

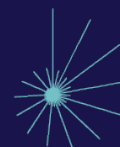
# *The Science of Forgiveness*

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JOHN TEMPLETON  
FOUNDATION

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## I. INTRODUCTION

This review was created to assist journalists in developing compelling, science-informed pieces that relate to forgiveness. The philosophy that governs which information I have highlighted is shaped by a realization that hot studies are typically news—and well worth highlighting as they are published. However, hot studies are quickly relegated to the past as back issues of scientific journals. Reviews and meta-analyses are different—they survey many articles and thus have a longer shelf-life. They can be relevant years after publication. In addition, those who write meta-analyses and reviews tend to be experts within a subfield of forgiveness studies, and they are usually producing new and relevant research in the areas they review. They are good sources for journalists to consult, at least at the outset for context and quotes. I have tried to note topics that come up frequently and describe how journalists might craft pieces around those “hooks.” Having been interviewed over 1,000 times and given hundreds of public talks on forgiveness, I also have reflected on some of the best questions that journalists, other interviewers, and people in audiences have asked me.

Over the years, I have been fortunate to receive funding from each of the Templeton Foundations (John Templeton Foundation, Templeton World Charity Foundation, and Templeton Religious Trust) for my studies in forgiveness. From 1999 to 2005, I served as executive director for A Campaign for Forgiveness Research, a 501(c)3 corporation with the mission of raising philanthropic support to fund research in forgiveness. The Campaign was independent of JTF, but it was formed after the first world-wide request for proposals by JTF revealed a plethora of fundable research initiatives—only a few of which could be funded by the money initially available. The Campaign allowed me to serve as a media spokesperson on behalf of forgiveness research, which fueled my interest in bringing forgiveness information to the public. Later, I was involved with helping make documentary movies, editing handbooks reporting forgiveness research, being a guest on talk shows, and providing information for print pieces. I have also been pleased to connect scientists with journalists. So, creating this document is a joy for me and is well within my life mission: to do all I can to promote forgiveness in every *willing* heart, home, and homeland.

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## II. UNDERSTANDING FORGIVENESS

During the late 1990s, in the aftermath of the fall of Communism, Nelson Mandela's election in South Africa, and an easing of the conflict in Northern Ireland, the world faced a new era in which former enemies tried to work with each other. Forgiveness took on new significance beyond religion, with which it had often been associated. The John Templeton Foundation issued a call for proposals that resulted in 20 funded grants, establishment of the non-profit organization, A Campaign for Forgiveness Research, which funded eight additional grants, and a total of almost \$10 million put toward research on forgiveness. By 2005, this infusion of research money had moved the scientific study of forgiveness from 58 studies (1997) to over 1,100 published articles in 2005. Now, 15 years later, as we take stock, we find that research has continued not just to grow, but to accelerate.

The recent *Handbook of Forgiveness*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Routledge) has collected over 30 reviews or meta-analyses of subfields. Researchers have increased their attention to the context of transgressions, their aftermath, the behaviors and communications around transgressions, and the intertwined behaviors of offender and forgiver. Rather than emphasize only the experience of the forgiver, it pays attention to the entire set of experiences surrounding transgressions. That means that, although forgiveness of others is still the dominant research focus, researchers are also studying forgiveness of one's self, intergroup forgiveness, and feeling as if one is forgiven by God.

Forgiving itself is also seen as more nuanced than it was 15 years ago. Rather than treating forgiveness as a generic process, many researchers are differentiating a decision to forgive from emotional forgiveness. A decision to forgive is primarily a decision to try to act differently toward the offender and, not seeking payback, treating the person as a valuable and valued person. Many people struggle with deciding to forgive, but once the decision is made, it is made—like turning on a light. On the other hand, emotional forgiveness is the (usually) gradual replacement of unforgiving emotions like resentment, bitterness, or anger with positive other-oriented emotions like empathy or compassion for the offender. Emotional forgiveness means that unforgiveness gradually lessens until neutrality is reached. Then, with a valuable relationship, one might continue to generate more positive emotions until a net positive feeling is restored.

One paradox that has been often noted is this. Most people highly value forgiveness. Religions advocate it. Talk-show hosts advise it. Yet, despite all this positive attention, most people struggle to forgive. The good news is that there are two well-established, research-supported programs to promote forgiveness—and there are many others that just have less research support, but the limited support for them is still positive. The two most supported methods are Robert Enright's Process model and Everett Worthington's REACH Forgiveness approach.

Enright's Process model of forgiving suggests that people who are led through a four-phase repeatable process are likely to forgive. In the Uncovering phase, the person seeks to understand the offense and its impact on one's life. In the Decision phase, the person is taught about forgiveness. He or she decides to commit to forgiving. Forgiveness is explicitly chosen. In the Work phase, people seek to understand

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the offender and potential reasons why the offender might have acted hurtfully. This helps a person rethink the offense and re-perceive the offender, seeing the person as a fallible human. In the Deepening phase, people seek to find a sense of meaning or purpose in suffering. They might also come to want to engage more with others. Often, they feel less sad, anxious, and suspicious. They sometimes feel more purpose in life. This process of forgiving is not descriptive of natural forgiveness. No experimental data support such a naturally occurring forgiveness process. Rather, the phases occur within a forgiveness intervention that helps people who want to forgive to do so. The process model is more accurately a model of intervention than a descriptive theory of forgiveness as it naturally occurs. It has been shown to help people forgive in many help-giving contexts.

Worthington's REACH Forgiveness model also is a therapeutic model, not a theory of what naturally occurs. REACH is an acronym that cues each of three key steps to forgiving others. (And it can also be used in forgiving oneself.) The model begins by asking people to identify the most difficult thing they ever successfully forgave. It helps people see that there are physical, health, psychological, relational, and spiritual benefits to forgiving but that forgiving is but one alternative for dealing successfully with injustices. Thus, the forgiveness intervention is for people who wish to forgive. No one should ever be forced or coerced to forgive. People are shown that forgiveness involves both a decision to forgive and an emotional transformation. First people are led through the REACH Forgiveness five steps (see <http://www.evworthington-forgiveness.com/reach-forgiveness-of-others>).

**R = Recall the hurt.** To heal, you have to face the fact that you've been hurt. Decide not to be snarky (i.e., nasty and hurtful), not to treat yourself like a victim, and not to treat the other person as a jerk.

**E = Empathize with your offender.** Empathy is putting yourself in the other person's chair. Pretend that the other person is in an empty chair across from you. Talk to him or her. Pour your heart out. When you have had your say, sit in his or her chair. Talk back to the imaginary you in a way that helps you see why the other person might have wronged you. This builds empathy.

**A = Altruistic gift.** Forgive as an unselfish, altruistic gift. After all, an offender does not deserve to receive forgiveness. To help you want to give the gift of forgiving, try to remember when you wronged someone and that person forgave you. By forgiving altruistically, you can give that same gift to someone who hurt you.

**C = Commit.** Once you have forgiven, write a note to yourself—something as simple as, "Today, I forgave [person's name] for hurting me." This helps forgiveness last.

**H = Hold onto forgiveness.** The self-addressed notes of commitment (above) help us because we will almost surely be tempted to doubt that we really forgave. We can re-read our notes. We did forgive.

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The person then seriously considers whether he or she can treat the other person as a valued and valuable person—to forgive. Finally, people go through 12 steps intended to help widen the circle of people and events they have forgiven. REACH Forgiveness has had the same amount of research supporting it as the process model and both have been found to be equally effective per hour of intervention. It has been effective when used in small groups or do-it-yourself workbooks. Find these and other free resources that journalists could share with their audiences at <http://www.evworthington-forgiveness.com/diy-workbooks>.

One of the main reasons (other than congruence with one’s religion) that people want to forgive is that they find it to have many benefits. In the following section, we orient you to that research.

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### III. MEDIA TOOLKIT

Each year countless tragic events trigger enormous amounts of grief. How can people prevent their suffering from festering and causing even greater harm? Studies often show that forgiveness leads to better mental and physical health. When journalists publish powerful stories of forgiveness and point people to methods of forgiveness with strong empirical support, it can inspire people looking for ways to move forward. What are some ways in which we can fit these stories in the news cycle?

#### **Calendar Events**

The calendar can be a source of stories on forgiveness. Virtually any holiday can be a hook on which to hang a story about forgiveness. New Year's might be the hook for a news article on making resolutions to improve relationships. One way to begin the year is to forgive grudges that are still worrisome. I have gone through the calendar (see Appendix 1) and created hooks for each potential holiday.

#### **News Events**

Mass shootings are all too common today. When they happen, some people choose to forgive and sometimes they express their forgiveness publicly. Two examples were the Amish community forgiving the shooter in the Nickle Mines killings, and some families of those killed at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, forgiving shooter Dylann Roof.

Other events catch the public eye. For example, Judge Tammy Kemp, after a long, tense trial that led to the conviction of Amber Guyger, a police officer who had shot and killed Botham Jean, hugged Guyger. She later also hugged and comforted members of Jean's family. Afterwards, she gave Guyger a Bible. The act by Judge Kemp provoked controversy, with some hailing it as an act of compassion within an otherwise heartless justice system but others deriding it as an example of favoritism of white defendants over defendants of color.

Public figures fail and fall. Apologies are offered and expressions of contrition and remorse are often captured by media. The public is usually divided on how to react to such behaviors, which provides opportunities to discuss seeking and granting (or not granting) forgiveness.

Political opponents are often hateful, critical, and cruel with a justification that they are merely telling the truth to their political backers. But contempt for an opponent is easily detected by others who support the target of contempt. This breeds a divisive spirit within the public square, and as the 2020 national elections approach, there will be multiple instances in which forgiveness is needed, forgiveness is offered or withheld, and the results of ill feeling and civic division will cascade amid the general population.

Physical and sexual abuse has been prevalent. Sometimes an abused woman or child will publicly forgive the abuser. That provides a hook for a story on forgiveness.

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Marriage and long-term relationships among celebrities fail weekly. Sometimes those divorces are characterized by acrimony, conflict, lawsuits, and public put-downs. These endings of highly visible relationships offer journalists the opportunity to ask people to reflect on their own relationships or the relationships of people they know and care about. Those reflections can stimulate forgiveness for ex-spouses, parents who divorced, children who divorce, and other friends whose relationships have ended unhappily.

Clergy abuse has received a lot of press in the last couple of decades, partly because the Roman Catholic Church's policy position was that revealing abuse by clergy was a matter for the church, not civil criminal justice. Only recently has the Vatican reversed that policy, allowing evidence to be turned over to police. Such abuse by trusted church officials—priests who are “fathers”—feels like incest, and an incest that also violates the sacred. Thus, such cases are often high profile and lead to discussions and journalistic pieces on forgiveness.

Stress is rampant in modern society. It has negative effects on people's physical and mental health and on relationships. One type of stress is the product of holding unforgiving attitudes toward others.

Veterans have returned from the Gulf Wars and from Afghanistan, and many have witnessed or participated in egregious acts. They often feel a self-inflicted sense of wrongdoing and moral injury, resulting in record rates of suicide for combat-experienced veterans. Self-forgiveness is an issue for the vets, but when the moral injury leads to suicide, feelings of guilt or blame, anger, shame, self-condemnation (for failing the one taking his or her own life), and unforgiveness are common among survivors of the deceased.

There is an epidemic of opioid over-use and alcoholism. Forgiveness issues abound in people who have abused alcohol or prescription or recreational drugs—especially when the abuse has occurred over a long time. People afflicted with an addiction may justify the misuse of substances by blaming others and being unforgiving. But more commonly, they feel guilt, blame, and shame over their own failures of self-control and failures of the ones who love and support them. Family members might hold resentments toward an abusing family member for many reasons, including the time and expense involved in their treatment and care or the regret at a life that seems headed downhill.

### **Evergreen Topics**

Many themes that appear regularly in the news are suitable for a forgiveness angle or follow-up story to breaking news:

- Health, wellness, mental health
- Relationships (couples, families)
- Religion and conflicts within church organizations
- Politics



- Historic injustices
- Social and societal disagreements
- The Me-Too! movement (a response that complements justice)
- Film and book reviews with justice or forgiveness as a theme

## Interviewing Book Authors

Many new books related to forgiveness come out each year and these provide opportunities for news coverage. Here are some of the issues that you might want to explore to deepen the conversation and make the interview stand out. (Most of these questions could work in interviewing scientists, psychotherapists, theologians, politicians, or anyone who writes or speaks about forgiveness from the stance of an expert.)

Question	What You Might Be Thinking about this Question
Establish or verify the person's qualifications.	Presumably, you have already investigated the qualifications—scientific, psychotherapeutic, theological or clerical, political, celebrity, or stories in media—of the person. What is easy to miss is personal experiences—“Have you had difficult things in your life that you’ve struggled to forgive?” (This can be a hard question to start with, but you might want to work it in.)
How do you understand forgiveness? What is your definition?	There is a mild controversy among psychologists. Most will say that forgiveness involves emotions, motivations, and cognitions. But authors differ in what they emphasize. Among theologians, sometimes forgiveness and reconciliation are intertwined. Psychologists separate the two. Forgiveness happens inside people's skin. Reconciliation happens between people (and only when both people are committed to being trustworthy).
Why do you think that people should forgive?	This is kind of a trick question. Few experts think others <i>should</i> forgive. You might hope for a nuanced answer suggesting that many options for dealing with injustice exist. Forgiveness is a choice.
What are the benefits of forgiveness?	These typically are physical health, mental health, relationship, and perhaps spiritual benefits. Different experts can give more-or-less complete descriptions of the costs in each realm.
Are there potential costs to forgiving?	Forgiveness is hard. That effort is a cost. Some people believe that it is a further injustice that the wronged person must exert additional effort to forgive—especially if the offender is not requesting forgiveness or seeking it, or (worst case) does not feel that he or she wronged the “forgiver.” You might

	think that, in fact, this does place an additional burden on the person who is a victim, but holding onto grudges imposes physical, mental, relational, and perhaps spiritual costs that far outweigh the cost of forgiving. Not everyone will agree, so this is a good question to ask.
Do you think there are any offenses or hurts that are not forgivable?	Some people think that a given class of offenses or severity of offense is not in principle forgivable, and thus people should not be forced even to consider forgiving that type of act. In Judaism forgiving murder is impossible because the victim is deceased. For others, the limitation is not one in principle, but in practicality. They might argue that no one should be forced to consider forgiving a mass murderer or terrorist—because if it is possible in principle, it is impossible in practice (except for the rare “saint”).
What makes your book on forgiveness stand out from the many that are out there?	I recommend checking Amazon. There are an amazing number of good books on forgiveness by people in many walks of life.
What kind of new insights are you suggesting that are not available in other books on forgiving, or that have not been suggested in scientific studies, or have not been talked about in theology and philosophy?	This requires the author to boil down the essence of what is new and emerging. Some books, of course, do not present new insights, but present material in new and compelling ways. But it is good to get the author’s take on this.
What can the readers of [your publication] learn about forgiving?	You will have a specific audience in mind depending on if you are writing for a health magazine, a general news magazine or newspaper or blog, a documentary, a television show, etc. Get the author to speculate on the applicability of their book to that particular audience.
How should someone who wishes to forgive, but has been unsuccessful thus far, forgive? Do you recommend a method or set of steps?	This helps the author focus on the application of their work.
Are there broader social implications of the lessons you recommend that can help groups or society?	This asks for broader thinking in applicability.
Lots of people write about forgiveness. What would you say are the major	This can cue you to interview people with opposing viewpoints, which helps your audience be aware of controversies. (Although you might be writing something that

controversies among these people? What do they tend to disagree about most?	takes a unified point of view rather than one that points out divisive issues.)
In your subspecialty (research on forgiveness, psychotherapy, clergy), are there any interesting personal disagreements or controversies?	Again, this alerts you to other people you might interview.

### Interviewing Experts on Forgiveness

As I mentioned earlier, the same questions might apply to scientific or treatment experts. However, for these experts, you might ask these additional questions.

Question	What You Might Be Thinking
Describe your recent work (i.e., article, book, scientific book, blog post).	
Describe ways that you have changed people's thinking about or understanding or practice of forgiving.	This helps people take a long view, and it can put their most recent work in a larger context.
Looking back over all your work over the years, what do you think your most enduring contribution to the study of forgiveness will be?	This asks the person to narrow their selection to the most important work.

