those letters [from former rebel fighters], but also a lot of need for affection and friendship," says Cecilia López, a high-school teacher who says her students can learn a lot about history from the guerrillas' letters. "Those letters show another side of the conflict, the voice of other people, who are also fighting for similar goals."

Through the letter-writing campaign, political science student Manuela Jiménez Avila heard for the first time "voices who have never had a voice or a vote ... [of] those that I often considered monsters, and even came to hate" and began to realize that the voices belonged to "human beings with beautiful feelings that were distorted by the environment in which they had to live and by the conditions that created them."

The attempt to communicate with people on opposite sides of the conflict has resulted in greater understanding of the life experiences and perspectives of "the other." Avila concluded that "all human beings, including those who have killed so many and caused so much damage, have something to teach us, plus a smile and a hug to give away."

Gustavo González, commander of the Caldono-Cauca camp housing former rebels, wrote to Cali's Archbishop Darío de Jesús Monsalve that it would take more than disarmament to bring peace to Colombia. The commander cited inequality, hunger, and lack of access to education, health services and job opportunities as barriers to peace. Overcoming mistrust after decades of war is another.

Still, González said "we are betting on peace, on politics without weapons. ... we call on all the defenders of peace -- regardless of race, religion or ideology -- to rise above those who dream of a country at war. ... we know first hand that nothing is easy ... but we will succeed together."

More on this story can be found at these links:

[Love Letters to Guerrilla Fighters. *Tea After Twelve*](#)
[As the War Ends in Colombia, Civilians Become Penpals With FARC Guerrillas. *Fusion*](#)
[Lessons in Tolerance: The Colombian Letters Sent to Former FARC Fighters. *El Pais*](#)
[With Peace in Sight, a Guerrilla Faces a Choice: FARC or Family? *Miami Herald*](#)
[Conflict Transformation: What Is Reconciliation? *Beyond Intractability*](#)

The Big Questions

1. Have you ever written a communique to someone you feel has wronged you? What was your goal in writing? Without going into detail, summarize the main points a communique of this nature should make.
2. Have you ever been on the receiving end of a communique outlining how someone believes you wronged him or her? What was the tone of the message and how did it affect you? What was the impact of that exchange on your relationship?
3. How would you reply to a person who felt you wronged him or her? Do you need to apologize if you don't think you did anything wrong? How does your faith guide you in such a time of conflict?
4. Is forgiveness obligatory for the Christian in every case? Why or why not? What does it take to forgive someone for causing you great pain? What do you need to do to truly forgive that person? What is the role of empathy in the process of forgiveness? What is the role of wisdom? What is the role of faith?
5. Are there times when forgiveness with full reconciliation is impossible? Explain. Can you live in relative peace with an adversary without achieving a complete end of hostilities? What might that peace look like?

Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

Proverbs 10:10, 12

*Whoever winks the eye causes trouble,
but the one who rebukes boldly makes peace.
... Hatred stirs up strife,
but love covers all offenses.* (For context, read 10:9-12.)

Some letters written to the FARC guerrillas emphasized a general willingness to welcome the ex-combatants back into society, while others acknowledged the pain the warriors had inflicted on others.

The writer of this chapter teaches that peace comes from the courageous, hard work of bold rebuke, combined with a merciful covering of all offenses.

The bold rebuke that makes peace is not the same as rude, abusive criticism which angers and harms the recipient of the rebuke. Rather, it is akin to God's discipline for the child he loves (see Hebrews 12:5-11). A child who is disciplined has a parent who cares enough to correct him.

TWW member Joanna Loucky-Ramsey recalls a supervisor who rebuked her once for pride and another time for self-centeredness: "I would have cared less about the criticism if it had come from a boss who was disinterested in my spiritual development. But the rebuke stung more because I knew this pastor loved me like a daughter."

Questions: Give an example of a person (from the Bible, from history, or from your own personal experience) who "rebuked boldly" in the context of peacemaking. Did that same person also "cover all offenses"? Is it possible to do both at the same time? Explain.

How is the way God provides salvation through the death and resurrection of Christ an example of the bold, necessary rebuke of our sin and merciful covering of all our offenses?

Psalm 23:5

*You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.*
(For context, read 23:1-6.)

In this chapter known as the Shepherd Psalm, the psalmist uses the metaphor of the Lord as shepherd and he himself as one of the sheep in his flock. In John 10, Jesus describes himself as the Good Shepherd of the sheep. In both passages, there is reference to the enemies of the sheep, whether thieves who come to steal, or predators who seek to kill and destroy them, but the Lord as Shepherd rescues the sheep from danger, causing them to feast in the presence of those who would wish them harm.

Questions: How does the Lord vanquish the enemies of his sheep? What are the enemies of the sheep doing while the Lord prepares a table before the sheep? What does Paul mean when he says that while we were enemies, he reconciled us to himself through the death of his Son (Romans 5:10)?

Genesis 33:4

But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. (For context, read 33:1-17.)

