

FORGIVENESS IN A PRISON CAMP

In his book, *Loving God*, the late Charles Colson – an evangelical Christian leader who founded Prison Fellowship and BreakPoint – tells of a quiet act of forgiveness that began a chain of events that still survives.



Deep in one of Siberia's prison camps during World War II, a Jew by the name of Dr. Boris Kornfeld was imprisoned. As a medical doctor, he worked in surgery and otherwise helped both the staff and the prisoners. He met a Christian, whose name is unknown, possessed of a quiet faith marked by the frequent reciting of the Lord's Prayer. What Dr. Kornfeld saw and heard from this Christian moved him.

One day, while repairing a guard's artery that had been cut in a knifing, Dr. Kornfeld seriously considered suturing it in such a way that he would bleed to death a little while later. Then, appalled by the hatred and violence he saw in his own heart, the doctor found himself repeating the words of the nameless prisoner: "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us."

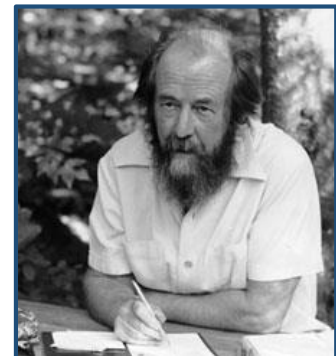
Shortly after that prayer, Dr. Kornfeld began to refuse to go along with some of the standard practices of the prison camp, including one day turning in an orderly who had stolen food from a dying patient. After that, he knew his life was in danger, so he began to spend as much time as possible in the relative safety of the hospital.

One afternoon, he examined a patient who had just been operated on for cancer of the intestines – a man whose eyes and face reflected a depth of spiritual misery and emptiness that touched Kornfeld deep within his soul. So the doctor began to talk to the patient, telling him his entire story; it was his incredible confession of secret faith.

That night, someone sneaked in and smashed Dr. Kornfeld's head while he was asleep; he died a few hours later.

But Kornfeld's testimony did not die, for the patient who had heard his confession became a Christian as a result. And he survived that prison camp and went on to tell the world what he had learned there.

The patient was the great writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Russian novelist, historian and short-story writer, whose works helped to raise global awareness of the Gulag forced-labor camp system.



(more)

Colson's story of what happened in that prison camp offers at least two primary conclusions:

1. The force of a Christian's personal testimony – that of the nameless prisoner as well as the confession of Dr. Kornfeld – and how it can be used in amazing ways.
2. The power of forgiveness in human interaction.

Is there someone in your life who needs your forgiveness today?

And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you (Ephesians 4:32 NKJV).

– Beecher Hunter