

How to Forgive:

There are many books that will help to guide you through the forgiveness process (please see the “Forgiveness Resources” section). One of the approaches that you may want to consider is Worthington’s (1998) empathy-humility-commitment model. This model is made up of three components. Empathy for the offender is the main component involved in the process. The second component is humility. This happens when the victim, “. . . sees humans as fallible, the offender as human, and (finally) the self as one of those fallible human beings” (Worthington, 1998, p. 64). The final component is commitment. By commitment Worthington (1998) meant an overt act on the part of the forgiver that signifies a change has taken place. This act could be crying or admitting that forgiveness has taken place to another person, or other overt acts signifying the change.

This is just one option to consider. You may need to look into the different resources to find a process that works for you.

If you have further questions about forgiveness and whether or not it may be an option for you, you can take steps to explore this choice. You can find joy and hope.

If you are in doubt about where to turn for assistance, please feel free to call the Regent University Psychological Services Center at (757) 226-4488.

Forgiveness Resources:

Books:

McCullough, M.E., Pargament, K.I., &Thoresen, C.E., *Forgiveness: Theory, research, and practice*. New York, NY: The Guildford Press.

Enright, R.D. (2001). *Forgiveness is a choice, A step-by-step process for resolving anger and restoring hope*. Washington, DC: APA Life Tools.

Worthington, E.L. Jr. (1998). *Dimensions of forgiveness: Psychological research & theological perspectives*. Radnor, PA: Templeton Foundation Press.

Websites:

www.forgivenessweb.com

www.forgivenessinstitute.org



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Is Forgiveness An Option For You?



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What is Forgiveness?

Forgiveness has been defined in many ways, by many different people. McCullough et al. (1997) described forgiveness as involving three different motivational changes: (a) one's motivation to retaliate against the offender decreases, (b) one's motivation to uphold separation from the offender decreases, and (c) one's motivation for conciliation and positive thinking about the offender increases, even though the offender has caused pain.

What Forgiveness is NOT:

When dealing with the topic of forgiveness, it is necessary to dispel some myths about what forgiveness is not. Enright and Coyle (1998) articulated what many researchers have also contended when they outlined what forgiveness is not. Forgiveness is not condoning, pardoning, denying, forgetting, excusing, or reconciling (Enright & Coyle, 1998).

Why Forgive:

Forgiveness has been shown to have a positive impact on both physical and psychological health (McCullough et al., 1998; McCullough & Worthington, 1999). Cardiovascular problems as well as chronic pain have been said to improve in people who forgave (Pettitt, 1987). Huang (1990) studied the affect of forgiveness on blood pressure and found that those who forgave had lower blood pressure than those who did not forgive. In regard to psychological well-being, increases in hope, forgiveness and self-esteem, and decreases in depression and anxiety were seen in individuals who participated in a group to help them forgive, even a year later (Enright, Gassin, Longinovic, & Loudon, 1994).

In his book, *Forgiveness is a Choice: A Step-by-Step Process for Resolving Anger and Restoring Hope*, Enright (2001) wrote, "If at this point you are asking yourself 'why should I begin the forgiveness process?' it's OK if you choose one of the following motivations:

- I am tired of feeling this pain and want it to stop.
- I don't want to go on letting this person hurt me.
- If I forgive, I will feel better.
- If I forgive, maybe I will become physically or psychologically healthier.
- I don't want to give this person the satisfaction of hurting me" (p. 75-76).

It's a Process:

Forgiveness is a process; don't get discouraged if it doesn't happen overnight. Newberg et al. (2000) described the process people go through after they have been injured, in order to reconcile the hurt. First, the injured party must acknowledge the transgression toward him or herself. Second, there is a period of cognitive dissonance in which the injured party takes inventory of the loss he or she has suffered. Third, the injured party chooses a plan of action to rectify the inner incongruence. This is typically done via revenge or forgiveness. Fourth, a change in the injured party's worldview takes place, as he or she no longer sees him or herself in relationship to others and the world in the same way. Fifth, taking into account a change in worldview, available resources are drawn on to allow equilibrium to be restored in the injured party (this could happen through empathy, religion etc.). Finally, the sixth stage in the process involves a behavior change on the part of injured party in accordance with the changed worldview

and the restored equilibrium. It is through this process that forgiveness likely takes place.

Spiritual Integration:

Forgiveness is a key concept in the Christian faith. It is how God built a bridge back to His children (i.e., Adam and Eve, and consequently all of humanity) after the fall in the garden (Genesis 3:15). Historically, in the Christian tradition, a blood sacrifice was needed to atone for sin. Jesus Christ, the Son of God came to earth in the form of a man. He lived roughly 33 years on earth, as both God and man and died on a cross as a perfect sacrifice for sin to atone once and for all for the sins of all of those who would believe in Him. Prior to Christ, many blood sacrifices were made to atone for sin, but after Christ no further blood sacrifices were needed, as He was the ultimate sacrifice building a bridge back to the Father God. While Jesus was being crucified on the cross, he said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34, New International Version). Forgiveness is one way Christians reach God. He is perfection, we are fallible, but through the blood of Christ there is forgiveness. It is from the love of God through Christ's dying for sinners that those who believe are compelled to forgive and to love. Forgiveness is an outflow of the love that was first given from God. As in the Jewish faith, it is also believed in the Christian faith that God forgives those who forgive others. Forgiveness is the linchpin on which all of Christianity hinges. Forgiveness creates a path into healthy relationship building with God and others.

