

Preach and Teach REACH Forgiveness:
A Practical Resource for Promoting Forgiveness in
Your Congregation

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Acknowledgements

This resource booklet is intended to provide practical advice to pastors and lay leaders about promoting forgiveness in the local congregation. This has been a dream of mine since I started doing research on forgiveness. The Episcopal Preaching Foundation provided an impetus to get some of those thoughts down on paper, and I have continued to add to them.

I would like to thank the many people who have been instrumental in helping compile this resource that I hope can help pastors, rectors, clergy, and seminarians be better equipped to integrate forgiveness into their church ministry. I hope they will be more equipped to preach about forgiveness, practice it themselves, practically integrate it into teaching, and program forgiveness into the life of their congregation or parish.

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Introduction

Preach and Teach REACH Forgiveness: An Introduction to This Resource Manual

This is a resource booklet to help you preach and teach about forgiveness. I focus the approach to forgiveness on the REACH Forgiveness method of forgiving and on a stress-and-coping theory of forgiveness. Both the REACH Forgiveness intervention and the basic science on which it is built (the stress-and-coping theory) are evidence-based. They are informed by both scientific and theological thinking, so over the course of this resource manual, I hope you'll think that you have practical tools for understanding forgiveness theologically and scientifically, for preparation for preaching about forgiveness (and including REACH Forgiveness model where you think it might be helpful), and for teaching about forgiveness using many modalities within your congregation. Consult www.EvWorthington-forgiveness.com for many no-cost downloadable resources.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Everett L. Worthington, Jr." The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "J" at the end.

Should You Enter into a Concerted Effort to Preach and Teach Forgiveness in Your Congregation?

Forgiveness is essential in Christianity, but recognizing that is far different than considering whether you, as Rector, should enter into a program in which you seek to preach and teach forgiveness. You need to make an eyes-open decision before jumping in.

Consider Theology

Consider the theology. Some have argued that forgiveness is *the* centerpiece of Christianity—forgiveness of humans by God and forgiveness of humans by other humans. Others have asserted that love holds the pre-eminent place of honor in Christianity, and Jesus, when asked what the most important commandments were (Luke 10:26), taught this: “He answered, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind”; and, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (NIV; Luke 10:27; see also Matt 22:36-38). And certainly a case could be made for justice and practicing humility as well. In Micah 6:8, we read, “He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (NIV). Certainly, though, forgiveness is a practice not only recommended to Christians, but commanded (Matt 6:14-15).

But saying that something is theologically crucial does not mean we should necessarily make it a central focus of preaching and teaching for some period. There are many ways that the virtue of forgiveness might be encouraged, preached, taught, and nurtured. And there are many priorities in Christian formation across the lifespan. Let’s consider some additional things.

Consider Your Motivations

Reflect on your goals. Most rectors want to participate in God’s call to change lives to form the mind of Christ within people. That includes promoting forgiveness using at least four ways. These four ways of helping people become more forgiving include (1) the personal practice of forgiveness, (2) powerful preaching of forgiveness, (3) targeted teaching of forgiveness, and (4) advancing administration of a program that spreads the targeted teaching of forgiveness (a) within the congregation to families, to individuals, to children, to classes, to small groups, to friends, to co-workers, and to congregants (regular or less frequent attenders) and (b) through the congregation into the world through the congregants’ work, life, and community involvement. Thus, most rectors’ goals are to form more forgiving people, to form more forgiving congregation, and to form a more forgiving world.

But ways of carrying out these goals involve working through the gifts God has given you. Some are preachers, some are teachers, and some administrators, we read in 1 Cor xx:xx. But, those gifts are to build up the body of Christ, and we all have the seeds of those gifts, and the Holy Spirit activates those seeds as needed. So, at any moment, we might have a hierarchy of gifts. At one time in our career or at one time in our tenure at a church, we might have preaching as our primary gifting, with teaching and administration taking a back seat. But a few months later, we might find ourselves being heavily involved in administration, and preaching and teaching are less in the limelight. A little while after that, we will be doing mostly teaching as empowered by the Holy Spirit.

It is important to reflect on what you think the Holy Spirit is guiding you to with your responsibilities in the congregation. If you are considering adding an emphasis on preaching, teaching, and administering a program on forgiveness, what might need to change to make room for that initiative? As we know, time is a limited resource, and if we add things to our agenda, something else gets crunched or eliminated—if we are going to have a life not consumed by stress. The same consideration happens when we complete one aspect. So, suppose you decide to create an eight-week sermon series on forgiveness. Those preparations will consume lots of time, but at some point, the preparations will end, and that might free up some time for teaching or organizing before it is necessary to start the preparations for your next sermon series.

Of course, as you know, you don’t have to be the sole person responsible for changes. Might you need to change your emphases? Might you need to recruit a lay leader or assistant rector to carry out administration or teaching while you focus on preaching?

Sustainability is always a concern. We don’t want to create a program, have it run its course, and then have people walk away and not only not be more forgiving but not even be able to recall that there was an initiative to promote forgiveness. So, you need to give some time to long-term planning about sustainability. Might you have something like an eight-week sermon series now, then reinforce the teaching on forgiveness with planned sermons on New Year’s weekend (“Start a New Year with Forgiveness”), Valentine’s Day (“Spice Up Your Romance—Forgive Your Romantic Partner”), Easter (“Forgiveness Triumphs”), Mother’s Day (“Forgiveness and a Mother’s Love—a Story of Mary’s Role in Preparing Jesus for Forgiveness”), Memorial Day weekend (“Remembering the Sacrifice and Joy of Forgiving”), Father’s Day (“The Father’s Love and Forgiveness”), July 4th weekend (“The Freedom from Grudges That Comes from Forgiving”), Labor Day (“Celebrating the Work of Forgiving”), Thanksgiving (“Forgiveness—Guilt, Gratitude, and Grace”), Advent (“How Forgiveness Entered into the World”),

Christmas (“The Birth of Forgiveness Incarnate”). I tactfully left out my favorite holiday, Start of Daylight Savings Time (“Forgiving People Who Forget to Spring Forward”).

Sustainability also is a concern with group programs. Can you have a number of groups that deal with forgiveness in different ways. These could be undertaken one a year for several years, or people might rotate from one to another. This might involve a psychoeducational group to learn and apply REACH Forgiveness, a book discussion group, and a movie discussion group.

Consider Your People

What do you know about the people in your care? Are their divorces? Conflicts and bitter unforgiveness between partners? Struggles between parents and their children? How about life within the congregation? Do your elders and deacons disagree, engage in power struggles, and hold onto hurts? Do you have tension and conflict with the other leaders of your congregation, or with the denominational leadership? Has your church had a history of divisiveness, with splits, near splits, and families leaving because they did not feel valued? Are there hurt feelings among members of the congregation? What about people’s work situations? Do you know of people having conflict at work with an intolerant supervisor or cantankerous co-workers or rebellious and disrespectful supervisees? How would you evaluate the people in your congregation? Are they quick to forgive and let bygones be bygones? Is there conflict and unforgiveness against social institutions, or is there societal disaffection and alienation?

If your people are not beset by such problems—or at least not inordinately—then great. But, if you can name many needy parishioners, then you might consider how to encourage changes.

As a rector you care about how people might be formed in Christ-like character within the church and within the family, but how they might carry it into the world outside of church and family. We know that the *Zeitgeist* has changed over the years, and the sense that truth is absolute is not common in secular society (or perhaps in the church). It can be downright unhealthy to one’s career, friendships, or social standing to voice Christian ideas. To say that one would like to help others come to Christ is often considered a form of Christian proselytization or colonialization. This has led many to bifurcate their Christian experience, talking and acting one way at church (and at home) but a different way everywhere else. We have become a culture where faith is nurtured only in two places—at church (or explicitly Christian schools) or at home. This is not ideal. We want character to transcend situations as much as possible.

One way to do this is to talk about virtues. Christian virtues are often also secular virtues. This is true with forgiveness. Forgiving is a human virtue, not a specifically Christian one. To forgive is part of the common grace, like to love, to be self-controlled, to be just. So, having a campaign for forgiveness at the church gives people the opportunity to discuss at work or in the clubhouse or in the local watering hole something that is at once Christian and secular, avoiding the bifurcation that often occurs. This helps the people in your congregation bring their faith into the places other than family and church where they live. This provides a way that the church can minister in the public square, and at the same time it provides a way that people—even those who don’t consider themselves Christian—can be invited to church.

Consider Costs

It is costly to organize a sermon series. It requires your time, energy, and commitment, especially if you have not preached often on a topic and are faced with numerous new preparations. It is also costly to instigate changes within the church, like new Sunday School classes, programs for youth (e.g., children, early adolescents, late adolescents) or young adults (college age or emerging professionals or entry-level jobs). It is costly to locate, recruit, and train leaders, and to supervise them (or assure their supervision). However, some training is necessary if the lay leaders are to be effective. It is costly to find curricula, books, or movies that you trust.

Consider Chances of Success

When we get excited about a new program, we almost always feel that the program will be a smashing success. This is human nature. Cognitive science tells us, however, that virtually all of us are—over the long-run—really lousy at predicting the future. We might hit a fantastic prediction correctly sometimes, and those are usually easy to recall. But we tend to forget or explain away all of those failed predictions. In cognitive psychology, this is called the over-confidence fallacy.

So, if we aren’t good at predicting the future, how do we judge the likelihood of success? We rely on base rates. Base rates are averages across many people of how they respond to a program. A good base rate is sometimes hard to come by. “Experts” are not always right, especially when they predict the future. But they are usually right when estimating the rate at which outcomes occur. Also, scientific studies provide another look at base rates. Scientific studies of how people respond to forgiveness groups, for example, show us the rate at which people in the groups forgive. The leaders are almost always really positive, optimistic, and confident. But how do people respond? Fortunately, the base rate of responding to forgiveness interventions—whether psychoeducational groups, do-it-

yourself workbooks, online exercises, discussion groups, book groups, or whatever—is well established. The longer people invest in thinking about and trying to practice forgiveness, the more forgiving they become. So, if you preach one sermon on forgiveness, you can expect a small response in change in actual forgiving, but if you preach a five-week series, you literally will get five times the response in actual forgiving. If people also are in an eight-week Sunday School group, they will have four times the effect of two weeks of discussing forgiveness in Sunday School.

What really is “success” in a forgiveness group, forgiveness sermon series, or forgiveness book club? Will participants become completely and infallibly forgiving? No, we know too much about fallen human nature to expect that. But will they become better at forgiving? Will their character come to approximate the “mind of Christ” through the Christian formation of working toward forgiveness? Will they “put on” forgiveness more often and “put off” resentment and grudge-holding more often? Will some of the short-term problems that you see as you assess the people in your congregation—relational conflict, hurts, bitterness, and dissatisfaction—be lessened?

Consider Potential Roadblocks

Consider what might hold you back from entering a costly (in terms of time and effort) decision to prioritize forgiveness in your preaching and teaching. Usually, it is familiarity with the way things are now, uncertainty about changes you might provoke, and worry or concern over what might be lost (i.e., the opportunity costs) in trying to instigate change. Are there other roadblocks preventing you from promoting forgiveness? There are many legitimate roadblocks—such as already having committed to some other important emphases. But sometimes, unfortunately, we all succumb to the easy way of status quo.

Consider What You Think You *Should* Do

Think about this: Suppose a rector is your best friend. He or she is leading a church like yours. How would you advise that person? Write down your answer.

Start Immediately by Investing Five Seconds a Week

Consider this example from Chip Heath and Dan Heath’s book *Switch: How to Change Things When Change Is Hard*. Have you heard of a designated driver? Of course we have. Where did that term come from? Jay Winsten, a Harvard Professor, had heard the concept in Scandinavia. He persuaded 160 television programs to insert the idea for a mere five seconds in a television show. Three years (1991) after he launched that campaign (1988), nine out of ten people in the USA were familiar with the term; 37% of all US adults reported having been a designated driver in the last three years; 54 percent of people who said they were frequent drinkers had been driven home by one. Alcohol-related traffic fatalities declined from 23,626 in 1988 to 17,858 in 1992—saving almost 5,000 deaths a year!

Want to dramatically change forgiveness in your congregation. **Pledge to adopt the Five-Second Forgiveness Fix for the next six months. In every service, say “Christian are forgiving people.”** A good time to do this is, just before confession of sins, just before communion or the Eucharist, or just before praying for people’s needs. Name the identity that Christians embrace. We are a forgiving people.

Why People Should Forgive

If you are still with me after those serious considerations, and if you are still interested in promoting forgiveness within the community of people you care for, then perhaps a first step is to consider why people *should* forgive.

To forgive is human. It is part of common grace, available to all humans as a consequence of having been created with the *imago Dei* within. However, as fallen creatures, we humans do not practice forgiveness as often as we should. Scientific studies have shown that holding unforgiveness, especially chronically, is bad for people's physical health, mental health, and relationships. And we know from Scripture that forgiveness is good for us spiritually.

Although Scripture is clear that we should forgive, it is less clear about how to do so. It presumes that if one knows that one should forgive, then one can muster the sufficient motivation to overcome obstacles to forgiving. But those obstacles are often daunting, and of course, people differ dramatically in how much they understand what forgiving is, how important it is to forgive, what the consequences might be for not forgiving, how forgiveness relates to relationship well-being, and how one might go about forgiving if facing those daunting obstacles.

Science has documented with a huge amount of evidence that it is good for people to forgive. It is good for their physical and mental health. Recently, Loren Toussaint of Luther College and his colleagues (me and David Williams of Harvard) have compiled about 17 sets of scholars who wrote reviews of the scientific literature in different areas in which forgiveness can promote better health (see *Forgiveness and Health: Scientific Evidence and Theories Relating Forgiveness to Better Health*). Numerous reviews have also documented the many benefits to relationships when people are more forgiving. Similarly, spiritual benefits are associated with forgiving, and we find that not just from Scripture but in a meta-analysis of over 50 scientific studies by Donnie Davis and his colleagues. Because we are considering this in explicitly Christian context, let's start with Christian formation.

Christian Formation

Your Call to Promote Christian Formation

As a minister of the good news of Jesus' saving work on the cross, you want to spread that good news far and wide, and you also want to help people act consistently with Christ's call on their lives. That means, you are interested in helping people develop their Christian character. Christian formation is composed of ways of acting that help people develop the mind of Christ and be more Christ-like and act commensurately. Christian formation has developed over the centuries as people have refined methods that have been tried and found to be helpful. These include ways of preaching the Word, ways of teaching the Word, ways of acting in Christian community during worship, during times of retreat, during religious community activities, and in solitary worship, prayer, and study.

Ways to Promote Christian Formation Have Changed over Time

Some aspects of Christian formation have continued much as they originated, and come down to us today as they were created. But others have evolved because the old ways did not speak to people in latter times. We see from books like Richard Foster's *Celebration of Disciplines* that many practices aimed at building Christian formation bear strong resemblance today to what they looked like when proposed. Others—for example, Benedict's Rule for building humility—would not be well received today if one tried to practice it exactly like Benedict laid it out.

Certainly worship in a catacomb when hiding from Roman persecutors differs dramatically from worship in a Catholic cathedral in the early and even late Middle Ages, and from worship in a 21st century small British Anglican congregation and from worship in a large urban Episcopal congregation like St. Martin's (Huston, Texas, over 9000 members). Think of the innovation of the Book of Common Prayer and what a difference it made from early worship. Christian formation and the worldly ways it is brought about change over time.

Christian Formation Today

How do we promote the development of positive Christian character today? We draw on contemporary adaptations of historic methods of spiritual formation. We rely on other Christians within the body of Christ who can teach and mentor those younger of less spiritually developed and can share wisdom. But we can also introduce new methods for promoting spiritual growth. These might use modern technology and also draw from what the sciences (i.e., neuroscience, biology, psychological science and sociological science) have found about learning, motivation, memory, character development through the lifespan, and (in particular) development of virtues and character strengths. In addition, sciences like economics, neuro-economics, organizational development, leadership, sociology, relationship science, family science, group dynamics, and political science have developed ways that people learn, develop, and interact within groups of people. Applied sciences and helping fields like psychotherapy, clinical science, prevention science, social work, and rehabilitation medicine has contributed to helping get people

back on track who have strayed due to choices, social interactions, or genetics or have prevented people who are at risk for heading down a troubling road from moving further down it.

Main Reasons to Forgive

Four Big Reasons

There are numerous reasons to forgive that make sense to us intuitively, but also that have been shown to be true from (1) theological reflection or (2) from scientific studies.

1. Theology is clear about the need to forgive (see Matt 6:12, 14-5).
2. Science has demonstrated clearly that there are health costs to being unforgiving frequently. Loren Toussaint, myself, and David Williams edited a book in 2015, *Forgiveness and Health: Scientific Evidence and Theories Relating Forgiveness to Better Health*, in which 17 independent research teams reviewed the research studies in different areas of health and mental health to show that forgiveness was related to better physical and mental health.
3. Science has also demonstrated clearly that relationships are better when people forgive.
4. Scientific studies have also shown that spirituality (one's degree of closeness to God) and religion (beliefs, values, and practices of a community of similar-minded and committed people), measured in terms of religious commitment, both are related to forgiveness.

Varieties of Forgiveness Treatments

There are many ways to become more forgiving. As I mentioned earlier, time in sincere effort to practice being more forgiving, whether reading a book, listening to a sermon, or participating in some kind of group experience, is the key.

Versions of REACH Forgiveness. The REACH Forgiveness method (and understanding of forgiveness) is available and has been tested in both Christian-adapted format and secular format. Both work equally well. It has been learned by people in counseling, couples counseling, parent training, in colleges, in churches, and has been learned in psychoeducational groups, couple enrichment, preparation, and therapy, individual psychotherapy, and in do-it-yourself workbooks. Many of these are publicly available at no cost on www.EvWorthington-forgiveness.com.

The Christian-adapted version of REACH Forgiveness (see also www.EvWorthington-forgiveness.com) works well with Christians from all denominational backgrounds. It is not denominationally specific, nor is it specific to theological liberal, moderate, or conservative interpretations. Even the secular version works well in Christian congregations because research has shown that, even when going through the secular version, Christians go ahead and do things like search the Scriptures, pray for the ones who have harmed them, consult Christian people (like rectors or lay people or other friends who are Christians) and study Christian writings. Outcomes in terms of forgiveness tend to be the same. Those in explicit Christian groups, however, do seem to increase their faith more than when going through the secular version.

Other forgiveness treatments. The other often-used forgiveness treatment was developed by Robert Enright at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Most of the applications he has developed have adapted his 20-step model for specific problems that people might see in psychotherapy. (Both have been shown to be equally effective hour for hour.) I have adapted my REACH Forgiveness model for generally normal populations, using psychoeducation, enrichment, and other educational applications. The REACH Forgiveness model has been tested in borderline personality disordered patients, so it has been shown to work in forgiveness therapy, and it also has been used as an adjunct to psychotherapy where people in counseling do not want to spend more than a couple of hours on forgiveness, but instead use their psychotherapy time to deal with things like depression. They attend groups or complete workbooks to supplement the psychotherapy.

