

Dimensions of Forgiveness: An Overview

Everett L. Worthington, Jr.

Virginia Commonwealth University

Thursday, May 17, 2018, (45 minutes within 19:30-21:00)

The Coventry Lecture

Presented at 6th European Conference on Religion, Spirituality and Health and the 5th International Conference of the British Association for the Study of Spirituality

Coventry, England

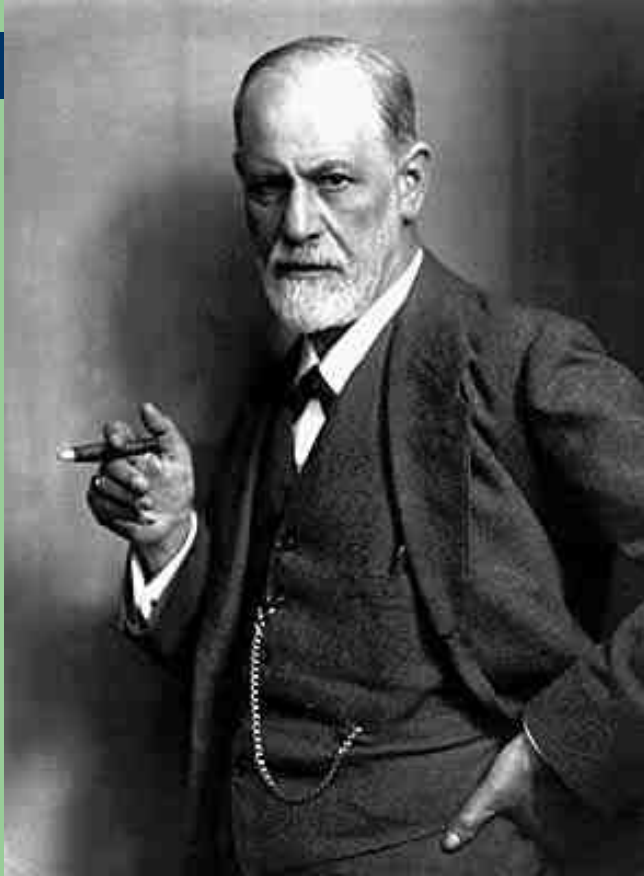


Ev is Commonwealth Professor Emeritus within the Department of Psychology at VCU. When he isn't off speaking, he's in his sensory deprivation chamber aka office (mailing address: Box 842018, 806 West Franklin Street, 23284; office 918 W. Franklin) and is reachable by email (eworth@vcu.edu) and phone (804-828-1150). Visit his website for free material on promoting forgiveness, humility, patience, of other virtues (www.EvWorthington-forgiveness.com)

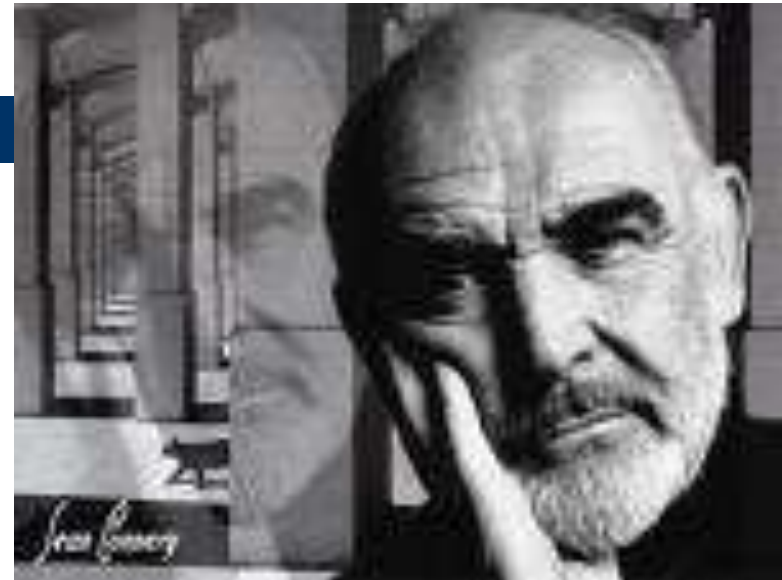
I Know What You're Thinking



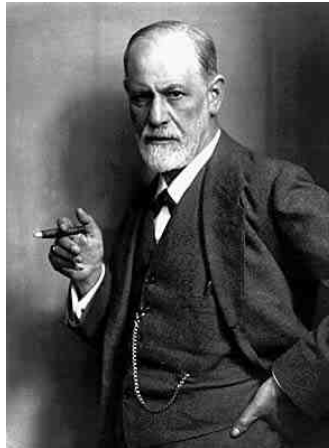
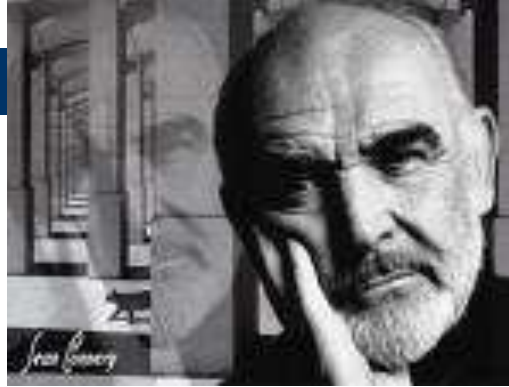
NOT me



Nor (unfortunately) is this



See!! (I'm the one with the beautiful woman.)



Learning Objectives

- By the end of this one-hour presentation, the participant will be able to
 - Describe a current conceptualization of the field of forgiveness studies.
 - Relate forgiveness to religion and spirituality

