

Richard E. Davies. *Seventy Times Seven: Stories and Thoughts about Christian Forgiving*. Morrow, GA, 2011. 158 pages. \$12.

This small book is a unique collection of various sorts of resources on forgiveness that span Christian history. The resources are organized in four sections. Section I focuses on concepts. Davies begins with his own theological essay on options in thinking about forgiveness that arise out of historic tensions between grace and works, different views of which comes first, and the temptation to emphasize one to the exclusion of the other. He includes in this essay a story of how this tension played out in his own life, followed by stories in the New Testament that hold grace and works together in a sometimes ambiguous relationship. He then continues in this section by reprinting an extensive portion of an analysis of forgiveness by George Herbert Palmer who taught ethics at Harvard in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. This analysis was published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in the aftermath of World War I. Next comes Davies' own word study of Greek words we might or do translate "forgive" and "forgiveness" found in ancient extra-Biblical Greek literature and in the New Testament. Davies says that the extra-Biblical literature shows that for gentile Greek-speaking culture, forgiveness was not a virtue. For the New Testament authors it was clearly a virtue, but finding vocabulary to speak about it was not a simple matter and led to the use of a variety of metaphors and terms that carried other connotations as well. The result is that translating reveals the complexity of the concept. Davies brings this first section to a close with a brief essay on anger, an antonym for forgiveness, by a Roman Catholic moral theologian writing at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Section II Davies entitles "Themes and Stories." The materials here include sermon excerpts, an interview, folk and personal and Biblical stories, legends, a midrash, classic myths, brief references to or excerpts from dramas and novels, a letter, a newspaper account. Most of these materials stem from the last century or two but occasionally from an earlier period. They touch on all manner of experiences, including pie baking, baseball, struggles with schoolmates, slavery, war experiences, peace missions, crime, and auto fatalities. Davies arranges these materials by themes, which include Christ and forgiveness, forgiving and forgetting, forgiving and dialogue, injury and consequences. He presents them in settings of his own comments. Section III is a small collection of four sermons by The Venerable Bede, Albert Schweitzer, Henry Ward Beecher, and Harry Emerson Fosdick. Davies introduces and offers brief commentary on these sermons. Section IV Davies entitles "Some More 'Academic' Material. First is a set of two sermons published in 1799 by Samuel Stanhope Smith that illustrate how the philosophy of that formative period in American history took ethics seriously and expected human beings to be intelligent enough to act properly. The final contribution is an article by the late nineteenth century scholar William Henry Paine Hatch, "The Pauline Idea of Forgiveness."

The materials in this small book will keep preachers busy for a long time, enabling them to return again and again to this central and many faceted theme of the Christian faith. They would also be ideal for group discussions that might flower into sermons. This is a book not to miss.

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