Forgiveness takes time. It is important to know that forgiveness takes time. The major finding from studying the various ways people seek to promote forgiveness is that each hour of treatment seems to produce a change in the amount of forgiveness one experiences. In addition, when people go through forgiveness groups or workbooks, they become less depressed and less anxious, and this is probably because their hope increases.

Forgiveness has benefits. As I summarized earlier, forgiveness is strongly related to benefits. It is related to positive mental health benefits. But it also is related to positive physical health benefits. It is related to relationship benefits and to spiritual benefits. The scientific evidence supporting each type of benefit of forgiving is extensive. Scientific review articles in refereed journals report both qualitative and quantitative (i.e., meta-analytic) reviews of the research on forgiveness and its benefits. I will not seek to summarize the findings in each area but I will provide some references to illustrate that comprehensive reviews in many areas exist.

What Can You Expect from the Remainder of This Resource Packet?

I have sought to use my experience in Christian ministry as a Christian speaker, ordained elder for almost 40 years, and teacher and presenter in Christian education at all levels from early childhood, through youth groups

and adolescent Sunday School, to college and adult Sunday School, and my experience as a university teacher, researcher, and speaker to give you some ideas about how you might use the REACH Forgiveness materials in your congregation—to preach and to teach about forgiveness.

Preaching and teaching forgiveness. Of course, my main hope is that you will preach and teach forgiveness. My expectation is that you will draw from your theology, your interpretation of Scripture, your reading, examples you have been exposed to, and your life experience. Naturally, in my thirty plus years of studying forgiveness, I believe that the REACH Forgiveness model might be something that helps you organize your own thinking about how to forgive and how to help those in your pastoral care forgive.

Preaching REACH Forgiveness. In the section on Preaching REACH Forgiveness I describe some passages that might lend themselves to sermons on forgiveness. I provide some commentary about each one. Beyond individual sermons, though, I provide some ideas about sermon series. Those might stretch beyond merely dealing with forgiveness into reconciliation and relationships.

Teaching about forgiveness. In the section on teaching about forgiveness, I provide ideas about (a) adult Sunday school, (b) books that might be read and discussed relating to forgiveness, (c) movies relating to forgiveness, and series of discussion topics that can be used to organize a term of group meetings. I talk about forgiveness in couples, forgiveness in parents, forgiveness in the world of work, and forgiveness within the church. I discuss problems that sometimes beset Christian congregations, such as the fall into sin by a prominent member in the congregation, and that might include rectors, assistant rectors, elders, music team leaders, and de facto individual leaders. I also deal with healing congregational splits when in the midst of hot conflict and also when that is a significant part of the history of the church but is not an active conflict. I discuss children and when and how they might learn about forgiveness.

Teaching REACH Forgiveness. One of the nice things about REACH Forgiveness is it breaks experiences associated with experiencing forgiveness into manageable steps. Cognitive psychology tells us that if people who are struggling to forgive are ever to forgive, they must do two things—grow into their identity as a forgiver and have a method that breaks the sometimes overwhelming experience of getting past a major hurt, injury, and offense into manageable steps. The Christian approach to REACH Forgiveness does both.

Teaching (and preaching) helps people grow into their Christian identity. It emphasizes that Christian people are called to be forgiving people. That is part of their identity. Being reminded of that and having them take on ways of arranging their physical and social lives so that that aspect of their Christian identity is often in their mind's eye is a way to foster that Christian identity as forgiver. We do this in church services. But people often compartmentalize their lives. Church is church. Home is home. Work is work. We want people to live out their Christian identity as forgiver in church, home, and work—in fact throughout their whole lives. Having a memorable acrostic, REACH, that cues memory can facilitate helping people incorporate forgiveness in home and work in addition to church. You can help through your preaching and teaching by calling attention to those movies, songs, internet sites, personal stories, and reflections on people's personal experiences that keep forgiveness salient.

Teaching (and preaching) helps people take forgiveness in bite-sized chunks. People can always just simply forgive—all at once experiencing complete decisional and emotional forgiveness through an act of grace and mercy by the Holy Spirit. When this occurs, we rejoice. But, as C. S. Lewis observed, Jesus did not just do the miracle of turning water into wine at the wedding feast, but God turns water into wine daily through the miracle of growing grape vines, developing grapes, and, after harvest, having knowledgeable, trained hands turn grapes into wine by applying their knowledge, advice, and simple labor. Similarly, forgiveness can happen all at once, but it also can happen through a more naturally occurring process with substantial input in terms of knowledge, advice, and simple labor from workers like priests, lay ministers, mental health workers, or just friends. By teaching (and preaching) REACH Forgiveness with its easy-to-remember five steps, you increase the number of laborers able to help others use it.

Should You Start a Church Effort to Promote Forgiveness?

How Can YOU as Priest Contribute to Change?

At the core of this booklet are three questions:

- How do we form our own character to be more Christ-like?
- How do we help others with Christian formation?
- How do we help others help still others form more Christian character?

These days it's a national epidemic--busyness. Everyone is busy. We are tyrannized by the urgent. So, those three essential questions boil down to, How do we engage busy people who are living a life full of family, work, community, church and recreation to live more Christianly—and to do so out of love for God and gratitude to Christ rather than a sense of dreadful guilt and shame of potential failure?

To do so requires inspiration, motivation, information, formation, and consolidation. We inspire, and that is often through sermons and through personal stories and personal example. We motivate, which is about the internal drives, incentives, values, and needs of the person to be motivated. We cannot know the inner drives of those in our congregations, but we need to be astute observers of human nature and provide spotlights that illuminate for our parishioners the internal motives. We provide information, which happens through both the sermons and education that we establish in congregational life. We encourage formation, which involves so much more than inspiration, motivation, and information. It provides opportunities to practice repeatedly and to put character to the test. We also need to consolidate the learning, practice, and remolded (and sometimes even redeemed) characters of those we serve.

Many in the church often talk the talk of the spiritual Christian but do not necessarily walk the walk. This is not necessarily hypocrisy, though that happens. As psychology tells us, behavior is strongly influenced by situations. In church on Sunday morning, the rector does not wear the same softball uniform as in the midweek game, nor does the rector perhaps angrily slam the Bible on the table like might be done in the midst of a highly competitive racquetball game or heated *Shoots and Ladders* contest with the head deacon. (Okay, perhaps this reveals too much personal information about me.)

So, to bring this home, we might structure our lives to encourage consistent Christian living. We have a morning quiet time. We pray regularly. We build in time for reflection, Bible study, and sermon preparation. We have meetings with people in the church, and even do several hours a week of Christian care and counseling. Pretty much, we feel that we are living a committed and consistent Christian life. Yet, things happen that aren't in our game plan. We have an argument with our spouse. We get stuck in traffic and just when we think we are getting free, a semi cuts us off and sticks us in the slow lane for another five minutes. Oh how easy it would be to make a, well, a gesture, shall we say. If only we didn't have that clergy sticker on our bumper. Or our relative deeply offends us by snide comments to our aging parent, who eventually cuts us out of the will. (The money didn't matter, but the betrayal of the loved one aches for years.) Often, it seems like we live two lives—the one we can structure and exert some control over, and the one in which stuff happens and often leaves a lasting mark.

It is those latter times when forgiveness, and often other virtues like humility, patience, self-control, justice, altruism, compassion, and love (especially love of our enemies) are put to the test. Often those are the tests at which we flunk—or at least fail to make an A. Those are the times that this booklet helps you deal with. It attempts to help you with your own character formation, but also to help others, and to prepare others to be helpers in turn.

Some Suggestions for How to Have a More Successful Forgiveness “Campaign”

Embrace the idea that *people want to change when they see it is necessary to change*. First, let's get a misconception out of the way. We often hear, “People don't want to change.” But that isn't really true. The important question is, What change are they considering? Think of it this way. Almost everyone in life embraces positively and enthusiastically huge changes. For example, they decide to go to college, move from unemployed student to employed worker. They decide to start romantic relationships, to end romantic relationships, to get married (and sometimes to end marriages), to have a child, to have other children, to take up new pastimes, hobbies, or sports, to enter new business ventures, to buy houses or other property, to invest, to save, to go on a medical insurance plan, to change jobs, to move to a new city, and eventually to retire. In most of these cases, we are not forced into the changes, we rush towards them. It isn't that people don't want to change—when they see the necessity of doing so.

Make change easier. So, where did the idea that people don't want to change come from. Often it comes from a lack of motivation. Change, though often embraced, can be hard. To change, we must do something different from our routines—often many things. That usually requires willpower.

Willpower has its limits. Willpower has finite limits. A popular theory in psychology today is Roy Baumeister's ego depletion theory. It argues that exerting conscious willpower will deplete our energy and make it more difficult to exert willpower on subsequent tasks that might require effort. While there might be some truth to this, it is best not to over-emphasize it. No matter how much willpower we've exerted recently, we always can seem to make more willpower for dealing with a life-threatening crisis. And, of course, it doesn't seem to even require a life-threatening crisis. We come home from the office “completely exhausted.” Our friend calls with a tempting invitation—to play golf or tennis, to go shopping, or something that seems pleasurable. Or our child wants us to play in the back yard. We find a way.

Using cognitive psychology to make change as easy as possible. Some clues to make change easier come from a wonderful book that seeks to use what we know about cognitive psychology to help us make changes. The book is entitled, *Switch*.

Heath, C., & Heath, D. (2010). *Switch: How to change things when change is hard*. New York, NY: Broadway Books.

The Heath brothers employ an analogy to capture the essence of cognition and of change that was put forth by New York University psychologist, Jon Haidt (rhymes with “might”; Jon says, “I study elevation and awe; I’m Jon Haidt”). Cognitive psychology has been summarized beautifully by Daniel Kahneman (2011) in *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. Nobel Prize winner Kahneman suggests that cognition is of two types—explicit and implicit. *Explicit cognition* is conscious, rational, reasonable, word-based, and generally requires effort and work to think logically, make arguments and counter-arguments, and reason our way to a conclusion. But cognitive psychologists agree that in our normal lives, explicit cognition makes up only about 5 percent of all of our mental activity. On the other hand, implicit cognition accounts for about 95 percent of people’s mental activity. It is implicit, unconscious, usually automatic, not carefully thought out, empowered by emotion and impulse, non-rational (not necessarily irrational), and often well-rehearsed and habitual. It takes little willpower to use implicit cognition precisely because it is so automatic, habitual, and well-rehearsed. It is our default mode.

What triggers implicit (and occasionally explicit) cognition? Something has to set the implicit cognition in motion. Usually, it is triggered by what we see in front of us—the environment. The environment is composed of the physical environment, social environment, and internal environment. The physical environment triggers patterns because it is so ever-present. We walk into work in the morning, and we see our computer (we automatically logon and enter the password), our coffee pot (we automatically go through the ritual of fixing coffee), and our email (we automatically start answering emails in our inbox). The social environment involves the people we see, talk to, and interact with in any way. We see a person we know has an ill mother, and we ask about her. We respond to what others do and say. The social environment, especially in patterned and habitual social relationships, is important in triggering habitual implicit cognition. Finally, we respond to our internal environment. This can be as simple as responding to bodily needs for food, liquid, or sex. But also our internal environment includes what we think explicitly. We see ourselves first thinking, and then we do. Because we can easily call to mind such instances because we were (by definition) paying attention to them, we get the feeling that it is *usually* our thoughts that determine our actions. That is really *inaccurate*. Such think-first-then-act scenarios account for only a couple of percent of our actual behaviors. Mostly actions are on automatic pilot. And when we think we are being oh so logical, we often reason explicitly in ways that support what our implicit cognition wants us to do. This is rationalization. We want something, and we build a logical mental case for it, and then we convince ourselves that we logically came around to desire what (in truth) our implicit desires wanted in the first place.

The Jon Haidt elephant-rider-path metaphor. Haidt likens explicit cognition to an elephant rider. The rider looks to all observers like he or she is in total control, but getting the elephant to move in a particular direction that the elephant does not already want to move is laborious. It requires lots of effort, and it is often unsuccessful, so the rider ends up saying to himself or herself, “Well I wanted to go this way anyway.” Implicit cognition is likened to the elephant. Pretty much, if the elephant wants to turn left, it turns left, taking the rider with it. Haidt likens the path on which the elephant is walking to the environment. The easy way for the elephant, the way without thinking, is to head down the path. Little effort is required and the rider goes along for the ride. But if the rider wants to guide the elephant off-path, lots of whacking is required, which tires the rider out for future directive ventures that take the elephant off path.

Applying the Rider-Elephant-Path Metaphor to Building Forgiveness, a Virtue, and Also to Changing Your Congregation to a More Forgiving Congregation

Why we need a more forgiving congregation. We need to have a more forgiving congregation. There are many places that we need forgiveness in congregations. One category is old conflicts; another is interactions with leaders; a third is personal offenses and new hurts. Those are big, big problems and they do not ever seem to go away.

How can we possibly fix those big holes? When we look at ourselves or our congregations, we see such intractable problems as *big holes* (i.e., our own problems with unforgiveness or that pesky person we cannot seem to forgive and also we see bitter people in the congregation that often seem to poison others). We see big holes. We don’t see the many triumphs where people forgive quickly. We don’t see the many people who don’t really struggle with forgiveness. The problems are in our faces and seem insurmountable. Basically, we are hard-wired for survival to see big problems. If we don’t respond quickly to big problems, we don’t survive.

Here’s a big hole. Christians can thus seem very unforgiving. Back in 1999, Mike McCullough and I reviewed the research on religion and forgiveness. We found that Christians reported themselves to be more forgiving than people who were not religious. The difference was about 0.4 standard deviations. But, when we looked at studies that assessed how forgiving people were of a particular hurt or offense, Christians only differed

about 0.2 standard deviations from people who were not religious. What's up? Are Christians being hypocritical and saying they were very forgiving but when the rubber meets the road in a particular hurt, they aren't as forgiving as they claimed? It turned out, though, after some additional research, Christians were indeed more forgiving than those who did not claim to be religious.

JoAnn Tsang and her colleagues asked Christians and non-Christians to recall four of the most recent and hurtful transgressions against them. On the one that was the most recent and most severe, there was little difference between Christians and others (about 0.2 standard deviations). But, in number 2, 3, and 4, Christians had pretty much forgiven them and put the hurts behind them, but people who were not Christians had not. Added together, it turned out that the difference between Christians and others was 0.4 standard deviations—just like Christians claimed.

So, when we look at our congregation, we tend to see the hot and severe conflicts and not the ones people worked through or never even developed unforgiveness in the first place. But it looks like a big hole. And we assume that a big hole needs a big solution. This sets us looking for a giant 2 ft diameter, 2 ft high gold canister to fill a same-sized hole. When we think about changing ourselves, it seems too big, too difficult. We worry and worry, think of big solutions that are practically impossible (“I need to remake my entire personality”), and basically get analysis paralysis. We are stuck, and we don't get change underway. When we see these glaring holes to fill in our congregation (“How can we possibly become a more forgiving congregation?”), we think that we must create a crisis, or a “burning platform” to get people to change. But manufacturing a crisis rarely leads to a good long-term solution.

Manufacturing a crisis to motivate someone to change is common “wisdom” but it really isn't wise at all. Think about some popular solutions. For AA, the wisdom has been that the person must reach the bottom before they will change, and if they haven't reached bottom, it is fruitless to try to get them to change. So, that sometimes leads to “family interventions” to create a crisis and force the person to change. Recent research on motivating people with addiction or dependence on substances is more in line with “motivational interviewing” approaches. In those approaches, people are invited to talk about why they are dissatisfied with where they are (even if not in a crisis) and what benefits they might derive from changing. Motivational interviewing leads to even better change results than crisis-manufacturing and longer-lasting results as well.

“Burning platforms” have their place. It isn't that a burning platform is useless. Burning platforms are useful in limited, act-now, emotion-driven, clear-solution-in-front-of-you situations. For example, when one is on a real burning platform, it really helps to realize it and jump NOW. But for Christian formation, changing a congregation, and most of life problems, we are in just the opposite situation. There is no urgency to change. People are on automatic pilot. They are acting on habit. The systems have been coasting. They don't have an immediate act-now character. The solution is not obvious. In fact the solution really requires creativity, flexibility, and often many approaches from different angles to solve the problem. A create-the-crisis approach takes people down a road very likely not to yield a good solution.

Positive emotions motivate by broadening and building. Instead of fear-based burning platform, you need positive emotions to broaden and build—broaden your perspectives and build your resources. Instead of looking for one big container to fill the big hole, big holes need many small cups of gold to fill them.

A Program of Reasonable Changes (Based on *Switch*)

I'm going to draw on Chip and Dan Heath's book *Switch* to make some practical suggestions. I'll use their organizational scheme, which in turn uses Jon Haidt's elephant, rider, path metaphor. (See Heath, C., & Heath, D. (2010). *Switch: How to change things when change is hard*. New York, NY: Broadway Books.) In that metaphor, recall that implicit cognition = elephant; explicit cognition = rider; and path = environmental track

Practical Advice: Shape the Path

We can shape the path in three general ways. We can tweak the environment, build new habits, and rally the herd. Let me explain in general what each of these means, drawing on the Heaths' book. I will then apply it to changing one's own forgiveness and then to helping a congregation change.

Tweak the environment. We can make important fundamental changes ahead of time so that it is easiest to do the helpful thing, not the thing that keeps you stuck. In the movie *Moneyball*, Brad Pitt's character, Billy Beane, is general manager for the 2002 Oakland Athletics. He had an idea for winning baseball based on on-base percentage instead of traditional wisdom of selecting players that were flashy. Art Howe, the team's manager, disagrees with Beane's new philosophy and keeps undermining the strategy by refusing to play the players Beane has selected. So, Beane tweaks the environment. He sells the players Howe was playing so that the only players available are the ones selected under the statistics-based selection. The As go on a best-ever winning spree of 20 straight games. Ironically, Howe is lauded as a great manager.

Build habits. This tweaks the internal environment. Habits don't require much energy. They operate on autopilot. When doing something new or trying to change a habit, ego depletion is likely. So, arrange a clear path by making positive habits and practicing until they become habits of the heart.

Rally the herd. Success is contagious and brings others along. So, one way to motivate is to get excited by engineering early successes.

Practical Advice: Motivate the Elephant

Find the feeling. The Heaths tell of Jon Stegner, who worked for a large manufacturing company. Nationwide, the company had deeded purchase of gloves to local entities, and as a result, 424 kinds of gloves were being used, at prices from \$5 to \$17 per pair. Stegner wanted to centralize glove purchases, and he could have arranged a logical Power Point presentation to make his point. But he didn't. He had an intern bring one of each pair of gloves used within the company, attach the price paid, and pile them on a table in the center of the Board Room. The Board of Directors immediately decided to centralize glove purchases. Stegner found the cogent picture, and it appealed to the elephant of Board members, resulting in rapid change.