Understanding Forgiveness

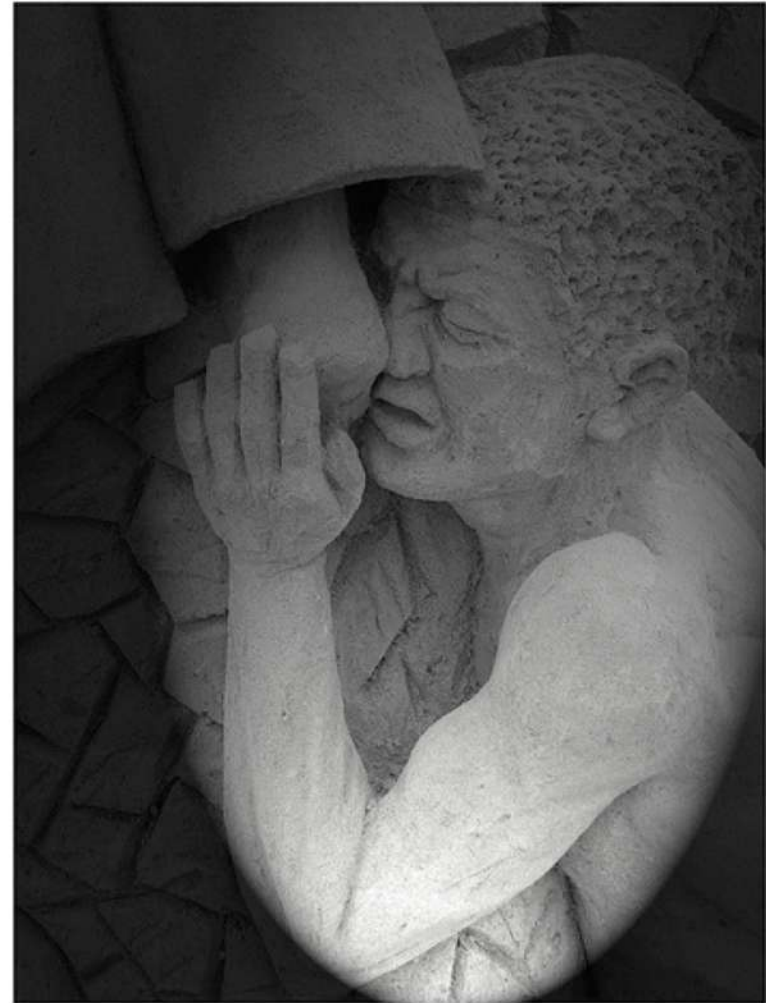
- Experienced as wrongdoer
 - Divine Forgiveness (God forgives people)
 - Self-Forgiveness (People wrestle with self-condemnation)
- Experienced as victim
 - Person-to-Person Forgiveness (our focus)
 - Social and Societal Forgiveness (see Enright, R. D., Y. -R. Lee, M. J. Hirshberg, et al. 2016. Examining group forgiveness: Conceptual and empirical issues. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 22.2: 153–162.)

Forgiveness Can Be a Turning Point in Life



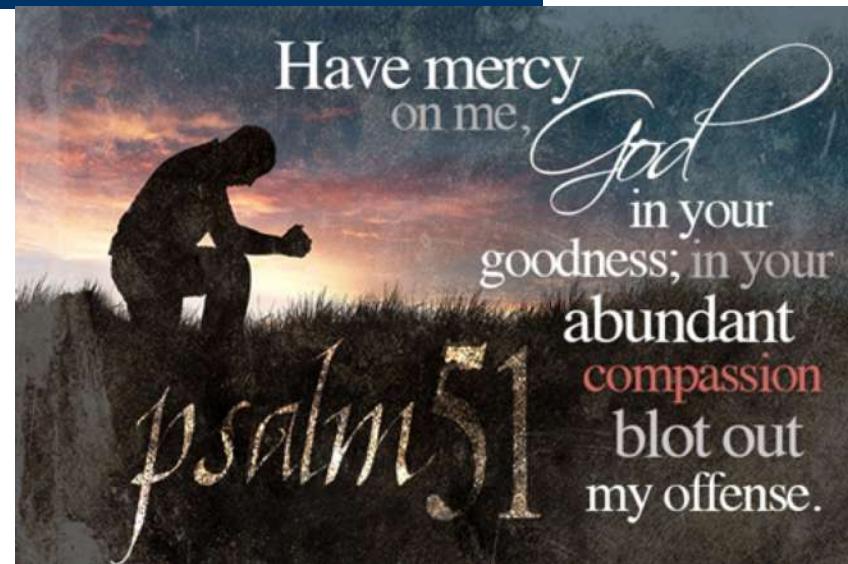
Forgiveness: The Hard Virtue

- Note: Forgiveness occurs within our skins



Divine Forgiveness

- A sense that God has forgiven one for one's wrongdoing or "wrong-being"
- A sense that one has regained a sense of balance (or "forgiveness") after a wrong against people or against nature or against the cosmos.



Growing Up Today Study (GUTS; Chen, Harris, Worthington, & *VanderWeele*, under review)

- Longitudinal data from the Nurses' Health Study II and the GUTS (N = 5,246 to 6,994, depending on forgiveness type and outcome)
- All models predict 3 or 6 years—controlled for demographics, prior religious service attendance, and prior values of the outcome variables.
- **All forgiveness types—by God, of others, of self—positively associated with psychological well-being and inversely associated with depressive or anxiety symptoms in a dose-response pattern.**
- In this study, little evidence that forgiveness related to health outcomes.





Self Forgiveness

Can This Be a Religious Act? Or Is Forgiveness Completely up to God



Ps 51: A psalm by David after Nathan confronted him.

David was confronted by Nathan: "You are the man."

Create in me a clean heart, oh God
And renew a right spirit within me.

Cast me not away from Thy presence, oh Lord
And take not Thy holy spirit from me.

Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation
And renew a right spirit within me.

Forgiveness Is Very Difficult



another t

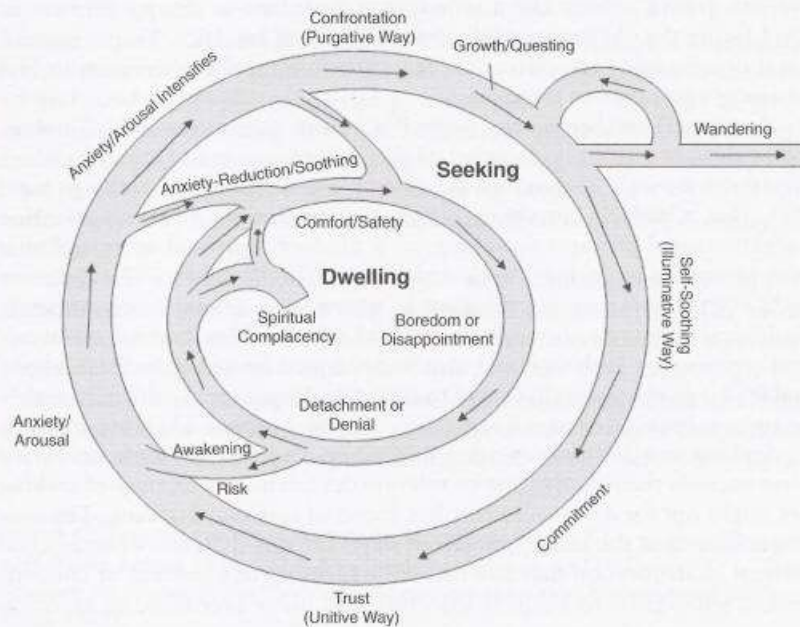


Forgiveness is hard because life is hard



- Yes, that's me in the para-military costume (aka band uniform), with the sharp, clip-on, and oh-so-well-coiffed tie canted at a jaunty angle.

