



# Faith in development: Transcript

## Season 1: Peacebuilding

### Summary keywords

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### Speakers

Alice Philip, David Couzens, Mariam Tadros, Rene August

### Episode 4: Embrace in peacebuilding

#### Alice Philip 0:02

Welcome back to our listeners across the world. This is the fourth and final episode in our series on peacebuilding. So far during this series, we've talked about the moral imagination, about hospitality, and this week we're going to be talking about embrace. So, the concept of embrace Mariam, could you tell us what that means in peacebuilding?

#### Mariam Tadros 0:24

So much of the work or the theology that we've hooked on to around embrace comes from the Croatian theologian, Miroslav Volf, who writes about exclusion and embrace. He explores the journey of reconciliation and peacebuilding within and between communities. This journey from exclusion into embrace. He talks about four key elements as part of this journey of embrace. He talks about repentance, forgiveness, making space in oneself for others, and the healing of memory. He also offers us this image of the four key moments of this journey from exclusion to embrace. If you can imagine two people who have had some form of exclusion or conflict between them coming together, and the four moments of coming towards a place of reconciliation, beginning with opening their arms to each other, or one, opening their arms to the other, then waiting for the other person to respond to the offer of embrace, this moment of waiting to see if there'll be reciprocation, to those open arms. If there is reciprocation, this closing of the

arms with each party holding and being held, and the embrace must be gentle so that both sides remain identifiably themselves. And then, finally, the opening of arms again, each must let go of the other, in order that they can keep their individuality, and yet be left with a trace of that coming together. He talks about these four moments that people on both sides of the conflict need to come towards. And both have to be a part of that process. They can journey on their own. But it won't come to the full, the full fruition of reconciliation, if both aren't involved in it.

### **Alice Philip** 02:34

So we've got repentance, forgiveness, making space for the other in oneself, and healing of memories. David, I know that you've got a biblical story illustrating the concept of embrace.

### **David Couzens** 2:49

There's a sort of an embrace that's recounted in the latter stages of the book of Genesis in the Bible. And it's an embrace between two brothers between Jacob and Esau. Jacob had tricked his brother Esau out of Esau's inheritance. Fearing for his life, he fled. He then spent many, many years away and apart. But there comes a moment when he decides to return. The story ends with an embrace, and in that embrace his brother Esau, the one who had deceived says, to see your face is like seeing the face of God. There's a moment of reconciliation that happens in that embrace. But I think that journey towards reconciliation is described by John Paul Lederach, one of the founders of conflict transformation. And he describes how there's a moment of risk, of the uncertainty of stepping into the unknown as Jacob begins to travel back towards his brother. There's a particular moment where he's camped, I think, by the Fjord of the Jabbok. He sends, in fear, his family across the river, in towards the land where his brother and his brother's family and his herds are and his shepherds and his servants. And he spends the night there by the food. And during the night, he wrestles, the story is a bit vague. Some people said he wrestles with God, or he wrestles with an angel who may or may not be God. And in that towards the end of this sort of wrestling match, they're both clinging to each other, exhausted, and Jacob demands a blessing. And God says, What is your name? And he won't release him until he says his name. And we lose a bit because Jacob for us is just a name. But when you translate it, what it actually means is deceiver or usurper. So in saying his name, he's admitting who he is, he's recognizing his own faults and complicity in the conflict between him and his brother. And I think there's a very significant part there and reconciliation in that embrace where you recognize that you too are at fault. It's not an either-or, you are at fault in there somewhere. I think that's a very significant moment in that. Then the next day he crosses with a limp. He crosses the river and has this embrace with his brother, and they are reconciled. But I think there is that key moment of coming face to face with who you are in that embrace as well.

### **Alice Philip** 5:37

So repentance is a key first step for place of a risk, but realisation of our own identity, our own role in the process. We're going to hear now from Rene August about forgiveness, which is the next step in the process.