### Personal Stories of Forgiveness

Of course, personal stories of forgiveness spice up articles about the science of forgiveness. New stories appear continually as people respond to tragedies, threats, pandemics, and their own challenges. Everyone wants to uncover the new and event-relevant. But it is reassuring that there are repositories that can direct you to interview candidates with past forgiveness stories you may be able to use. There are many.

Cantacuzino, Marina. (2015). *The forgiveness project: Stories for a vengeful age*. London, England and Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Bridges, R. (1999). *Through my eyes (1<sup>st</sup> ed.)*. New York, NY: Scholastic Press.

Bridges, R. (2009). *Ruby Bridges goes to school: My true story*. New York, NY Scholastic Press.

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Ilibagiza, I., & Erwin, S. (2006). *Left to tell: Discovering God amidst the Rwandan holocaust*. Carlsbad, CA: Hay House.

Newmark, A. (Ed.) (2019). *The forgiveness fix: 101 stories about putting the past in the past and moving forward*. New York, NY: Chicken Soup for the Soul Publishing.

Newmark, A., & Anderson, A. (Eds.) (2015). *The power of forgiveness: 101 stories about how to let go & change your life*. New York, NY: Chicken Soup for the Soul Publishing.

Noor, M., & Cantacuzino, M. (2018). Forgiveness is really strange. Norcross, J. C. (Ed.). (2002). *Psychotherapy relationships that work*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Tutu, D. M. (1999). *No future without forgiveness*. New York, NY: Doubleday.

Tutu, D., & Tutu, M. (2014). *The book of forgiving: The fourfold path for healing ourselves*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.

Worthington, E. L., Jr. (2003). *Forgiving and reconciling: Bridges to wholeness and hope*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

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## IV. KEY TOPICS AND EXPERTS

### 1. Forgiveness, Physical Health, and Mental Health

From the beginning of the study of forgiveness, the most asked questions about forgiveness have surrounded the relationships between forgiveness, physical health, and mental health. Almost any media story about forgiving or revenge is open to research on the health effects. In addition, positive psychology and its concern for flourishing has provided renewed interest in forgiveness and health. If we ask, “What causes a good marriage or long-term romantic relationship?” the answers that relationship experts give (e.g., Fincham, John Gottman, Worthington) are often surprising. It is not, as most think, good communication or good sex that causes a good relationship. Those are more the products of a good relationship than the causes. Rather, the causes of a good relationship are abilities to form, maintain, grow, and repair when damaged a strong emotional bond. Part of the ability to repair damaged emotional bonds includes the ability to forgive. Stable long-term relationships promote physical and mental health. Thus any relationship story can also be brought back to forgiveness and the indirect effects on physical and mental health that derive from repairing emotional bonds and the direct effects on stress and health.

#### Forgiveness and Physical Health

Unforgiveness is stressful, and holding unforgiving emotions and motives for long periods can take a toll on our bodies, leading to elevated blood pressure, heart rate, or cortisol. If those elevations persist they can cause stress-related problems (i.e., mental health problems and problems like elevated cardiovascular risk; problems in the digestive, immune, respiratory, and sexual-reproductive systems; and damage to the hippocampus and other brain structures). Furthermore, people might try to cope with the disorders or impending disorders by making lifestyle choices like too much drinking or medication.

Recommended experts:

- **Loren Toussaint**, Luther College ([Touslo01@luther.edu](mailto:Touslo01@luther.edu)) Toussaint is a noted health psychologist who has done definitive work on forgiveness and life-long health. He is one of the co-editors of *Forgiveness and Health*, is experienced with media interviews, and is one of the most knowledgeable people on forgiveness and health. He also has studied forgiveness and various diseases.
- **Everett Worthington**, Virginia Commonwealth University ([eworth@vcu.edu](mailto:eworth@vcu.edu)) Worthington has long studied forgiveness and health—including developing the first cortisol measure, participating in many peripheral physiology studies, writing theoretically about the health (and mental health, relationships, and spirituality; and the indirect effects of each on physical health) benefits of forgiving. He articulated the stress-and-coping model that related forgiveness (and unforgiveness) to health. He co-edited *Forgiveness and Health* (with Toussaint, with whom he frequently collaborates), and edited (first edition) and co-

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edited (with Nathaniel Wade, the second edition) of *Handbook of Forgiveness*. He recently published on the public health possibilities of forgiveness interventions.

- **Charlotte Witvliet**, Hope College ([witvliet@hope.edu](mailto:witvliet@hope.edu)) Witvliet is a clinical physiological psychologist with a large amount of media experience. She has investigated the peripheral physiology of forgiveness (i.e., blood pressure, heart rate, heart rate variability) more than anyone. Recently she has begun to study accountability of offenders in forgiving.
- **Fred Luskin**, Institute of Transpersonal Psychology ([learningtoforgive@comcast.net](mailto:learningtoforgive@comcast.net)) Luskin was trained as a counseling health psychologist at Stanford. He developed an intervention, Forgive for Good (FFG), which has been investigated in a few studies (and he has recently worked with Toussaint).
- **Robert Enright**, University of Wisconsin, Madison ([renright@wisc.edu](mailto:renright@wisc.edu)) Enright was the unquestioned first pioneer in studying the psychology of forgiveness. While a few others had one-off studies on forgiveness, Enright put together a program of research that included defining forgiveness, assessing it (Enright Forgiveness Inventory), and intervening with the Process Model of Forgiveness to promote forgiveness. Enright is an Educational Psychologist, so he has been the leader in trying to develop a school-based way of helping children forgive. Much of his research on the process model of forgiveness intervention has been aimed at producing better physical and mental health. He has often targeted his interventions to specific problems.
- **Jon Webb**, Texas Tech University ([Jon.R.webb@ttu.edu](mailto:Jon.R.webb@ttu.edu)) Webb has collaborated with Toussaint since their early training at the University of Michigan Survey Research Center. His specialty areas within the study of forgiveness are alcohol misuse and mental health effects.
- **Robert Sapolsky**, Stanford University ([sapolsky@stanford.edu](mailto:sapolsky@stanford.edu)) Forgiveness and stress, especially the role of cortisol. Sapolsky did research early in the study of forgiveness. He is a MacArthur Award winner for research in cortisol and is perhaps the leading expert in the world in stress and cortisol. Sapolsky is a colorful and knowledgeable expert and gives a terrific interview. He has taught Great Courses on stress, and he speaks often to media.
- **Peter Strelan**, University of Adelaide ([peter.strelan@adelaide.edu.au](mailto:peter.strelan@adelaide.edu.au)) Social psychologist Strelan has written about forgiveness within a stress-and-coping framework, and he has studied various aspects of forgiveness.

The Toussaint, Worthington, and Williams (2015) edited *Forgiveness and Health* summarizes research on forgiveness and a variety of physical ailments. One chapter deals with mental health, and others with addictions. Self-forgiveness is also considered, but on that subject the specific *Handbook of the Psychology of Self-Forgiveness* (Woddyatt et al.) is a better and more comprehensive source.

## **Forgiveness and Mental Health**

Unforgiveness produces rumination (which is unwanted, unregulated, negative emotion-based obsessive thinking). Rumination is related to anger disorders, depression, anxiety, obsessive-

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compulsive problems, PTSD, and some psychosomatic symptoms. Furthermore, those mental health problems have secondary fallout affecting physical health and relationships.

Recommended experts:

- **Loren Toussaint**, Luther College ([Touslo01@luther.edu](mailto:Touslo01@luther.edu)) 2020 review of research with co-author Webb).
- **Jon Webb**, Texas Tech University ([Jon.R.webb@ttu.edu](mailto:Jon.R.webb@ttu.edu)) 2020 review of research with co-author Toussaint.
- **Steven J. Sandage**, Boston University ([ssandage@bu.edu](mailto:ssandage@bu.edu)) He has worked the REACH Forgiveness intervention into Dr. Marsha Linehan's Dialectical Behavior Therapy treatment for patients with a borderline personality disorder.
- **Robert Enright**, University of Wisconsin, Madison ([renright@wisc.edu](mailto:renright@wisc.edu)) He and psychotherapist Rich Fitzgibbons have written a definitive book on forgiveness and mental health. Bob has written on the general harm to mental health of unforgiveness and the positive effects of forgiving. Discussion of treating forgiveness in psychotherapy draws on the expertise of Fitzgibbons.

## Forgiveness and PTSD

Recommended experts:

- **Charlotte Witvliet**, Hope College ([witvliet@hope.edu](mailto:witvliet@hope.edu))

Witvliet, C. V. O., Phipps, K. A., Feldman, M. E., & Beckham, J. C. (2004). Posttraumatic mental and physical health correlates of forgiveness and religious coping in military veterans. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 17, 269-273.

- **Brandon J. Griffin**, Veterans Administration Medical Center, Little Rock, Arkansas ([Brandon.Griffin2@va.gov](mailto:Brandon.Griffin2@va.gov)) Griffin is a researcher-clinician; previously he was at VAMCs in Salt Lake City and in San Francisco. He has expertise in treating PTSD, complex PTSD, and moral injury. He has written on forgiveness and self-forgiveness.

## Forgiveness and Physiology

Recommended experts:

- **Charlotte Witvliet**, Hope College ([witvliet@hope.edu](mailto:witvliet@hope.edu)) Witvliet is the unquestioned leader in studying the peripheral physiological concomitants of forgiving (i.e., blood pressure, heart rate, skin conductance, muscle tension; also heart rate variability, which is a way people calm themselves).

Witvliet, C. V. O., DeYoung, N., Hofelich, A. J., & DeYoung, P. (2011). Compassionate reappraisal and emotion suppression as alternatives to offense-focused rumination: Implications for forgiveness and psychophysiological well-being. *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 6(4), 286-299.



- **Everett Worthington**, Virginia Commonwealth University ([eworth@vcu.edu](mailto:eworth@vcu.edu)) Cortisol. Worthington developed a cortisol measure of unforgiveness and forgiveness, which was applied to troubled and untroubled couples (Berry & Worthington, 2001) and within a large couple-enrichment study of 156 couples over four years (Worthington et al., 2015).

Berry, J. W., & Worthington, E.L., Jr., (2001). Forgiveness, relationship quality, stress while imagining relationship events, and physical and mental health. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 48, 447-455.

Worthington, E. L., Jr., Berry, J. W., Hook, J. N., Davis, D. E., Scherer, M., Griffin, B. J., Wade, N. G., Yarhouse, M., Ripley, J. S., Miller, A. J., Sharp, C. B., Canter, D. E., & Campana, K. L. (2015). Forgiveness-reconciliation and communication-conflict-resolution interventions versus rested controls in early married couples. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 62(1), 14-27.

- **Michael McCullough**, University of California, San Diego ([memccullough@ucsd.edu](mailto:memccullough@ucsd.edu)) Cortisol and oxytocin. McCullough and colleagues developed both cortisol and oxytocin measures of forgiveness.

McCullough, M. E., Orsulak, P., Brandon, A., & Akers, L. (2007). Rumination, fear, and cortisol: An *in vivo* study of interpersonal transgressions. *Health Psychology*, 26, 126-132.

Tabak, B.A., McCullough, M.E., Szeto, A., Mendez, A., & McCabe, P.M. (2011). Oxytocin indexes relational distress following interpersonal harms in women. *Psychoneuroendocrinology*, 36(1), 115-122.

- **Tom Farrow**, University of Sheffield, U.K. ([t.f.farrow@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:t.f.farrow@sheffield.ac.uk)) Farrow works with the central nervous system and brain scanning. There have been very few brain scanning studies of forgiveness. (More have investigated aggression and revenge.)

Farrow, T. F. D., Hunter, M. D., Wilkinson, I. D., Gouneea, C., Fawbert, D., Smith, R., Lee, K., Mason, S., & Spence, S. A. (2008). Quantifiable change in functional brain response to empathic and forgivability judgments with resolution of posttraumatic stress disorder. *Psychiatry Research*, 140, 45-53.

Farrow, T. F. D., & Woodruff, P. W. R. (2005). Neuroimaging of forgivability. In Everett L. Worthington, Jr. (Ed.), *Handbook of forgiveness* (pp. 259-272). New York: Brunner-Routledge.

Farrow, T.F.D., Zheng, Y., Wilkinson, I.D., Spence, S.A., Deakin, J.F.W., Tarrier, N., Griffiths, P.D., & Woodruff, P.W.R. (2001). Investigating the functional anatomy of empathy and forgiveness. *Neuroreport: An International Journal for the Rapid Communication of Research in Neuroscience*, 12, 2433-2438.



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- **Kevin T. Larkin**, West Virginia University, Morgantown ([klarkin@wvu.edu](mailto:klarkin@wvu.edu)) Larkin frequently studies the psychology of religion and spirituality, but he has reviewed the literature on forgiveness and physiology.

Larkin, K. T., Goulet, C., & Cavanaugh, C. (2015). Forgiveness and physiological concomitants and outcomes. In Lydia Woodyatt, Everett L. Worthington, Jr., Michael Wenzel, & Brandon J. Griffin (Eds.), *Forgiveness and health: Scientific evidence and theories relating forgiveness to better health* (pp. 61-76). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer Science + Business Media.

### **Forgiveness and Public Health**

In an exciting development, forgiveness is being looked at for its public health potential. If interventions have been developed to promote forgiveness reliably (see the following major section), then could we not use such interventions—along with other community transformative interventions—to promote forgiveness and thus better physical health, mental health, relationships, and even spirituality?

Recommended experts:

- **Tyler VanderWeele**, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health ([tvanderw@hsph.harvard.edu](mailto:tvanderw@hsph.harvard.edu)) VanderWeele is the director of the Harvard Flourishing Project. He is one of the leading statisticians in the world. He also is head of analysis in a grant testing the efficacy of REACH Forgiveness worldwide.

VanderWeele, T. J. (2018). Is forgiveness a public health issue? *American Journal of Public Health*, 108(2), 189-190.

- **Everett Worthington**, Virginia Commonwealth University ([eworth@vcu.edu](mailto:eworth@vcu.edu)) Worthington has developed one of the two most-used interventions to promote forgiveness (REACH Forgiveness), and it has been used effectively within community transformative efforts to promote forgiveness. Such efforts have been conducted in universities, churches, and organizations.

Griffin, B. J., Toussaint, L. L., Zoelzer, M., Worthington, E. L., Jr., Coleman, J., Lavelock, C. R., McElroy, A., Hook, J. N., Wade, N., Sandage, S., & Rye, M. (2019). Evaluating the effectiveness of a community-based forgiveness campaign. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 14(3), 354-361.

- **David Williams**, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health ([dwilliam@hsph.harvard.edu](mailto:dwilliam@hsph.harvard.edu)) Williams is co-editor of *Forgiveness and Health* (with Toussaint and Worthington). Although forgiveness is not his major interest, he has published about it many times over the years.

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## 2. Forgiveness Interventions

### How Can I Forgive Faster, More Thoroughly, and More Lastingly?

One of the most frequently asked questions of forgiveness researchers is, “How can I forgive faster, more thoroughly, more dependably, and more lastingly?” Also, documentaries, television daytime talk show segments, blogs, newspaper articles, and magazine articles end segments on forgiveness by giving viewers or readers practical ways to forgive more effectively. Fortunately, there is a lot of research on this. Approximately 100 studies have investigated interventions to promote forgiveness. These investigations are sometimes focused on promoting forgiveness psychotherapeutically—such as in forgiving in psychotherapy, in couple or family therapy, in group therapy, and in health care settings. Other research on interventions, however, is aimed at how to forgive when the offense or psychological disturbance, for whatever reason, might not warrant therapeutic treatment. These two categories—the psychotherapeutic and the psychoeducational—are usually lumped together in reviews and meta-analyses. I will examine some of the research that analyzes the interventions together, and then I will look separately at the two areas.