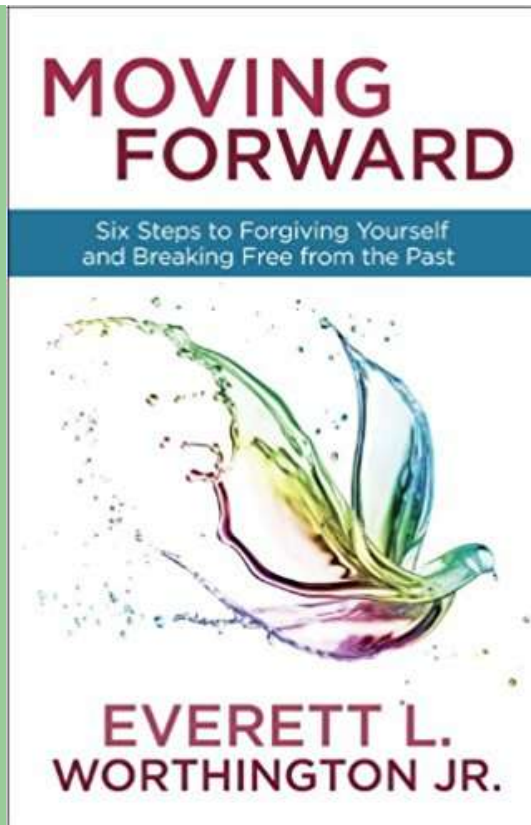
Times of Dwelling versus Seeking



Maureen Miner,
University of Western
Sydney Psychologist

Robert Wuthnow, Princeton University Sociologist

Worthington and Griffin's Dual-Process Theory of Self-Forgiveness



Dual Process Model of Self-Forgiveness: Six Steps to Self-Forgiveness and Decisional Plus Emotional Self-Forgiveness

- Responsibility
 - Step 1: Receive God's Forgiveness (or Humanity, or Nature)—Moral repair (Decisional)
 - Step 2: Repair Relationships—Moral repair (Decisional)
 - Step 3: Reduce Rumination (Rumination, Expectations, Standards)—Internal condemnation (Emotional)
- REACH Emotional Self-Forgiveness
 - Step 4: Explicit Decision plus REACH Emotional Self-forgiveness)—Moral Repair (Decisional) plus Internal condemnation (Emotional)
- Repair of Self
 - Step 5: Realize Self-Acceptance—Internal condemnation (Emotional)
 - Step 6: Resolve to Live Virtuously—Moral Repair (Decisional)

Worthington, E. L., Jr. (2013). ***Moving Forward: Six Steps to Self-Forgiveness and Breaking Free from the Past.*** Colorado Springs: WaterBrook/Multnomah.



Griffin, B. J., Worthington, E. L., Jr., Lavelock, C. R., Greer, C. L., Lin, J., Davis, D. E., & Hook, J. N. (2015). Efficacy of a self-forgiveness workbook: A randomized controlled trial with interpersonal offenders. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 62(2), 124-136.

Davis, D. E., Ho, M. Y., Griffin, B. J., Bell, C., Hook, J. N., Van Tongeren, D. R., Worthington, E. L., Jr., DeBlaere, C., & Westbrook, C. (2015). Forgiving the self and physical and mental health correlates: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 62(2), 329-335.

Workbook to Promote Self-Forgiveness

*Moving Forward:
Six Steps to Forgiving Yourself and
Breaking Free from the Past*



Self-Directed Learning Workbook

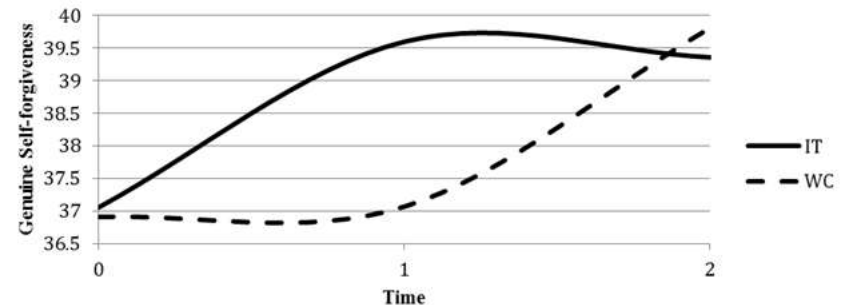
An Intervention Designed to Promote Self-Forgiveness

Everett L. Worthington, Jr., PhD
Virginia Commonwealth University
(Adapted as a Workbook by Brandon Griffin & Caroline Lavelock)

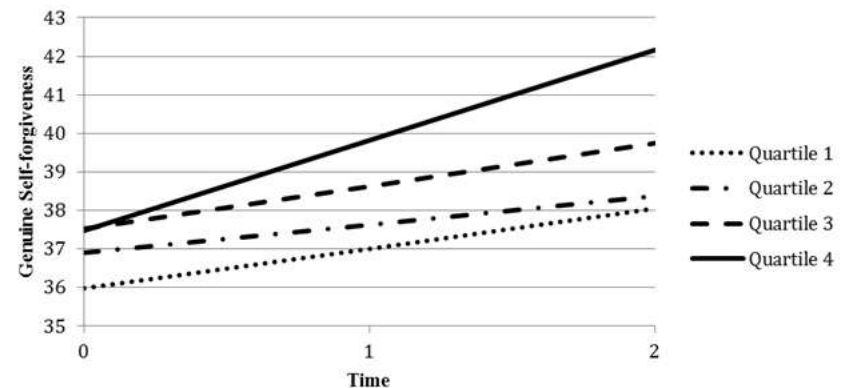
Running Head: EFFICACY OF A SELF-FORGIVENESS WORKBOOK