### **Rene August 5:55**

Watching important about forgiveness. Well, I think the entire story of Scripture requires us to explore this idea of forgiveness. As a South African I can't get away from the person of Desmond Tutu, who among the books he's written, he's written to about forgiveness and spends a lot of his life talking about forgiveness, and him having had a personal influence on my life, I couldn't ignore the topic. I think the command to honor your mother and your father is only possible if we begin to address the issue of forgiveness. I see through the traces of the entire story, from Genesis to Revelation, there are these implications and requirements of forgiveness that make life and community possible. And so if we don't have some idea of what Scripture says about forgiveness, if we don't have some idea of what it looks like to live a life of forgiveness, even though we live in contexts of pain and injustice, then we can't actually call ourselves disciples of Jesus in any faithful way.

### **Alice Philip 7:01**

It was great to hear from Rene there about forgiveness. So, 'space for the other', Mariam. Talk to us about that.

### **Mariam Tadros 7:09**

So this is one of the bits that I really love about Volf's four parts of this journey. He really recognizes that forgiveness is a key moment where hostility breaks down. But it doesn't necessarily lead to a restored relationship. And so making space for the other is the g one step beyond, and is actually attempting to embrace one another in relationship because you could easily forgive one another for past hurts and go your separate ways. And maybe that is what needs to happen at that moment. But there is in reconciliation, this part of coming together for the sake of restoration and transformation. And he puts it in the image actually, of both the Trinity and the kind of Christian theology, as well as Jesus on the cross. This moment in which Jesus in his suffering, in his oppression, opens his arms and offers forgiveness, even to those who had done him wrong. In offering that forgiveness, invites people into that relationship with God into that Trinitarian open relationship in which we can be a part of the heart of who God is. And so for Volf, it's very much about invitation, it's about recognizing that we are built for relationships and for restored relationships where there has been hurt. And he says that, in the grace of God, we shouldn't be resisting being made into the agents of grace, which means that in accepting grace, we must also be willing to work from a place of grace for others as well.

## **Alice Philip** 8:49

Wow. Rene August has more to share with us today, and we're going to listen to her speak about the healing of memories.

## **Rene August** 8:59

My favorite pilgrimage that I did, was the one a year off to death of Nelson Mandela. We went away to Robben Island and took a group of sort of 30-somethings. We spent some time reading 2 Kings chapter 2, the story of Elijah and Elisha. To watch those young people engage with a story pretending that they were Elisha, talking to their Elijah, whoever that is, walking the streets of Robben Island where our leaders walked day after day, from the prison cell to the lime quarry, and then begin to realize that within them lies the potential for leadership, within them lies the opportunity for them to stand up and say yes, to giving leadership. It was a joyful, wonderful, wonderful time for me. And so it was a real privilege to be able to do that. At the same time, having with us the former archbishop Njongonkulu, who was a political prisoner on Robben Island, and interviewing him and having him share stories with us. And then at the end for him to pray and lay hands on some of those young people and commissioned them to, you know, become leaders in our country, that was a really enriching experience.

## **Alice Philip** 10:12

So the last part that Volf talks about is the healing of memories. Could you just tell us a bit about that?

## **Mariam Tadros** 10:20

So the key to this part for him really is that in any journey of reconciliation, there's a certain kind of forgetting, in which people will always still remember their histories. But in the healing of memories, it's about not trying to pretend like you're going to forget what happened to you. But it's about moving from a place of holding anger, holding a grudge, and allowing yourself to hold that memory whilst trying to move towards reconciliation, and a restored relationship with people. So Volf talks about the healing of memory as a part of this process of reconciliation, where it's not about forgetting everything that happened to you. It's about remembering your history, but moving beyond holding grudges. And he talks about different ways in which that reconciliation can happen. And essential parts of that. And I think that's what I love about this part of the theology is that both really grounded in the reality of who we are as humans and our complexity. And he talks about telling the truth about the past. He talks about placing our memories in the context of a hopeful vision, recognizing that we have a responsibility not to repeat what was done to others, and acknowledging that reconciliation is offered to our enemies as well as to ourselves. And if we're able to move through that process, and by no means is that a simple process, we can move beyond the hurt, anger, that memories can hold for us. Remember our histories, but move into a space of reconciliation.