Shrink the change. We can motivate the elephant by either making the steps smaller or the elephant bigger (which will be covered in the next paragraph). Make the steps small enough not to intimidate but large enough to be rewarding (Limit the investment you are asking for). There are a few good examples that illustrate this. For example, in one study (Nunes & Dreze, 2006), people were given a card to earn a free car wash if eight paid car washes were purchased. Another group was given a card that promised a free wash if ten were purchased, but the first two were already given free. Thus, each group had to pay for eight washes. The group with the running start purchased eight far more quickly. A second example is the Fly Lady's 5-minute room make-over. She argues that walking into a room you have to clean will demotivate the elephant. But if you merely say, "I'm going to clean for only five minutes," then we work—often 20 or 30 minutes—and the room is cleaned quickly. In a third study, Crum and Langer (2007) took maids and divided them into two groups discussing doing exercise to lose weight. In one-half of the maids, they lauded the benefits of doing exercise at spas. They told how many calories were burned by running, biking, etc. In the other half of the maids, they merely pointed out that maids already got much exercise and burned off many calories making beds, pushing a cart, vacuuming, cleaning, etc. The group that were told how many calories they were already burning—because they already were exercisers—actually lost more weight.

Grow your people. One way to motivate the elephant is to make the steps somehow seem smaller. But the other way is to make the person bigger. We can do this with identity psychology. Remind people of their identity—one they want to be more consistent with. Important to this is what kind of mindset people approach a problem with. Carol Dweck, a Stanford professor, has devoted years to that research (see Dweck, 2006; *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, Random House). Dweck claims that some people hold fixed mindsets, believing "This is how I am; I cannot change." Others have a growth mindset, believing "Abilities are like muscles; although I cannot do something now, that does not mean I cannot improve." When I started playing tennis, I was dreadful. Over the years, I learned, and after playing for 55 years, I'm still learning. (Okay, the body is betraying me, but I'm still learning to do things I didn't know how last year.)

Practical Advice: Direct the Rider

Follow the bright spots. In 1990, Jerry Sternin, working for Save the Children, went to Vietnam to try to solve the malnutrition problem. National child malnutrition is a giant hole that needs to be filled. But instead of trying to find huge hole-fillers, like change the national GDP, eliminate poverty, provide national healthcare programs—all true solutions but impossible to enact—Sternin went to a local village and engaged a group of mothers with a single question: In poor rural villages, are all kids malnourished. The answer was No. So, why not? The mothers went into the homes of the kids who were not malnourished and tried to find how they differed from the majority of homes with children. The answers were simple. (1) They fed the kids four small meals per day instead of two large meals; (2) the child's mother ensured that the child actually ate (even if the mother had to feed the child); and (3) the mother put some sweet potato greens and tiny shrimp and crabs in the kids' rice. When those changes were taught to parents in community cooking sessions, the village's malnutrition problem went away. Those changes spread throughout Vietnam.

They identified small successes—regardless of how trivial they looked—and got people to make those changes. They found and followed the bright spots. Solution-focused therapy is a type of individual and couple therapy that is built on this method. People are asked in the beginning, "If a miracle occurred tonight and you awoke tomorrow cured, what would look different about your day?" People might say, "I'd not be critical of my spouse," or "My partner would kiss me good morning." People are encouraged to do the simple little thing. People are also asked, "On a scale from zero couple satisfaction to ten equaling perfect couple satisfaction, where are you now?" If they say, "I'm 2," they are encouraged to see if they can do something to raise it to 2.5 by the next session." We use

these in my couple therapy, Hope-Focused Couple Approach (see Jennifer Ripley and me, 2014; *Couple Therapy: A New Hope-Focused Approach*, InterVarsity Press). These little changes are easy to do and people see success. That builds hope.

Script the critical moves. It is not helpful to think of a grant strategy to change oneself (or one's congregation) from a low-forgiveness person (or congregation) to a high forgiveness person (or congregation). That is, don't think of the "big picture." After all, we've probably done that—many times. Instead, think in terms of three *critical* steps: (1) What is going to get me started? (2) What will keep me moving during the inevitable times in the middle when I am discouraged? And (3) what will it take to bring me home? In my REACH Forgiveness method, what gets people started is usually thinking of something that was hard to forgive in the past but they succeeded in forgiving. That recollection of a success is actually done in the icebreaker, almost before the group starts. But even after that, people are told "Forgive because you will benefit if you forgive, and in just two to five minutes, they are told that they will experience physical, mental health, relationship, and spiritual benefits. Third, they are asked to make a decision to act differently toward the person regardless of whether they feel forgiving.

In any change program, there will usually be a lull in progress and even a time of backsliding. Plan ahead for this because it is inevitable. If people expect a time of stagnation, they can deal with it. With REACH Forgiveness, this is anticipated with C=Commit to the forgiveness you experience through making some public demonstration—like signing a forgiveness certificate or like pinning a written description of the transgression to a cross or burning it. We suggest that the reason they make a public declaration is so that they will H=Hold onto forgiveness when doubt (inevitably) arises.

The road home is through a written 30-minute exercise that takes people through practicing REACH Forgiveness in 12 steps. This is called, "12 steps to becoming a more forgiving person," and it is about generalizing the gains the person made by working through the group trying to forgive one event.

Point to the destination with a destination postcard. My wife and I wanted to go to Yosemite one more time while we were still able to hike long distances. We got pictures of Yosemite's sights, and that helped keep a picture of our goal before our eyes. It was a destination postcard. Regularly, we get mail with beautiful and exotic pictures, inviting us to go on a long (and expensive) cruise to that port. Knowing where we are going is important, but having a physical picture before our eyes is even more motivating. Can you think of a way to paint a destination postcard for what you might be like if you were more forgiving. For some, perhaps that is a picture of their marriage in a happier time? For others, that is a picture of work before the pressures of leadership intruded? For some, it is a congregation before conflict set in over some hot emotional topic.

Set clear goals. I've always been a goal setter. I suppose it started with my father quoting, "Aim for the stars, and even if you miss, you'll be higher than a lamppost." For me, that set up a need for aspirational goals. I tend to make grand goals, and not really care if I fall short, because I know I'm going to accomplish a lot. But that actually is pretty rare. Most people succeed more by using some variant of SMART Goals. (SMART is an acronym for Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Timely). Performance goals should be closer to SMART goals than aspirational goals are. So, I keep a to-do list open always on my computer, and as I complete tasks, I check them off. (I've been known to do a task not on my to-do list, type it on the list, and then check it off. Frequently, if truth be told.) SMART goals do not really inspire us. SMART goals presume inspiration. They don't create it. So, it is the aspirational goals that are more instrumental in creating inspiration.

Applying Some of These Practical Ideas to Becoming a More Forgiving Christian

I'm sure as I was discussing these ideas, you could see how many could be applied to becoming a more forgiving Christian. So, let me just point to a few. First, as you preach forgiveness (or teach it), affirm the positive: Christians are forgiving people. Call their attention to who they are and whose they are. They are a forgiving people of a forgiving God.

How do we become and even more forgiving people? Here are some ways: Awareness. But you should be aware that just raising people's awareness is of limited (important, but limited) success potential. It pulls for willpower, and as we know, willpower is limited. If something is the most important thing in a person's life, then willpower is usually enough. But those people probably don't need a sermon to become more forgiving. So, the people you are seeking to help are usually those that are struggling with forgiveness or not even thinking about it at all. You can help by calling their attention to their identity as a forgiving Christian and by providing small steps that are fillable rather than making it seem that a big, big effort is needed (in a burning platform appeal). Use REACH Forgiveness to make steps small and achievable. This makes forgiveness more like filling the hole with cups rather than trying to find a huge solution to a problem. Even some steps can seem difficult to attain. E=Empathize with the one who hurt you, can seem almost insurmountable. But the Heaths credit their father with saying, "When

difficulties arise reaching milestones, turn milestones into a lot of inch pebbles.” Make the steps smaller, and celebrate those small victories.

Forgiveness in Your Congregation

As a leader of your congregation who is trying to instigate not only individual progress in people who become more forgiving Christians but also to instigate corporate change and creation of a more forgiving climate, there are other things you might do. Let me approach these systematically.

Shape the Path

Tweak the environment. Plan programs that people cannot avoid. For example, plan programs and sermons on forgiveness around Lent and Easter and Christmas. Many people attend church around those times, when they do not attend at other times during the year. So, use those times strategically. As another example, you could encourage people in the congregation to undertake the REACH Forgiveness workbook in their devotional time, which is already a habit. Encourage them to listen to a book on tape on forgiveness as they drive to work, even if the commute is brief. Ask people to look up examples of people whose lives illustrate heroic forgiveness and print out their biographies from Wikipedia and then read them during an established time for reading or devotions. Then, at the next worship service, have two or three people read short summaries. If people watch video movies, they could choose examples of forgiving characters and reflect on them. They could share ideas of good movies reflecting forgiveness as a theme with the rest of the congregation.

Educate people on how virtue is formed. We often live as if we wished we could upload virtue like Neo in *The Matrix* was able to upload his combat programs, learning hundreds of kinds of martial arts instantly. But, virtue is not built that way. The book of James is a good instruction manual on building Christian virtues. It teaches that to build virtue, we must glimpse the goal. Then we work and practice to build habits of the heart. But we might think we have worked and practiced to build a virtue, when the sad fact is we simply have not been tested yet. When life tests us, we might not perform as well as we thought we might. So, we can test ourselves as we go along. We can look at little aggravations as small tests. Realizing that we all fail at times and that failure does provide valuable information that helps us toward ultimate success, we can ready ourselves for some of life’s bigger tests by engaging in those momentary little tests. This will lead to ultimate satisfaction—not necessarily happiness, for we might not be happy when we are doing good things (like caring for aging parents), but rather ultimate satisfaction. Have people then practice a habit of forgiveness. They might think of how they could serve someone they might have a grudge against by seeking to provide help willingly with a positive attitude.

Rally the herd. Is there a way to plan a congregational event that is likely to produce success? It is good to do this early in a campaign to help build congregational forgiveness. For example, encourage everyone in the congregation to complete the REACH Forgiveness workbook, which has great success at helping initiate change.

Motivate the Elephant

Find the feeling. You can help people find the feeling through motivating sermons with examples of heroic forgiveness. I have provided many examples in the later parts of this resource manual from Scripture, movies, plays, novels, non-fiction accounts, real-life examples of people you know, etc. You could find other examples of heroic forgiveness. Identify times in your life when you felt your forgiveness advance—often marriage and responsibility for another person, disagreements around decisions necessitated by birth of children and realization that you weren’t prepared and that you had to respond and be other oriented, and times of service for others.

Shrink the change. Think of a forgiveness campaign over the long term. Plan progress over a year—not just a four-sermon series or an eight-week Sunday School class. Set quarterly goals. Recommend that people work through the REACH Forgiveness Do-It-Yourself workbooks. There are 2-hour and 7-hour versions available. Those break the process of forgiving into manageable steps.

Grow your people. Examples are great ways of showing that Christians are forgiving people. Tell stories. Find Biblical accounts.

Direct the Rider

Follow the bright spots. Ask people, “When were you successful forgiving?” Get people to share their stories of successful forgiveness. When people identify a time they were successful at forgiving, ask, “Can you do more of that? Can you move your current forgivingness (as a personality trait) on a scale from 0=none to 10=perfect from, say, 7 to 7.5 this week by paying more attention to aiding others and by being more accurately aware of your own failures in humility?”

Script the critical moves. Remember, that you have three critical moves to think through. Some step must engage people from the get-go to get them started. You have to help them commit to try—as a congregation—to make a decision to become more forgiving Christians. You have to help them learn and work through REACH Forgiveness and think of ways to keep motivation up when the program seems to be getting “long in the tooth.”

Third, you need to think of a celebration event for the end of the program—something to help them end with triumph. You need a plan for the entire year.

Destination postcard. One destination that we can count on is that forgiveness has benefits. These have been well established by science—physical health, psychological, relationship, and spiritual. Can you paint a picture of what people might be like one year from today?

SMART goals: In addition to the destination postcard—or aspirational goal that is made clear for the changes desired by the end of the year, you can set up goals to get to the end. An example, is that, within one year, our congregation average forgiveness score will increase by 25% or by the end of one year, we will have our monthly potluck Sunday meal and people will be sitting with folks that they are now in conflict with.

Other Practical Suggestions

Keep your efforts focused. As we know from the church calendar, it is important to have a limited emphasis on a particular topic. Advent is for a season, as is Lent. This is born of centuries of practical experience. People need limited times to focus their energies. We all know about those Bible studies or church-wide prayer meetings that get scheduled with no ending date, and they seem to go on and on, but attendance and enthusiasm dwindle. Yet we don't know when to end.

This is because of the way people think. Cognitive psychologists have told us that humans are great at running on automatic pilot. The default setting is usually to continue on without thinking about change. Decisions about ending any activity are often needed and there are several ways to build into the structure of your church ways to consider whether programs should continue or whether you should move to another program. These are (a) tripwires, (b) measuring against a standard, (c) setting a deadline, and (d) partitioning progress.

Set a tripwire. A *tripwire* is something that triggers you to give a hard look at an ongoing program. A great example is given in the book *Decisive: How to Make Better Choices in Life and Work* (by Chip and Dan Heath). In the 1970s and 1980s, Van Halen was a heavy metal band that cranked out the hits and toured extensively. They were well known for their complicated electronic and pyrotechnic displays onstage. The lead singer was David Lee Roth, and he was, well, weird. At least it seemed that way. He had venues sign a multi-page detailed contract about how all the electronics were to be done and how people could be kept safe. But when the band arrived, they immediately checked to see whether their M&Ms were backstage. This was a specification in their contract, that backstage would be a bowl of M&Ms with all of the brown ones removed. If Van Halen pulled in and the M&Ms were missing, a thorough review of everything was in order. Because the M&M clause was not a tribute to David Lee Roth's narcissistic diva-ness. It was a tripwire that indicated right away to the band whether the venue had been vigilant on all of the little details in the contract, keeping fans safe during the explosions and sparks from the pyrotechnics. If the bowl of M&Ms was missing or contained brown M&Ms, that was indication that the band needed to not proceed on automatic pilot, but needed instead to undergo a careful analysis of the safety precautions. You might set up various tripwires to judge whether the programs you have going at church are worth continuing.

Measure against a standard. Suppose, when you start a program or a class or a sermon series, you set up some measurement standard. Let's say, you said, "I'll ask ten people each week what they got out of the sermon, and if three or more can't name one of my three points, then I'll reconsider the sermon series." Or, suppose you said, "I'll continue this Bible study, but if attendance falls below five for two weeks in a row, we'll reconsider."

Set a deadline. Most deadlines are arbitrary, but most people actually work better when they know there is a time limit. So, suppose you said, "This will be a seven-week Forgiveness Campaign." You would have a deadline. You probably would accomplish more in that seven weeks than if you set in your mind that you hoped to focus on forgiveness for three months, but you did not tell others about that deadline.

Partition progress. When you break decisions into smaller packages, people are better able to control themselves. You've seen those 100-calorie packs of nuts. Often we pick up a package and eat it. Then we stop. At least we are much more likely to stop when we actually have to make a decision than if we had a bowl full of nuts sitting out on the table next to us. We would easily go on automatic pilot, and before we know it, the bowl might be empty. So, suppose you set up a Campaign for Forgiveness that used seven sermons, two small psychoeducational groups, one book group, and one movie group—all within a seven-week period. You could do a one-month and then a two-month evaluation of the program, letting people know that you intend to take the pulse of the program after a month. That gives people partitioned progress goals as well as a goal for the entire program.

Understanding Forgiveness

Test Yourself on Your Understanding of Forgiveness

I have provided a 25-question multiple choice quiz. After that, I included 20 facts about forgiveness to which the questions on the quiz correspond. Finally, I provided the answers.

Assessments of Essential Knowledge that Psychology Gives about Forgiveness

**Everett L. Worthington, Jr.
Virginia Commonwealth University**

1. The injustice gap is the difference between...
 - a. True Biblical justice and the way we treat needy people today.
 - b. The way a person would like a transgression resolved and the way the person sees it currently.
 - c. The way the justice system operates and a way that social justice considerations would have it operate.
 - d. The way minorities are treated in society and the way majorities are treated.
2. Which of these is true for Christians in dealing with personal harms and offenses?
 - a. There are many Biblically consistent ways to deal with such harms and offenses.
 - b. The Bible says there is only one way for Christians to deal (Biblically) with harms and offenses—forgive (Matt 6:14-15).
 - c. Reconciliation is mandated.
 - d. One should almost always use Christian discipline outlined in 1 Cor 5.
3. If one's sense of injustice or unfairness over a transgression against one progresses to unforgiveness (i.e., bitterness, resentment, hostility, hatred, anger, and anxiety), then the Christian should deal with it by (at a minimum)
 - a. Forgiving
 - b. Reconciling
 - c. Forbearing
 - d. Engaging a neutral third party
4. According to research on forgiveness, when people suffer day to day hurts, offenses, and transgressions, even if they do not explicitly forgive, the level of unforgiveness or sense of injustice will likely be virtually non-existent by about
 - a. One day or less
 - b. One week
 - c. Two to three weeks
 - d. One year
5. If our sense of injustice turns into bitterness, resentment, and hostility, this is usually because
 - a. We have been offended or hurt again.
 - b. We did not make a decision to forgive quickly enough.
 - c. We have a highly developed sense of justice.
 - d. We are probably ruminating about it.
6. Holding onto a sense of injustice or emotional unforgiveness has negative effects on one's
 - a. Physical health
 - b. Relationships
 - c. Neither a nor b
 - d. Both a and b
7. Which statement is true about the way most psychologists view forgiveness today?
 - a. There are two types of forgiveness—one is within the person and the other is interpersonal and involves both offender and forgiver.

- b. There are two types of forgiveness—one is a decision about future behavior and the other is an emotional transformation.
 - c. There is a single type of forgiveness that involves two aspects—a decision about future behavior and then slower emotional transformation.
 - d. There is a single type of forgiveness that involves restoring trust in a relationship between offender and forgiver.
- 8. Decisional forgiveness is
 - a. A behavior.
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 - c. An intention about one's behavior that might, in some cases, never be enacted.
 - d. An intention about one's behavior that must be carried out for complete forgiveness to have occurred.
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 - a. The emotional substitution of unforgiving emotions with emotions like sympathy, compassion, and empathy.
 - b. The emotional substitution of unforgiving emotions with non-self-focused emotions like hope, gratitude for one's own forgiveness, and humility.
 - c. Never fully realizable because emotions are stamped into long-term memory, but can occur "substantially"
 - d. Part of complete forgiveness.
- 10. What people might describe as "complete emotional forgiveness"
 - a. Still has residual unforgiveness within.
 - b. Involves eliminating all negative emotion towards the offender and having a net positive emotional valence toward the person.
 - c. Often is simply getting to fundamental emotional neutrality towards a person.
 - d. Involves a decision to trigger the emotional change process.
- 11. The order that must occur for forgiveness is which one?
 - a. There is no prescribed order.
 - b. People make a decision to forgive followed by emotional forgiveness.
 - c. People experience emotional forgiveness and later make an explicit decision.
 - d. People experience both at (or near) the same time.
- 12. Forgiveness—whether decision or emotional change—is
 - a. Often explicit and conscious for both, but not always.
 - b. Virtually always explicit and conscious for both.
 - c. Almost always implicit and occurring outside of awareness for both.
 - d. Explicit for decisional forgiveness but implicit for emotional forgiveness.
- 13. Forgiveness is different from reconciliation in which way(s)?
 - a. Forgiveness and reconciliation are not different; they are two words for the same essential process.
 - b. Forgiveness happens inside one person; reconciliation happens between two.
 - c. Forgiveness includes reconciliation within the process.
 - d. People can forgive without reconciling, but people cannot reconcile without forgiving.
- 14. Worthington states (some might disagree) that according to his reading of Scripture, which statement is most likely true?
 - a. Neither forgiveness nor reconciliation is mandatory for Christians.
 - b. According to Jesus, forgiveness is mandatory for Christians.
 - c. According to Paul, forgiveness is mandatory for Christians if offenders repent, but otherwise, not.
 - d. According to Paul, reconciliation is mandatory for Christians.