40

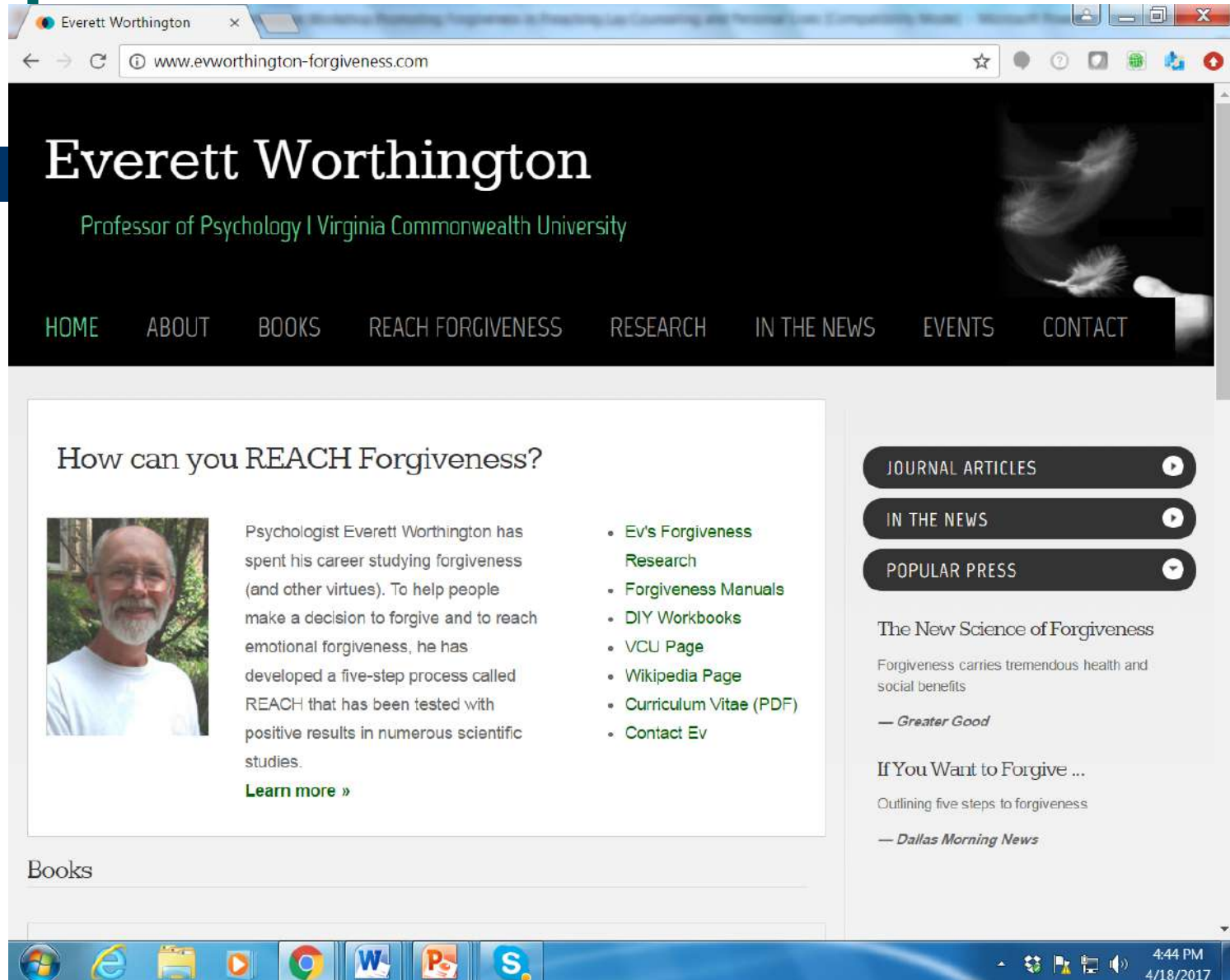
A.



B.



Make Materials Available and Free— Group Manuals and Workbooks Are Free


A screenshot of a web browser displaying the website of Everett Worthington. The browser's address bar shows the URL www.eworthington-forgiveness.com. The website has a dark header with the name 'Everett Worthington' in white, followed by 'Professor of Psychology | Virginia Commonwealth University' in green. A navigation menu below the header includes links for HOME, ABOUT, BOOKS, REACH FORGIVENESS, RESEARCH, IN THE NEWS, EVENTS, and CONTACT. The main content area features a section titled 'How can you REACH Forgiveness?' which includes a portrait of Everett Worthington, a paragraph about his work, and a list of links. To the right of this section are three buttons for 'JOURNAL ARTICLES', 'IN THE NEWS', and 'POPULAR PRESS'. Below these buttons are two featured articles: 'The New Science of Forgiveness' and 'If You Want to Forgeve ...'. At the bottom left, there is a 'Books' section. The Windows taskbar at the bottom of the screen shows various application icons and the system clock indicating 4:44 PM on 4/18/2017.

Everett Worthington

Professor of Psychology | Virginia Commonwealth University

HOME ABOUT BOOKS REACH FORGIVENESS RESEARCH IN THE NEWS EVENTS CONTACT

How can you REACH Forgiveness?



Psychologist Everett Worthington has spent his career studying forgiveness (and other virtues). To help people make a decision to forgive and to reach emotional forgiveness, he has developed a five-step process called REACH that has been tested with positive results in numerous scientific studies.

[Learn more »](#)

- [Ev's Forgiveness Research](#)
- [Forgiveness Manuals](#)
- [DIY Workbooks](#)
- [VCU Page](#)
- [Wikipedia Page](#)
- [Curriculum Vitae \(PDF\)](#)
- [Contact Ev](#)

JOURNAL ARTICLES

IN THE NEWS

POPULAR PRESS

The New Science of Forgiveness

Forgiveness carries tremendous health and social benefits

— *Greater Good*

If You Want to Forgeve ...