### Types of Clinical Research

Most of the research is called “efficacy” research by psychologists. Efficacy refers to whether the interventions help people forgive within highly controlled scientific studies, usually randomized controlled trials. This is different from “effectiveness” research, which has more to do with how psychotherapists or psychoeducators apply the treatments within the environment in which they are working. Typically, efficacy research has high “internal validity,” meaning it is strictly controlled, so there is some assurance that the study is consistent and could be replicated. But the lab-like environment, which might involve graduate-student therapists, or people who do not have truly clinical levels of problems, makes interpretation less certain. On the other hand, effectiveness research has its problems, too. Often the controls are not as stringent, making it less likely that alternate explanations for results can be eliminated. Most research is inevitably efficacy research.

### Efficacy of Forgiveness Interventions

There are two definitive reviews of the research on interventions. (There are other reviews or meta-analyses, but they select a subsample of intervention studies.) The definitive reviews are Wade, Hoyt, Kidwell, & Worthington (2014), a meta-analysis of all randomized controlled trials of forgiveness outcomes, and Wade & Tittler (2020), a comprehensive qualitative review of randomized controlled trials that have been published since the Wade et al. meta-analysis.

Wade et al. (2014) analyzed 54 randomized controlled trials. Approximately one-third of the studies investigated Worthington’s REACH Forgiveness model. Another third of the studies investigated Bob Enright’s Process model ([renright@wisc.edu](mailto:renright@wisc.edu)). The remaining third of the studies were of all others combined, but some were more specialized. (1) Fred Luskin has studied forgiveness and health. Loren Toussaint has investigated Luskin’s model in about three studies. Luskin has written two books on his Forgive for Good approach, and he has appeared in the media many times. He is a great interview. (2) Kristi Gordon has investigated forgiveness in couples after affairs. (3) Nathaniel Wade has examined

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process groups; in those, people discuss their problems unguided but group therapists conduct the discussions. (4) Les Greenberg has studied forgiveness and emotionally focused therapy, and he has written a book on it. (5) Other people who have done two or more interventions include Fred DiBlasio (a decision-based approach with couples) and Mark Rye (a REACH Forgiveness approach for women with unforgiveness in past romantic relationships).

Recommended experts:

- **Nathaniel Wade**, Iowa State University ([nwade@iastate.edu](mailto:nwade@iastate.edu)) The definitive meta-analysis on forgiveness interventions in 2014; 2020 review of interventions since then. Wade is experienced with media. He has done more research on forgiveness in groups than anyone. He also co-edited *Handbook of Forgiveness*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (with Worthington), so he is up-to-the-minute in understanding the wide field of forgiveness. He is an excellent, thoughtful, and winsome interview.

### **Health- and Psychotherapy-related Interventions**

Enright's Process Model. Enright's is a versatile model for promoting forgiveness. It has been tested in psychotherapeutic (mostly targeted toward more psychological disturbance) and psychoeducational (untargeted) group contexts. It has been adapted and applied to problems in mental health and physical health—with about equal emphasis. It also has been adapted for communicating in professional and trade books. Finally, it has been communicated through an educational intervention to school-aged children and adolescents.

Freedman, S., & Enright, R. D. (2020). A review of the empirical research using Enright's process model of interpersonal forgiveness. In E. L. Worthington, Jr. & N. G. Wade (Eds.), *Handbook of forgiveness*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (pp. 266-276). New York, NY: Routledge.

Forgive for Good. Luskin's model is a cognitive-behavioral model most often tested in physical health (rather than mental health) contexts, and the emphasis throughout has been cardiovascular health. It has been presented this same way in books for lay audiences. Overall, the Forgive for Good (FFG) model has much less research support than either Enright's process model or REACH Forgiveness, but it is considered an evidence-based practice for promoting better cardiovascular health. While Luskin has not done much research in recent years (working on clinical health work rather than academics), his collaborator and a trainee in the method, Loren Toussaint, a health psychologist, has also initiated investigations using the FFG model—including a recent study comparing it to REACH Forgiveness—and those trials have also been efficacious.

Toussaint, L. L., Griffin, B. J., Worthington, E. L., Jr., Zoeler, M., & Luskin, F. (2020). Promoting forgiveness at a Christian college: A comparison of REACH Forgiveness and Forgive for Good methods. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, in press.

REACH Forgiveness. Worthington's REACH Forgiveness model, like Enright's process model, is a versatile model to promote forgiveness, and overall has equally strong evidence supporting its efficacy.

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It has been tested mostly in untargeted psychoeducational contexts (i.e., allowing participation by anyone who wants to forgive something). It has the most focus on mental health of the three major approaches—rather than physical health interventions. It has been targeted less often to psychotherapeutic problems (though it has been used with people diagnosed to have borderline personality disorders). Its strengths clearly have been its applicability to a wide variety of problems and people—mostly adults and young adults. In addition, it has been tailored for use with Christians and numerous experiments support its efficacy with that population. It also has been applied to physical health problems, but less often than either Enright’s or Luskin’s models. Like both Enright’s and Luskin’s models, it has been presented in books for professional and lay audiences.

Worthington, E. L., Jr. (2020). An update of the REACH Forgiveness model to promote forgiveness. In Everett L. Worthington, Jr. & Nathaniel G. Wade (Eds.), *Handbook of forgiveness*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (pp. 277-287). New York, NY: Routledge.

### **Psychoeducational Group Interventions**

REACH Forgiveness. Generally, Worthington’s REACH Forgiveness model, whether the secular or Christian-accommodated program, has more evidence supporting its general use with adults and young adults.

Enright’s Process Model. Enright’s process model has been used in some contexts without a specific focus, and it is a strong evidence-based model. However, its strength has been with focused and tailored application and documenting effects on physical health.

Rye’s Forgiveness Model. Rye et al. targeted helping women with romantic relationship hurts forgive their ex’s. They designed a targeted approach that, although they described it as based on REACH Forgiveness, was substantively different due to its being adapted to specific populations. Two studies compared a secular and a Christian-accommodated approach, finding them virtually indistinguishable in their effects.

Rye, M. S., & Pargament, K. I. (2002). Forgiveness and romantic relationships in college: Can it heal the wounded heart? *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 54, 419–441.

Rye, M.S., Pargament, K.I., Pan, W., Yingling, D.W., Shogren, K.A., & Ito, M. (2005). Can group interventions facilitate forgiveness of an ex-spouse? A randomized clinical trial. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 73, 880-892.

Wade (Forgiveness in Unstructured “Process” Groups). Wade has investigated REACH Forgiveness, and he has compared it to unstructured process groups that are centered on the topic of forgiveness but are unscripted. Those groups rely heavily on trained leaders to manage the conversations. In two head-to-head comparisons with REACH Forgiveness groups, his research team has found few differences in outcomes.

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Wade, N. G. & Goldman, D. (2006). Sex, group composition, and the efficacy of interventions to promote forgiveness. *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 10, 297-308.

Wade, N. G., Cornish, M. A., Tucker, J. R., Worthington, E. L., Jr., Sandage, S. J., & Rye, M. S. (2018). Promoting forgiveness: Characteristics of the treatment, the clients, and their interaction. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 65(3), 358-371. doi:10.1037/cou0000260

## **Forgiveness in Treating Couples**

Recommended experts:

- **Everett Worthington**, Virginia Commonwealth University ([eworth@vcu.edu](mailto:eworth@vcu.edu)) Couple enrichment and couple therapy through the Hope-Focused Approach. Worthington developed the Hope-Focused Approach to couple enrichment and couple therapy, and later he was joined by Jennifer Ripley ([jennrip@regent.edu](mailto:jennrip@regent.edu)), a former student and now professor of clinical psychology at Regent University. The approach has been written into practical books for secular (Worthington & Ripley, 2021, under contract) and Christian couple therapists (Ripley & Worthington, 2014; Worthington, 2005).

Worthington, E. L., Jr., & Ripley, J. S. (2021). *Hope-focused couple counseling*. New York, NY: Routledge (forthcoming).

Ripley, J. S., & Worthington, E. L., Jr. (2014). *Couple therapy: A new hope-focused approach*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press (a CAPS Book).

Worthington, E. L., Jr. (2005). *Hope-focused marriage counseling: A guide to brief therapy, rev. ed with a new introduction*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

The Hope-focused Approach has been developed for both couple therapy and couple enrichment, and both have been investigated in many articles. Part of the approach is to help couples forgive. A recent grant-funded study headed by Ripley found it to be the most used couple approach for Christian couples seeking couple therapy. In addition, a ten-year outcome study of the Hope-focused Approach for community-based Christian couples is almost complete. Whereas the Hope-focused Approach has more research on its efficacy with secular couples than Christian couples, it is clearly the most research-supported approach that has been specifically tailored to Christian couples.

Ripley, J. S., Leon, C., Worthington, E. J., Berry, J. W., Davis, E. B., Smith, A., Atkinson, A., & Sierra, T. (2014). Efficacy of religion-accommodative strategic hope-focused theory applied to couples therapy. *Couple and Family Psychology: Research and Practice*, 3, 83-98.

Ripley, J. S., & Worthington, E. L., Jr. (2002). Hope-focused and forgiveness-based group interventions to promote marital enrichment. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 80, 452-463.

Worthington, E. L., Jr., Berry, J. W., Hook, J. N., Davis, D. E., Scherer, M., Griffin, B. J., Wade, N. G., Yarhouse, M., Ripley, J. S., Miller, A. J., Sharp, C. B., Canter, D. E., & Campana, K. L.

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(2015). Forgiveness-reconciliation and communication-conflict-resolution interventions versus rested controls in early married couples. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 62(1), 14-27.

- **Fred DiBlasio**, University of Maryland, Baltimore ([FDiBlasio@ssw.umaryland.edu](mailto:FDiBlasio@ssw.umaryland.edu))  
Decision-based forgiveness. DiBlasio has a social work Ph.D. from the University of Maryland, Baltimore. He has developed a decision-based model to help couples in couple therapy forgive.

DiBlasio, F.A. (1998). The use of decision-based forgiveness intervention within intergenerational family therapy. *Journal of Family Therapy*, 20, 77-94.

DiBlasio, F.A. (2000). Decision-based forgiveness treatment in cases of marital infidelity. *Psychotherapy*, 37, 149-158.

DiBlasio, F. A., & Benda B. B. (2008). Forgiveness intervention with married couples: Two empirical analyses. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, 27(2), 150-158.

- **Les Greenberg**, York University, Canada ([lgrnberg@yorku.ca](mailto:lgrnberg@yorku.ca)) has studied forgiveness and emotionally focused therapy (EFT), an approach for couples (and also individuals) that he co-founded with a former student (Sue Johnson). He has written a book on how to practice EFT. He is now retired but continues to write and speak on the subject. EFT has been the subject of an enormous amount of research.

Greenberg, L. S., & Meneses, C. W. (2019). *Forgiveness and letting go in emotion-focused therapy*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Greenberg has also published research on Emotion-focused Therapy for couples.

Greenberg, L. S., Warwar, S., Malcolm, W. (2010). Emotion-focused couples therapy and the facilitation of forgiveness. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 36(1), 28-42. doi: [10.1111/j.1752-0606.2009.00185.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1752-0606.2009.00185.x).

Greenberg, L. S., Warwar, S. H., Malcolm, W. M. (2008). Differential effects of emotion-focused therapy and psychoeducation in facilitating forgiveness and letting go of emotional injuries. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 55(2), 185-196. doi: [10.1037/0022-0167.55.2.185](https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.55.2.185).

### 3. The Dark Side of Forgiving

In several mass shootings or tragedies, surviving victims or relatives of victims have, almost incredibly, pronounced forgiveness for the perpetrator. This has been the case with the Nickle Mines shooting, in which the Amish forgave the shooter the day of the murders, and with the Charleston, South Carolina, shooting at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, in which surviving church members proclaimed forgiveness at Dylann Roof's hearing. Stories of forgiveness within such mass shootings



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and interpersonal tragedies inspire us. But they raise another question. Is forgiveness always the go-to response? Might there be a dark side of forgiving?

Forgiveness might not always be helpful. These two scholars of forgiveness—both from Florida State University—have written about when forgiveness does not work.

- **James McNulty**, Florida State University ([mcnulty@psy.fsu.edu](mailto:mcnulty@psy.fsu.edu)) Psychologist McNulty has published on the dark side of forgiving, the times when forgiveness has not worked or has backfired.
- **Frank D. Fincham**, Florida State University ([ffincham@fsu.edu](mailto:ffincham@fsu.edu)) Fincham is better known as the most eminent expert on forgiveness in couples, but he has joined McNulty in an influential article in *American Psychologist* on the dark side of forgiveness.

They suggest that when violence or abuse is continuing, it might be more important to stand for justice before forgiveness.

McNulty, J. K. (2020). Highlighting the dark side of forgiveness and the need for a contextual approach. In E. L. Worthington, Jr., & N. G. Wade (Eds.), *Handbook of forgiveness*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (pp. 33-42). New York, NY: Routledge.

McNulty, J. K., & Fincham, F. D. (2012). [Beyond positive psychology? Toward a contextual view of psychological processes and well-being](#). *American Psychologist*, 67(2), 101-110.

- **David S. Chester**, Virginia Commonwealth University ([dschester@vcu.edu](mailto:dschester@vcu.edu); [david.s.chester@gmail.com](mailto:david.s.chester@gmail.com)) Chester has studied violence, aggression, and mass violence using brain scanning and social psychology. He has published in the largest journals (*JAMA*, *Lancet*, etc.). He is an expert on aggression and is an excellent source for physiological and health data.

Chester, D. S., & DeWall, C. N. (2016). The pleasure of revenge: Retaliatory aggression arises from a neural imbalance toward reward. *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience*, 11(7), 1173-1182.

Chester, D. S., & DeWall, C. N. (2017). Combating the sting of rejection with the pleasure of revenge: A new look at how emotion shapes aggression. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 112(3), 413-430.

Chester, D. S., & DeWall, C. N. (2018a). Aggression is associated with greater subsequent alcohol consumption: Shared neural basis in the ventral striatum. *Aggressive Behavior*, 44(3), 285-293.

Chester, D. S., & DeWall, C. N. (2018b). Personality correlates of revenge-seeking: Multidimensional links to physical aggression, impulsivity, and aggressive pleasure. *Aggressive Behavior*, 44(3), 235-245.

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Chester, D. S., DeWall, C. N., Derefinko, K. J., Estus, S., Lynam, D. R., Peters, J. R., & Jiang, Y. (2016). Looking for reward in all the wrong places: Dopamine receptor gene polymorphisms indirectly affect aggression through sensation-seeking. *Social Neuroscience*, 11(5), 487-494.

Chester, D. S., DeWall, C. N., Derefinko, K. J., Estus, S., Peters, J. R., Lynam, D. R., & Jiang, Y. (2015). Monoamine oxidase A (MAOA) genotype predicts greater aggression through impulsive reactivity to negative affect. *Behavioural Brain Research*, 283, 97-101.

Chester, D. S., Lynam, D. R., Milich, R. & DeWall, C. N. (2017). Physical aggressiveness and gray matter deficits in ventromedial prefrontal cortex. *Cortex*, 97, 17-22.

Chester, D. S., Lynam, D. R., Milich, R., & DeWall, C. N. (2018). Neural mechanisms of the rejection-aggression link. *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience*, 13(5), 501-512.

Chester, D. S., & Martelli, A. M. (2020). Why revenge sometimes feels so good. In E. L. Worthington, Jr., & N. G. Wade (Eds.), *Handbook of forgiveness*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (pp. 43-51). New York, NY: Routledge.

Chester, D. S., Merwin, L. M., & DeWall, C. N. (2015). Maladaptive perfectionism's link to aggression and self-harm: Emotion regulation as a mechanism. *Aggressive Behavior*, 41(5), 443-454.

- **Michael E. McCullough**, University of California, San Diego ([memccullough@ucsd.edu](mailto:memccullough@ucsd.edu)) McCullough has written a book on the evolutionary psychology of forgiveness in light of revenge. He can provide theoretical justifications for revenge within evolutionary theory. He also has investigated two conditions that must be considered in forgiving—whether the person is a valued person or there is risk of exploitation.

Burnette, J. L., McCullough, M. E., Van Tongeren, D. R., & Davis, D. E. (2012). Forgiveness results from integrating information about relationship value and exploitation risk. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 38(3), 345-356.

McCullough, M. E. (2008). *Beyond revenge: The evolution of the forgiveness instinct*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

McCullough, M. E., Kurzban, R., & Tabak, B. A. (2013). Cognitive systems for revenge and forgiveness. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 36(1), 1-15.

