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English journalist Michael Henderson has written about forgiveness for more than ten years. *No Enemy To Conquer* is his third book on the subject, and a companion to *The Forgiveness Factor* and *Forgiveness: Breaking the Chain of Hate*.

Once again Henderson takes readers across the globe to share remarkable accounts of forgiveness that has led individuals, families, and national leaders to places of hope and healing. Unambiguously and without sentimentality, he makes the point that where vengeance finds resistance, forgiveness blossoms. He suggests that forgiveness is like a muscle that is strengthened through exercise. It's not about theory, but about the hard-won experience of real people – courageous men and women who reach out across religious, cultural, and political boundaries to talk with one another. He observes that when people acknowledge responsibility for wrongs done by them or their communities, allowing victims to heal, they move beyond the desire for revenge and help stop the cycle of violence.

Henderson mentions a fellow journalist in London who spent his entire career reporting on human behavior at its worst, only to find he couldn't retain his belief in God in the face of so much "wanton savagery." Henderson explains that he, personally, continues to believe, because of the positive developments he's witnessed in similar settings – "humankind at its best", he says. "The readiness of men and women to forgive...in the most trying circumstances is awe-inspiring." And this anthology of personal observation blended with excerpts from books, essays and speeches by international figures shows you why.

*No Enemy To Conquer* leaves you in no doubt that there are plenty of stories out there that might help people be more optimistic about the future – a "reality-based optimism that encourages greater participation." South Africa is a good example. "We were a hopeless case if there was one," says peacemaker Desmond Tutu. But "God [intended] that others might look at us as a possible beacon of hope...to show the world that it can be done anywhere."

Henderson also quotes US diplomat George Mitchell, who was involved in the peace process in Ireland. He maintained that if there was ever to be a durable peace and genuine reconciliation in the world's trouble spots, what was really needed was the "decommissioning of mind sets." In tackling mind sets," writes Henderson, "there are initiatives that private civil society can sometimes undertake that governments cannot, particularly in healing the hurts of history." Grass-roots emotional wounds and scars, he continues, often frustrate the best intentions of carefully crafted diplomatic agreements.

Henderson steps boldly into several cultural and political trouble spots, but always with tact and with a concern that his readers should share his longing to know more about others who are different from us. He quotes Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, who says that fear of one another, and especially of strangers, “keeps all of us in one or another kind of prison... We must keep our bridges in good repairs.”

“Too often,” writes Henderson, “we judge ourselves by our ideals, and others by their actions. We do it with nations as well as with our lives.” He suggests that people bear in mind Jesus’ rebuke about their tendency to remark on the speck they see in another’s eye without considering the log in their own eye. We are not helped by the misinformation floating around on the web, adds Henderson, but “too many of us are brought up on historic pictures of the ‘other’ that have been exaggerated in the telling.”

He also shares an observation made by Margaret Smith of American University’s School of International Service in Washington, DC, who emphasizes that forgiveness is not a matter of condoning or ignoring wrong: “It is a recognition that the harmful act can be transformed to something else if the victim finds a new sense of empowerment to repair the world.”

So, after a lifetime in the field of conflict resolution, where does Henderson himself stand on the issues he addresses in the book? His answer during a phone conversation was swift and succinct: “Some people are not quite ready to use the *forgiveness* word in the context of what they have done. And not all even recognise that it is God who has to be credited for their generous response to tragedy. But as a Christian, I have no doubt who is the author of peace and the lover of concord.”