Outlining five steps to forgiveness

— *Dallas Morning News*

Books

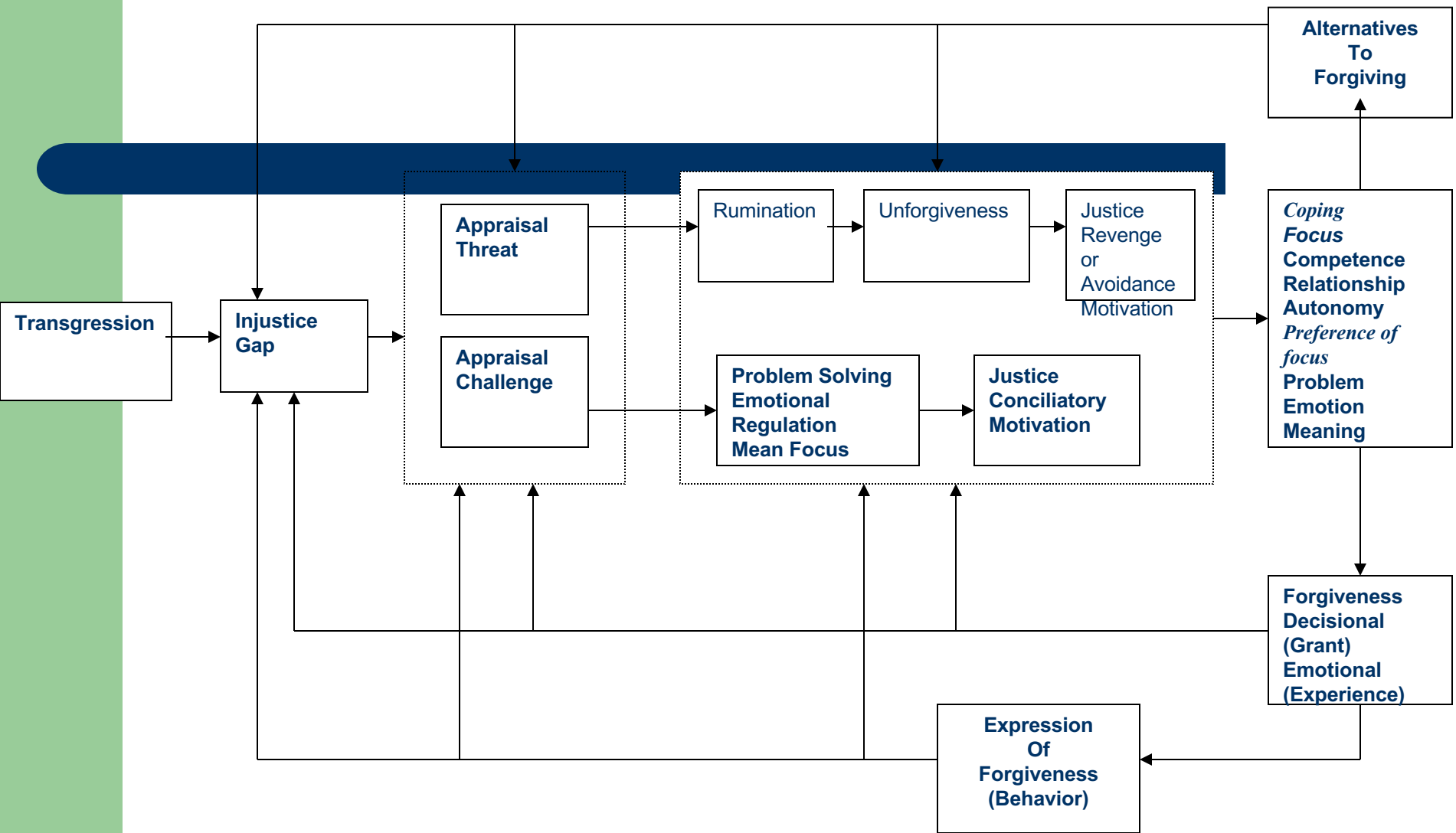
Forgiveness Experienced as a Victim

- **Social and Societal Forgiveness**
- **Defined:** a public pronouncement by someone with the authority to do so granting forgiveness to a group (or person) for a crime (or transgression) against the (forgiving) group
- This involves the social and societal contexts and actual behavior.
- People within societies and social systems differ.
- How one handles transgressions by the other side determines how fragile the social and societal forgiveness are.

Understanding Person-to-Person Forgiveness—From One Particular Perspective (Stress-and-Coping Theory of Forgiveness)



Model of Stress and Coping with Interpersonal Transgressions (Worthington, 2006)



Worthington and Sandage's Spirituality and Religion Theory of Relational Forgiveness

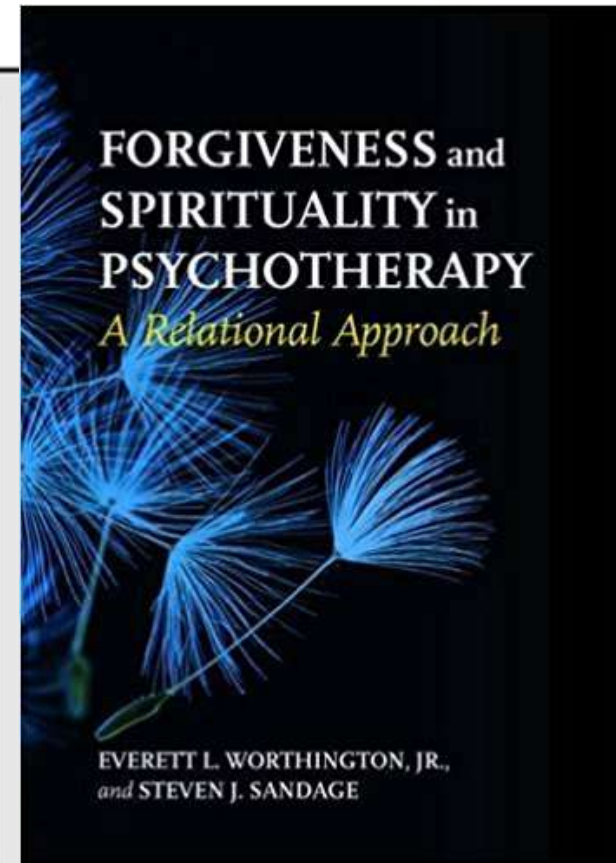
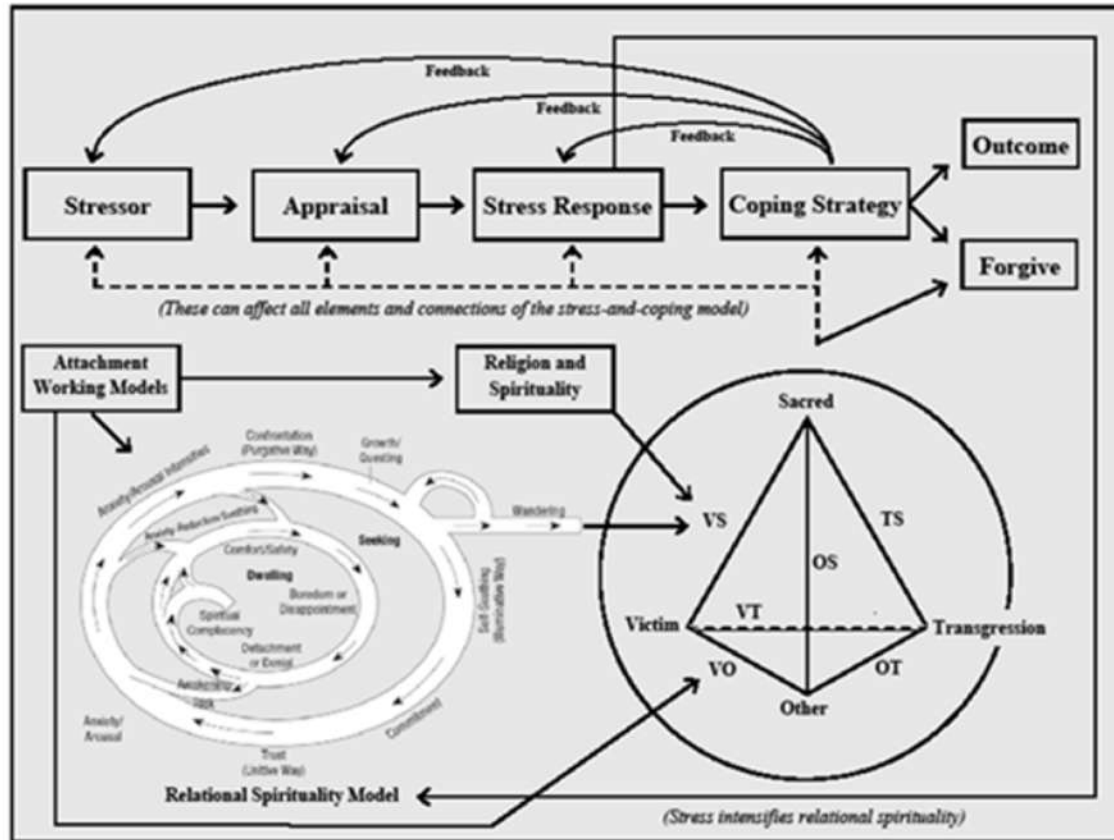