McCullough, M. E., Luna, L. R., Berry, J. W., Tabak, B. A., & Bono, G. (2010). On the form and function of forgiving: Modeling the time-forgiveness relationship and testing the valuable relationships hypothesis. *Emotion*, 10(3), 358-376.



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McCullough, M. E., Pedersen, E. J., Tabak, B. A., & Carter, E. C. (2014). Conciliatory gestures promote forgiveness and reduce anger in humans. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 111(30), 11211-11216.

## Public Apologies

Public figures and others frequently make public apologies. When apologies are not perceived as sincere, forgiveness can be risky (at best—see Ohtsubo’s work on apologies).

Recommended expert:

- **Y. Ohtsubo**, Kobe University, Japan ([yohtsubo@lit.kobe-u.ac.jp](mailto:yohtsubo@lit.kobe-u.ac.jp)) Ohtsubo is a professor of evolutionary social psychology.

Ohtsubo, Y., Watanabe, E. (2009). Do sincere apologies need to be costly? Test of a costly signaling model of apology. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 30(2), 114-123.

Ohtsubo, Y., Watanabe, E., Kim, J., Kulas, J. T., Muluk, H., Nazar, G., Zhang, J. (2012). Are costly apologies universally perceived as being sincere? A test of the costly apology-perceived sincerity relationship in seven countries. *Journal of Evolutionary Psychology*, 10(4), 187-204.

Ohtsubo, Y., Yagi, A. (2015). Relationship value promotes costly apology-making: Testing the valuable relationships hypothesis from the perpetrator's perspective. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 36(3), 232-239.

## Forgiveness in Psychotherapy and in Law

Sharon Lamb is a psychotherapist who is not a big fan of overly generous forgiveness. In several books and papers, she has written about the potential costs of forgiving. She has particularly been critical of introducing forgiveness into deliberations by women who are dealing with sexual or physical abuse. She edited a book with Jeffrie Murphy, a philosopher and emeritus professor at Arizona State University Law School. Murphy has written about the beneficial aspects of holding onto resentment.

- **Sharon Lamb**, University of Massachusetts, Boston ([Sharon.Lamb@umb.edu](mailto:Sharon.Lamb@umb.edu))
- **Jeffrie G. Murphy**, Arizona State University ([Jeffrie.Murphy@asu.edu](mailto:Jeffrie.Murphy@asu.edu))

Lamb, S. (2002). Women, abuse, and forgiveness: A special case. In S. Lamb & J. G. Murphy (Eds.), *Before forgiving: Cautionary views of forgiveness in psychotherapy* (pp. 155-171) NY: Oxford.

Murphy, J. G. (1982). Forgiveness and resentment. *Midwest Studies on Philosophy*, 7, 503-516.

Murphy, J. G. (1988). Forgiveness, mercy, and the retributive emotions. *Criminal Justice Ethics*, 7, 3-15.

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Murphy, J. G. (1997). Repentance, punishment, and mercy. In A. Etzioni (Ed.), *Repentance: A comparative perspective* (pp. 143-170). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Murphy, J. G. (2000). Two cheers for vindictiveness. *Punishment and Society*, 2, 131-143.

Murphy, J. G. (2002). Forgiveness in counseling: A philosophical perspective. In S. Lamb & J. G. Murphy (Eds.), *Before forgiving* (pp. 41-53). New York, NY: Oxford.

Murphy, J. G. (2003). *Getting even: Forgiveness and its limits*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Murphy, J. G., & Hampton, J. E. (1988). *Forgiveness and mercy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

## 4. Religion and Forgiveness

### Forgiveness and Religion—Theological Perspectives

Recommended experts:

- **Mark Rye**, Skidmore College ([mrye@skidmore.edu](mailto:mrye@skidmore.edu)) Rye organized a book chapter published in 2000 in which he had representatives of the five major religions of the world (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism) write about their religion's view of forgiveness. Theology changes relatively slowly relative to science, so that chapter is relevant today. To summarize (and overgeneralize), all five religions value forgiveness. It is central for Christianity, but more peripheral or embedded in other virtues (like repentance or *teshuva* for Judaism, justice for Islam, or compassion for Buddhism).

Rye, M. S., Pargament, K. I., Ali, M. A., Beck, G. L., Dorff, E. N., Hallisey, C. Narayanan, V., & Williams, J. G. (2000). Religious perspectives on forgiveness. In M. E. McCullough, K. I. Pargament, & C. E. Thoresen (Eds.), *Forgiveness: Theory, research, and practice* (pp. 17-40). New York: Guilford Press.

Others who have spoken about religious perspectives on forgiveness include the following:

- **Jonathan Sacks** ([info@rabbisacks.org](mailto:info@rabbisacks.org)) Sacks was the chief rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth in London from 1991 to 2013.
- **Elliot N. Dorff**, University of California, Los Angeles ([community@myjewishlearning.com](mailto:community@myjewishlearning.com)) Dorff is a visiting professor of law at UCLA School of Law and distinguished professor and rector of Jewish theology at the American Jewish University, which was previously called the University of Judaism.

### Forgiveness and Religion—Empirical Perspectives

Numerous psychologists have investigated the relationship between religion and forgiveness. When the empirical study of forgiveness started in the late 1990s, public perception was largely that religion “owned” forgiveness. Early research in the area was summarized by McCullough and Worthington

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(1999), who set off a flurry of research with a review of forgiveness and religion. They found that the correlation between forgivingness and religion was about .4, and yet, when people had to deal with transgression events, the correlation was .2. (Two recent meta-analyses by Davis et al., 2013, and by Choe et al., 2020, have updated those figures to about .3 and .15, respectively.) One conclusion was that perhaps religious people were reporting themselves to be more forgiving than they were in practice.

This conundrum—that rating immediate hurts was less related to religion than were trait measures of general forgiveness—was unriddled in 2005. Jo-Ann Tsang (now at Baylor), working at McCullough’s lab, found that a methodological choice had set up the seeming inconsistency. Tsang et al. (2005) found that when the most immediate unresolved hurt was rated, and that rating was correlated with religion, the finding of McCullough and Worthington held (i.e., the correlation was .2). However, if religious and non-religious people each identified their three major hurts and the three were combined into a single index, then the correlation between religion and forgiveness was .4. *In plain English, when people were dealing with raw hurts, religious people were not much more forgiving than were non-religious people, but when asked to identify several grudges they held, religious people had a harder time doing so—forgiveness had been practiced more quickly.*

Recommended experts:

- **Michael McCullough**, University of California, San Diego ([memccullough@ucsd.edu](mailto:memccullough@ucsd.edu))  
McCullough was at the University of Miami, but as of 2020 is at University of California, San Diego. McCullough is one of psychology’s most cited psychologists. (See <https://psychology.ucsd.edu/people/profiles/mmccullough.html>.) He not only was one of the first investigators in forgiveness, but with Robert Emmons started research in gratitude, and he is one of the most-cited psychologists in the psychology of religion. He was one of the first to study evolutionary roots of forgiving. He has also done groundbreaking research in the effects of religion and spirituality on physical health and mortality. In a 2000 meta-analysis, he and his colleagues found that after statistically controlling six confounding variables, people who attended church one time a week or more had longer lives. The effect of religion—after statistically controlling other religion-related variables like smoking, drinking, and legal troubles—was equal to the effect of stopping smoking a pack and a half of cigarettes a day. This incredible finding literally started health researchers routinely including measures of attendance at religious services in health research.
- **Everett Worthington**, Virginia Commonwealth University ([eworth@vcu.edu](mailto:eworth@vcu.edu))

McCullough, M. E., & Worthington, E. L. Jr. (1999). Religion and the forgiving personality. *Journal of Personality*, 67, 1141-1164.

Davis, D. E., Worthington, E. L., Jr., Hook, J. N., & Hill, P. C. (2013). Research on forgiveness and religion/spirituality: A meta-analytic review. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 5(4), 233-241.

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Choe, E., McGlaughlin, A., McElroy-Heltzel, S., & Davis, D. E. (2020). Forgiveness and religion/spirituality. In E. L. Worthington, Jr. & N. G. Wade (Eds.), *Handbook of forgiveness*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (pp. 107-116). New York, NY: Routledge.

- **Jo-Ann Tsang**, Baylor University ([JoAnn\\_Tsang@baylor.edu](mailto:JoAnn_Tsang@baylor.edu))

Tsang, J., McCullough, M. E., & Hoyt, W. T. (2005). Psychometric and rationalization accounts for the religion-forgiveness discrepancy. *Journal of Social Issues*, 61, 785-805.

- **Don E. Davis**, Georgia State University ([ddavis88@gsu.edu](mailto:ddavis88@gsu.edu)) Davis and his colleagues meta-analyzed existing research on forgiveness and religion in 2013, and again in an updated meta-analysis in 2020. Davis has won awards for his research in psychology. He is likely the most prolific researcher in studying humility and has looked at how humility (as well as religion) has been involved in helping people forgive. But he also studies forgiveness and religion.

Davis, D. E., Worthington, E. L., Jr., Hook, J. N., & Hill, P. C. (2013). Research on forgiveness and religion/spirituality: A meta-analytic review. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 5(4), 233-241.

Choe, E., McGlaughlin, A., McElroy-Heltzel, S., & Davis, D. E. (2020). Forgiveness and religion/spirituality. In E. L. Worthington, Jr. & N. G. Wade (Eds.), *Handbook of forgiveness*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (pp. 107-116). New York, NY: Routledge.

## Anger at God

Early in the study of forgiveness, Exline wrote about “forgiving God.” That language met with resistance among religious people; they observed that, technically, God’s acts were not forgivable. Still, people get hurt and blame God. They feel unforgiving toward God, so psychologically speaking, perhaps forgiving God is a legitimate concern. But to avoid controversy generated by that language, she has continued to study the ways people get angry at God and do (or do not) resolve the resulting anger and spiritual struggles. Exline is a prolific writer, clinical psychologist, and social psychological researcher. She also has training in spiritual direction. Her research received a lot of attention when she studied professed atheists, who, even though they did not believe God exists, reported anger and struggles with God.

Recommended experts:

- **Julie Exline**, Case Western Reserve University ([Julie.Exline@case.edu](mailto:Julie.Exline@case.edu)) Exline has a lot of media experience. She has studied forgiveness in general for over 20 years, but during the last 10 years, she has mostly studied spiritual struggles and anger at God.
- **Joshua Grubbs**, Bowling Green State University ([grubbsj@bgsu.edu](mailto:grubbsj@bgsu.edu)) Joshua Grubbs is a former student of Julie Exline, now an assistant professor at Bowling Green, and he continues to study spiritual struggles and anger at God.

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Exline, J. J., Park, C. L., Smyth, J. M., & Carey, M. P. (2011). Anger toward God: Social-cognitive predictors, prevalence, and links with adjustment to bereavement and cancer. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 100(1), 129-148.

Exline, J. J. (2020). Anger toward God and Divine forgiveness. In Everett L. Worthington, Jr., & Nathaniel G. Wade (Eds.), *Handbook of forgiveness*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (pp. 117-127). New York, NY: Routledge.

Grubbs, J. B., Exline, J. J., & Campbell, W. K. (2013). I deserve better and god knows it! Psychological entitlement as a robust predictor of anger at God. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 5, 192–200.

Grubbs, J. B., Exline, J. J., Campbell, W. K., Twenge, J. M., & Pargament, K. I. (2018). God owes me: The role of divine entitlement in predicting struggles with a deity. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 10(4), 356–367.

### **Divine Forgiveness (A Psychological Approach to Assessing Feeling Forgiven by God)**

Amazingly little research has been done on receiving or experiencing forgiveness by God—especially considering religions’ claims that divine forgiveness is vital to spiritual life. Many published surveys have included a single item to assess whether one has a sense of forgiveness by God and, using this single-item measure, studied how such perception is related to longevity, health, and well-being. All those links are well established. However, apart from several studies by Jon Webb at Texas Tech, no real program of research has been developed to investigate feeling forgiven by God. Frank Fincham has initiated such a program, and he has begun to publish regularly in the area. Fincham’s work has received a lot of attention. He is one of the two most prolific scientists studying marriage (the other being John Gottman). He certainly is the reigning expert on forgiveness in couples. Born in South Africa, Fincham has been a professor at the University of Cardiff in Wales and in various universities in the United States. He is now eminent scholar at Florida State University, and has over 900 scientific publications and over 45,000 citations from other scholars.

Recommended experts:

- **Frank Fincham**, Florida State University ([ffincham@fsu.edu](mailto:ffincham@fsu.edu))

Exline, J. J. (2020). Anger toward God and Divine forgiveness. In Everett L. Worthington, Jr., & Nathaniel G. Wade (Eds.), *Handbook of forgiveness*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (pp. 117-127). New York, NY: Routledge.

Fincham, F. D., May, R. W. (2020). Self-forgiveness and well-being: Does divine forgiveness matter? *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2019.1579361>

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## 5. The Forgiving Personality

Much has been written about forgiveness and personality—including a qualitative review by Mullet and Neto in 2005. However, Hodge et al. (from the lab of Joshua Hook at the University of North Texas) have meta-analyzed the research. The relationship between the Big Five personality traits and forgiveness is usually the starting point. Those Big Five are considered five true **traits**. That is, traits are stable personality characteristics supported through early inheritance, early environmental conditioning, and later epigenetic development (i.e., when proteins “turn on” latent genetic influences. Most personality characteristics are transitory *dispositions*. In the Hodge et al. (2020) meta-analysis, each of the Big Five factors of personality and various measures of forgiveness (e.g., trait and state forgiveness of others, self, and situations) are meta-analyzed. Higher neuroticism (i.e., emotional instability) is related to less forgiveness ( $r$ s ranged from  $-.42$  to  $-.20$ ). Higher agreeableness is related to more forgiveness ( $r$ s ranged from  $.25$  to  $.44$ ). Those two traits are most strongly related to forgiveness. Extraversion ( $r$ s ranged from  $.10$  to  $.27$ ), conscientiousness ( $r$ s ranged from  $.03$  to  $.19$ ), and openness to experience ( $r$ s ranged from  $.02$  to  $.16$ ) are also related to forgiveness—though less strongly. Humility, which is sometimes thought to be a sixth basic personality trait, is also related to higher levels of forgiveness. The following sections put the correlations in plain terms.

Agreeableness. When people are highly agreeable as a personality disposition, they tend not to interpret slights and minor hurts as being troublesome, and thus they do not develop unforgiveness. In addition, when they do feel unforgiving, their dispositional agreeableness helps them resolve the grudge more quickly than others who are less dispositionally unforgiving.

Neuroticism (i.e., emotional instability). People high in neuroticism are quite unforgiving. Neuroticism is an old-fashioned term (still used by psychologists for historical reasons) that means the person is prone to react emotionally, especially with negative emotions of anger, sadness, and anxiety, to small provocations. Such people also tend to ruminate, which is to replay negative events and rehearse potential negative consequences, a great deal. The result is that people who are high in neuroticism tend to develop unforgiveness easily and hold onto it.

The rest of the Big Five plus humility. Extroverted people tend to forgive easier than introverted people—perhaps because of the importance of interpersonal relationships to extroverts. Conscientious people also tend to forgive a bit easier than those low in conscientiousness. People open to experience are slightly more likely to forgive than those less open to new experiences. Humility is strongly related to forgiveness—about the same strength as agreeableness and neuroticism.

Other personality dispositions that have been consistently found to be related to forgiving are a forgiving disposition, secure attachment to early caregivers and within current relationships, and high stable self-esteem.

Recommended experts:

- **Joshua N. Hook**, University of North Texas ([Joshua.Hook@unt.edu](mailto:Joshua.Hook@unt.edu))



- **Don E. Davis**, Georgia State University ([Ddavis88@gsu.edu](mailto:Ddavis88@gsu.edu))
- **Daryl R. Van Tongeren**, Hope College ([vantongeren@hope.edu](mailto:vantongeren@hope.edu))

Hodge, A. S., Captari, L. E., Mosher, D. K., Kodali, N., Hook, J. N., Davis, D. E., Van Tongeren, D. J. (2020). Personality and forgiveness: A meta-analytic review. In Everett L. Worthington, Jr., & Nathaniel G. Wade (Eds.), *Handbook of forgiveness*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (pp. 97-106). New York, NY: Routledge.