15. Worthington believes that psychology can inform theology in that,
 - a. The forgiveness Jesus is referring to in Matthew 6:14, 15 is decisional forgiveness.
 - b. The last statement in the parable of the unforgiving servant (“you must forgive from the heart” suggests that emotional forgiveness is mandatory.
 - c. The forgiveness required of Christians is total forgiveness involving decisional and emotional forgiveness.
 - d. Forgiveness includes reconciliation within its process.
16. Luke 17:3, says, “If a person repents, forgive.” Which is true?
 - a. This makes Biblical forgiveness conditional.
 - b. This suggests that offenders are part of the forgiveness process.
 - c. This does not say what to do if people do not repent.
 - d. None of the above.
17. Forgiveness of one political or religious group by another has been shown to be possible. It depends on which of the following:
 - a. People’s strength of their own political or religious identity.
 - b. The similarity or divergence of the other political ideology or religious faith to one’s own.
 - c. The degree of emotional involvement a person has in the issue.
 - d. All of the above.
18. What is the state of the science about using interventions to help people forgive?
 - a. Psychological interventions can help people forgive.
 - b. A few psychological interventions have been shown to help people forgive, but many do not work.
 - c. Psychological interventions can help people make short-term superficial changes in forgiving an event, but not long-term changes in their dispositional forgiveness.
 - d. Psychological interventions to help people forgive are fruitless; only God can build forgiveness into people (whether they are aware that God is at work or not).
19. The REACH Forgiveness method is
 - a. The best psychological method of helping people forgive.
 - b. One of the best two psychological methods of helping people forgive.
 - c. One of many equally effective psychological methods of helping people forgive.
 - d. Effective only if supplemented by prayer and sincere Christian devotion to becoming a more forgiving person.
20. A practice-tested analogy helpful to introduce the REACH Forgiveness intervention to Christians is which of the following? The five steps of REACH Forgiveness are like
 - a. Five boards that frame a structure that will be filled with concrete (representing permanent change instigated by the Holy Spirit).
 - b. Five terraces (or level resting places) in arduously climbing a difficult mountain to the mountain-top experience of forgiving
 - c. Five giant slabs making up a pyramid in which the bottom one is the foundation and each builds on the previous one.
 - d. Five necessary building blocks to construct a structure of forgiveness and without any one of them will lead to an unstable structure.
21. The “REACH” in REACH Forgiveness is an acrostic for a path to emotional forgiveness. A stands for
 - a. A=*Allow time* for healing to take place
 - b. A=*Analyze* the offender for repentance
 - c. A=*Altruistic* gift of forgiveness
 - d. A=*Always pray* for your offender
22. Working through the REACH Forgiveness model will help most people experience forgiveness, but also help to reduce _____ and to increase _____.

- a. Resentment and anger; Love
 - b. Compulsive behavior; Self-regulation
 - c. Depression and anxiety; Hope
 - d. Discouragement and bitterness; Positivity
23. Who can help people forgive by working with them to work through the REACH Forgiveness model?
- a. Only people credentialed in mental health counseling; others should refer.
 - b. Only Pastors or pastoral counselors because forgiveness is within the purview of the church.
 - c. Pastors, Pastoral counselors, and lay counselors can do almost as well as professional mental health workers.
 - d. Pastors, Pastoral counselors, and lay counselors can help (and have positive outcomes), but they do not do nearly as well as professional mental health workers.
24. Forgiveness practiced as a long-term character strength or virtue is good for you. Which is most effective for positive effects on physical health?
- a. Emotional forgiveness affects physical health the most.
 - b. Decisional forgiveness affects physical health the most.
 - c. Both decisional and emotional health are equally needed for long-term physical health benefits.
 - d. Neither has been shown to affect physical health in the long-term.
25. People often enter into forgiveness because it is good for them.
- a. You should discourage that because, for best results, forgiveness should be sought for its intrinsic benefits.
 - b. You should discourage that because it is a “works-orientation” instead of a “grace-through-faith orientation.”
 - c. You should encourage that because people will likely do what benefits them.
 - d. You should encourage that at first, but shift to a more unselfish motive.

Twenty-Five Statements Making up the Understanding of Forgiveness

1. When offended, we mentally construct an ongoing account of the size of an *injustice gap*, which is adjusted as events happen—like forgiving or like having the offender apologize, show sincere remorse, seek to make amends.
2. There are many Biblically consistent ways of narrowing the injustice gap, including seeing justice done, seeing a person get the natural consequences for his or her acts of injustice, turning the matter over to God for divine justice (some day), relinquishing the matter to God because it is God's to deal with not our own, forbearing (not responding negatively for the sake of group harmony), accepting and moving on with life, finding a new way to view the event that changes the way we look at it (i.e., empathy, sympathy, compassion, or love for the perpetrator; or understanding the antecedents or consequences of the event in a way that helps us understand it more); reminding us, "... for they don't know what they are doing"; forgiving.
3. If the sense of injustice progresses to unforgiveness (i.e., bitterness, resentment, hostility, hatred, anger, and anxiety), then the Christian should not neglect forgiving (regardless of whether other methods to reduce the injustice gap are employed).
4. A sense of injustice, and even unforgiveness, often decline following a power curve (fast at the beginning and slower as time progresses), and most minor transgressions we experience have declined to where they are not noticeable by two to three weeks.
5. When our sense of injustice turns into unforgiveness (bitterness, resentment, etc.), it is usually because we are ruminating about it (i.e., playing it over and over mentally focusing on the negative).
6. Holding onto a sense of injustice or emotional unforgiveness has negative effects on one's physical health, mental health, relationships, spirituality, and morality.
7. There are two independent types of forgiveness—both of which occur inside of one's skin.
8. Decisional forgiveness is (technically) a behavioral intention statement not to seek revenge but to treat the person as a valued and valuable person. That is, decisional forgiveness is about how you intend to behave in the future. We might not ever put the intention into effect (because, for example, the person could die or move or harm us again).
9. Emotional forgiveness is the emotional replacement of unforgiving emotions with positive, other oriented emotions like empathy, sympathy, compassion, and love. At first, the positive emotions are not experienced but just reduce the amount and quality of negative emotions. Only later might the person actually feel positive emotions toward the person forgiven.
10. Full emotional forgiveness differs depending on the type of relationship. If a stranger or person we do not intend to continue to interact with offends or transgresses, full emotional forgiveness is getting to zero emotion. We usually stop there. But if a loved one or someone we value and need to continue to interact with is the offender, we usually are not content with a neutral feeling toward the offender. We keep pouring in the positive emotions until a net positive emotional valence characterizes our emotional stance toward the person.
11. People can make a decision followed by emotional forgiveness or they can experience emotional forgiveness and later make an explicit decision or they can experience both at the same time. There is no prescribed order. (However, that said, most forgiveness occurs by making a decision first and later having the usually harder-to-change emotions finally catch up.)
12. Forgiveness—whether decision or emotional change—is often explicit and conscious, but not always. Much happens outside of our awareness, and we might actually forgive without consciously deciding or consciously trying to get our emotions to change.
13. Forgiveness is different from reconciliation in many ways. (1) Reconciliation happens between two people; forgiveness happens inside one's skin. (2) Reconciliation is about restoring trust in a relationship where trust has been violated; forgiveness is both a decision and an emotional experience and is not dependent on the other person (the offender). Note, though, that the other person can take acts that make forgiveness easier (i.e., show regret, make amends, apologize—all of which reduce the size of the injustice gap). (3) We can forgive without reconciling (e.g., we can forgive a dead person); we can reconcile without forgiving (at work, people often regain trust over time after a long-ago betrayal, but they might not forgive); we can do both—with either coming first or both coming at the same time.

14. Jesus mandates forgiveness (Mt 6:14-15). Jesus does not mandate reconciliation. Sometimes the other person simply will not reconcile. Paul says, "As much as it is up to you, live at peace with all people." But it is not always up to us.
15. The mandated forgiveness is decisional forgiveness—a decision about how we intend to act toward the offender in the future (or how we would act if the offender were alive or present today). Emotions are not subject to willful control. We might not be able to remove, stop, ignore, or change negative emotions. Jesus does not mandate emotional forgiveness, though God desires emotional forgiveness.
16. Decisional forgiveness is unilateral and not conditional. It does not require repentance on the part of the offender. For how would we ever know whether the repentance were sincere. Yes, Luke 17, says, "If a person repents, forgive." But it does not say what we do if a person does not repent. Answer, forgive. Jesus did not require repentance before forgiving on the cross.
17. Forgiveness of one political or religious group by another has been shown to be possible and to depend on (1) people's strength of their own political or religious identity, (2) the similarity or divergence of the other political ideology or religious faith to one's own, and (3) degree of emotional involvement in the issue.
18. We can help people forgive. The clinical science is clear. Interventions can help people forgive.
19. The REACH Forgiveness method is one (of many) ways people can help others forgive or ways that people can employ on their own to forgive. Using the REACH Forgiveness method will produce about 0.1 standard deviation of increase in forgiveness (on the average) per hour it is used. (We might expect about the same rate of change in forgiveness with other reputable methods of intervention. This extends to working through workbooks, and it might extend to reading books while reflecting on applying the lessons to forgiving someone.
20. It is Biblically consistent to use human structures to bring about the spiritual (and psychological) change of forgiveness. We use structures like worship music, Bible study groups, church buildings, etc. all the time. So, the five steps of REACH Forgiveness are just structures like those human activities of worship, study of Scripture, and going to a church building. The five steps of REACH Forgiveness are like five boards that frame in a structure that will be filled with concrete. In this analogy, the concrete is the forgiveness that is built within people by the Holy Spirit and the REACH provides an efficient mold to make the shape needed. (To build a support for a ceiling, we could, after all, pour concrete in a mound until it reached the ceiling. Instead, we frame a pillar and pour in the concrete and a pillar is formed.
21. REACH Forgiveness is an acrostic for five steps to emotional forgiveness. Before launching onto those five steps, people should try to agree that there are two types of forgiveness—decisional and emotional. Examine Scripture and what it teaches about forgiveness, and make a decision to forgive. Then work through the steps: R=Recall the hurt. E=Empathize with your partner. A=Altruistic gift of forgiveness. C=Commit to the emotional forgiveness you experience. H=Hold onto that emotional forgiveness when you doubt.
22. As one works toward forgiveness, one not only forgives (at 0.1 SD per hour) but simultaneously increases hope (0.1 SD/hour) and that leads to decreases in depression (0.05 SDs per hour) and anxiety (0.05 SDs per hour).
23. Professional can help people forgive by working with them to work through REACH Forgiveness, but pastors and lay counselors do almost as well.
24. Forgiveness is good for your physical health (esp. emotional forgiveness), mental health (esp. emotional forgiveness), relationships (esp. decisional forgiveness), and spiritual forgiveness (esp. decisional forgiveness), and morality (esp. decisional forgiveness). It operates on health often through reducing chronic stress.
25. People often enter into forgiveness because it is good for them. (There is nothing wrong with that. People also often become Christians because they fear judgment or the think that loving God is good for them.) But, it turns out, that if they can shift their motive to forgiving *also* because it is a chance to do something altruistic for the offender, to give an altruistic gift that the offender does not deserve, then that will actually produce more benefits for the forgiver than having the main motive as self-enhancement.

Answers to the Self-Test

1. The injustice gap is the difference between...
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Preach REACH Forgiveness

Ideas for Sermons and Series of Sermons

People learn more about forgiving from stories than from simple didactic teaching. So, rather than preach (many sermons) on simple instructional texts, like Matt 6:12, 14-15 (i.e., Jesus' instructions on the necessity of forgiving), it is often well to focus on stories.

Sermon Ideas

I have provided below a set of texts and some possible points to make regarding forgiveness. Here are some story-based sermon ideas.

Passage	Common Name	Points You Can Make
Matt 6: 12, 14-15	Lord's prayer and explanation of "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."	This is a great introductory sermon for a series. "What Did Jesus Really Teach about the Necessity to Forgive Others?" I will outline a potential sermon below, which you (of course) are free to disregard, use, or modify.
	Prodigal Son (or Lost Son)	This can be about divine forgiveness. The lost son (this appears in a collection of three parables—the lost coin, the lost sheep, and the (two) lost sons. It is about the importance of seeking and finding and being found. On one hand, we have lost our way in the Garden of Eden, and we seek diligently to find home. But more frequently, this is interpreted as God, the Father, having a heart to seek after the lost. The lost son parable is about the son who has a desire to be free of the Father. He demands his inheritance (1/3 of the estate) and goes off and squanders the wealth until he is a complete outcast, unclean, living with pigs (who are unclean), and eating pig food, which is unclean. But the Father is watching, eager to forgive. The son realizes that he can work for the Father like an indentured servant and regain his status slowly by earning. He has a plan for working his way into salvation. The Father is looking for him and does the undignified act of running to meet the son who is returning home. The Father interrupts the son's plan to work his way back into good favor, and restores the son to sonship—albeit without his treasure, which has already been consumed.
	The Second Lost Son	The second lost son (the elder brother) is also lost. He has done righteous behavior throughout his life, and he is resentful of the younger brother who has squandered part of the family fortune. The father comes out to meet him, just as the younger brother. The older brother seems to refuse to come in. His heart is hardened like the Pharisees. (Paul: "As much as it is up to you, live at peace with all people." It isn't always possible to live at peace with those who will not be reconciled.
	Hosea and Gomer	This book is about the way that God pursues us, even when we continue to be unfaithful. (Francine Rivers has a book that is an excellent rendition of this Bible story.) Lesson: God keeps forgiving. We need to keep forgiving also. (But that does not mean we will always keep reconciling.)
	David's Forgiveness of Mephibosheth	Mephibosheth is Saul's only surviving son. David, out of kindness and love for Jonathan, forgives this member of Saul's family, even though, as long as Mephibosheth is alive, he is a threat to David's kingship. He not only forgives Mephibosheth but allows him to eat at the king's table for the remainder of Mephibosheth's life.
	Jesus' restoration of Peter	Peter has denied Jesus three times, and after the resurrection, Jesus comes to the disciples, who have decided to return to fishing, their dreams crushed by the crucifixion (even though they have seen the resurrected Lord). Jesus restores Peter not only by forgiving him but by giving him a task to do ("Feed my sheep, feed my lambs, feed my

		sheep”) repeated three times.
Luke 5:17-26	Healing of the paralyzed man	Forgiveness is a prelude to healing. The friends of a paralyzed man brought him to Jesus for healing. The crowds were so large that the friends could not seem to get access to Jesus, so they cut a hole in the roof and lowered him inside. When Jesus saw their faith, he did not immediately say “Your faith has made you well” as he did with others. He also did not heal immediately. Instead he said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven you.” He pronounced divine forgiveness. It was not interpersonal forgiveness, for the man had not sinned against Jesus as a human to human sin. It was an illustration of Jesus’ divinity, and only after showing that he could forgive sins did he say, “Rise, take up your bed, and walk.”
	Peter’s interactions with Jesus throughout the three years of walking with Jesus	Peter is continually blowing it, and Jesus is continually restoring him. Lesson: Forgive and keep on forgiving. Our forgiveness does not depend on the other’s contrition, good works, making amends, admitting responsibility, etc. Lesson: Forgive unilaterally. (But, what about Luke 17:3, if a person repents, forgive him? Yes, but if the person does not repent, we also forgive him. Note Jesus forgiving on the cross.)
	Jesus’ prayer for forgiveness of the people who are crucifying him	Jesus prays to the Father for forgiveness because the people do not know what they do. This is empathy for a needy people.
	Daniel’s response to being led into captivity (displaced, refugee)	Daniel’s response was to become the leader in all the land next to the king, and then, when displaced again (after the handwriting on the wall) to become a leader once again. Lesson: Don’t get trapped in the past. When transgressions happen to you, quickly put them behind you and get on with seeking what God has in mind for you next. Then pursue it with devotion.
	Saul tries repeatedly to kill David, but David will not kill Saul in the cave	David is able to forgive, but it is not safe to put himself in Saul’s hands again. So, he does not reconcile.
	Paul in his travels is repeatedly beaten, scorned, and rejected. He keeps a heart for the people who do not know God	Regardless of what the world does to you, keep your eyes on the prize. Keep your mission for God foremost in your sight, and pursue it.
	The Unforgiving Servant	The king has forgiven a debt that is unbelievably large, comparable to the entire Roman annual budget. The unforgiving servant refuses to pass along the undeserved forgiveness he has received. That is an egregious offense, more serious to the king by far than the large debt was. So, the king puts the servant in prison. The points to make include: (1) God does not withdraw his generous forgiveness, but we can be ungrateful. (2) Ingratitude is serious. (3) That offense is serious. (4) In addition, you can make the point that a second offense is much more serious than the first (e.g., a first affair might be forgiven, but the second is really difficult to forgive).
	Joseph forgiving his brothers	He tests the waters for their repentance before seeking to build reconciliation. He has already forgiven, but he doesn’t want to attempt reconciliation until they prove that they are going to be trustworthy
Rom 8:1	There is therefore no	

	condemnation...	
1 Cor 13:5	Love keeps no record of wrongdoing.	
Jonah 3:10	God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that he had said he would bring upon them, and he did not do it."	
Neh 1:5-7	Confessed the sins against God.	
Ex 27:20-21	Joseph	Joseph being sold into slavery, being unfairly betrayed by Potiphar's wife, forgiving the brothers.
James 5:16	Confess your transgressions to each other,	
Jer 31:34	For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.	
Luke 6:37	Forgiveness in the context of judgment and forgiving others	"Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven." (Luke 6:37)

Putting Sermons Together in a Sermon Series on Forgiveness

Here are a few ideas for sermon series about forgiveness. (I have jokingly mentioned earlier, forgiving at the holidays. So don't forget that.) Here are other ideas.