Figure 3-2

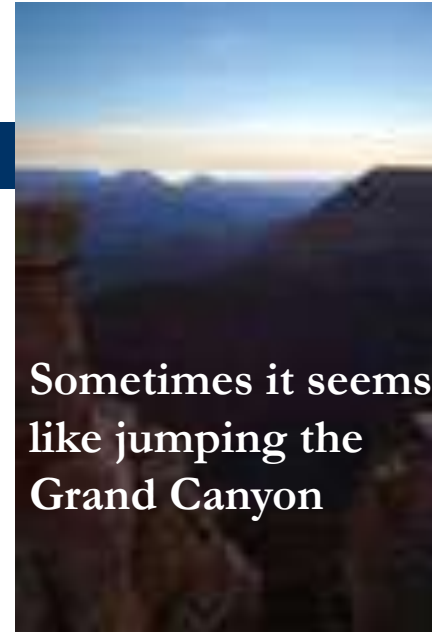
The full forgiveness and relational spirituality process model, which combines (1) the stress-and-coping model (top boxes) with (2) the relational spirituality model (circular figure in bottom left, which will be replaced with a revised picture, see below, after the first of the year), which is in turn affected by (3) the attachment working models (shown as a box with arrow pointed at the relational spirituality model) and connected with (4) the forgiveness and

Injustice Gap: the gap between my ideal and the way that I perceive that things currently stand

Size of injustice gap is proportional to difficulty forgiving.



Small injustice gap



Sometimes it seems like jumping the Grand Canyon

Davis, D. E., Yang, X., DeBlaere, C., McElroy, S. E., Van Tongeren, D. R., Hook, J. N., Worthington, E. L., Jr. (2016). The injustice gap. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 8(3), 175-184.







We Have Options

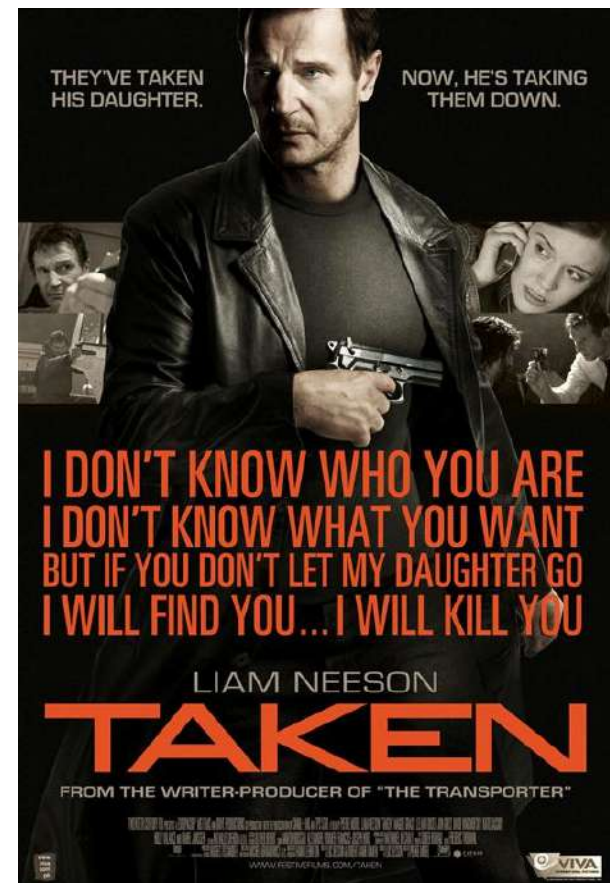
- There are many ways to deal with injustice

Revenge



HELLO. MY NAME IS INIGO MONTOYA

You killed me father.
Prepare to die.

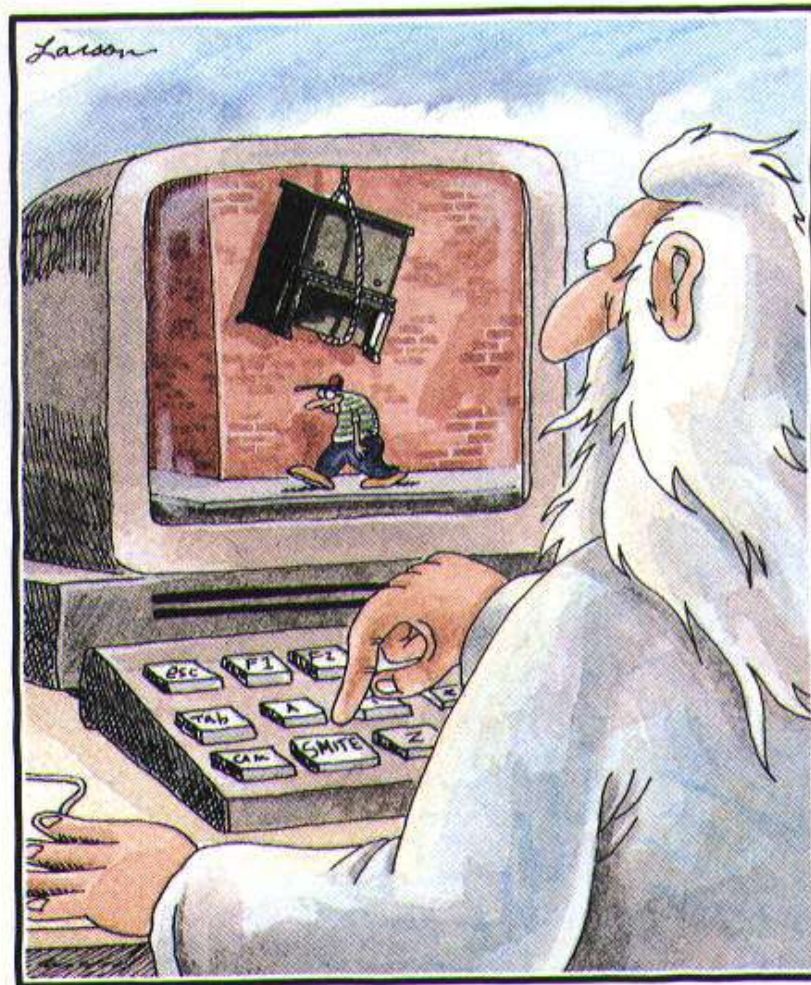


See Justice Done

******Worthington, E. L., Jr.
(2009). *A just forgiveness:
Responsible healing
without excusing injustice.*
Downers Grove, IL:
InterVarsity Press.