## **Alice Philip** 11:56

That's so deep but so practical. It's been great to talk about embrace today, I'd love to come back to that image of the embrace that Volf gives us and the stages that the people involved go through, those both sides of the conflict. Could you just run through that for us, again, Mariam?

## **Mariam Tadros** 12:15

Volf talks about opening the arms to the other person, that sense of then waiting for the other person to respond to the offer of that embrace. If that person responds and comes towards there is in the closing of the arms, with each party holding and being held gently enough that each person can still identify themselves. And then finally, the opening of the arms again, where each must let go of the other. So they can remain themselves and yet be enriched by the traces of that embrace.

## **Alice Philip** 12:46

Enriched by the traces of that embrace. David, you had a thought about that?

## **David Couzens** 12:54

Yes, I mean, going back to the story of Jacob and Esau in that embrace, where they come together, and Esau says to Jacob that seeing your faces like seeing the face of God. But of course, they then do open their arms again and release each other. I think from the story, there is a bit of feasting there's bound to be there generally is in the stories at that point, I think, and they spend time together. But then they recognize that there isn't space for them both in the same place, their herds are too big. They agree to separate and to go their separate ways. But they go reconciled. And so there was a release each to their own, there's no longer a sense of damage from the past, there is a relationship and we know there's a relationship because when their father dies, they both come together and bury him together as brothers together united. And so there is something in that release again, that there's no sense of control or ownership over each other. There is a freedom with each other and you're freed from what's bound you, from that hatred, from that bitterness and from that fear. So they leave as, in some ways, freed men.

## **Alice Philip** 14:03

That was a really helpful story to illustrate how actually peace has been built. But these two men are not living in the same space afterwards. Peace can look different. I know that Mariam you have a story of where perhaps peace between two men looked different at the end. And in fact, they did end up occupying more of the same space together at the end of their process of reconciliation. So, we'd love to hear about that.

## **Mariam Tadros 14:28**

It was a story from Lebanon, where I think about three years ago I was we were doing kind of faith in conflict tour around Lebanon, and part of our tour was meeting this organisation called Fighters for Peace. The two men that came to speak to us one called Ashraf Dari and the other Ziad Salim, who at the time of the Lebanese civil war, which lasted for fifteen years in the 1970s as Ashraf Dari was a general of the Maronite army and Ziad Salem was one of the militia fighters on the Palestinian side, both essentially fighting against each other. At the time of the Lebanese civil war, there was so much sectarian fighting that even they themselves would say that the Civil War blinded us. And all that we could do was to take up arms. Ashraf Dari, in his own telling of his story often talks about how, as far as he was concerned, it was a case of survival. It was a case of winning, it was a case of only seeing the enemy. And he tells a story of how essentially he commanded the death of dozens of people from the command and control where he was as a general. And for Ziad, it was fighting for a bigger picture of being a Palestinian refugee of the Assyrians coming in and then potentially losing more space, more identity. And being on the side that was trying to keep that identity within the Civil War, which had just become everybody fighting against everybody. What was incredible about this story was that both of them went through a very particular healing of memories journey. Both came towards the end of that journey, seeking forgiveness, not just from each other, but from their own communities. What was equally interesting, I remember as Ashraf during particularly saying how he wrote an open letter to the Lebanese people seeking forgiveness for what he had done. And how many of his own in his own community reprimanded him for seeking forgiveness. But his own deep journey was one way he took that responsibility for his actions. So he went through the process of repentance, he sought forgiveness, some of which was given by some and some which wasn't. He then made space for those he was fighting against, and him and Ziad over the last sort of six or seven years have built a deeply beautiful friendship, where they now go out to universities, they work with the armed forces, they work with young people who may be enlisted into the army, to talk about the rules of engagement to talk about peace over justice. And I know, when I was sitting in the room with both of them listening to their stories, what really struck me was the depth of inner journey that they'd each gone through. And the conviction that they had to seek forgiveness, even though it wasn't always given from the other. But they just had this deep conviction that there was a different way to do things. And seeing them together, telling the story is just an incredible thing in and of itself. And I know in the current situation in Lebanon, where things are fraught at the moment, for them, they're even more exercised about passing on. And this is where the memory comes in both of them wanting to recall what had happened in the days of the Civil War to the next generation, as a way in which to say to them, This is what happens when we take up arms, and when we create enemies and create walls between us. And so in telling the story over and over again, trying to build a choice in the next generation to not take up arms and go down the same road that they went down.