Isaac's twin sons Esau and Jacob had a tenuous relationship at best and a hostile one at worst. Jacob tricked Esau into giving up his birthright and his father's blessing, fled from his brother's fury and remained an exile for years before returning home to face the music. When he saw Esau in the distance accompanied by 400 men, he was understandably rattled, thinking perhaps that his brother still held a grudge against him.

So he organized his family into groups and he went ahead of them, bowing to the ground seven times before his brother.

In some cultures, bowing down is not only a sign of respect, but also may indicate deep repentance. For Jacob to bow, not once, not twice, but *seven times* seems to have touched Esau greatly. If he had not already been predisposed to let bygones be bygones, apparently the gesture moved him in that direction.

And it didn't hurt that Jacob then offered his brother gifts as a sign of his desire to be reconciled (33:10-11).

Ron Kronish, author of *Coexistence and Reconciliation in Israel: Voices for Interreligious Dialogue*, wrote: "In the biblical story, they go their separate ways. So at least the war between them ended. No more fighting. You live here and I'll live there. Separation becomes the operational modality. Not Peace. Just an armistice. ... As long as you don't shoot missiles at us, you can live over there ... or wherever. ... Integration is not the model. Love and mutual understanding are really not needed for mere 'Coexistence'. This is not an exciting solution, but it is better than killing one another."

Questions: Have you essentially "called a truce" in any relationships, which, for whatever reason, you find you are not able to move closer to "love and mutual understanding"? How does your faith speak to such "imperfect" relationships? Have you done everything you can do "as far as it is possible with you" to live at peace with all others (Romans 12:18)? What else, if anything, might still be done to improve that one painful relationship? What do you do when you have done all you could do, without results?

Luke 15:18-20

"I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'" So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and

was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. (For context, read 15:11-24.)

In the parable of the Prodigal Son, Jesus emphasizes the mercy of the father toward his son who has treated him abominably. But rather than thinking about his own hurt feelings, the father sees how far his boy has fallen and empathizes with him. He guesses that the boy had to swallow his pride and humble himself greatly in order to return home destitute and starving. So he pulls out all the stops to throw him the biggest welcome home party he could imagine.

In the news article, we read of young people who somehow put themselves in the shoes of the isolated FARC fighters and felt compassion for them, even though they did some terrible, hurtful things. The youth wrote "love letters" as a way of embracing the guerrillas to welcome them home.

Questions: In both the parable and the news story, we have a slice of life without a conclusion. After the initial "welcome home" initiative, what other hard work do you think remains for the family in Luke 15? For the Colombian people? For a new convert who has recently repented of sin?

Galatians 1:22-24

... the churches of Judea that are in Christ ... only heard it said, "The one who formerly was persecuting us is now proclaiming the faith he once tried to destroy." And they glorified God because of me. (For context, read 1:13-24.)

Paul made no secret of the fact that before he met Christ on the road to Damascus, he violently persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. Jesus' disciples had reason to suspect his motives when he turned up in their midst. Was he there to spy on them and take names, so that he could return later with armed men to arrest them?

The FARC rebels and Paul all had a reputation for violence, making the task of building trust and achieving reconciliation more challenging. The Colombians hope the FARC rebels can really "beat their swords into plowshares," but there are no guarantees. Paul sometimes had to struggle to be accepted, because of his past sins. Ultimately, the churches in Judea glorified God because of the miraculous change they saw in him.

Questions: What should a Christian do with feelings of rejection, when you struggle to have a voice, to be accepted and to belong? How should a church or society handle a person whose conversion does not appear to be genuine? Under what circumstances should a person be accepted into membership in a local church?

For Further Discussion

1. What other options might one choose to use as a response to conflict, other than writing a letter seeking forgiveness or healing?
2. Whom do you know who might be feeling rejected? How could you encourage that person?

3. Read [the short bio of Anne Gallagher](#) and comment on her approach to forgiveness.
4. Discuss a story on reconciliation from [The Forgiveness Project](#) that interests you.
5. Comment on this from Toronto counselor Christopher Emmanuel: "Forgiveness took away the illusion that my past had made me powerless."
6. Reflect on this from motivational speaker Dr. Chuck Sandstrom, who forgave a man who brutally assaulted him, leaving him with Traumatic Brain Injury: "To borrow from Harold Kushner, forgiveness is first and foremost a way of seeing. It cannot change the facts about the world we live in but it can change the way we see those facts. So most people see my injury as a tragedy but for my wife and me it's created an opportunity to love more deeply. Strange as it sounds I see my brain injury as a great gift."

Responding to the News

Perhaps now is the time to write a letter of reconciliation to someone you feel has wronged you, or to someone you have wronged. To whom do you need to say, "You hurt me deeply, but I love and forgive you"? To whom do you need to say, "I was wrong. I'm sorry. Please forgive me"?

Prayer

O God of peace, teach us how to reconcile with our brothers and sisters when they have done something against us; teach us also how to forgive those who trespass against us, that your mercy would flow through us, cleansing us and blessing others, to the glory of your name. Amen.