Hook, Davis, and Van Tongeren are amazingly productive of scientific research. They often collaborate on research, usually meeting annually at a weeklong retreat to plan their collaborations. Much of their research has been aimed at personality—mostly positive psychology’s character strengths or virtues. Joshua Hook is an associate professor at the University of North Texas. His subspecialty is cultural humility, but he has written widely about character strengths. He has a popular blog, <https://www.joshuanhook.com/blog/>. Don E. Davis is an associate professor at Georgia State University. He specializes in humility more generally. Daryl Van Tongeren is an associate professor at Hope College, a Christian college near Grand Rapids, Michigan. Daryl specializes in studying meaning.

## 6. Forgiveness and Evolution

### Forgiveness and Evolutionary Psychology

McCullough, in a 2008 book, presented a theory of forgiveness and evolutionary fitness. He has a lot of experience with media. McCullough, Burnette, and Van Tongeren have pursued studies that show that valuable members of a group are more likely to be forgiven and people who exploit the group are more likely to be sanctioned. McCullough is the most visible expert on evolution and forgiveness, although two other well-known scientists have also contributed by studying primates. These are Frans de Waal (director of the Yerkes Primate Center, Emory University) and Robert Sapolsky (biologist from Stanford University).

Recommended experts:

- **Michael McCullough**, University of California, San Diego ([memccullough@ucsd.edu](mailto:memccullough@ucsd.edu))
- **Jeni Burnette**, North Carolina State University ([jlburne5@ncsu.edu](mailto:jlburne5@ncsu.edu))
- **Daryl Van Tongeren**, Hope College ([vantongeren@hope.edu](mailto:vantongeren@hope.edu))

Burnette, J. L., McCullough, M. E., Van Tongeren, D. R., & Davis, D. E. (2012). Forgiveness results from integrating information about relationship value and exploitation risk. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 38(3), 345-356.

McCullough, M. E. (2008). *Beyond revenge: The evolution of the forgiveness instinct*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

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## Primate Studies and Reconciliation

Frans De Waal (at Emory's Yerkes Primate Research Center) and Robert Sapolsky (Stanford University) are ethologists and biologists, respectively. They have looked at reconciliation in various non-human primates. Both give excellent interviews.

Recommended experts:

- **Robert Sapolsky**, Stanford University ([sapolsky@stanford.edu](mailto:sapolsky@stanford.edu)) Sapolsky is the John A. and Cynthia Fry Gunn Professor and professor of neurology and neurosurgery at Stanford. Sapolsky did research early in the study of forgiveness, and it was published in what was essentially a book on cultural anthropology. He traced the fate of a baboon troupe that he followed each summer in the Kalahari. The males ate tuberculin meat, and most died. The females then passed along a culture of pacifism to the next generation of adolescent males. Usually, adolescent males leave their tribe of origin, and they find a home as junior members of another tribe. Because the Sapolsky-stalked tribe had no senior males, the females took over leadership and mentored the new adolescent members into a culture of peace. In *A Primate's Memoir*, Sapolsky also showed parallels in the way people behaved both in African nations and in faculty meetings at Stanford University. The book is, shall we say, a hoot.
- **Frans de Waal**, Emory University ([dewaal@emory.edu](mailto:dewaal@emory.edu)) de Waal has studied reconciliation among non-human primates for his entire career and has published numerous books on the topic. He is the C. H. Candler Professor of Psychology at Emory. He tells numerous stories that point up the similarities (and differences) between non-human and human primate behavior.

Sapolsky, R.M. (2002). *A primate's memoir*. New York: Touchstone books.

de Waal, F. B. M. (1989). *Peacemaking among primates*. London: Penguin Books.

de Waal, F. (1996). *Good natured: The origins of right and wrong in humans and other animals*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

de Waal, F. (2019). *Mama's last hug: Animal emotions and what they tell us about ourselves*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton and Sons.

## 7. Couples, Families, and Forgiveness

### Forgiveness in Couples

The consensus expert regarding empirical research into how couples might forgive each other is Frank Fincham. His body of research on this topic extends to over 100 articles (and almost 1,000 articles on couple relationships in general). Fincham primarily does basic research in partners forgiving each other, and is the most eminent expert on forgiveness in couples—bar none. He also has developed a scale to assess forgiveness in marriage and marriage-like relationships (i.e., the Marital Offence-specific



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Forgiveness Scale), and as I mentioned earlier has lines of research in divine forgiveness and the dark side of forgiveness.

Recommended expert:

- **Frank Fincham**, Florida State University ([ffincham@fsu.edu](mailto:ffincham@fsu.edu))

Davis, J. L., Green, J. D., Reid, C. A., Moloney, J. M., & Burnette, J. L. (2015). Forgiveness and health in nonmarried dyadic relationships. In L. L. Toussaint, E. L. Worthington, Jr., & D. R. Williams (Eds.), *Forgiveness and health: Scientific evidence and theories relating forgiveness to better health* (pp. 239-253). New York, NY: Springer Science + Business Media. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-9993-5\\_16](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-9993-5_16)

McNulty, J. K. (2008). Forgiveness in marriage: Putting the benefits into context. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 22(1), 171–175. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0893-3200.22.1.171>

McNulty, J. K., & Russell, V. M. (2016). Forgive and forget, or forgive and regret? Whether forgiveness leads to less or more offending depends on offender agreeableness. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 42(5), 616-631. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167216637841>

Paleari, F. G., & Fincham, F. D. (2015). The reciprocal relationship between husbands and wives' marital forgivingness: A two-wave cross-lagged latent difference score analysis of ten-year data. *TPM-Testing, Psychometrics, Methodology in Applied Psychology*, 22(2), 287-330.

Paleari, F. G., Regalia, C., & Fincham, F. D. (2009). Measuring offence-specific forgiveness in marriage: The Marital Offence-Specific Forgiveness Scale (MOFS). *Psychological Assessment*, 21(2), 194– 209. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0016068>

### **Forgiveness after Affairs**

A team of researchers with different perspectives and strengths have created an approach to treating couples after affairs. Donald Baucom provides the initial cognitive processing of the affair. Douglas Snyder handles the psychodynamic (i.e., psychoanalytically informed) long-term psychological insights. Kristi Gordon provides the expertise in forgiveness.

Recommended experts:

- **Kristi Gordon**, University of Tennessee, Knoxville ([kgordon1@utk.edu](mailto:kgordon1@utk.edu))
- **Don Baucom**, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill ([don\\_baucom@unc.edu](mailto:don_baucom@unc.edu))
- **Douglas Snyder**, Texas A & M ([d-snyder@tamu.edu](mailto:d-snyder@tamu.edu))

This prolific team has summarized their research in a practical counseling handbook, based on a foundation of substantial research.

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Baucom, D. H., Snyder, D. K., & Gordon, K. C. (2009). *Helping couples get past the affair: A clinician's guide*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Baucom, D. H., Gordon, K. C., Snyder, D. K., Atkins, D. C., & Christensen, A. (2006). Treating affair couples: Clinical considerations and initial findings. *Journal of Cognitive Psychotherapy*, 20(4), 375–392. <https://doi.org/10.1891/jcpiq-v20i4a004>

Gordon, K. C., Khaddouma, A., Baucom, D. H., & Snyder, D. K. (2015). Couple therapy and the treatment of affairs. In A. S. Gurman, J. L. Lebow, & D. K. Snyder (Eds.), *Clinical handbook of couple therapy*, 5th ed. (pp. 412-444). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

- **Eli Finkel**, Northwestern University ([finkel@northwestern.edu](mailto:finkel@northwestern.edu)) Finkel is an excellent social psychologist who has investigated relationships, specifically, forgiveness in relationships. Finkel was trained—as so many excellent researchers in social psychology were—by Carol Rusbult, who died in the early 2000s at a relatively young age.

Finkel, E. J., Rusbult, C. E., Kumashiro, M., & Hannon, P. A. (2002). Dealing with betrayal in close relationships: Does commitment promote forgiveness? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 82(6), 956-974. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.82.6.956>

### **Forgiveness after Abuse**

When forgiveness after abuse is studied, the results can seem confusing. Ysseldyk, Matheson, and Anisman (2019) found that in a study of abused women's dispositions, both forgiveness and revenge were related to psychological symptoms.

There are a lot of explanations for why such confusing results populate the studies of abuse. Those reasons need to be understood as one evaluates the findings of hot new research on forgiveness and abuse. Here are some things to consider.

First, many people do not have a clear understanding of what forgiveness is. They might confuse it with reconciliation and believe that if a woman forgives the offender, the woman is bound to return to the unsafe relationship. In the results, some women with this belief might be included with others who have a more accurate understanding, that is, that forgiveness is an internal process and does not mean one must reconcile.

A second source of confusion in the findings is failing to make a distinction between deciding to forgive and the longer and more tortured process of forgiving emotionally. Some women might say they forgive because they have decided to do so even though they still experience a lot of emotional unforgiveness. Another woman might be in the same state, yet she might assay her emotions and conclude (and say) she has not forgiven.

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Another reason for confusing results can be an unwillingness to consider the time course of forgiveness and the many different pathways women might arrive at forgiveness. Most people, when they experience a harm, forgive fairly quickly. With severe harms and betrayals, they do not forgive quickly (if ever). So, depending on how severe, how often repeated, and how threatening is the abuse, women might follow widely different pathways to reconciliation (or not) and forgiveness (or not).

Of the investigators who study forgiveness after abuse, Kristi Gordon, who also studies forgiveness after affairs, might be one of the best sources.

Recommended expert:

- **Kristi Gordon**, University of Tennessee ([kgordon1@utk.edu](mailto:kgordon1@utk.edu))

Chi, Peilian, Tang, Yixin, Worthington, Everett L., Chan, Cecilia L. W., Lam, Debbie O. B., & Lin, Xiuyun. (2019). Intrapersonal and interpersonal facilitators of forgiveness following spousal infidelity: A stress and coping perspective. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 75(10), 1896-1915. <https://doi.org/jclp.22825>

Gordon, K. C., Burton, S., & Porter, L. (2004). Predicting the intentions of women in domestic violence shelters to return to partners: Does forgiveness play a role? *Journal of Family Psychology*, 18(2), 331–338. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0893-3200.18.2.331>

Ysseldyk, R., Matheson, K., & Anisman, H. (2019). Revenge is sour, but is forgiveness sweet? Psychological health and cortisol reactivity among women with experiences of abuse. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 24(14), 2003-2021.

### **Forgiveness after Clergy Abuse**

A socially hot topic is whether abused people can forgive abuses that took place in the Roman Catholic Church. Beyond the sexual abuse, there are extra layers of betrayal. The clergy person is referred to as “father” and is often treated that way, giving the abuse an incestuous component. The abuse occurs in a religious setting, so abused people often feel that a desecration occurred. Finally, in many cases the church leadership either covered up the crime (and sin) or dismissed it as inconsequential.

Recommended expert:

- **Thomas Plante**, Santa Clara University, professor of psychology

Plante, T. G. (Ed.). (2019). *Healing with spiritual practices: Proven techniques for disorders from addictions and anxiety to cancer and chronic pain*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger/ABC-CLIO.

Plante, T. G., & McChesney, K. L. (Eds.). (2011). *Sexual abuse in the Catholic church: A decade of crisis, 2002-2012*. Westport, CT: Praeger/Greenwood.

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## Forgiveness and Divorce

Forgiveness usually helps people cope with divorce. This has been established in the United States (Rye et al., 2004) and in other countries, for example, Malaysia (Sumari, Subramaniam, & Md Khalid, 2019; Yarnoz-Yaben, 2015). Interventions have been tested, successfully, to see whether people could be helped to forgive ex-spouses (see Bonach, 2009; Rye et al., 2012, 2005). Rye's program has the most support.

Recommended expert:

- **Mark S. Rye**, Skidmore College ([mrye@skidmore.edu](mailto:mrye@skidmore.edu)) Rye is professor of psychology and chair of the Department of Psychology at Skidmore.

Bonach, K. (2009). Empirical support for the application of the Forgiveness Intervention Model to postdivorce coparenting. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 50(1), 38–54. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10502550802365631>

Rye, M. S., Fleri, A. M., Moore, C. D., Worthington, E. L., Jr., Wade, N. G., Sandage, S. J., & Cook, K. M. (2012). Evaluation of an intervention designed to help divorced parents forgive their ex-spouse. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 53(3), 231–245. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10502556.2012.663275>

Rye, M. S., Folck, C. D., Heim, T. A., Olszewski, B. T., & Traina, E. (2004). Forgiveness of an ex-spouse: How does it relate to mental health following a divorce? *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 41(3-4), 31–51. [https://doi.org/10.1300/J087v41n03\\_02](https://doi.org/10.1300/J087v41n03_02)

Rye, M. S., Pargament, K. I., Pan, W., Yingling, D. W., Shogren, K. A., & Ito, M. (2005). Can group interventions facilitate forgiveness of an ex-spouse? A randomized clinical trial. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 73(5), 880–892. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-006X.73.5.880>

Sumari, M. R. Subramaniam, S. D., & Md Khalid, N. (2019). Coping with parental divorce: A study of adolescents in a collectivist culture of Malaysia. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, Oct 17 , 2019 <https://doi.org/10.1080/10502556.2019.1679595>

Yarnoz-Yaben, S. (2015). Forgiveness, adjustment to divorce, and support from the former spouse in Spain. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 24(2), 289-297.

## Teaching Children to Forgive

How do we teach children to forgive? Following talks on forgiveness, this is one of the most frequently asked questions. Until about 2016, I usually answered that there was not much if any evidence that young children, younger than early adolescence (say age 11 or 12) could forgive. In fact, no interventions had ever shown that children could do more than respond to parental “scaffolding.” That is, parents guide their children’s behaviors by saying, “Marie, say you’re sorry” or “Filipe, tell your sister that you forgive her.” The hope has been that children can learn the forgiveness behaviors

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even if they cannot internally experience forgiveness like middle and late adolescents can. Then, having learned the behaviors, the hope is that experiencing forgiveness will be easier.

That has changed. There was an explosion of research in 2019 showing that four- and five-year-olds can forgive. This might be one of the biggest changes in the psychology literature in the last 10 years. It also opens the way for educational interventions, such as the one developed by Bob Enright.

Recommended experts:

- **Amrisha Vaish**, University of Virginia ([av8u@Virginia.EDU](mailto:av8u@Virginia.EDU)) Vaish has studied forgiving in young children (four and five years old).

Oostenbroek, J., & Vaish, A. (2019). The benefits of forgiving: Young children respond positively to those who forgive. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 148(11), 1914-1924. <https://doi.org/10.1037/xge0000576>

Oostenbroek, J., & Vaish, A. (2019). The emergence of forgiveness in young children. *Child Development*, 90(6), 1969-1986. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.13069>

- **Johan C. Karremans**, Radboud University, Netherlands ([j.karremans@psych.ru.nl](mailto:j.karremans@psych.ru.nl)) Karremans has studied 9- to 13-year-olds.

Van der Wal, R. C., Karremans, J. C., & Cillessen, A. H. N. (2019). Interpersonal forgiveness in late childhood: Associations with peer status. *European Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 16(6), 666-679. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405629.2018.1491399>

- **Robert D. Enright**, University of Wisconsin, Madison ([renright@wisc.edu](mailto:renright@wisc.edu)). Enright is an educational psychologist, so he has been the leader in trying to develop a school-based way to help children forgive. Enright's early research—the first research aimed at forgiveness—was devoted to studying how children reason about forgiveness. Enright thought that children's development of reasoning about forgiveness might parallel the development of reasoning about justice found by Lawrence Kohlberg. In a series of studies, he found this to be true.

Chen, E. Y.-Y., Enright, R. D., U Tung, E. Y.-L. (2016). The influence of family unions and parenthood on transitions on self-development. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 30(3), 341-352.

Enright, R., Enright, J., Holter, A., Baskin, T., & Knutson, C. (2010). Waging peace through forgiveness in Belfast, Northern Ireland II: Educational programs for mental health improvement of children. *Journal of Research in Education*, Fall, 63-78.

