

And who is my enemy?

Essays by our readers reminded me of the call to forgive “70 times seven,” especially in relationships with people we can’t eject from our lives.

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Who is the psalmist talking about when he cries out to God to “Deliver me from my enemies”? Perhaps you’ve winced, as I have, at the psalmist’s raw anger and his uncomfortable clarity about what should happen to his enemies. (“Let burning coals fall on them!”)

In [our latest installment of essays by readers](#), our writers bravely name their enemies, past and present. They admit their pain, their ongoing struggles to forgive, and their struggles to survive living alongside someone who wants to do them harm.

Some of our writers’ stories reminded me of times when I’ve reacted too quickly, assigning “enemy” status to someone who has angered or annoyed me, and not waiting to consider my unreliable and unfair emotions. One writer, an airplane traveler, realizes that she’d labeled two noisy fellow passengers as enemies before she’d even seen them. A man remembers pummeling the school bully on the school playground; as an adult he rues his quick aggression and imagines reacting differently.

Other writers reminded me of the call to forgive “70 times seven,” especially in our relationships with enemies whom we can’t eject from our lives. One woman struggles with the reality of her mother as her abuser and admits that even though her mother is dead, she’s haunted. Forgiveness will probably not happen. Another woman has adopted a foster child and realizes that she will have to put up indefinitely with visits from her enemies—the child’s dysfunctional, manipulative,

and sometimes cruel family members.

Finally, some writers reminded me that I must constantly be alert to the danger of using *enemy* as a collective noun. The labeling of an entire group of people loses its power when one looks a little longer, and sees individual human beings. A soldier in WWII sees the suffering of Japanese soldiers, and goes to Japan after the war as a Christian missionary. Last but not least, a writer tells the story of Bishop Tutu stepping up to a microphone with an addition to an anti-apartheid resolution.

Perhaps you have your own such story—dramatic or ordinary—to share. We are [inviting submissions of first-person narratives until April 15](#) on the one-word prompt *storm*. Who knows what tales that single word will conjure up for our readers!