## **Alice Philip 18:36**

What an incredible story, what incredible men on such a journey, and such fruit from that journey that they've chosen to take in themselves. There may have been a journey for some of our listeners. This is the fourth episode, we've looked at an overview about peacebuilding, we've covered the moral imagination, we've thought about hospitality. And today we've been thinking about embrace. Some people might be really deeply involved already in peacebuilding. And I hope for those listeners, they've found a community of fellow peace builders in the interviewees in the room and those we've listened to you from further afield.

And for others, this might be the beginning of a journey into peacebuilding. And I hope particularly in that first episode, you enjoyed hearing about how Maryam and David themselves came into this work. So I'd like to pose the question to you, David unto you, Marian, for those listeners who have been feeling a stirring as they've been listening, what could they do in the places that they're in to start that journey of being a peacebuilder? Taking on some of these ideas that we've explored together?

### **David Couzens** 19:46

I guess one way is to begin to think about how can you provide hospitality. Are there people that you can reach out to without an agenda and just provide that hospitable place where people can come and be generous? And then be real. And to do that, with what Laderach calls a 'paradoxical curiosity', a willingness to listen and to learn and an openness to see new things and to hear new things, and to see new visions in that.

### **Mariam Tadros** 20:15

I think for me, I'm reminded of the question that Ruby Sales, who's an American civil rights activist always asks, which is, where does it hurt? And asking that question to ourselves, and it may well be that that's within your personal circle, it may be that that's within your community. It may be further afield, but really beginning to ask the question of where does it hurt? And from that, allow yourself to acknowledge it. Then, begin that journey of imagination. What is it that could possibly be different in this space of hurt? And then moving into that space of, as David said, hospitality. Who can I invite around the table? And then how can we go through this journey of reconciliation by embracing one another?

### **Alice Philip** 21:03

People might want to look more deeply at some of these concepts. I was wondering if you could just remind us of the key texts and the titles that people could look up to explore more about moral imagination, hospitality embrace.

### **David Couzens** 21:20

So in hospitality, I think, pretty much anything by Henry Nouwen but in particular, his book *Reaching Out* is a good place to start.

### **Mariam Tadros** 21:30

On the moral imagination, we tend to lean on John Paul Laderach a lot. He's written both a book called *moral imagination*, as well as his journey to reconciliation.

**David Couzens** [21:41](#)

And from Miroslav Volf, there is his book, from exclusion to embrace.

**Mariam Tadros** [21:48](#)

I guess just to highlight that on Tearfund's own website, we've got both our theological framework available, as well as a series of Bible studies, which were created by Rene August that take you through all of these different concepts and ideas.

**David Couzens** [22:05](#)

We also have on our website, as well as a whole host of different peacebuilding tools, games and activities that you can do. They are very powerful games, there are instructions on them as to how to use them, and try them out. Try them out with different groups of people.

**Alice Philip** [22:24](#)

That website is the Tearfund learn website. It's [learn.tearfund.org](http://learn.tearfund.org). We'll put all those links accompanying this podcast. It's been an amazing time recording this series. Thank you so much for the time that you've given Mariam, David. Thank you to producer Lucy Gardner and our sound recordist Andrew Philip. I'm Alice Philip. Thank you for joining us.



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