Enright, R. D., & Fitzgibbons, R. P. (2015). Forgiveness education. In Enright and Fitzgibbons, *Forgiveness therapy: An empirical guide for resolving anger and restoring hope* (pp. 233-250). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

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Enright, R. D., & The Human Development Study Group (1994). Piaget on the moral development of forgiveness: Identity or reciprocity? *Human Development*, 37, 63-80.

Rahman, A., Iffikhar, R., Kim, J. J., & Enright, R. D. (2018). Pilot study: Evaluating the effectiveness of forgiveness therapy with abused early adolescent females in Pakistan. *Spirituality in Clinical Practice*, 5(2), 75-87.

## **Forgiveness and Families**

Families are notoriously hard to investigate psychologically because so many different perspectives must be accounted for statistically. Much more work has been done with couples than families. Still, some work has shed light on family dynamics around forgiving. Not surprisingly, Frank Fincham has been a leader in this area.

Recommended experts:

- **Frank Fincham**, Florida State University ([ffincham@fsu.edu](mailto:ffincham@fsu.edu))

Fincham, F. D. (2017). Translational family science and forgiveness: A healthy symbiotic relationship? *Family Relations: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Applied Family Studies*, 66(4), 584-600. <https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12277>

Gordon, K. C., Hughes, F. M., Tomcik, N. D., Dixon, L. J., & Litzinger, S. C. (2009). Widening spheres of impact: The role of forgiveness in marital and family functioning. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 23(1), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0014354>

Maio, G. R., Thomas, G., Fincham, F. D., & Carnelley, K. B. (2008). Unraveling the role of forgiveness in family relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 94(2), 307-319. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.94.2.307>

de Vel-Palumbo, Melissa, Wenzel, Michael, & Woodyatt, Lydia. (2019). Self-punishment promotes reconciliation with third parties by addressing the symbolic implications of wrongdoing. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 49(5), 1070-1086. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2571>

- **Jeff Green**, Virginia Commonwealth University ([jdggreen@vcu.edu](mailto:jdggreen@vcu.edu)) Green has studied “third-party forgiveness.” This is something we often experience. Most parents can relate to this: If someone hurts my child, I will almost certainly hold a grudge against that person. Often the grudge of the parent will be stronger than the grudge held by the child!

Green, J. D., Burnette, J. L., & Davis, J. L. (2008). Third-party forgiveness: (Not) forgiving your close other's betrayer. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 34(3), 407-418. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167207311534>



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## 8. Forgiveness and Society

Investigating forgiveness in society is complex, and as a result, several approaches have been developed. Some researchers have investigated how people in one culture or country handle injustices differently than those in other cultures. Some studies directly compare cultures, but assessing forgiveness within a single culture is less likely to yield misleading results. There are many reviews of forgiveness in separate cultures.

### Forgiveness and Culture

Recommended experts:

- **Steven J. Sandage**, Boston University ([ssandage@bu.edu](mailto:ssandage@bu.edu)) Sandage holds a joint appointment in psychology and theology at Boston University. He is a gifted psychotherapist, who conducted a psychotherapy sold on video to accompany the book, *Forgiveness and Spirituality in Psychotherapy: A Relational Approach* (Worthington & Sandage, 2016). Sandage has written widely on culture as well as on numerous other topics including forgiveness, theology, couple therapy, and psychoanalytically informed psychotherapy. He often writes chapters in edited books on culture and the way it relates to the other topics (including forgiveness) that he studies.
- **Etienne Mullet**, Institute of Advanced Studies (EPHE), France ([etienne.mullet@wanadoo.fr](mailto:etienne.mullet@wanadoo.fr)) Professor Mullet has done research throughout the world, and is one of the foremost experts on forgiveness across different cultures.

There are studies of forgiveness in different cultures, and there are reviews of cross-cultural research. What is helpful are reviews of culture issues that affect forgiveness. For an example, see this review by Sandage and his colleagues.

Sandage, S. J., Crabtree, S. A., & Bell, C. A. (2020). Forgiveness and culture: Conceptual issues. In Everett L. Worthington, Jr., & Nathaniel G. Wade (Eds.), *Handbook of Forgiveness*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (pp. 201-211). New York, NY: Routledge.

The *Handbook of Forgiveness*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. has a variety of research reviews about different cultures:

Ho, M. Y. (2020). Forgiveness in East Asia. In Everett L. Worthington, Jr., & Nathaniel G. Wade (Eds.), *Handbook of forgiveness*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (pp. 234-241). New York, NY: Routledge.

Mullet, E., & Neto, F. (2020). Forgiveness in the Arab World and in Central Africa. In Everett L. Worthington, Jr. & Nathaniel G. Wade (Eds.), *Handbook of forgiveness*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (pp. 212-222). New York, NY: Routledge.

Rique, J., de Abreu, E. L., & Klatt, J. (2020). Theories and empirical research on forgiveness in South America and Latin Europe: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Spain, and Portugal. In

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Everett L. Worthington, Jr., & Nathaniel G. Wade (Eds.), *Handbook of forgiveness*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (pp. 242-252). New York, NY: Routledge.

Worthington, E. L., Jr., Nonterah, C. W., Utsey, S. O., Griffin, B. J., Carneal, C. C., Osei-Tutu, A., Cowden, R. G., Cairo, A. H., Pillay, B. J., Kulick, K., & Germer, L. S. (2020). Forgiveness research in Africa: The present status and future prospects. In Everett L. Worthington, Jr. & Nathaniel G. Wade (Eds.), *Handbook of forgiveness*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (pp. 223-233). New York, NY: Routledge.

- **Julio Rique**, Federal University of Paraiba, Brazil ([julio.rique@uol.com.br](mailto:julio.rique@uol.com.br))
- **Félix Neto**, University of Oporto, Portugal. Neto is director of the psychology doctoral program.
- **Man Yee Ho**, City University, Hong Kong ([my.ho@cityu.edu.hk](mailto:my.ho@cityu.edu.hk))

### Intergroup Forgiveness

Another approach to societal forgiveness is called intergroup forgiveness. This body of literature is about how people in a group (i.e., country, political party, religious identity group) forgive people in an out-group that they perceive has hurt or offended them. This is generally about individuals forgiving other individuals. The expert in this area is unquestionably Daryl Van Tongeren. He has conducted two meta-analyses on this topic. In the 2014 meta-analysis of 42 studies, he found nine factors that influenced whether people forgave or did not forgive people in an out-group. In his 2020 qualitative review of 30 studies conducted since the 2014 meta-analysis, he found support for the same nine variables to be positively associated with intergroup forgiveness: empathy for out-group members, collective guilt, trust of the out-group, the out-group having tried to make amends, having a common superordinate group identification, and more personal contact with people in the out-group. Negative emotions, perceived victimhood, and stronger in-group identification were negatively associated with intergroup forgiveness.

Recommended expert:

- **Daryl Van Tongeren**, Hope College ([vantongeren@hope.edu](mailto:vantongeren@hope.edu))

Van Tongeren, D. R., Burnette, J. L., O'Boyle, E., Worthington, E. L., Jr., & Forsyth, D. (2014). A meta-analysis of inter-group forgiveness. *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 9(1), 81-95.

Van Tongeren, D. R., & Lindeman, R. (2020). Intergroup forgiveness. In Everett L. Worthington, Jr. & Nathaniel G. Wade (Eds.), *Handbook of forgiveness*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (pp. 301-311). New York, NY: Routledge.

### Societal and Social Forgiveness

This type of forgiveness differs from both forgiveness in a culture (or comparative studies of two or more cultures) and intergroup forgiveness. In both of those, forgiveness is being conceptualized and measured at an individual level. However, sometimes, individuals have difficulty forgiving organizations that they believe have wronged or hurt them. Perhaps they feel bitterness toward the



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state. On the other side of the coin, sometimes societies make statements of either apology or forgiveness toward another group. When Bill Clinton, acting as President of the United States, asked forgiveness of Japanese who were interned during World War II, this was societal forgiveness.

Recommended experts:

- **Robert Enright**, University of Wisconsin ([renright@wisc.edu](mailto:renright@wisc.edu)) Enright and colleagues have created a great review about forgiveness in society.

Enright, R. D., Lee, Y.-R., Hirshberg, M. J., Litts, B. K., Schirmer, E. B., Irwin, A. J.

Klatt, J. Hunt, J., & Song, J. Y. (2016). Examining group forgiveness: Conceptual and empirical issues. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 22(2), 153-162.

An example of this societal forgiveness might involve forgiveness of (say) Christians as a group who are perceived to have harmed other Christians. This involves an in-group member forgiving the group to which the person belongs—not forgiving an individual, forgiving a “faceless” collective. This could extend to community members forgiving police, demonstrators, oppressors, people of the other sex, etc.

In basic research on within-group forgiveness, **Chelsea Greer** ([cgreer@shc.edu](mailto:cgreer@shc.edu)) found that we are hurt more by people in our in-group than people in an out-group for the same offense against us. In subsequent research, she also did an intervention to promote forgiveness in in-groups, and that treatment was more effective than benchmarked comparisons.

### **Forgiveness within a Like-Minded Community**

Everett Worthington has studied campaigns on college campuses and in churches to promote forgiveness.

- **Everett Worthington**, Virginia Commonwealth University ([eworth@vcu.edu](mailto:eworth@vcu.edu))

Griffin, B. J., Toussaint, L. L., Zoelzer, M., Worthington, E. L., Jr., Coleman, J., Lavelock, C. R., McElroy, A., Hook, J. N., Wade, N., Sandage, S., & Rye, M. (2019). Evaluating the effectiveness of a community-based forgiveness campaign. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 14(3), 354-361.

### **Forgiveness in the Workplace**

Probably the reigning experts on forgiveness in organizations and in the workplace are Ryan Fehr, Michele Gelfand, and Karl Aquino. Fehr and Gelfand—who usually write the review papers together—have done major reviews in the area, including a 2020 chapter in *Handbook of Forgiveness*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. They also reviewed apologies and their effects in organizations. Aquino has done much original research on this topic.

Recommended experts:

- **Ryan Fehr**, University of Washington, Foster School of Business ([rfehr@u.washington.edu](mailto:rfehr@u.washington.edu))

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- **Michele Gelfand**, University of Maryland ([mgelfand@umd.edu](mailto:mgelfand@umd.edu))

Reviews. Generally, the research on organizations parallels research about individuals, but there are important differences. One difference is leadership; another is power. Leadership styles directly affect forgiveness norms within organizations. Research on power has shown that those in powerful roles strengthen the link between employees' dispositions and actions. Forgiving leaders can empower the entire organization to be more forgiving. But vengeful leaders can promote organizational vengefulness. In addition, forgiveness has meaningful links to organizationally relevant outcomes, like worker morale, productivity, justice, and forgiveness. The following are some of the review papers.

Fehr, R., & Gelfand, M. J. (2010). When apologies work: How matching apology components to victims' self-construals facilitates forgiveness. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 113, 37-50.

Fehr, R., & Gelfand, M. J. (2012). The forgiving organization: A multilevel model of forgiveness at work. *Academy of Management Review*, 37, 664-688.

Fehr, R., & Gelfand, M. J. (2020). Forgiveness in organizations. In Everett L. Worthington, Jr. & Nathaniel G. Wade (Eds.), *Handbook of forgiveness*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York, NY: Routledge.

Fehr, R., Gelfand, M. J., & Nag, M. (2010). The road to forgiveness: A meta-analytic synthesis of its situational and dispositional correlates. *Psychological Bulletin*, 136, 894-914.

#### Original research.

Recommended expert:

- **Karl Aquino**, University of British Columbia, Sauder School of Business ([karl.aquino@sauder.ubc.ca](mailto:karl.aquino@sauder.ubc.ca))

Aquino has been less productive in organizational forgiveness research in the last few years, but he is still an active researcher with an excellent record of productivity.

Aquino, K., & Thau, S. (2009). Workplace victimization: Aggression from the target's perspective. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 60, 717-741.

Aquino, K., Tripp, T. M., & Bies, R. J. (2006). Getting even or moving on? Power, procedural justice, and types of offense as predictors of revenge, forgiveness, reconciliation, and avoidance in organizations. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 91, 653-668.

Bies, R. J., Barclay, L. J., Tripp, T. M., & Aquino, K. (2016). A systems perspective on forgiveness in organizations. *Academy of Management Annals*, 10, 245-318.

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Cox, S. S., Bennett, R. J., Tripp, T. M., & Aquino, K. (2012). An empirical test of forgiveness motives' effects on employees' health and well-being. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 17*, 330-340.

Goodstein, J., & Aquino, K. (2010). And restorative justice for all: Redemption, forgiveness, and reintegration in organizations. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 31*, 624-628.

### **Forgiveness and Political Differences (in Family, in Friends, with Acquaintances)**

This area tends to overlap greatly with research on political humility. There is not a lot of research to date, but more is forthcoming, and the political polarization in the country (indeed, the world) makes working out political humility, tolerance, committed civility, and understanding and empathizing with people of different political persuasion essential for the 21<sup>st</sup> Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), and Richard Mouw (past president of Fuller Theological Seminary). For individual research studies, Joshua Hook would be excellent. We are conducting a funded study of the efficacy of an eight-hour workbook to promote political humility, which I have created. The project is headed by Kristin Garrett, a political scientist at Wheaton College. The project should be complete and the results analyzed by the end of 2021.

Recommended experts:

- **Everett Worthington**, Virginia Commonwealth University ([eworth@vcu.edu](mailto:eworth@vcu.edu))
- **Joshua Hook**, University of North Texas ([Joshua.Hook@unt.edu](mailto:Joshua.Hook@unt.edu))

Brooks, A. C. (2019). *Love your enemies: How decent people can save America from the culture of contempt*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.

Haidt, J. (2012). *The righteous mind: Why good people are divided by politics and religion*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books.

Hodge, A. S., Mosher, D. K., Davis, C. W., Captari, L. E., Hook, J. N., Davis, D. E., & Van Tongeren, D. R. (2020). Political humility and forgiveness of a political hurt or offense. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, in press.

Lukiandoff, G., & Haidt, J. (2018). *The coddling of the American mind: How good intentions and bad ideas are setting up a generation for failure*. New York, NY: Penguin Press.

Mouw, R. J. (2010). *Uncommon decency: Christian civility in an uncivil world, rev ed.* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Worthington, E. L., Jr., (2017). Political humility. In Everett L. Worthington, Jr., Don E. Davis, & Joshua N. Hook (Eds.), *Handbook of humility: Theory, research, and application* (pp. 76-90). New York: Routledge.

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## Forgiveness in the Justice System

Few people write about forgiveness within the justice system—which broadly speaking involves law making, law enforcement, criminal and civil judicial processes, fairness in sentencing, judicial decisions (i.e., fines, civil settlements, criminal sentencing, resentment against juries), incarceration and the federal and state prison systems and local jails, victims (and their supporters) forgiving offenders, forgiving murders of a loved one. In another justice-related topic, restorative justice procedures more often than other criminal and civil justice proceedings seem to result in participants being reconciled to each other and forgiving.

This is a huge system, and stories on forgiveness are likely always to pop up. I have listed some experts—each with a different specialty.

- **Michael Wenzel**, Flinders University, Australia ([michael.wenzel@flinders.edu.au](mailto:michael.wenzel@flinders.edu.au)) Wenzel has long studied restorative justice.
- **Charlotte van Oyen Witvliet**, Hope College ([witvliet@hope.edu](mailto:witvliet@hope.edu)) Witvliet has studied processes in restorative justice by assessing physiological (as well as self-report) measures.
- **Everett Worthington**, Virginia Commonwealth University ([eworth@vcu.edu](mailto:eworth@vcu.edu)) Worthington has also studied restorative justice and the processes within it.

The following are some recent studies on restorative justice.

Kiefer, R. P., Worthington, E. L., Jr., Wenzel, M., & Woodyatt, L. (2020). Apology and restitution in a role play restorative justice experiment: Multiple perspectives, multiple measures. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, in press. [Impact factor = 0.735] doi: 10.1177/0091647120911114

Wenzel, M., Okimoto, T., Feather, N. T., & Platow, M. J. (2008). Retributive and restorative justice. *Law and Human Behavior*, 32, 375-389.

