FORGIVENESS IN HISTORY

As Abe Lincoln's eyes swept over the crowded, makeshift hospital ward, he was filled with sadness for the men so badly wounded from fighting the Confederate soldiers. He went from bed to bed with Dr. Jerome Walker, who was doing all he could for the men. Abe listened to the wounded men and encouraged them, thanking them for fighting for their nation. Some voiced bitterness at the South for starting the war that seemed to be destroying the nation, calling their soldiers "rebels."

Abe answered them by saying, "We have all played a part in that destruction. There are two sides to every war; the fault is not entirely theirs."

Did you spot the "I Will"? Abe was willing to admit his own wrong, rather than entirely blaming others.

Abe and the doctor then entered a ward containing Southern prisoners, although Dr. Walker had assumed Abe would not want to visit them. Surprising Dr. Walker, Abe was kind and compassionate to these men as well, even though they had no doubt killed many of his own men.

Did you spot the "I Will"? Abe was quick to forgive his enemies.

Dr. Walker said in amazement, "How do you do it, sir? How can you be kind to these men who are prisoners of war?" Abe replied, "They are also brave soldiers who also need care and forgiveness."

Did you spot the "I Will"? Abe showed kindness to those who had opposed him.

Abe began to tell Dr. Walker one of his famous tales. He told of a time when he and friends were attacked as they were taking a boat down the Mississippi by a band of escaping slaves who feared capture. They were able to fight them off and escape safely to continue down the river.

Then Abe posed a question to Dr. Walker, "Do you think it would have been right for me to believe that all Africans were evil based on that one experience?"

Did you spot the "I Will"? Abe did not take up a personal offense against the slaves who attacked him.

Abe continued, "Then I can't assume that these men are evil either. There is no need for revenge, with all the pain these men have already endured."

Did you spot the "I Will"? Abe knew he should not seek revenge.

The war ended on April 9, 1865 when the Confederate army surrendered to the Union. Mr. Lincoln again demonstrated forgiveness with the generous terms of surrender he gave to the Confederacy. This forgiving attitude enabled the United States of America to be one nation again.

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