1. Lenten series. Given that the theme of Lent is centered on forgiveness, this is often a time that the Lectionary will provide enough leeway that you can actually think of a series of contiguous sermons on a single theme.
2. Think through the year's schedule of Lectionary readings. You might be able to draw from Gospel, Epistle, and Old Testament passages and put a short series together. Or you might think of the series as an "interrupted" series—like just holidays, or like trying to find one sermon a month or one a quarter that you can plan as a sequence that builds on each of the previous ones. Assuming you can find some way to sequence a series of sermons, here are some ideas for such series.
3. (a) Forgiveness by God; (b) Forgiveness of others (Jesus' teachings on forgiveness); (c) forgiveness of self; (d) The other side of the coin (repentance before God, accepting responsibility to one you harmed, confession to the one harmed, apology, making amends); (e) forgiving yourself *responsibly*.
4. Stories of Forgiveness: (a) Biblical stories that show both interpersonal forgiveness and provide lessons about how God forgives as well: David and Mephibosheth, the parable of the lost sons; Hosea and Gomer; (b) Biblical stories about how to respond to horrendous injustices: David's response to Saul's persecution; Hosea and Gomer; Daniel's response to captivity; (c) Biblical stories that show that God expects us to pass along forgiveness to others: Jesus' restoration of Peter; the unforgiving servant; (d) Biblical stories about how forgiveness is a response to continued re-offenses: Paul's repeated abuses on his missionary journeys; (e) Biblical stories about self-forgiveness: David confronted by Nathan, David's confession, Nathan's pronouncement of divine forgiveness, and Psalm 51 which shows that for self-forgiveness to occur, several things are needed—repentance, making amends, repairing psychological issues, and then forgive the self responsibly.
5. If you do expository sermon series (perhaps as a night-time meeting), tackle instances of forgiveness throughout a gospel—like Matthew or Luke. You can begin with the Birth of Jesus and discuss the advent

as forgiveness coming bodily into the world for divine forgiveness. But you can move throughout the gospel dealing with instances of divine forgiveness, baptism and divine forgiveness, Jesus' teachings on forgiveness, the teaching coupled with forgiving the sin of the paralytic whose friends lowered him into the presence and at the feet of Jesus, instances of persecution of Jesus by people in authority (and his times of forgiveness and also of standing firm against their tyranny), conflicts between disciples, dealing with rejection when the disciples could do no miracles or healing when sent forth by Jesus, and other instances of interpersonal forgiveness. You also could look at self-condemnation and how it was dealt with by disciples. For instance, they all ran away when Jesus was taken from the garden. Peter was eaten up by self-condemnation from his denials of Jesus, and yet the Lord restored him and we can see from his ministry from that time forward that he was able to move forward after the restoration to become a powerful witness and the rock on which the church was built.

What Did Jesus Really Teach about the Necessity to Forgive Others?

Text: Matthew 6: 12, 14-15

Christians Must Forgive to Be Forgiven

Point 1: As we think about this teaching of Jesus, the effect of this passage is not necessarily that it will provoke universal forgiveness in Christians. Sometimes this passage can actually have an unintended effect of increasing resentment.

This text at once motivates many to forgive and inhibits some from forgiving. It motivates because people want to do what Jesus commanded, not to earn favor but to please a gracious Lord. It inhibits because people simply cannot see, in many cases, how it is possible to forgive an enormous wrong in their lives. Plagued by misconceptions about forgiveness, their mind simply puts this passage aside, perhaps dismissing it as impossible, as an ideal, or resisting a seemingly cruel and non-empathic demand on a hurting person. The easy way a conflicted mind deals with this strain is to concentrate on the very wrong (or accumulation of wrongs, or continuation of wrongs) that was done, and in dwelling on the harm done and the way that the offender is evil or a jerk, the person diverts attention from Jesus' encouragement to forgive until the attention is swept away with other events in life. Thus, the effect of this passage in the short run is not necessarily to provoke universal forgiveness in Christians. Sometimes it can actually have an unintended effect of increasing resentment. Of course, whether it works to stimulate people to forgive immediately or to build resentments until, over time, the necessity of forgiving becomes more apparent to them, the end result of the passage is to encourage forgiveness. But, people who react with resentment often live for days, weeks, months, or even years with resentment, which takes its toll on their physical health, mental health, relationships, and spiritual peace.

Why Are Christians Not Better at Forgiving?

Point 2: Why don't people forgive more often and faster than they do? Why do they carry lifelong grudges, hates, and aggravations? There are several reasons.

First, they simply don't consider the forgiveness option. Pain is in our face. When we smash our thumb closing a drawer, we focus on the pain, the anger, the fear that the pain will happen again or something else will harm the injured thumb. Pain occupies our attention, so it takes some intervention to shift our attention to the solution of the pain—especially the long-term solution. The short-term solution might be to put ice on the injury, but the long-term solution of repairing the sticky drawer takes lots of energy, time, and effort (and perhaps money). That is not in our mental frame, so it is easy to ignore.

Second—and this is not an attractive thing, so it's hard to face squarely when we do it—we sometimes take comfort in dwelling on the hurt because it allows us to blame the offender for our pain and for holding us back from happiness, progress, or needed action. It can be easier to blame the offender than to take a lot of risky, sometimes costly, and yet needed action in our lives. People again dwell on the way the offender, a jerk, has hampered their lives.

Third, they have a misconception (or more than one misconception) that forgiveness requires (1) reconciliation (restoring a trusting relationship); (2) returning to the old relationship pattern, which is unacceptable; (3) liking the offender; (4) somehow condoning or accepting the wrong that was done; and (5) giving up any pursuit of justice. Any or all of these misconceptions can cause people to quickly dismiss the forgiveness option.

There are other misconceptions that hinder forgiving, too, by aiming the forgiver at *not* forgiving. They might think that the offender should repent prior to forgiving him or her. This is a misconception, and it means that people are allowing the offender to re-victimize them by not being as repentant as the potential forgiver would want them to be. Also, Biblically, we are to forgive without conditions, not wait for forgiveness.

Fourth—and this is also a misconception—people might think that forgiveness is all or nothing. That is, they want instant and total changes in mind, feeling, motivation, and behavior toward the offender. But while

decisions happen suddenly (although often they happen after a period of indecision and struggle) when they happen, our feelings and motivations do not change quickly. So there will likely be a period when the person is not completely—all of nothing—at peace. Because people have, over the years, experienced the slow, and often up-and-down changes of emotion, they discount that such total forgiveness can happen (quickly or at all).

There Are Two Types of Forgiveness

A better understanding of forgiveness is that there are actually two separate, different types of forgiveness—*decisional forgiveness*, which is a decision about how we intend to act toward the offender in the future, and *emotional forgiveness*, which is the (often) gradual change in feelings and emotions toward the person. Making a decision to forgive can be all or nothing, but emotional forgiveness is rarely all or nothing.

Narrow Framing

But the all-or-nothing way of thinking is what cognitive psychologists call a narrow frame. It is a classic decision-making error. Anytime people frame a decision as asking whether or not to do something, that is a constricting narrow frame, and it eliminates options by focusing on only two when many are possible. There are many scripturally consistent ways to deal with injustices. We can seek justice, appeal to God for eventual divine justice, observe the person get the consequences from formal justice or from the natural consequences of his or her behavior, forbear, accept and move on with life. It is possible to deal with injustice using any of those and also to forgive. The other biblical options are often the first recourse of dealing with injustices, and any residual sense of injustice or the development of the root of bitterness that is the core of unforgiveness can be dealt with by forgiving.

If we are framing a decision too narrowly, as an all-or-nothing feel-emotional-love-for-my-enemies forgiveness, then how can we break out of the narrow frame? There are a couple of methods that Chip and Dan Heath, decision-science researchers recommend in their popular book, *Decisive: How to Make Better Choices in Life and Work*.

First, you can examine the opportunity costs of both forgiving and staying as you are. Ask yourself, What could I do with all of the energy, time, perhaps money, effort, and coping resources to deal with the stress of unforgiveness that I'm exerting holding onto unforgiveness? For example, I might be able to use all of that energy to parent better, be a better romantic partner, devote more creative energy to work, and keep the house in better shape. When we see what we were not considering previously—the enormous costs in energy it takes to hold a grudge—it can motivate us to forgive.

Second, ask yourself this: If you were absolutely prevented from continuing as you are and also from forgiving, then what would you do? This allows you to respond creatively by considering things like praying for the person, doing positive things to repair the relationship, take careful ways of dealing with the person, plan ways to avoid an unsafe person, accept the hurt and move on, forbear (don't act negatively toward the person for the good of the group—your family, your workplace, your church), or seek some sort of just solution.

What Was Jesus Really Teaching?

Point 3: So, this brings us to the question, we began with. What was Jesus teaching when he taught about forgiveness in Matthew 6?

First, let's note that Jesus did not put the total sum of his teaching into these couple of sentences. So, can we agree at the outset that this is only one part of the story? Second, not all of Jesus' teaching was even captured in the four gospels. Third, we must assume that, through the Holy Spirit, Jesus taught Peter, Paul, James, and the other writers of Scripture. So, we can learn about forgiveness across Scripture, not just in this particular two sentences.

Scriptural teaching about forgiveness is this. Jesus wants us to look through God's eyes (Col 3:1). We are to forgive as God forgave (Eph 4:32; Col 3:13)—as a free gift without obligation. But when you feel unforgiving (i.e., resentment, bitterness, hate, hostility, anger, and fear), you can make a decision to forgive and treat the other person as a person of value, one created, as you are, in God's image, and one who, as you are, is flawed and fallen. You will want to forgive from the heart (Mt 18:35), which in Biblical times didn't mean forgive emotionally but forgive with the will, which is to make a decision to treat the other person as one of value.

Jesus recognizes that there are many roads to dealing with injustice—such as bringing about God's justice. We discern justice humbly, by looking through God's eyes, not our own eyes. We usually want pay-back, retributive justice, instead of what God's justice usually demands, restorative justice. We are humble by not trusting fully that we are really hearing correctly from God. The heart is deceitful (Hos 10:2). Justice is a social concept. It depends on more than one person, not just we ourselves. We are responsible for what God requires of us, "to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). That is, we are responsible for how we act, not for the relational outcome.

We can deal many ways with injustices. We can forbear (Eph 4:2). We can turn the matter over to God for divine justice (vengeance is mine) or simply to relinquish our burdens to God (Mt 11:28, 30). We can accept and move on with life (xx).

Forgiveness of others is necessary when we have developed unforgiveness, involving bitterness (Prov 14:10; Eph 4:31) and hatred (Lev 19:17). It is a decision to forgive, which is under the person's control, not emotional forgiveness, that Jesus is commending to us. We cannot control our emotions. Of course, Jesus *desires* that we be at emotional peace as well as relational peace. But in the same way that Paul argues, "As much as it is up to you, live at peace with all," because it isn't always up to us fully, the expectation for Jesus' requirement of forgiveness is for decisional, not emotional forgiveness.

So, we have looked to the "requirement of forgiveness" and seen three things. First, taking the Matthew 6 passage on Jesus' requirement to forgive can lead to pushback and also can stimulate people to dismiss forgiveness or simply resist it. Second, we often don't forgive faster and more often because we construe our options too narrowly. We can buck this trend by looking for the things we could do with the energy we put in grudge-holding and by considering what other things we could do if we didn't remain mired in a grudge and also didn't forgive. Third, we can see the requirement to forgive through God's eyes. Jesus humbly stepped into history to serve as a propitiation for human sin, and God gave each of us a free gift of forgiveness for the sake of Jesus. We can pass along that forgiveness to others not as a duty but as a way to show our gratitude for the precious gift of forgiveness that we have received.

The Ways Different Religions Understand Forgiveness

As a preamble, let us note how we might respond if someone asked us for "*the* Christian understanding of forgiveness." The presumption is that there is only one understanding that is Christian, while we have already seen that there can be many Christian theologies of forgiveness. Similarly, there is no single Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, or Hindu version of forgiveness.

Jewish Understandings of Forgiveness

Christian understandings of forgiveness have traditionally differed from Jewish understandings of forgiveness as a result of the unique vision for forgiveness of Jesus, and because the disciples dealt with the fact of a resurrected Lord, which gave a new way to interpret many of the passages in the Hebrew Scriptures. In the twelfth century, Moses Maimonides compiled the teachings of the rabbis on forgiveness. Jewish interpretations center around the idea that in sin, one leaves the path of God. *Tseuvah*, what in English we call repentance, is thus the focus to return to the path of God. That leads to an understanding of forgiveness as conditional rather than the Christian interpretation as unconditional. In Judaism, the focus is return to God's path, not forgiveness. In Christianity, unconditional love and unconditional forgiveness are the foci, so human forgiveness mirrors divine forgiveness.

The conditions for granting forgiveness (an explicit act) are that the offender show full and unambiguous intent of return. To do this, the offender must illustrate to the community an admission of wrongdoing, full and contrite apology, effort to make amends, and a direct request one wronged to forgive. In fact, even after full indication of sincere *tseuvah*, the wronged party does not have to forgive at the first request. This tests the offender's willingness to remain repentant. But, after three requests, the victim is required to forgive, and if he or she does not, the victim has left the path of God and must go through the process of *tseuvah*. This is not in Scripture, but in Jewish Mishnah or tradition. From the scientific study of forgiveness, we would note that this process is about reconciliation rather than about forgiveness. Forgiveness is internal, but the process of *tseuvah* and return are social and interpersonal.

Parenthetically, we might note that this idea of *tseuvah*, return to God's path, which helps restore offenders to community, is responsible for the stance that many Jewish people take that murder is an unforgivable sin. Clearly, the victim can never grant forgiveness because the victim is dead. In addition, in Judaism, character slander is also impossible to forgive. Slanders spread far and wide make it impossible practically to make amends and right the wrongs done by correcting the untruth to all who had heard it.

This process of *tseuvah* is the requirement to obtain forgiveness and an explicit granting of forgiveness from the person victimized. But the victim might give forgiveness regardless of whether the offender moves through *tseuvah*. On the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, people are encouraged to give forgiveness regardless of whether the offender has moved through the process of *tseuvah*. Thus, Jewish approaches have both a "works" and a "grace" option, though they would not use those words.

Islamic Understandings of Forgiveness

Islam understands forgiveness to be more optional than Christianity. Namely, while one of Islam's 99 names of God is a Forgiving God, for people forgiveness is deserving of a heavenly reward. Justice is every Muslim's concern and focus, but forgiveness is to be admired, and people receive heavenly rewards for forgiving.

Buddhist Understandings of Forgiveness

Buddhists tend to have no formal conception of forgiveness. However, they have strong emphases on both compassion and lovingkindness, which overlap.

Hindu

There are many Hindu understandings of forgiveness. Usually, forgiveness is seen as helpful and in some cases even necessary.

Some Misconceptions about What Forgiveness Is and Is Not

Not reconciliation. Reconciliation is restoring trust in a relationship where trust has been damaged. Trust requires both sides to be trustworthy. If one person does not act in a trustworthy way, no trust will be built and reconciliation will not happen. Reconciliation is not required in Christian Scripture. Paul says, "As much as it is up to you, live at peace with all people." But it is not always up to us, and if a person adamantly refuses to reconcile or to act trustworthily, then reconciliation will not occur.

Not saying "I forgive you." Forgiveness is a decision and emotional forgiveness is an emotional change. Both occur within a person's skin. Saying "I forgive you" is not forgiveness. One could say, "I forgive you" simply to throw a person off guard and take advantage of the person later. Saying "I forgive you" can be an important part of reconciling, but it is not to be confused with forgiving.

Not justice. Getting justice or seeing justice done can reduce the size of the injustice gap and it therefore can reduce the stress of unforgiveness. However, experiencing a reduced sense of injustice should not be confused with forgiveness. People might forbear, turn matters over to God, accept and move on, or simply excuse an offense. In all cases, the emotional impact of the transgression is reduced, but none of those is forgiving.

Forgiving does not require an offender's repentance. We are not denying that repentance is wonderful. But people can forgive regardless of whether the offender repents. In Luke 17:3, Luke says, "If a person repents, forgive the person" but Luke does not say what to do if the person does not repent. The answer: forgive. Jesus forgave people who were unrepentant (i.e., the man who was lowered through the roof) or had not asked for forgiveness (i.e., Peter's restoration; note that he did not say, "I forgive you" but that was implied).

Sources for Sermons on Forgiveness: Books

Some Good Non-Fiction Books that Deal Directly with Forgiveness

Religious and spiritual books. Religious books have predominated, especially from the Christian tradition, where forgiveness is the central aspect of the religion. Most of the religious books have been expositions of New Testament scriptures, often by pastors or religious inspirational writers. Probably over 100 such books have been published in the last 25 years. While many have been excellent books with examples from scripture and illustrations of scriptural principles from the lives of Christians (for the most part), the approach has been limited largely to the Christian tradition and the books are typically not bought by those outside of that tradition. Even within Christianity, denominational or theological adherence usually relegates books to a particular segment of the Christian market. Among the best is Miroslav Volf's *Free of Charge*.

Inspirational non-religious books. Some of the best examples of inspirational books about forgiveness are the following. (1) Lewis Smedes' book, *Forgive and Forget: Healing the Hurts We Don't Deserve* (Harper & Row, San Francisco, 1984) is the classic in the field as a trade book. Smedes' book was a best-selling book that began the scientific interest in forgiveness by breaking out of the religious framework. It stimulated therapists to begin to publish in professional journals, which ultimately interested researchers to study forgiveness. Smedes writes beautifully with a style that incorporates teaching and anecdote. (2) Johann Christoph Arnold's book *Seventy Times Seven* (The Plough Publishing House of The Bruderhof Foundation, 1997; later retitled *The Lost Art of Forgiving*). Arnold's book is another book of stories of forgiveness, mostly involving religious aspects. Many of those concern the people within a community of Christian believers—the Bruderhof. (3) Michael Henderson's book *The Forgiveness Factor* (Grosvenor Books, 1996), and *Forgiveness: Breaking the Chain of Hate* (Book Partners, 1999) provide a larger, more systems-wide approach to forgiveness. He describes places in which forgiveness movements have changed communities. Henderson's books are a compilation of stories about forgiveness. Aimed at the socio-political arena, through over 50 years of work of Moral Rearmament, Henderson's books provide often gut-twisting anecdotes about forgiveness and reconciliation on the international and inter-ethnic scene. (4) Mona Gustafson Affinito's book *When to Forgive* (New Harbinger Publications, 1999), and (5) Gerald Jampolsky's book

Forgiveness: The Greatest Healer of All (Beyond Words Publications, 1999) are spiritually oriented, but not Christian books.

Inspirational “new age” books. Another type of non-religious book on forgiveness dominates the market—books that argue that forgiving is a great gift one gives the self. One of the better examples is *Forgiveness: A Bold Choice for a Peaceful Heart* by Robin Casarjian (1992), which is published under Bantam’s New Age imprint. Another example is *Good-Bye to Guilt: Releasing Fear through Forgiveness* by Gerald Jampolsky (Bantam, 1985). Such books argue that forgiveness is undertaken essentially for oneself. Forgiveness is desirable “for a peaceful heart” or to release guilt and fear. Little or no attention is given to the relationship or to the person receiving forgiveness. Forgiveness is essentially for getting, not for giving. A third example, which won the Writer’s Digest Award, is Colin C. Tipping’s *Radical Forgiveness: Making Room for the Miracle*. Tipping tells the story of how he helped his sister Jill save her marriage. He uses that as a jumping off point to present his theory, which he uses in therapy and workshops. He blends a therapeutic focus with new age concepts like channeling, karmic force, and energy fields. The book is really quite focused on eastern mysticism.