Witvliet, C. v. O., Root Luna, L. R., Worthington, E. L., Jr., & Tsang, J.-A. (2020). Apology and restitution increase forgiveness with emotional and physiological change: Offender accountability responses influence victim empathy and forgiveness. *Frontiers Psychology* doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00284. [Impact factor = 2.129]

Witvliet, C. v. O., Wade, N. G., Worthington, E. L., Jr., Luna, L. R., Van Tongeren, D. R., Berry, J. W., & Tsang, J.-A., & Davis, D. E. (2020). Apology and restitution: Offender accountability responses influence victim empathy and forgiveness. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, in press.

In an earlier section, “The Dark Side of Forgiving,” I described and cited Jeffrie G. Murphy’s work on legal philosophy.

- **Jeffrie G. Murphy**, Arizona State University ([Jeffrie.Murphy@asu.edu](mailto:Jeffrie.Murphy@asu.edu))

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## Forgiveness and Tragedies

### Mass Shootings

- **David S. Chester** ([dschester@vcu.edu](mailto:dschester@vcu.edu)) Chester has studied violence, aggression, and mass violence. I summarized and referenced his work in the section, “The Dark Side of Forgiving.” The following is one summary chapter.

Chester, D. S., & Martelli, A. M. (2020). Why revenge sometimes feels so good. In E. L. Worthington, Jr., & N. G. Wade (Eds.), *Handbook of forgiveness*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (pp. 43-51). New York, NY: Routledge.

Chester, D. S. (2017). The role of positive affect in aggression. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 26(4), 366-370.

### Amish Nickel Mine Shooting

- **Donald B. Kraybill**, Elizabethtown College, Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies ([kraybilld@etown.edu](mailto:kraybilld@etown.edu)) Kraybill is a lecturer and educator on the Anabaptist faiths. He is Distinguished College Professor and Senior Fellow.

Kraybill, D. B., Nolt, S. M., & Weaver-Zercher, D. L. (20). *Amish grace: How forgiveness transcended tragedy*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

### Forgiveness in South Africa

- **Richard Cowden**, University of the Free State, South Africa ([richardgregorycowden@gmail.com](mailto:richardgregorycowden@gmail.com)) Cowden is a native of South Africa now living in the United States. He conducted a comprehensive review of research on forgiveness in South Africa.

Dalai Lama, & Tutu, D. (2016). *The book of joy: Lasting happiness in a changing world*. Houston, TX: Cornerstone Publishers.

Tutu, D. M. (1999). *No future without forgiveness*. New York: Doubleday.

Tutu, D., & Tutu, M. (2014). *The book of forgiving: The fourfold path for healing ourselves*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.

Worthington, E., Jr., & Cowden, R. (2017). The psychology of forgiveness and its importance in South Africa. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 47, 292-304. doi:10.1177/0081246316685074

For a more critical look at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, see Audrey Chapman’s works:

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Chapman, A. R. (1998). Truth commissions as instruments of forgiveness and reconciliation. In R. G. Helmick & R. L. Petersen (Eds.), *Forgiveness and reconciliation: Religion, public policy, and conflict transformation* (pp. 247-267). Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press.

Chapman, A. R. (1999). Coming to terms with the past: Truth, justice and/or reconciliation. *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics*, 19, 237-260.

Chapman, A. R., & Spong B. (Eds.). (2003). *Religion and reconciliation in South Africa*. Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press.

### **Forgiveness in Rwanda**

- **Erwin Staub**, University of Massachusetts, Amherst ([estaub@psych.umass.edu](mailto:estaub@psych.umass.edu)) Staub is an emeritus professor at the University of Massachusetts. He has devoted his entire career to studying prejudice, discrimination, violence against minorities, mass killing, and genocide.

Staub, E. (2005). Constructive rather than harmful forgiveness, reconciliation, and ways to promote them after genocide and mass killing. In Everett L. Worthington, Jr. (Ed.), *Handbook of forgiveness* (pp. 443-459). New York: Brunner-Routledge.

Staub, E., Pearlman, L. A., & Miller, V. (2003). Healing the roots of genocide in Rwanda. *Peace Review*, 15, 287–294.

For a more popular account:

Ilibagiza, I., & Erwin, S. (2006). *Left to tell: Discovering God amidst the Rwandan holocaust*. Carlsbad, CA: Hay House.

## **9. Seeking Forgiveness**

In our last chapter in the *Handbook of Forgiveness*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (2020), Nathaniel Wade and I identified changes in the scientific study of forgiveness during the 15 years since publication of the first edition (2005). We then speculated on the future of the field. One of the major changes we noted was that researchers were shifting from an almost exclusive focus on the experience of the victim and the conditions preceding and following forgiveness (or alternative responses to the transgression). Thus, the context surrounding forgiveness (or its absence) has taken on added importance, and this is almost certain to extend into the foreseeable future. Some of those events that are likely to gain increased scrutiny are the interpersonal interactions preceding the experience of a decision to forgive and how that might lead to the quick or gradual experience of emotional forgiveness (or revenge-seeking or grudge-holding).

The offenders' actions could involve things like a cascade of denying responsibility for the act and perhaps even trying to turn the tables and blame the victim for the transgression. That cascade could

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include things like denying responsibility outright, ignoring or deflecting reproaches (technically, these are requests for the offender to explain why he or she acted in a way perceived to be hurtful), calling attention to the victim's provocations and perhaps even prior hurts (either proximal or distal to the transgression under discussion). In the literature, these unhelpful responses are generally classified as denial or refusal, justifications, or immediate excuses. However, this is based on early research by Schönbach (1990), and the classification system is likely oversimplified given all the research that has taken place in the last 30 years.

Schönbach, P. (1990). *Account episodes: The management or escalation of conflict*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Or the offender might initiate a virtuous cycle. Those accounts are called concessions (or confessions). Those confessions have several positive elements, which I describe using the acronym CONFESS. The end point of CONFESS is to seek forgiveness. Not a lot has been written about seeking forgiveness. Australians Wenzel and Woodyatt are conducting a systematic research program on the reciprocal relationships among (for the offender) making amends, seeking forgiveness, receiving forgiveness, and self-forgiveness and (for the victim) forgiving and communicating that forgiveness.

**C = Confess without excuse.** (This requires accepting responsibility for the act—i.e., being accountable. Witvliet has written recently about accountability, and she and several collaborators have a grant-funded research program on accountability.)

**O = Offer an apology.** (Many people have studied apologies. I list a few below.)

**N = Note the person's pain.** (This is empathy. Empathy has been thoroughly studied as a victim characteristic promoting forgiveness. This is the other side—the offender's ability to empathize with the suffering of the victim, and to communicate that understanding and empathy to the victim.)

**F = Forever value the other person.** (This is a statement or non-verbal communication that the offender values the relationship with the person who was hurt or offended and is willing to sacrificially respond to make the relationship better.)

**E = Equalize.** (This is an offer to make restitution or amends for the wrong done.)

**S = Say “never again.”** (This is a statement of intention to not repeat the harm or one like it in the future. It is an attempt to reduce the risk for the victim to grant forgiveness.)

**S = Seek forgiveness.** (This is a direct request to the victim to forgive.)

Bassett, R. L., Bassett, K. M., Lloyd, M. W., & Johnson, J. L. (2006). Seeking forgiveness: Considering the role of moral emotions. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 34, 111-124.



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Bassett, R. L., Edgerton, M., Johnson, J., Lill, C., Russo, G., Ardella, L., et al. (2008). Seeking forgiveness: The view from an experimental paradigm. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, 27, 140-149.

da Silva, S. P., Witvliet, C. V. O., & Riek, B. M. (2016). Self-forgiveness and forgiveness-seeking in response to rumination: Cardiac and emotional responses of transgressors. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*. doi:[10.1080/17439760.2016.1187200](https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2016.1187200)

Struthers, C. W., Eaton, J., Santelli, A. G., Uchiyama, M., & Shirvani, N. (2008). The effects of attributions of intent and apology on forgiveness: When saying sorry may not help the story. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 44, 983-992.

Witvliet, C. V. O. (2020). Forgiveness, embodiment, and relational accountability: Victim and transgressor psychophysiology research. In Everett L. Worthington, Jr. & Nathaniel G. Wade (Eds.), *Handbook of forgiveness*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (pp. 167-177). New York, NY: Routledge.

Witvliet, C. v. O., Root Luna, L. R., Worthington, E. L., Jr., & Tsang, J.-A. (2020). Apology and restitution increase forgiveness with emotional and physiological change: Offender accountability responses influence victim empathy and forgiveness. *Frontiers Psychology* doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00284.

Witvliet, C. v. O., Wade, N. G., Worthington, E. L., Jr., Luna, L. R., Van Tongeren, D. R., Berry, J. W., & Tsang, J.-A., & Davis, D. E. (2020). Apology and restitution: Offender accountability responses influence victim empathy and forgiveness. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, in press.

Witvliet, C.v. O., Ludwig, T.E., & Bauer, D.J. (2002). Please forgive me: Transgressors' emotions and physiology during imagery of seeking forgiveness and victim responses. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, 21, 219-233.

#### Recommended experts:

- **Rodney Bassett**, Roberts Wesleyan University ([BassettR@Roberts.edu](mailto:BassettR@Roberts.edu))
- **Charlotte Witvliet**, Hope College ([witvliet@hope.edu](mailto:witvliet@hope.edu))
- **Michael Wenzel**, Flinders University, Australia ([michael.wenzel@flinders.edu.au](mailto:michael.wenzel@flinders.edu.au))
- **Lydia Woodyatt**, Flinders University, Australia ([lydia.woodyatt@flinders.edu.au](mailto:lydia.woodyatt@flinders.edu.au))
- **Jennifer Thomas** ([jennifer@drjenniferthomas.com](mailto:jennifer@drjenniferthomas.com)) Thomas, co-author with Gary Chapman of *Five Languages of Apology*, has popularized research on apology. Chapman wrote the *Five Languages of Love*, which has been a Christian bestseller for over 20 years, selling multiple millions of copies.

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## Making Things Right after Harming Someone

Recently, several papers have taken up this topic under various labels. In a chapter in the *Handbook of Forgiveness*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Witvliet has written about the role of accountability in interactions around transgressions. Witvliet and colleagues have done a series of laboratory studies on the effects of apology and restitution on forgiveness. Worthington has written a study on the effects of apologies and offers of restitution on forgiveness by a victim of a criminal act, the victim's mother, and the offender's mother, in a type of restorative justice, that is, Family Group Conferencing. Some also call this making amends. It includes some focus on the processes of apology or restitution or both.

- **Charlotte Witvliet**, Hope College ([witvliet@hope.edu](mailto:witvliet@hope.edu))
- **Everett Worthington**, Virginia Commonwealth University ([eworth@vcu.edu](mailto:eworth@vcu.edu))

Griffin, B. J., Moloney, J. M., Green, J. D., Worthington, E. L., Jr., Cork, B., Tangney, J. P., Van Tongeren, D. R., Davis, D. E., & Hook, J. N. (2016). Perpetrators' reactions to perceived interpersonal wrongdoing: The associations of guilt and shame with forgiving, punishing, and excusing oneself. *Self and Identity*, 15(6), 650-661. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15298868.2016.1187669>

There are a few other processes that are important. One is whether the offender might feel forgiven by God, or might be experiencing shame and guilt, compounded by sinfulness. The other is whether the person might be locked into continual self-condemnation and unable to forgive himself or herself. I addressed feeling forgiven by God in a previous section. The next section will look at self-forgiveness.

## 10. Self-Forgiveness

Research on self-forgiveness has exploded in the last decade. People consider forgiving themselves because they are experiencing self-condemnation. Usually that experience is due to doing something that violates their own moral code or to feeling a sense of inadequacy at reaching prized standards of behavior. Sometimes, the self-condemnation arises from depression or long-standing poor self-esteem, but when that happens, treatment of the underlying personality or emotional problem will provide relief, or will reduce the severity and reveal that there are also problems due to morally or behaviorally falling short of one's standards.

To forgive oneself, two processes are needed—to restore our sense of morality (by getting right with God, the people we hurt, and our own psychological moral injuries) and to restore our emotional peace. Without restoration of responsibility and accountability, self-forgiveness (as mere feeling better) is called pseudo-self-forgiveness or simply letting oneself off the hook.

A recent *Handbook of the Psychology of Self-Forgiveness* has collected chapters that summarize a wealth of basic and (less in amount) applied work. The co-editors are given in the reference below.

Woodyatt, L., Worthington, E. L., Jr., Wenzel, M., & Griffin, B. J. (Eds.). (2017). *Handbook of the psychology of self-forgiveness*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer Nature.

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- **Brandon J. Griffin**, Veterans Administration Medical Center, Little Rock, Arkansas ([Brandon.Griffin2@va.gov](mailto:Brandon.Griffin2@va.gov)) Griffin is a clinical psychologist at the VAMC in Little Rock, Arkansas, and he has developed an evidence-based do-it-yourself workbook to promote self-forgiveness, a scale to measure it, and applied self-forgiveness within moral injury in combat veterans.
  - **Everett Worthington**, Virginia Commonwealth University ([eworth@vcu.edu](mailto:eworth@vcu.edu)) Worthington has written a trade book on self-forgiveness and co-authored with Griffin the workbook study and scale. He has an agreement with Oxford University Press (with co-author John McConnell) for a book on self-forgiveness in psychotherapy.
  - **Lydia Woodyatt**, Flinders University, Australia ([lydia.woodyatt@flinders.edu.au](mailto:lydia.woodyatt@flinders.edu.au)) Woodyatt, a social psychologist, has developed a scale to assess responsibility (with Wenzel), and edited the first Handbook on the Psychology of Self-Forgiveness (Springer), which was co-authored with Worthington, Wenzel, and Griffin.
  - **Michael Wenzel**, Flinders University, Australia ([michael.wenzel@flinders.edu.au](mailto:michael.wenzel@flinders.edu.au)) This social psychologist has participated with Woodyatt, Worthington, and Griffin in research on self-forgiveness.
  - **Marilyn Cornish**, Auburn University ([mac0084@auburn.edu](mailto:mac0084@auburn.edu)) has developed an evidence-based psychotherapy treatment to help people forgive themselves.
  - **Don E. Davis**, Georgia State University ([ddavis88@gsu.edu](mailto:ddavis88@gsu.edu))
  - **Frank D. Fincham**, Florida State University ([ffincham@fsu.edu](mailto:ffincham@fsu.edu))
  - **Loren Toussaint**, Luther College ([touslo01@luther.edu](mailto:touslo01@luther.edu))

### Basic Research on Self-Forgiveness

Research on self-forgiveness was kicked off by two articles by Judith Hall and team leader Frank Fincham (who has programs of research primarily of forgiveness in couples, and who also has started a line of research in perceiving forgiveness by God. Hall and Fincham initially called self-forgiveness research the forgotten stepchild of forgiveness research and three years after their 2005 seminal article, they did an empirical article that seemed to dislodge the field's inertia.

By seven years after Hall and Fincham (2008), Davis and his colleagues (2015) had meta-analyzed the research on self-forgiveness and mental and physical health. Research and writing on the basic processes associated with forgiving oneself generally have centered on accountability processes, championed by Lydia Woodyatt and Michael Wenzel of Flinders University in Adelaide, Australia. On the other hand, Worthington and Griffin have put forth a dual process model.

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.

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Griffin, B. J., Worthington, E. L., Jr., Bell, C. M., & Davis, D. E. (2017). Self-directed intervention to promote self-forgiveness. In L. Woodyatt, E. L. Worthington, Jr., M. Wenzel, & B. J. Griffin (Eds.), *Handbook of the psychology of self-forgiveness* (pp. 207-219). Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.

Griffin, B. J., Worthington, E. L., Jr., Danish, S. J., Donovan, J., Lavelock, C. R., Shaler, L., Dees, R. F., Maguen, S., & Davis, D. E. (2017). Self-forgiveness and military service: Equipping warriors to combat moral injury. In L. Woodyatt, E. L. Worthington, Jr., M. Wenzel, & B. J. Griffin (Eds.), *Handbook of the psychology of self-forgiveness* (pp. 221-234). Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.

Griffin, B. J., Worthington, E. L., Jr., Davis, D. E., Hook, J. N., & Maguen, S. (2018). Development of the Self-Forgiveness Dual-Process Scale. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 65(6), 715-726.