Divine Justice



God at His computer

Relinquishing It



Forbear

Lin, Y., Worthington, E. L., Jr., & Wertheim, E. (2017).
Forbearance: Creation of a
brief measure and evidence
of psychometric support.
Unpublished manuscript, in
preparation.

- Effortful attempts to suppress showing that one is upset over a transgression to preserve group harmony



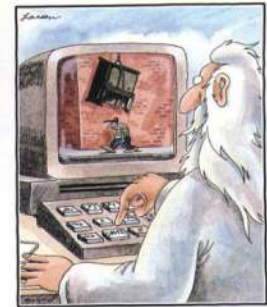
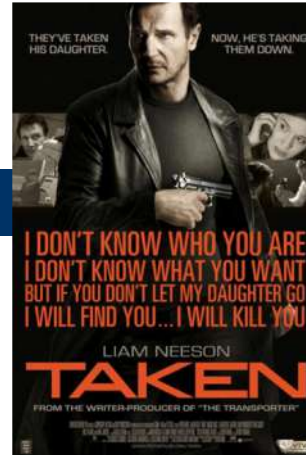


peace

acceptance

Summary: We Have Coping Options

- Revenge
- Justice
- Turn it over to God
- Forbear
- Accept and move on
- Forgive
- These can all be pursued simultaneously



Wade, N. G., & Worthington, E. L., Jr. (2003). Overcoming interpersonal offenses: Is forgiveness the only way to deal with unforgiveness? *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 81, 343-353.

F  R G I V E

Historically, there has been a lot of conflict over how forgiveness is *defined*.

**Historically, there has been a lot of conflict over how forgiveness is defined.
(Here are two forgiveness researchers discussing their definitions.)**



← Me, before the
unfortunate bulimic
episode

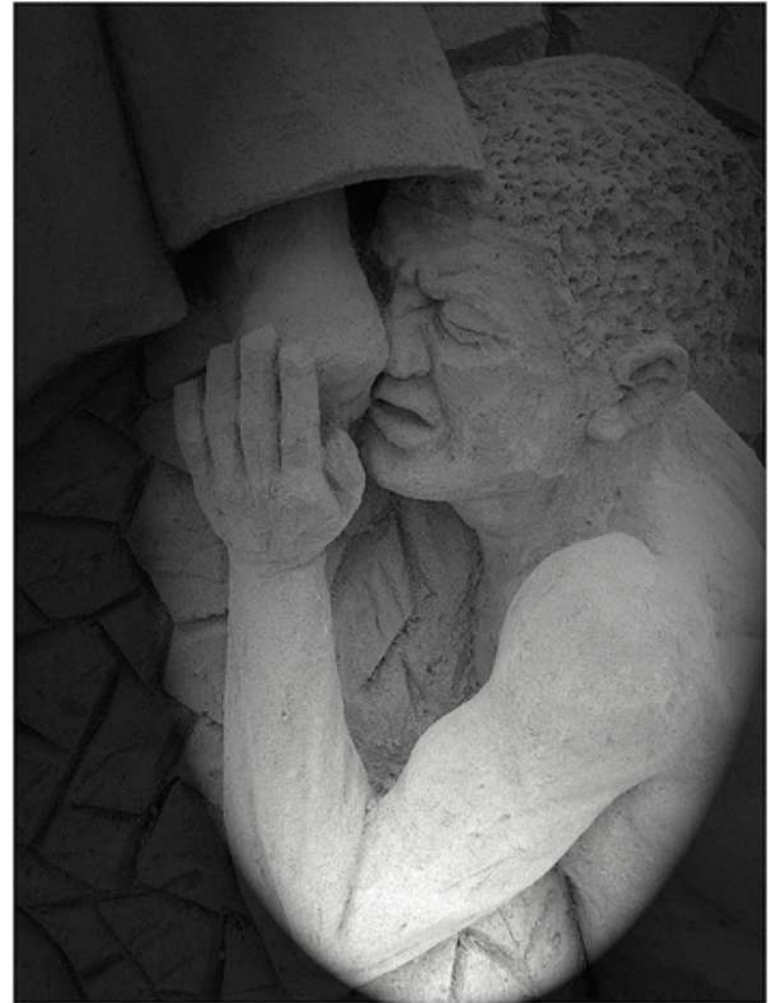
What Forgiveness Is NOT

- **Not Forbearance**
- **Not Condoning**
- **Not Reconciling**
- **Not Forgetting**
- **Not Justifying**
- **Not Getting Justice**
- **Not Excusing**



What forgiveness IS

- Two SEPARATE things:



Decisional Forgiveness

**An intention statement
stating one's intent to
forswear revenge and
treat the person as a
valued and valuable
person**



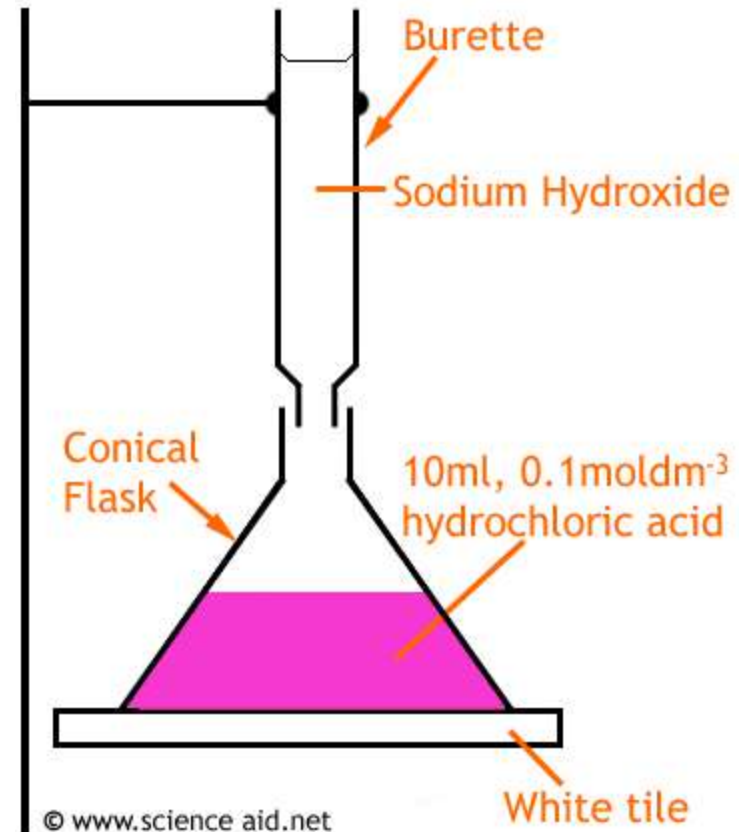
We might decide to forgive and still feel **Emotional Unforgiveness**

A complex combination of negative emotions (i.e., resentment, bitterness, hostility, hatred, anger, and fear)



Emotional Forgiveness

Emotional forgiveness is the emotional replacement by positive other-oriented emotions of negative unforgiving emotions.