Philosophical or conceptual books. Several philosophers have written about forgiveness. Perhaps most stimulating, Simon Wiesenthal (1969) wrote moving of his experiences as a Jew in World War II being asked by a young SS soldier to forgive him on behalf of Jews for his massacre of Jews. Wiesenthal convened a symposium of scholars to answer the question, what would you have done. The book was entitled *The Sunflower*. A second edition (1997) includes responses by many of today’s scholars. Jeffrie G. Murphy (Murphy & Hampton, 1988, *Forgiveness and Mercy*), Martha Minow (*Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History after Genocide and Mass Violence*, 1998), Hanna Arendt (*The Human Condition*, 1958), Harold Kushner (*How Good Do We Have To Be*, 1996), and Desmond Tutu (*No Future Without Forgiveness*, 1999) have written philosophically and experientially about forgiveness. Black African Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela (2003) has written a wonderful memoir of her experiences questioning and interviewing Eugene de Koch, chief architect of much of the violence of the Nationalist Party in South Africa’s apartheid era—*That Night a Human Being Died*.

Scientifically informed trade books on forgiveness. Recently books have begun to appear that are more scientifically centered. In 1997, Michael McCullough, Steve Sandage, and Worthington wrote *To Forgive Is Human: How to Put Your Past in the Past*. That book, based on the early scientific studies of forgiveness, was published by a Christian press (InterVarsity Press, 1997). At the point when the book was written, Worthington’s research team had published only one empirical study of the REACH intervention at the time of writing of that book, and the intervention was not well developed. Nevertheless, InterVarsity Press, whose contacts were largely in the Christian bookstores whereas the book was aimed at a secular mass-market audience, has kept *To Forgive Is Human* in print and it continues to sell.

Four people have written trade books that are based on scientific findings. In 2001, Worthington published *Five Steps to Forgiveness: The Art and Science of Forgiving* (Crown Publishers). When it went out of print (so its release date was the week of September 11, 2011), IVP published a revised and updated Christian version *Forgiving and Reconciling: Bridges of Healing and Hope* (Worthington, 2003, which continues to sell well and is my most enthusiastic recommendation for Christians in the pew to learn a Christian version of forgiveness and of reconciliation). See also *A Just Forgiveness: Responsible Healing without Excusing Injustice* (Worthington, 2009), *The Power of Forgiveness* (Worthington, 2006; Templeton Press), and self-forgiveness (*Moving Forward: Six Steps to Forgiving Yourself and Breaking Free from the Past*, 2013; WaterBrook Multnomah).

Others have written similar trade books – Enright (2001), Luskin (2001), and Spring (2004). Enright’s book is with APA Books and is a companion to his clinical professional book with Fitzgibbons, which they updated in 2014. Fred Luskin’s book is very cognitive in orientation and it incorporates some Buddhist-informed treatments. Janis Spring, who takes a Judaism-informed perspective, has written a “backlash” book. It is about the limits of forgiveness. Its premise is that forgiveness should not be granted until the perpetrator deserves forgiveness through making sufficient amends. That perspective is championed by Jewish scholars from the 12th century, under Maimonides, onward. Some “pop-psychology” books, which are both psychology- and theology-lite, have been mentioned, but I recommend sticking with the books more rooted in psychology than in pop-psychology. McCullough (2008) wrote *Beyond Revenge*, which is an evolutionary justification for forgiveness.

Edited collections of scientific chapters. In 1998, two edited books of collected scientific chapters on forgiveness were published, one by Robert Enright and Joanna North (*Exploring Forgiveness*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1998) and the other by Worthington (*Dimensions of Forgiveness*, The Templeton Foundation Press, 1998). The state of the science of forgiveness was, at that time, rudimentary. The edited volumes were more heavily based on hypothesizing than on data.

Another edited volume was published in 2000. Co-editors are Michael McCullough, Kenneth Pargament, and Carl Thoresen (*Forgiveness: Theory, Research, and Practice*, Guilford Press). That book is a collection of heavy mainstream scientific chapters. (I authored one of those.) The market is to professional researchers and therapists. That book was state-of-the-science as of 1999. The book's strength (i.e., multiple viewpoints) is simultaneously its weakness. Although most chapters are of high quality, there is (as in all edited volumes) some differential quality.

A fourth collection of chapters, and perhaps the most comprehensive to date is *Handbook of Forgiveness* (Worthington, 2005). Those 33 chapters were state of the science, although now 13 years have passed since the research that authors of chapters reviewed was conducted. Almost every author had completed empirical research on their topic. The reviews were thorough and scholarly. This book represents the strongest collection to date of the science of interpersonal forgiveness under one cover. It is thoroughly scientific and mostly non-religious. By now, numerous meta-analytic review papers, published in journals, have been published, so particular topics are better covered in those recent journal articles.

A final edited volume is *Forgiveness and Health* (Toussaint, Worthington, & Williams, 2015; Springer). It reviews different aspects of health psychology and the research aimed particularly at those physical disorders. It is state-of-the-science for forgiveness and its interaction with health psychology. It is prohibitively expensive.

Single-voice scientific and clinical books. Single-voice scientific and clinical books have been published (or are nearing publication). Worthington and Sandage (2015) wrote *Forgiveness and Spirituality in Psychotherapy: A Relational Approach* (APA Books) that is accompanied by a videotape that illustrates the psychotherapy approach. Enright and Fitzgibbons (2000) wrote *Helping Clients Forgive* (APA Books), which focused on Enright's process model. In 2014, they updated it (*Forgiveness Therapy*; APA Books). Enright and Fitzgibbons concentrate on the ways that forgiveness therapy can be used in a variety of psychological disorders. They are more interested in justifying forgiveness therapy for psychotherapy application and health psychology application than in a general theory, but they do describe Enright's process model, which has been broadly applied.

Worthington (2006) wrote a book for professionals, mostly therapists but pastors could understand and benefit by reading it. It is *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Theory and Application*. It lays out a basic stress-and-coping theory of forgiveness, and it describes the REACH Forgiveness model in applications to counseling, psychoeducation, teaching, and other applications. This was perhaps the first comprehensive theory of forgiveness, and it was framed for secular audiences, which Christians will not be put off by.

McCullough (2008) wrote a book on *Forgiveness and Revenge* from a perspective of evolutionary theory. This is an original book, well-informed by the science. It is based on evolutionary theory. The argument is basically that revenge, which later became a more civilized justice motives, are necessarily to prevent unjust actions within and between groups. But, without a centripetal force to hold the group together, groups would disintegrate under the centrifugal force of revenge and group members would be lost to predators. Thus, forgiveness is seen as an evolutionarily stamped in urge. I like many of the ideas, but I would say that it is reconciliation, not forgiveness, that is more likely to be a (group) survival motive.

In 2015, Worthington and Sandage completed a book entitled *Forgiveness and Spirituality in Psychotherapy: A Relational Approach* for the American Psychological Association. In that book, they promoted a relational theology and a relational psychology. It is heavy reading, but it has a large section on treatment, especially in short- and long-term counseling, couples, families, and groups.

Theological books on forgiveness. Numerous books have addressed the theology of forgiveness, though most have dealt with divine forgiveness. I cannot possibly review those. The following books, though, are particularly relevant because they deal more with interpersonal forgiveness than do most theological books. Lewis Smedes (1984), a theologian from Fuller Theological Seminary, and one of the best writers of our generation, in *Forgive and Forget: Healing the Hurts We Don't Deserve*, focuses mostly on how forgiveness of other people is good for us. In doing so in a popular book, he initiated the current preoccupation with forgiveness. Therapists and researchers were drawn to forgiveness as a virtue in which people could better themselves by obtaining the benefits of forgiveness. Forgiveness was portrayed as therapeutic. Jones (1995) *Embodying Forgiveness* is a polemic against "therapeutic forgiveness." Jones argues that forgiveness is meant to be part of the body of Christ, not a self-help method. His opposition to the beneficial aspects of forgiving notwithstanding, the book is an excellent call to attend to the role of the Christian church in setting up the conditions to forgive. Volf's (1998) *Exclusion and Embrace* examines interpersonal tensions between transgressions and love. Volf's (2005) later book, *Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace*, is about forgiveness directly, and is highly recommended. He begins with God as a generous God, willing to give of himself freely, and Volf encourages people to be like God, seeking to exercise free gift-giving.

Psychology and theology. Shults and Sandage (2003), who are Bethel Seminary Professors, in *Faces of Forgiveness*, examine forgiveness within the psychology of losing and saving face and the theology of the face of God. This book is the closest to being a competitor to the currently proposed book. Shults is a theologian. He writes in Part 2 about God's face in forgiving. Sandage is a psychologist. He and Mike McCullough co-authored *To Forgive Is Human* with me. Both are my former graduate students. In Part 1 of *Faces*, Sandage summarizes the psychology of saving face in interactions surrounding transgressions. In Part 3, Shults and Sandage have a conversation about two clinical cases, bringing theological and psychological aspects together. Baker Book House published *Faces of Forgiveness* (2003). It is not exactly a trade book, and it has some sophistication of both theology and psychology. It deals with both psychological and theological issues. It is not an easy read, but it is a good read.

Both *Forgiving and Reconciling* (which I reviewed above) and *A Just Forgiveness*, also integrate theology and psychology. My 2009 book, *A Just Forgiveness*, uses Micah 6:8 as the organizing principle, and that might work to structure a sermon series around. It deals with justice, mercy (and forgiveness), and humility.

Here are a few others. *Amish Grace* (Graybill et al.), *The Sunflower* (Wiesenthal), *The Hiding Place* (Corrie Ten Boom), *Left to Tell: Discovering God Amidst the Rwandan Holocaust* (Immaculee Ilibagiza),

Some Good Fiction Books

Francine Rivers, *Redeeming Love*. This tells the Hosea and Gomer story in a moving way. *The Brothers Karamazov*, Fyodor Dostoyevsky says of a man who had confessed to a hidden murder, "I feel joy and peace for the first time after so many years. There is heaven in my heart.... Now I dare to love my children and to kiss them."

Les Miserables (Victor Hugo), *Unbroken* (Laura Hillenbrand), *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (C. S. Lewis), *Great Expectations* (Charles Dickens), *The Shack* (William Young), *The Kite Runner* (Khaled Hosseini), and *Horton Hatches the Egg* (Dr. Seuss).

Sources for Sermons on Forgiveness: Movies

Many Movies Are about Revenge

Consequences of revenge. In revenge, people's own injustice/unforgiveness gap can be closed. They have gotten even. But the other person's injustice gap is usually widened. People usually feel their own pain more intensely than they feel other people's pain, so if a person feels he or she has gotten even, the other person usually feels disadvantaged. And the interactions that are not peaceful continue. Examples are many. These include *Kill Bill*, *The Princess Bride* (Inigo Montoya), *Revenant*, and virtually all action movies.

There Are Numerous Movies about Forgiveness

You've Got Mail, *Les Miserables*, *Unbroken*, *Dead Man Walking*, *Unforgiven*, , *The Mission* (self-forgiveness), *Woodlawn*, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, *Forest Gump*, *To End All Wars*, *Hacksaw Ridge*, *Chariots of Fire*, *Great Expectations*, *The Messenger*, *Ben Hur*, *Gladiator*, *The Interpreter*, *The Royal Tenenbaums*, *As Good as It Gets*, *Pay It Forward*, *Fireproof*, and *Facing the Giants*. For more ideas, see <http://www.wingclips.com/themes/forgiveness> .

Sources for Sermons on Forgiveness: Real-Life Examples of Heroic Forgiveness

Forgiving a Person Who Tried to Kill Him

Chris Carrier, as a young boy, was abducted and stabbed repeatedly on December 20, 1974 in Miami. He was shot through the temple, which took his eye, and he was left for dead, waking up in a swamp six days later, discovered by a deer hunter. He recovered. As an adult, he received a call on September 3, 1996. David McAllister had confessed to his abduction. He cared for the then frail 77-year old man who had attempted his murder until the man's death three weeks later. Chris had visited, talked, and cared for David from their meeting until David's death.

New York, 1986. Steven McDonald was a NYC police officer and detective. He was shot in Central Park, and paralyzed from the neck down. He had been married less than a year and his wife was pregnant (two months). He was questioning three youths at the time. Shavod Jones, Steven's assailant, lived in a Harlem housing project while Steven lived in a white, wealthy, Nassau County suburb. Steven tried to understand Shavod, and the system that led to seeing police as racist and abusive. "I'm sometimes angry at the teenage boy who shot me. But more often I feel sorry for him. I only hope that he can turn his life to helping and not hurting people. I forgive him and hope that he can find peace and purpose in his life." Steve and his wife Patti teach forgiveness in schools.

Pope John Paul, forgiving the man who tried to assassinate him (and the man's subsequent misunderstanding)

Forgiving Those Who Killed a Loved One

In 1987, Enniskillen, Northern Ireland, Gordon Wilson lost his daughter to a Belfast bombing. He held her hand buried under rubble, as she died. Later he told reporters from BBC, “I have lost my daughter, and we shall miss her. But I bear no ill will. I bear no grudge. ... That will not bring her back.... Don’t ask me, please, for a purpose. ... I don’t have an answer. But I know there is a plan. In 1996, my mother was murdered, and I forgave. See the account in *Forgiving and Reconciling*. Elizabeth Elliott forgave the murder of her husband Jim Elliott.

Forgiving a Torturer

Jacob DeShazer was a WWII bombardier, who was captured and tortured in a Japanese prison camp. After seeing in a smuggled in Bible, the Luke passage, Father forgive them, for they know not what they do, he forgave. (granting forgiveness on the realization that they don’t know what they do). At the end of WWII, he returned to Japan and established a mission to help the Japanese. See also *The Railway Man* (Eric Lomax) and Laura Hillenbrand’s book (also a movie) *Unbroken* about Louis Zamperini.

Seeking Forgiveness on the Realization That They Don’t Know What They Do

Mitsuo Fuchida led the bombing raid on Pearly Harbor on Dec 7, 1941. At the end of the war, he was discouraged, and a brochure of Jacob DeShazer’s mission was put in his hand. ON the 25th year celebration of Pearl Harbor Day, he spoke to survivors of the attack, gave them a Bible, and it was inscribed with a verse, Luke 23:7.

The Adventist missionary who forgave.

Forgiving across Racial and Ethnic Lines

Elias Chacour, Palestinian and now a Melkite Priest, whose village was destroyed by Israel in 1947, became president of a mixed racial university.

Bishara Awad is another Palestinian, whose father was killed when Bishara was a youth. He later immigrated to the United States and later became a teacher in a Palestinian Christian school. But, he described the rising hatred of Jews and said that made his teaching ineffective to the mostly Palestinian students he taught. He realized that God couldn’t use him as a result of the hatred, so that night, “I prayed to God in tears. I asked forgiveness for hating the Jews and for allowing hatred to control my life. And that same evening I felt God’s presence. ... He took away my frustration, hopelessness, and hatred and replaced it with love. (p. 105, Arnold,)

Forgiving for One’s Own Benefit

Robert Coles, Harvard psychiatrist, told a story about Anna Freud. Speaking of an older woman, Anna Freud said, “... this poor old lady doesn’t need us at all.... What she needs ... is forgiveness. She needs to make peace with her soul, not talk about her mind.”

Sources for Sermons on Forgiveness: Quotes

Some preachers like to sprinkle quotes throughout sermons. Here are a number of quotes that are related to forgiveness.

Though justice be thy plea, consider this:
That in the course of justice none of us
Should see salvation. We do pray for mercy,
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render
The deeds of mercy.

William Shakespeare

We do not really know how to forgive until we know what it is to be forgiven. Therefore, we should be glad that we can be forgiven by our brothers. It is our forgiveness of one another that makes the love of Jesus manifest in our lives, for in forgiving we act towards one another as he has acted towards us.

Thomas Merton

A Poison Tree

(By William Blake)

I was angry with my friend:
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.
I was angry with my foe:
I told it not, my wrath did grow.

And I water'd it in fears,
Night and morning with my tears;
And I sunned it with smiles,
And with soft deceitful wiles.

And it grew both day and night,
Til it bore an apple bright;
And my foe beheld it shine,
And he knew that it was mine,

And into my garden stole
When the night had veil'd the pole;
In the morning glad I see
My foe outstretched beneath the tree.

William Blake

"I shall allow no man to belittle my soul by making me hate him."
Booker T. Washington

"Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven."

Luke 6:37

"We must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. He who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love. There is some good in the worst of us and some evil in the best of us. When we discover this, we are less prone to hate our enemies."

Martin Luther King Jr.

"Too err is human, to forgive, divine."

Alexander Pope

"In its human dimension, sin is countered by the truth of divine love, which is just, generous, and faithful, and which reveals itself above all in forgiveness and redemption."

Pope John Paul II

Without being forgiven, released from the consequences of what we have done, our capacity to act would, as it were, be confined to a single deed from which we could never recover; we would remain victims of its consequences forever, not unlike the sorcerer's apprentice who lacked the magic formula to break the spell.

Hannah Arendt

From a little spark may burst a mighty flame.

Dante Alighieri

The past is not dead; it's not even past.

William Faulkner

History, despite its wrenching pain
Cannot be unlived, but if faced with courage
Need not be lived again.

Maya Angelou

Hatred is the rabid dog that turns on its owner. Revenge is the raging fire that consumes the arsonist. Bitterness is the trap that snares the hunter.

Max Lucado

Sometimes hate only nibbles at the edges of the heart; it does not always burn out the lining of the soul....But whether your hate is a carcinoma growing hell-bent for death inside your soul, or only a pesky heart-burn, it will hurt you if you do not use the right remedy. Your healing may take heroic surgery of the soul. Then again, you may get by with a quick cauterization. But eventually, unchecked hate will do you in.

Lewis B. Smedes

Resentment is like taking poison and waiting for the other person to die.

Malachy McCourt

Every one of life's trials creates an empty space where a seed can be grown.

Paul Tournier

"Consider it pure joy my brothers, when you face trials of many kinds. Because you know that testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work, so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking in anything."

James 1:2-4

Looking away may be a comfortable but ultimately disastrous path, the effects of which are incalculable.

Smail Balic

We make believe we are at peace while the furies rage within, beneath the surface. There, hidden and suppressed, our hate opens the subterranean faucets of venom that will eventually infect all our relationships in ways we cannot predict. Hate left to itself, denied and hidden, leaves us in a cold hell behind insulated masks of warm conviviality.

Lewis B. Smedes

Heat not a furnace for your own foe so hot,
That it do singe yourself.

William Shakespeare

A man that studieth revenge keeps his own wounds green, which otherwise would heal and do well.