Hall, J. H., & Fincham, F. D. (2005). Self-forgiveness: The stepchild of forgiveness research. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 24, 621-637.

Hall, J. H., & Fincham, F. D. (2008). The temporal course of self-forgiveness. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 27, 174-202.

Wenzel, M., Woodyatt, L., & Hedrick, K. (2012). No genuine self-forgiveness without accepting responsibility: Value reaffirmation as a key to maintaining positive self-regard. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 42, 617-627.

Woodyatt, L., & Wenzel, M. (2013). The psychological immune response in the face of transgressions: Pseudo self-forgiveness and threat to belonging. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 49, 951-958.

Woodyatt, L., & Wenzel, M. (2014). A needs-based perspective on self-forgiveness: Addressing threat to moral identity as a means of encouraging interpersonal and intrapersonal restoration. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 50, 125-135.

Woodyatt, L., Wenzel, M., & Ferber, M. (2017). Two pathways to self-forgiveness: A hedonic path via self-compassion and a eudaimonic path via the reaffirmation of violated values. *British Journal of Social Psychology*. Advance online publication. DOI:10.1111/bjso.12194

Woodyatt, L., Worthington, E. L., Jr., Wenzel, M., & Griffin, B. J. (2017). Orientation to the psychology of self-forgiveness. In Woodyatt, L., Worthington, E. L., Jr., Wenzel, M., & Griffin, B. J. (Eds.), *Handbook of the psychology of self-forgiveness* (pp. 3-16). Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.

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## Practicing Self-Forgiveness

People can seek self-forgiveness through individual psychotherapy, group psychoeducation, and self-administered treatments. One treatment method was put forth in Worthington (2013) in a trade book, but Griffin and his colleagues (2015) developed a do-it-yourself workbook (available free at [www.EvWorthington-forgiveness.com/DIYworkbooks/](http://www.EvWorthington-forgiveness.com/DIYworkbooks/)) that has been tested in randomized controlled trials. That process has six steps: (1) Making things right with the Sacred; (2) making things right with people harmed in one's social network; (3) making things right psychologically; (4) making a decision to forgive oneself and REACH emotional forgiveness; (5) accepting oneself as a person who is both flawed and valuable; and (6) setting one's sights on virtue in the future. Other treatments do not necessarily order the steps the same way but most treatments use similar processes.

Cornish, M. A., & Wade, N. G. (2015b). Working through past wrongdoing: Examination of a self-forgiveness counseling intervention. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 62, 521-528.

Griffin, B. J., Worthington, E. L., Jr., Lavelock, C. R., Greer, C. L., Lin, 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.

Scherer, M., Worthington, E. L., Jr., Hook, J. N., & Campana, K. L. (2011). Forgiveness and the bottle: Promoting self-forgiveness in individuals who abuse alcohol. *Journal of Addictive Diseases*, 30, 382-395.

Toussaint, L., Barry, M., Bornfriend, L., & Markman, M. (2014). Restore: The Journey Toward Self-Forgiveness: A randomized trial of patient education on self-forgiveness in cancer patients and caregivers. *Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy*, 20(2), 54-74.

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## V. WHAT'S HOT AND WHAT'S NOT?

In science, what's hot and what's not can change about as often as Taylor Swift puts out another number one song. So I offer this with a grain of salt. Nathaniel Wade and I surveyed the group of over 30 expert literature reviews that made up the *Handbook of Forgiveness*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. We identified “big trends” in the last 15 years of forgiveness research and “what is on the vanguard of research in the 2020s.” Here are our summaries.

### **Trends During the Last 10 Years**

- Defining forgiveness. Consensus has diminished since the first edition.
- Attention to processes regarding the offender and victim's interaction.
- Assessing forgiveness. Measures have proliferated, and have been translated into many languages, with psychometric evidence supplied. But what are the best ones?
- Understanding forgiveness theoretically. The stress-and-coping theory and interdependence theory are now being joined by newer theories—evolutionary theory, virtue theory, exposure theory.
- Seeking to describe how forgiveness of others, forgiveness of self, forgiveness by God, and societal forgiveness are interrelated. Up to now, each has been measured separately. More attention is being paid to how they influence each other.
- Promoting forgiveness. Two approaches dominate (REACH Forgiveness and the process model). But much more is now known about the nuances of helping people forgive. Can we improve the two dominant approaches?
- Perhaps the biggest new development is the overwhelming attention that has been lavished on cultural elements of forgiveness.
- Some subfields have grown virally—such as forgiveness and health and forgiveness and mental health—while others have either experienced modest growth (forgiveness in relationships and in organizations) or failed to coalesce (the development of forgiveness in children).

### **Hot for the Next 10 Years**

1. With all the attention being given to interactions between offender and victim, and with the parallel growth of interest in self-forgiveness, the field needs more sophisticated theories of what happens when people forgive.
2. In psychology, the absence of research into the development of forgiveness in children and early adolescents is troublesome. Most people think that many societal problems could be either prevented or made less severe if children could learn to forgive and learn to apply forgiveness early in their lives. How can this be promoted? How is forgiveness transmitted to children? How can we help children use forgiveness once they learn the mechanics of forgiving? There have been a couple of excellent papers recently, so let us hope this generates wider interest.
3. How exactly does forgiveness promote mental and physical health? That not forgiving is bad for physical health, mental health, relationships, and spirituality is supported by substantial research. But little is known about how forgiveness promotes good health. There have been few studies



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connecting processes that occur physically, psychologically, or relationally with mechanisms that produce better health and physical well-being. More is known about producing psychological well-being and relational well-being, but the physiology of forgiveness (rather than the physiology of unforgiveness) needs study.

4. Our society is polarized. Political humility is needed. How might forgiveness be a step to political humility and civil discourse?
5. Why do forgiveness interventions work, and why do they sometimes fail? For example, why is time spent trying to forgive so important in interventions? Perhaps more important than the content of interventions is the style of intervention (e.g., psychotherapy, psychoeducation, DIY workbooks). What must an intervention include to promote forgiveness and what is unnecessary? How can interventions be tailored for specific offenses, specific people, and to target specific outcomes? How can societies become more forgiving? How can societies use the promotion of forgiveness and reconciliation effectively while balancing the need to heal from traumas and uphold justice?
6. Coronavirus and the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) have drawn attention to public health. Is there a way that forgiveness can be a public health intervention? I have organized campus-wide forgiveness initiatives, and we are in the midst of funded studies in Hong Kong, Indonesia, Ukraine, Colombia, and South Africa, in which public health campaigns are being undertaken in communities—usually conflict-ridden communities—that are not associated with college campuses. Can public health forgiveness initiatives bring about better physical and mental health?
7. COVID-19 has made the world even more dependent on technology. Can forgiveness interventions be effectively delivered on the web or on apps? Research to date suggests that to forgive, (1) people must spend a lot of time trying to forgive, and (2) apps are hit-and-miss and online delivery does not hold people's attention without lots of monitoring and oversight. Thus, perhaps the answer to using technology is to deliver a self-administered downloadable workbook to promote forgiveness. As mentioned previously, we are conducting a funded controlled trial to investigate these workbooks.

### **A Final Thought**

With over 3,000 published articles (representing far more than 3,000 studies given the multiple-study format of most articles today), we know a lot about the antecedents and effects of forgiving or not forgiving. We know many of the moderators (i.e., what variables make forgiveness occur or not?) and mediators (what are the causal mechanisms?) that connect antecedents with forgiveness and forgiveness with its effects. Yet in many ways we have, so far, merely plucked the low-hanging fruit.

The first 30 years of forgiveness research has merely sketched a map of the territory. It is up to the next generation of researchers to develop the satellite imaging that will survey and map the entire territory. And it is up to journalists to convey those findings understandably to the public. I look at the upcoming decade or two as an exciting time of exploration, discovery, and dissemination of findings.

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## APPENDIX: HOLIDAYS AS NEWS HOOKS

- **New Year's** resolutions might include an intention to be more forgiving. Or the onset of a new year might motivate people to forgive or seek forgiveness to repair an important relationship.
- **Martin Luther King, Jr. Day** (third Monday of January) might prompt reflection on race relations and on King's "I Have a Dream" speech. That might inspire people hoping to forgive racial hurts or to seek forgiveness for a past in which those hurts have been inflicted.
- **Chinese New Year** (23rd day of the 12th lunar month of the Chinese calendar; in 2020, January 20). Stories can feature new year's resolutions—whether one is Chinese or not—regarding relationships with China as a country or people of Chinese descent.
- **Groundhog Day** (February 2) is mired within winter, but the day asks whether a groundhog sees its shadow to predict how much more winter to expect. This might be an opportunity to tell a story about the "winter of my relationship" with an estranged friend or family member. Bill Murray's *Groundhog Day* also comes to mind. Murray played a character who eventually learned to repair damage he had done in relationships and to become a better person.
- **Lincoln's Birthday** (February 12). In this era of political divisions and ill-treatment of political opponents, Lincoln's Birthday is a perfect time to remember quotes by Abraham Lincoln. Here's one: "With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations." How can we build the forgiveness needed for such a charitable attitude toward those who do not endorse our political sentiments?
- **Valentine's Day** (February 14). Can I forgive the little (and big) hurts by the person I truly care about? Can I seek forgiveness for the hurts I've meted out?
- **President's Day** (third Monday of February). We don't always agree with our president. Whether we are Democrat, Republican, or Independent, we can point to many presidential decisions that have taken the nation in harmful directions. Yet, this is a day when, perhaps, we might consider past presidents and the present president. Perhaps we might even seek forgiveness for judging them (at times) more harshly than their dedicated service warrants. Because we forgive does not mean we condone wrongdoing or support policies that we think are mistakes. It does not mean we will not be vocal and active at pursuing social justice. It does not mean we are giving up political dialogue. It does mean that, in humility, we acknowledge that we might not always be right or fair in our judgments. Can we give the presidents the benefit of the doubt?
- **Washington's Birthday** (February 22). Many of George Washington's quotes can be hooks for stories about forgiveness. For example, "It is better to offer no excuse than a bad

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one.” And another from his farewell address: “Observe good faith and justice toward all nations. Cultivate peace and harmony with all.”

- **Approach to Easter:** Mardi Gras (i.e., Fat Tuesday, the last day to eat hearty before Lent), Ash Wednesday (Christian remembrance that starts the 40 days of Lent leading to Easter), Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday). Easter is one of the two centerpieces of Christianity—both of which are about God’s forgiveness of humans through Jesus’ death and resurrection.
- **St. Patrick’s Day** (March 17) is a celebration of Irish culture. It could stimulate reflection on reconciliation with any people of Irish descent with whom we are estranged.
- **First day of Spring** (March 19, 20, or 21). Spring marks a time of emergence from winter’s cold and darkness. It could stimulate stories on relationship newness marked by forgiveness. It is celebrated on a different day each year. On the vernal equinox, the sun crosses the celestial equator.
- **Passover** (in 2020, April 9; officially Passover is the 15th of the month of Nisan in the Hebrew calendar; it lasts for seven or eight days depending on the branch of Judaism). This is a day of freedom—in which the Exodus story tells of the passing over of the angel of death and initiating the freedom from Egyptian enslavement. It could stimulate stories of freedom from the enslavement of people to unforgiving grudges.
- **Earth Day** (April 22). This is a day to celebrate environmental protection and to commit to a healthy environment. In 1969, peace activist John McConnell proposed a day to honor the earth and peace. A story about the history of Earth Day and its roots in peace can stimulate appeals for more forgiveness. In addition, the interpersonal environment seems at times to be as imperiled as the physical environment, so this could also provide the impetus to clean up our interpersonal environment by forgiving and asking for forgiveness and seeking peace through reconciliation.
- **Cinco de Mayo** (May 5). This has become a celebration day in the United States for Mexican-Americans and everybody else, too. It originated as a celebration of Mexican independence. Stories could tell the historical meaning of the day (i.e., the defeat of Napoleon II signifying the independence of Mexico from France) and tie it to personal independence from unforgiveness. People could thus be encouraged to forgive and celebrate independence from grudge-holding.
- **Mother’s Day** (second Sunday in May). This celebrates mothers. Many people are unforgiving toward their mothers, and some mothers harbor disappointments with their children—often adult children. This could be a day of forgiveness and reconciliation within the family.
- **Armed Forces Day** (May 16). This celebrates those serving in the armed forces. It is about being prepared to defend the country. A possible tie-in could be for people who feel that they are likely to be attacked by friends or family and feel that they are on constant amber alert. They could be encouraged to forgive and seek to broker a reconciliation.
- **Memorial Day** (the last Monday of May). This holiday honors those who have died serving in the armed forces. On a personal level, a writer could encourage people to recall

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past personal conflicts. Many of those will be over, yet hurts might remain unforgiven. Memorial Day could be a good time to forgive those past hurts. Memorial Day is seen as the (unofficial) first day of summer, with its perceived freedom from school-year restrictions and openness to new times of vitality and energy. People can be urged to forgive those against whom they hold wrongs and experience the vitality and energy of summer.

- **First day of summer** (June 20 or 21). The summer solstice, which is the first day of “astronomical” summer, occurs on or about June 21 in the Northern Hemisphere. As with Memorial Day, the unofficial beginning of summer, people can be urged to forgive those against whom they hold wrongs and experience the vitality and energy of summer.
- **Father’s Day** (third Sunday of June). Many people have a troubled relationship with their father. Father’s Day is celebrated around the world (not necessarily on the same day) to recognize the positive contribution that fathers and father figures make to their children.
- **Independence Day** (July 4). We think of July 4, 1776, as the day that represents the Declaration of Independence and signifies the beginning of the United States of America as an independent nation. What is largely unknown is that the Continental Congress voted for independence on July 2, but it was not declared until two days later. Telling that story can lead to a discussion of one’s personal declaration of independence from grudges, hate, or conflict. We often decide to forgive, but only later does emotional forgiveness happen—much as with congress’s decision to declare independence and the proclamation of actual independence.
- **Labor Day** (first Monday in September). Labor Day is a celebration of the social and economic achievements of American workers. It can be the basis for working on one’s relationships that are on shaky ground.
- **Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur**. Rosh Hashanah commemorates the creation of the world. It begins the Days of Awe, which is a 10-day period of introspection and repentance. That repentance culminates in Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. In Judaism, these high holy days are aimed at seeking and giving forgiveness.
- **International Day of Peace** (Peace Day, September 21). Peace Day is a worldwide celebration, begun in 1981 by a unanimous United Nations resolution. It is a date in which people of all countries are encouraged to prioritize peace over differences. This is a time when stories can address peace with family and friends, with opponents and even enemies, with oneself (i.e., self-forgiveness), and with God.
- **Columbus Day** (second Monday of October). Columbus Day is a national holiday in the United States. However, it has become a controversial day because it signifies at once the arrival of Europeans to the North American continent and the fallout of that in terms of destruction of indigenous native cultures. This day can serve as a time of reflection about the meaning and fallout of the arrival of Europeans and can serve as a time of seeking forgiveness on behalf of our nation’s failures over the years.
- **Veterans Day** (November 11) now celebrates those who have served in the armed forces, but originally it celebrated the end of World War I, with the armistice signed on the 11<sup>th</sup> hour of the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> month). This could make a great hook for a story about

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ending hostilities. The writer could then ask whether people would like to enter into a personal armistice with those friends or family with whom they have been in conflict.

- **Thanksgiving** (fourth Thursday in November). This is a day of remembrance and gratitude. The first Thanksgiving was attended by 90 Native Americans and 53 Pilgrims. It was a three-day harvest celebration. In the United States, Thanksgiving has become a time synonymous with family fellowship. Often, though, relationships in the family are not fully harmonious, and forgiveness can help smooth those relationships. In addition, with families gathered around the table, topics that engender difference, conflict, and negative feelings arise. Forgiveness is needed—both pre-emptively (because we often suspect which family member might be prone to beginning discord) and after conflicts arise.
- **Christmas** (December 25). Christmas is a Christian holiday celebrating the birth of Jesus, whose life brought forgiveness from God. Of course, Christmas has become secular and materialistic, and it can be a time of stress and unforgiveness. Forgiveness is a message that all of us need to practice during this stressful season.

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