Positive other-oriented emotions

- **Empathy**
- **Sympathy**
- **Compassion**
- **Agape (altruistic) love**
- **Romantic love**



Facilitated by Positive Non-Self-focused Emotions

- Gratitude (for having been forgiven)
- Humility (recognition that I, too, have erred)
- Hope (toward the future)



Reminder: Don't Confuse DF, EF, and Reconciliation

Reconciliation:
restoration of trust in
a relationship where
trust has been
violated

DF=decision

EF=emotional experience

Both occur within our skin



Forgiveness can promote reconciliation

**Decisional and Emotional Forgiveness
are not Reconciliation and they also
are not simply saying, “I forgive you.”**



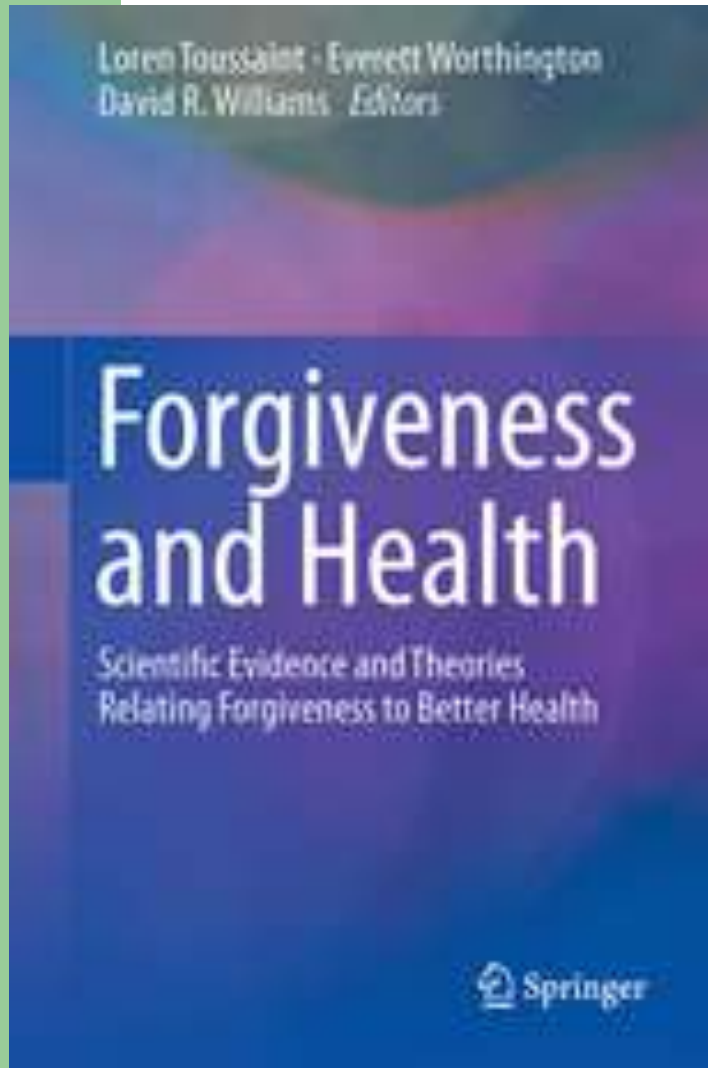
Review and Practical Advice: Use whatever works—all at the same time

- Decision to forgive
 - Emotional forgiveness
- +
- Seek justice
 - Turn it over to God
 - Forbear
 - Accept and move on

Why should we forgive?



Better Health



- Virtually All Bodily Systems

Better Mental Health

- Less

- Rumination,
- Therefore less

- Depression

- Anxiety

- Anger

- Hate

- Resentment



Better Relationships

- Romantic *partners*
 - *Family members*
 - *Work mates*
-
- Relationship problems lead to other problems in
 - ***Societies*** are upset when forgiveness is absent



Better Spiritual Well-Being



Forgiveness and the Abrahamic Religions



Two Types of Human-to-Human Forgiveness—In Christian Theology

- Decisional Forgiveness
(Required of Christians)
- Emotional Forgiveness
(Desired for Christians)



So, How Does Christian Scripture Tell Us to Forgive? The “Nike” Model—Just Do It!!

- **Just do it: Matthew 6:14-15 NIV** For *if you forgive men when they sin against you*, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. **Mark 11:25:** And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”
- **Repeatedly and potentially infinitely: Matt 18: 21-22 NIV** Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times? “Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but ***seventy-seven times***.”
- **As the Lord forgave you: Col 3:13 NIV** “Bear with each other and ***forgive one another*** if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” **Eph 4:32:** “Be kind and compassionate to one another, ***forgiving each other***, just as in Christ God forgave you.” How did the Lord forgive us? Unilaterally, without condition, every time. (We humans either do or don’t accept that forgiveness.)
- **From the heart** (which is not the way we understand the phrase today): **Matt 18:35:** “... you ***forgive your brother or sister*** from your heart.” (The parable of the unforgiving steward has no mention or implication of emotional forgiveness. It’s all about deciding about how you intend to behave—i.e., decisional forgiveness.)

Jewish Theology

- It's all about teshuva (i.e., return to the path of God)
- Confess
- Apologize
- Make amends
- Prove you won't do it again
- Ask



1135 to 1204

Islamic Forgiveness



- One of God's 99 names—A Forgiving God
- Justice is most highly desired and rewarded, and people are entitled to justice
- To forgive is desirable, and is highly rewarded, but it is not expected of all.



Helping People Forgive

A light green L-shaped graphic element is positioned in the top-left corner of the slide. A thick, dark blue horizontal bar spans across the slide, starting from the left edge and ending just before the right edge, positioned below the title.

Forgiveness Intervention Research Shows:

Findings:

- (1) REACH Forgiveness and Process model are used most;
- (2) All are equally effective per hour;
- (3) The more time trying to forgive, the more forgiveness;
- (4) You not only forgive, but you get more hope, and decrease both depression and anxiety.

Wade, N. G., Hoyt, W. T., Kidwell, J. E. M., & Worthington, E. L., Jr. (2014). Efficacy of psychotherapeutic interventions to promote forgiveness: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 82(1), 154-170.

The Story of Ruby Bridges



Chris Carrier's Story



Chris Carrier, Ruby Bridges, and I Forgave ...

**We refused to hate and were freer to
do positive things ...**



Questions and Answers