Francis Bacon

The man who opts for revenge should dig two graves.

Chinese Proverb

Blood cannot be washed with blood.

Persian Proverb

Properly understood, justice constitutes the goal of forgiveness. In no passage of the Gospel message does forgiveness, or mercy as its source, mean indulgence toward evil, toward scandals, toward injury or insult.

Pope John Paul II

The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.

Gandhi

Reparation for evil and scandal, compensation for injury and satisfaction for insult are conditions for forgiveness.

Pope John Paul II

No one, no memory, should have the power to hold us down, to deny us peace. Forgiving is the real power.

Jose Hobday

Reason to rule, mercy to forgive: The first is law, the last prerogative.

John Dryden

To be social is to be forgiving.

Robert Frost

Forgiveness, while not disregarding the act, begins not with it but with the person.

Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela

Everybody thinks of changing humanity but nobody thinks of changing himself.

Leo Tolstoy

We do not really know how to forgive until we know what it is to be forgiven.

Thomas Merton

He that cannot forgive others breaks the bridge over which he himself must pass if he would ever reach heaven; for every one has need to be forgiven.

George Herbert

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.

See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Ps 139:23-24

Tears in public will not be the last tears, but to know one's tears are *seen* may grant a sense of acknowledgement that makes grief less lonely and terrifying.

Martha Minow

The public form of forgiveness is reconciliation. And this is of necessity a much longer, more complex process....Reconciliation entails several stages: repentance, contrition, acceptance of responsibility, healing, and finally reunion.

John T. Pawlikowski

O Lord

Remember not only the men and women of good will,

But all those of ill will.

But do not remember all the suffering

They have inflicted upon us;

Remember the fruits we have bought

Thanks to this suffering –

Our comradeship, our loyalty, our humility,

Our courage, our generosity, the greatness of heart

Which has grown out of all this;

And when they come to judgment,

Let all the fruits we have borne

Be their forgiveness.

Found in the Ravensbruck concentration camp, 1945

Whatever is hateful unto thee, do it not unto thy fellow. This is the whole Law. The rest is commentary.

Hillel

Something in us wants to hold onto our pain and our justified bitterness. It is like a dark treasure that we wrongly consider to be precious. We cherish it.

Peter van Breeman

Justice seeks responsibility for the offense, while mercy seeks restoration of the offender.

John Vawter

Though justice be thy plea, consider this;

That in the course of justice none of us
Should see salvation. We do pray for mercy,
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render
The deeds of mercy.

William Shakespeare

You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

Genesis 50:20

Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

Luke 23:34

Right now, make a mental list of those who give you grief. Pray that God will change their hearts (remember, you can't). And pray that you will see the day when enmity is replaced with amity.

Charles R. Swindoll

If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

If we could read the secret history of our enemies, we should find in each man's life sorrow and suffering enough to disarm all hostility.

Charles L. Allen

We must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. He who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love. There is some good in the worst of us and some evil in the best of us. When we discover this, we are less prone to hate our enemies.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Anyone who wants to forgive must come down from his [or her] throne. Otherwise, the attempt at forgiveness degenerates into an indictment and then we should not be surprised when the other person rejects the offer.

Peter van Breeman

I, the captain of a Legion of Rome, serving in the desert of Libya, have learnt and pondered this truth: "There are in life but two things to be sought, Love and Power, and no one has both."

Inscription in the Libyan Desert

The chemist who can extract from his heart's elements compassion, respect, longing, patience, regret, surprise, and forgiveness and compound them into one can create that atom which is called love.

Kahlil Gibran

Wars are poor chisels for carving out peaceful tomorrows

Martin Luther King, Jr.

To laugh often and much; to win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children; to earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends; to appreciate beauty; to find the best in others; to leave the world a bit better whether by a healthy child, a garden patch, or a redeemed social condition; to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived. This is to have succeeded.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

It is an anomaly of modern life that many find giving to be a burden. Such persons have omitted a preliminary giving. If one first gives himself to God, all other giving is easy.

John S. Bonnell

We are all inclined to judge ourselves by our ideals, others by their acts.

Harold Nicolson

If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion.

Dalai Lama

Kindness can build on itself as well as violence can.

Anne Herbert

A willing helper does not wait until he is asked.

Danish Proverb

Love means believing in someone, in something. It supposes a willingness to struggle, to work, to suffer, and to rejoice.

Barb Upham

Men who have upright hearts are guided by character, generous qualities, and progressive ideas.

Fyodor Dostoevsky

If you do not expect the unexpected, you will not find it.

Heraclitus

If you cannot lift the load off another's back, try to lighten it.

Frank Tyger

People who fight fire with fire usually end up with ashes.

Abigail Van Buren

It is the shock of an unpleasant or perplexing experience that, ordinarily, drives men to energetic thinking. If life did not present problems, men would readily lapse into a state of mental stagnation.

Edward Leen

Kindness is a warm breeze in a frigid climate; a radiant heat that melts the icebergs of fear, distrust and unhappiness.

Unknown

Respect for the rights of others, is the law to which we must conform social institutions and national policy, if we would secure the blessings and abundance of peace.

Henry George

Wealth shines in giving rather than in hoarding, for the miser is hated whereas the generous man is applauded.

Boethius

Give and forgive.

Marie Rodet Geoffrin

You are indeed charitable when you give, and while giving, turn your face away so that you may not see the shyness of the receiver.

Kahlil Gibran

Kindness keeps our friendships in repair

Unknown

People do not have to be rich to be generous. If they have the spirit of true generosity, paupers can give like a prince.
Corrine U. Wells

It's good to forgive; then forget!
Robert Browning

It is only by forgetting yourself that you can draw near to God.
Henry David Thoreau

Forget injuries, never forget kindnesses.
Confucius

There is a hard law—that when a deep injury is done to us, we never recover until we forgive.
Alan Paton

People ask me what advice I have for a married couple struggling in their relationship. I always answer: pray and forgive. And to young people from violent homes, I say: pray and forgive. And again, even to the single mother with no family support: pray and forgive.
Mother Teresa

Live together in the forgiveness of sins.... Don't insist on your rights, don't blame each other, don't judge or condemn each other, don't find fault with each other, but accept each other as you are, and forgive each other every day from the bottom of your hearts.
Dietrich Bonhoeffer

It may be infinitely worse to refuse to forgive than to murder, because the latter may be an impulse of a moment of heat, whereas the former is a cold and deliberate choice of the heart.
George MacDonald

It is freeing to become aware that we do not have to be victims of our past and can learn new ways of responding. But there is a step beyond this recognition... It is the step of forgiveness. Forgiveness is love practiced among people who love poorly. It sets us free without wanting anything in return.
Henri J. M. Nouwen

History says, Don't hope
On this side of the grave.
But then, once in a lifetime
The longed-for tidal wave
Of justice can rise up,
And hope and history rhyme.

So hope for a great sea-change
On the far side of revenge.
Believe that a further shore
Is reachable from here.
Believe in miracles
And cures and healing wells.

Seamus Heaney

Other Quotes (Relevant but Not Precisely Forgiveness)

Kind words can never die, but without kind deeds, they can sound mighty sick.
Unknown

Noble deeds are the best cure for depression.

Dodie Smith

The robbed man that smiles, steals something from the thief.

William Shakespeare

Blessed are those who can give without remembering and take without forgetting.

Elizabeth Bibesco

Nothing is a waste of time if you use the experience wisely.

Auguste Rodin

Love is like quicksilver in the hand. Leave the fingers open, and it stays. Clutch it, and it darts away.

Dorothy Parker

Have courage for the great sorrows of life and patience for the small ones; and when you have laboriously accomplished your daily task, go to sleep in peace. God is awake.

Victor Hugo

I like the dreams of the future better than the history of the past.

Thomas Jefferson

It is surmounting difficulties that we discover our fortitude.

Hannah Webster Foster

Muddy water, let stand, becomes clear.

Lao-tzu

Too often we hand folks over to God's mercy, and show none ourselves.

George Eliot

Life is short and we have not too much time for gladdening the hearts of those who are traveling the dark way with us. Oh, be swift to love! Make haste to be kind.

Henri-Frederic Amiel

Courage is as often the outcome of despair as of hope; in the one case we have nothing to lose, in the other everything to gain.

Diane de Poitiers

People need loving the most when they deserve it the least.

Mary Crowley

Joy is the cream skimmed from duty.

Unknown

If the world seems cold to you, kindle fires to warm it.

Lucy Larcom

Emotion is the chief source of all becoming conscious. There can be no transforming of darkness into light and of apathy into movement without emotion.

Eric Jung

True love is the surest foundation for peace.

Corra may White Harris

It is doubtful if any gift could be more precious than the adoration of a heart, which has put out all hatred, self-pity and desire for revenge.

Charlotte Bronte

Let us direct attention to our common interests and to the means by which our differences can be resolved. And if we cannot end our differences, at least we can help make the world safe for diversity.

John F. Kennedy

Joy is a net of love by which you catch souls.

Mother Teresa

Everything has its wonders, even darkness and silence, and I have learned, whatever state I may be in, therein to be content.

Helen Keller

Aim at the sun, and you may not reach it; but your arrow will fly far higher than if aimed at an object on a level with yourself.

Joel Hawes

Happiness is like a cat. Coax it and it will avoid you. But pay it no attention and it will come to you. Pin your hopes on work, on family, on learning, knowing and loving. Pursue these other things and happiness will come.

William Bennett

Good timber does not grow with ease. The stronger the wind, the stronger the trees.

J. Willard Marriot

If the community is to be well-served, it is better to act out what we should feel, than to behave as we actually do feel in our selfish, private feelings.

Elizabeth Goudge

Character is a by-product; it is produced in the great manufacture of daily duty.

Woodrow Wilson

The influence of a beautiful, helpful, character is contagious, and may revolutionize a whole town.

Margaret Collier Graham

Work as though you would live forever; live as though you would die today.

St. Edmund

Gratitude is a humble emotion. It expresses itself, not for the gifts of this day only, but for the day itself; not for what we believe will be ours in the future, but for the bounty of the past.

Faith Baldwin

The mediocre person is ruled by his environment, whereas the successful man uses the pressure of adversity as an assist in obtaining his final objective.

Clifton Burke

The game of life is a game of boomerangs. Our thoughts, deeds, and words, return to us sooner or later with astounding accuracy.

Florence Scovel Shinn

Success is getting what you want, happiness is wanting what you get.

Unknown

They serve God well, who serve His creatures.

Caroline Sheridan Norton

Fame is a vapor, popularity an accident; riches takes wings. Those who cheer today will curse tomorrow. Only one thing endures: Character!

Horace Greeley

Do not look back. It will neither give you back the past nor satisfy your daydreams. Your duty, your reward, your destiny are here and now.

Dag Hammarskjöld

There is no limit to what can be accomplished if it doesn't matter who gets the credit.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Faced with crisis, the man of character is himself. He imposes his own stamp of action, takes responsibility for it, makes it his own. Difficulty attracts the man of character because it is in embracing it that he realizes himself.

Charles de Gaulle

Teach REACH Forgiveness

A Few Guidelines for Leading Groups

Why are some people reluctant to share in group situations?

A good group is one that is safe. If people do not feel safe, they will not benefit from the group, and in fact, the group can have a negative effect. So, if a person does not feel comfortable, for whatever reason, sharing anything (their story or otherwise), then they should feel complete freedom not to share, no coercion, no guilt. So, the leader has to establish a sense of safety and not imply (or say explicitly) that people should share anything they don't want to. This is something the leader should understand and should introduce the group by saying that sharing is completely voluntary.

That said, though, there are many reasons why people don't want to share their story. (1) They might just be shy, or slow to warm up. (2) They might have had bad experiences with groups previously, in which they might have shared and been punished for it (i.e., the leader or another group member uses the information and leaks it or hurts the person directly with a cruel or unthinking comment. So, people might be reluctant to share because they don't trust the leader or the other group members. (And sometimes, basically, that is a pretty smart position to take. Just because a person is a Christian does not mean he or she isn't going to be cruel, non-empathic, socially inappropriate, etc. So, being slow to open up is adaptive. (3) Some people don't like to be the center of attention due to modesty or feeling like it's not humble or whatever. (4) Some people might feel intimidated about sharing because there are very verbal people in the group, and the person feels like he or she will be judged by others or will judge himself or herself against the others. (5) Let's face it. Some people are genuinely paranoid.

Importantly, a small group at church is not a therapy group. Even a therapy group does not jump into interpreting people's unconscious or conscious reasons for sharing or not sharing. Such interpretations emerge over time as people gain trust and they are (hopefully) delivered by what psychologists call appropriate tact, timing, and dosage.

How does one encourage sharing? Go over the ground rules (don't take the info outside the group, be nice, be supportive, etc.) Open the group to sharing with the understanding that it is okay not to share. Let the ones who want, share first. That allows modeling. Tell personal stuff but not so personal stuff that it scares everyone.

Use an icebreaker. The icebreaker can be something like the two-part, what is your favorite dessert and tell something personal about yourself like a struggle that you successfully dealt with and that you feel comfortable sharing.

Let's analyze the icebreaker. First, the dessert issue is fun and it gets people saying words about something that is a clear preference and there is no wrong answer. Second, the personal event should be a struggle that one was successful with. This tells others about a struggle, but people don't have to admit failure. It's easier to share if you know you are telling something you won't be judged for.

If people don't share, don't shame them. They will share when they are ready and what they are ready to share. Don't force it.

Training Lay Leaders to Lead REACH Forgiveness Groups (Same Method Used with Professionals)

General

At the core of helping others to forgive is the fundamental method of counseling. A counselee and a helper start at different places. Imagine two people on opposite sides of the road. The helper on the left side has to move to the other person's side (the right side). We can't expect that a person needing help will come to where we are. We move to engage with the person through empathy. We join any person needing help by listening to the person. As we listen, we engage our emotions through empathizing (and sometime even just sympathizing). As we walk with the person needing help—in our example, on the right side of the road—we begin to share gently to move the person towards the left side of the road. At some point, after walking together for a while, the people can continue on the road at different paces—both headed more nearly down the left side of the road.

Specific to REACH Forgiveness Groups

How skilled do group leaders have to behave in order to be effective. First, the groups are mostly centered around group members' discussing their personal experiences with other group members, so the leader does not need to have a professional skill and experience at group leading. But more experience helps their comfort level. In comparisons, we have found that post-master's level counseling psychology trainees do only slightly better (in group members' outcomes) than do pre-bachelor's level leaders (doing co-leading; Lin et al., 2014). So, you can train with confidence that most leaders, if they are reasonably interpersonally adept, will do fine as leaders.

Training for the REACH Forgiveness leaders is easy. The way I've been doing it for years is to (1) have them watch the tapes with leader manuals present (they download from EvWorthington-forgiveness.com). (2) I have them usually read a chapter that covers the steps of REACH Forgiveness and defines forgiveness and gives an

understanding of the theory. (3) Then, I get them to take a "Quiz" on their own without consulting other people. (4) We sit down for an hour or so with the group of them and we score the quizzes as a group, and they ask questions. I attached the "Quiz" (and key for scoring. (I read the answers and they score each other's quizzes (each one scoring the person on his or her left). (5) I take them for documentation that they were trained and to provide incentive to get the right answers and that gives a tangible assessment of how much they understand the theory. Feel free to use the quiz. (6) To emphasize learning of the theory, I give a handout at the end of the training, "Essential Knowledge of Forgiveness." (7) I also give a blank copy of the Quiz for them.

Your cost in time is about 1 hour to 1.5 hours of group time. Their cost is as much time working through the manual as they want to put (let's say a couple of hours), an hour or two to read the chapter (let's say two), thirty minutes to do the quiz, an hour and a half for group, thirty minutes to review the essentials. Maybe 7 hours total prep.

We let lay leaders co-lead with an experienced leader (or another rookie). Experienced leaders can do these alone.

Discussion Questions for Small Discussion Groups on Forgiveness

These questions might be used as the focus of discussion in discussion groups that might be convened after people have gone through a psychoeducational forgiveness group, worked through a workbook to REACH Forgiveness (see www.EvWorthington-forgiveness.com), read Worthington's (2003) *Forgiving and Reconciling* (IVP) or some other forgiveness book. The discussion questions are designed to provide a lot of ideas that might provoke different points of view and also supply ways that you might learn from others. Each of the questions might actually be enough to discuss in one group meeting, or, if the group is small, perhaps two could be dealt with in a single session.

1. Discuss the degree to which Worthington persuaded you of each of the following.
 - a. Forgiveness is different from reconciliation.
 - b. Decisional and emotional forgiveness are different from each other.
 - c. Whereas hurts happen interpersonally, forgiveness is internal. This is true even though forgiveness (or not) can affect relationships and might promote reconciliation.
2. Worthington claims that one can forgive using the REACH Forgiveness model. He says that even in secular groups, he believes that God is working to help people forgive (despite not mentioning God in the groups). He also claims that when Christians use the secular REACH Forgiveness program, they usually still grow spiritually because they use their Christian interventions like prayer, Scripture, and Christian tradition despite their not being explicitly mentioned. However, he also claims that when Christians use a Christian-tailored intervention (like the Christian REACH Forgiveness groups or workbook or psychoeducation) they will usually grow more spiritually even though they do not forgive any more than with a secular program. Do you believe these statements? Discuss each.
3. How has thinking about, studying, and working through forgiveness affected your experiences at work, school, church, and other aspects of your daily life? If you had been as attuned to forgiveness when you were an adolescent or young adult as you are now, how might your life have been different? Are there any crucial turning points in your life that you can identify where a more forgiving attitude would have taken a relationship in a strongly different direction?
4. Some people are agreeable and tend to not get offended easily and when offended, they forgive easily. On the other end, some people are highly emotionally reactive. Even if they react positively often, they still tend to get hurt or offended because they do react strongly with emotion to whatever happens. In addition, they have difficulty forgiving because they ruminate, thinking negatively about the event often, and that tends to keep the offense often on their mind and in their emotions. Are you more on one of these two ends of the spectrum or are you more in the middle? What circumstances in your past and present have led you to that conclusion? Discuss the degree that you think it is possible to change such a disposition. Do you want to change?
5. Can you think of times when you have experienced unforgiveness? How did it feel? Were there any consequences in terms of your relationship with the person you had trouble forgiving? What about others in your life? Did they notice that you were feeling unforgiving? Did your behavior affect your relationship with them, even though they might not have been involved in the incident? Did your experience of unforgiveness affect your physical health? Did it make you feel stressed? Did it affect your mental health or

moods—depression, anxiety, anger, or tendency to obsess about the incident? Did the unforgiving experience affect your spiritual life?

6. Consider your current job or school situation—the way you spend big hunks of your time in relatively predictable patterns expending your productive effort. Are there some people who continually or often provoke you, hurt you (meaning to or not), or offend you? What are the things you do to try to avoid unforgiveness building up as you experience injustices? How are those coping attempts working? Are you able to forgive the person or people reasonably quickly? Are the hurts or offenses so frequent that you feel like you can never get over one before you have one, two, or more other offenses to deal with? Did you know that the largest number of people change jobs not because of pay, duties they don't like, or lack of perks, but rather because a boss or coworker has hurt or offended them either a few big times or many little times and they are seeking to get out of the situation? If you might be thinking about a job change, remember that it is a drastic change that, in addition to having to search, interview, and attempt to find a job that matches you, job changes often affect your family, network of friends, city of residence or community, disrupts your activities, and in general creates a huge period of adjustment. So, how much effort is it worthwhile to put into forgiving? Are some things just not worth the effort, and it is better to control the situation by leaving?
7. If you are a work supervisor, teacher, or someone with authority over a number of people, how can you help those you work with to be more forgiving? If you simply change your behavior and become more forgiving, do you think the others would notice? What can you do besides simply model more forgiving behavior?
8. What was the most difficult thing you ever successfully forgave? How did you do that? Do you think that the REACH Forgiveness method might make it easier or more difficult to forgive? Can you use it in the same way you might take aspirin—that is, use it when some pain in your life develops, particularly if other methods of dealing with the pain are not working?
9. If you could make changes in your workplace (or school environment) to promote more forgiveness, what might you do? Try to think of at least two practical changes that might be made. If you are in a group, might some of the other group members' suggestions work in your situation?
10. Describe a time when you recently experienced a transgression that you successfully dealt with. Did you use an alternative to forgiveness—like seeking justice or seeing justice done, like turning it over to God, like forbearing (i.e., just not responding for the good of the group), or like accepting and moving on with life? How did that work? If you had it to do over, would you use other methods to supplement what you did recently?
11. Becoming more forgiving is one form of developing your Christian character. Sometimes that happens because we suffer (as we see in James 1 and Romans 5). Sometimes we develop our character through effort (as we are told in Ephesians, to work out our own salvation). Sometimes God just does a work by grace in us. Learning and applying the REACH Forgiveness method involves your effort, but it also invites God to intervene. So, it is a way to work out our own salvation even though God is at work in us to will and to work in his good time. What are the barriers you see to working on becoming a more forgiving person? Are they theological? Practical, such as not having enough time? Being held back by past experiences trying unsuccessfully to forgive? A “thorn in your flesh” in the form of someone who continually hurts or offends you? What can you do to get around, over, or through those barriers? Can other people help you or give you ideas? What are you learning from other members in the group?
12. Do you think it would help to work with someone who is also trying to become a more forgiving person? Some people work best alone. Others work best in partnership. Are there people you might form an accountability partnership with? What would be a first step in interesting someone to form a partnership with?
13. If you assess your environment, do you identify changes you might be able to make to reduce the number of hurts or offenses you have to cope with? Are there ways you can change your home environment to give yourself time to work on materials that will help you forgive more easily, read about it, or think about it?
14. When you are in the midst of an episode in which you have been hurt or offended, how can you control your responses so that you do not make things worse by saying or doing provocative things yourself? What kind of emotional control methods do you use? What can you learn from others in your group that you can use? What about methods to control rumination? How do you distract yourself? Did others suggest ways of dealing with rumination that you have found helpful?

15. Workplaces do not typically encourage forgiveness, yet many offenses and hurts occur in the workplace. Think about your workplace. Is there a way you can limit interactions with people who provoke you? Can you plan ways to prepare for interactions with people whom you know are toxic? Are there ways you can depressurize after meetings that you know are likely to be conflictual? Can you find ways to take brief walks alone or with a supportive colleague to nurture forgiveness? Sometimes just blowing off steam, talking about how mad you are over hurtful or offensive actions by someone in your workplace can help, but sometimes, probably more often, it is a way that feeds into your anger, resentment, and hurt. In fact, it is not helpful for forgiving. Just the opposite. So, can you talk with someone in a way that helps you work toward forgiving instead of works toward rehearsing hurts and building resentment?
16. Are you, in your family, paid or volunteer work, or church on a pathway to promote forgiveness? If not, how might you change things? Are there book clubs that would let you study forgiveness in a group? Are there discussion groups? Are there ways your family members can help each other build Christian character, especially forgiveness?
17. Are there ways that education could be changed to promote more forgiveness? Sometimes middle schools and high schools can be breeding grounds for violence. How do you think schools could be changed to promote more forgiveness and less violence? Is there room in the curriculum to work in instruction about forgiveness, or are academic subjects that deal with standards of learning more of a priority that would edge out any psychological issues? What about universities, four-year colleges, community and junior colleges? Can you think of ways to work in ways to build forgiveness? What about Christian colleges? How important is Christian character formation relative to academic achievement? Are the two compatible?
18. If you are a parent, does your home promote forgiveness? The science has shown that children under about 11 years old really cannot forgive in deliberate ways like using the REACH Forgiveness method. However, parents can do what psychologists call “scaffolding” to promote forgiving behavior and other actions that will help other forgive, like accepting responsibility for wrongdoing, confessing, apologizing, and seeking to make restitution (make amends) for wrong done to others. What can you do to help young children by “scaffolding?” On the other hand, children in middle school and high school can learn methods of explicit forgiveness like the REACH Forgiveness method. What can be done in your home, if you have children of that age, to promote learning of REACH Forgiveness? Are there ways to work in such learning to busy high school social calendars? Are there ways that parents and the adolescent children can work together so that this doesn’t seem like a parent-imposed task?
19. Forgiveness is important, but so are other aspects of Christian character development. For example, can you develop (and help others in your home, work, or church develop) humility, love, patience, self-control, compassion, and a heart for justice? There are some free, downloadable, do-it-yourself workbooks (supported by published randomized controlled trial research) on Worthington’s website (www.EvWorthington-forgiveness.com) for building forgiveness, humility, and self-forgiveness. Are there ways to use those, completed individually a little bit each week, as the basis for a group?
20. What are the things that truly motivate you? These might include things like work achievement, building Christian character, having fun, being creative, getting exercise, and many other things. Discuss the activities that motivate you the most. Talk about how often you have been able to do the activities during the last week. There are 168 hours in the week. Do you want to do more of the things that you really enjoy? You might discuss whether you think that your use of time really should reflect your priorities. Are there just some very important priorities that do not require daily use? Or should activities reflect priorities?

Guide to Running Psychoeducational Groups to REACH Forgiveness

These can be found on www.EvWorthington-forgiveness.com. Both Christian and non-Christian leader and participant manuals are available at no cost.

Guide to Do-It-Yourself Workbooks to REACH Forgiveness

These can be found on www.EvWorthington-forgiveness.com. Chelsea Greer developed a 7-hour do-it-yourself workbook to help Christians forgive other Christians who have hurt them. This workbook was very effective at helping Christians forgive. There is also a secular do-it-yourself workbook available, which was developed by Caroline Lavelock and used by Quandrea Harper to help people in a secular university forgive.

Caroline has also used the workbook to promote forgiveness. The secular workbook is also available at www.EvWorthington-forgiveness.com.

Movie Discussion Groups

Many movies have forgiveness as a major theme, and one of the most frequent movie themes is revenge. A leader can convene a group to discuss movies that employ forgiveness as a theme. For example, *You've Got Mail*, *Les Misérables*, *Unbroken*, *Dead Man Walking*, *Unforgiven*, *Revenant*, *The Mission* (self-forgiveness), *Woodlawn*, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, *Forest Gump*, *To End All Wars*, *Hacksaw Ridge*, *Chariots of Fire*, *Great Expectations*, *The Messenger*, *Ben Hur*, *Gladiator*, *The Interpreter*, *The Royal Tenenbaums*, *As Good as It Gets*, *Pay It Forward*, *Fireproof*, and *Facing the Giants*.

For more ideas, see <http://www.wingclips.com/themes/forgiveness>.

Book Discussion Groups

A Few of the Many Books that Have Forgiveness as One Major Theme

Les Misérables, *Unbroken*, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, *Great Expectations*, *The Shack*, *The Kite Runner*, *Amish Grace*, *The Sunflower*, *The Hiding Place*, *Left to Tell: Discovering God Amidst the Rwandan Holocaust*, *Horton Hatches the Egg* (Dr. Seuss).

Developing a Program to Promote Forgiveness in Your Congregation

Your program to promote forgiveness within the people under your pastoral care should fit you, your congregation, your resources, your time, and your priorities. It can be big or small, and the scientific research supports that it will have an effect, but the effects will be more profound and more widespread the more time and energy you put in and the more people are exposed to seriously considering forgiving. For example, we know that when people are exposed to an intervention to promote forgiveness, they will experience (on the average) 0.1 SD of change *per hour of intervention*. That change will also bring an equal increase in hope, and half as much change as that in their feelings of depression and anxiety.

Let's put that in perspective. Suppose people attend a 15-week one-hour per week Sunday School class or midweek group on forgiveness using the REACH Forgiveness method. The average change will be $15 \times 0.1 \text{ SDs} = 1.5 \text{ SDs}$ in their forgiveness scores. But also, if they were depressed or anxious, they will experience 0.75 SDs of change in each of those affective moods. For perspective, 26 weeks of intensive one hour per week of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Depression will yield a change of 1.2 SDs in their depression score (much less in anxiety and virtually none in forgiveness).

How about this? We went to Luther College and for two weeks sought to simply raise awareness about forgiveness on the Luther College campus. We used announcement, billboards, teepees in the dining hall, ran newspaper articles, ran groups in the dorms, and tried to get people talking about and debating about forgiveness. Over that two weeks, the average student reported 2.5 hours of exposure to forgiveness awareness-raising stimuli. They changed an average of .25 SDs across the whole campus in their forgiveness scores.

So, if you undertake a program to promote forgiveness in your congregation, you can expect that people will be exposed to awareness raising through (at a minimum) your mentioning it in services, advertisements on your webpage, in the bulletin, and through talk within the congregation. Then, you will have a direct effect through your sermons (2 30-minute sermons yield 0.1 SDs), Sunday School classes (0.1 SDs per hour), midweek groups, book clubs or book discussion groups, etc.

How Extensively Should You Aim?

More is better as far as promoting forgiveness. Remember, it's all about how much time people spend trying specifically to forgive something. But, it takes effort and resources to recruit and train group leaders, to arm Sunday School teachers, to monitor progress. Your congregation will have more or less resources, and only you (and perhaps others in your leadership team) can estimate how much effort and time you want to invest.

There are also opportunity costs. Committing to a season to promote forgiveness means you did not commit to some other program or emphasis. You have to evaluate that as well.

Organize Your Program

Perhaps you want to start small—give a sermon and gauge the response of the congregation. Or perhaps you want to invite your management team to jump in and employ many of the resources in this manual and others they are familiar with. Planning can be a time of excitement. It's like forming a romantic attraction. You can see lots of upside benefits, but the downside just won't happen to us. Cognitive psychology is very clear about many things,

and one of those is this: You will be too optimistic about the outcomes and the small amount of effort you must invest.

So Take a Lesson from Decision Sciences and Cognitive Psychology

Use ideas from the book by Chip Heath and Dan Heath, *Decisive: How to Make Better Choices in Life and Work* (2013, Crown Publishers). Ask yourself the following questions and if you have a leadership team, answer them thoroughly.

1. Do a premortem. Ask yourselves, It's now six months (or six weeks, depending on the extensiveness of the program you are planning) later. The plan has been a disappointment. It failed even to get off the ground. Why? (Generate as many reasons as you can. First generate the entire list. If you have a team, go around and ask each person to share one reason. Go around again until all reasons are recorded on a computer screen, white board, or poster.)
2. Now, for each reason, what could be done at the present, *before* you start the programs, to make sure that this particular reason is short-circuited?
3. Do a FMEA (Failure Mode and Effect Analysis) for each reason. (The FMEA is an army method for analyzing risk.) For each potential reason for failure, ask two questions, and for each question, assign a number from 1 to 10. (a) How likely is this to occur? (b) How severe would the consequences be? Then, multiply the numbers and the largest product is the reason to focus on first and try the hardest to short circuit.
4. Do a preparade. Ask yourselves, It's now six months (or six weeks) later. The plan has succeeded more than our wildest expectations. (The church is planning a parade in our honor.) How do we ensure that we are ready for such change? List what unexpected blessings might occur and what issues could arise if that did occur.

20 Specific Suggestions to Change Your Congregation into an Even More Forgiving Congregation

1. Survey your congregation. (Type out these questions and make the survey anonymous.) Ask only four questions, giving people a few minutes to reflect and pray if they wish, and take up the answers immediately: (a) As you reflect back over this past 7 days, did you behave toward someone in a way for which you think you'd like to ask God's forgiveness? (b) Did you ask forgiveness for that act prior to now? (c) Did someone hurt or offend you in any way large, medium, or small that you think needs your forgiveness of that person? (d) Did you forgive the person prior to now?
2. Get a quick win. It is important in any change effort to get an immediate positive effect. One way to do that is to encourage as the first step for people to complete either a do-it-yourself workbook or participate in a six-hour psychoeducational group. Both of these have been frequently tested scientifically and will produce forgiveness in most people.
3. Five-Second Forgiveness Fix. In every service, say one of three things: "Christian are forgiving people." "We can all reach forgiveness." Or "Forgiveness is good for our relationships and for us." A good time to do this is, just before confession of sins, just before communion or the Eucharist, or just before praying for people's needs.
4. People take their cues from others. If your congregation reports high numbers in seeking or granting forgiveness, you can publicize the numbers and describe your congregation as a "forgiving congregation." This builds a positive identity. If the numbers are not high, then this can become a baseline and you can set a goal and repeat the survey about a month later. Setting a high but achievable goal is a destination poster of where the church wants to go.
5. Our habits are often glued to our environments. When people make major changes in their habits, they often need to change their environments. Could you make a minor modification in your worship service? We often pray for others who are needy, so that is in most congregations' order of worship. But what if you added just a one minute section to reflect on the week and whether people would like to pray for forgiveness (from God) for ways they have not acted well toward another person or pray a prayer forgiving someone who hurt or offended them during the week. (These are more in line of praying for our (temporary) "enemies" than the usual prayers of compassion and aid for needy loved ones.)
6. If you want people to be more forgiving, you need to provide clear direction. Give specific things to do like complete the REACH Forgiveness workbook, pray for those who persecute or harass you.
7. Appeal to people's feelings by stark, dramatic demonstrations. For example, get someone to give a story (in a small group, Christian education class, or even the worship service) of how they forgave something big. Find stories of forgiveness heroes to tell. You cannot motivate change by logic alone. Trying to fight inertia

and indifference with logic alone is like throwing a drowning person a computer with Power Point presentation on water safety. Find the feeling.

8. To motivate people, we may have heard that we need to “create a burning platform.” By that, people mean that you need to scare people into jumping by providing a scary, negative case for what will happen if change does not occur. That actually is a very limited way to motivate people to change. It only works if the choices are limited (like jumping into an ocean or burning to death on a burning oil rig). For a character transformation program, though, the choices are not simple but many. Also, creative solutions are needed, not just “jump now” life-or-death choices. Negative emotions like anxiety and fear narrow people’s focus. You want them to expand their focus. Give positive motives including better physical, mental, relational, and spiritual health and being able to bless an offender by forgiving.
9. People often say, “Change is hard,” or “People resist changes” or “People are too lazy to change.” But big changes in life are not always hard and unpleasant. In life we embrace changes frequently and enthusiastically. We change by getting married, having a child, going to school, changing careers, or even using a new technology. If we are excited about the changes, they aren’t hard. Most of them do change out environment quite a lot. Often the way we make a big change is to change our environment. All of these also make part of our identity salient. For example, a person goes from a single person to married person, from someone who is uneducated to a college student, from an engineer to a counselor, from a technologically challenged person to a Mac user. People often think of themselves as “not very forgiving.” Encourage them to see themselves as a Christian and Christians are very forgiving people. The science shows in fact that Christians forgive more and faster than people of other religions, people who are spiritual but not religious, and people who do not embrace any religion or spirituality. You can use that scientific finding to help motivate people. Tell people, “As a Christian, you are a forgiver. But you can be an even better forgiver.”
10. There are two kinds of mindsets people tend to have. Some have fixed mindsets—this is how I am and I can’t be different. Others have growth mindsets—life is a series of learning and new skill-building opportunities.
11. Willpower is limited. Get people to try to do things that use willpower once and then make it easy to follow-through. For example, if a person has a quiet time each morning, make up a list of people that we still have not forgiven completely. Have that list at the location where we have the quiet time so that it is seen first each morning. Pray when we see the list. This is called a trigger cue. You can create other trigger cues. When you pour your first cup of coffee in the morning, reflect on forgiveness. When you finish dinner, before you turn on the television, reflect on forgiveness.
12. Find the bright spots. We are hard-wired to take as our first response to look for the negative. That makes a lot of sense. If we don’t take care of the negative, we could be permanently injured or killed. So our brain is permanently set to find the problems, think about the problems, and hopefully solve the problems. But growth is not about merely solving problems. It is about finding ways you are succeeding and magnifying those bright spots. Reflect on your life. Are there times when you do forgive? Perhaps that occurs right before communion. Perhaps that might be in preparing to see a person who hurt you in the past. Find the times that work. See if you can build on those. For example, if communion is a time of self-examination, what if morning quiet time is started as a time of self-examination?
13. Don’t get caught in analysis-paralysis. We tend to think that a big problem requires a big solution, but often a big problem is solved by many small steps rather than trying to achieve all-at-once forgiveness. If you have a “junk room,” Marla Cilley (the Fly Lady) recommends a series of five-minute room rescues in which you set yourself a five-minute goal and get the big stuff cleaned up. (Good news, if we start out to do five minutes, we usually do more. More good news, once we’ve gotten started and gotten an early win, we are more likely to go back for tomorrow’s five-minute room rescue.) After a small victory, say to yourself, “You are on your way. You are already one-tenth of the way there.”
14. Ask yourself “the miracle question” which is a question solution-focused therapists ask clients. Here’s the miracle question: If I went to bed tonight and a miracle occurred and I woke up tomorrow and things were perfect (i.e., if I had totally forgiven the person), then how would I act differently than I did this morning? Begin to act that way. Follow up by using the exception question: Ask yourself, when was the last time you saw a little bit of the miracle?
15. Use another psychotherapy method, scaling: Ask, on a scale from zero = absolutely no forgiveness to ten = complete forgiveness, where am I right now? After you give yourself a number, ask yourself, What could I do practically this week to bring that number 1 point higher?

16. Plan the crucial moves. We don't have to plan all moves to our final transformation to being a more forgiving person. It is enough to plan only three. But write out the answer to these. (1) How will I get myself started becoming a more forgiving person? (2) If I detect that I've lost excitement, how will I get myself back on track? And (3) how will I end well?
17. Choose only things in your control as the target for your change.
18. As people reflect on their lives, it is helpful for them to have a BHAG (Big, Hairy, Audacious Goal), but also to have attainable steps to get to the BHAG.
19. Aim for success, plan for intermediate failures. In any quest, there are rock-bottom times when you think of quitting. Plan ahead how you will keep yourself motivated during those down times. Think back to learning a sport, a new skill, a new job. Reflect on this: "Everything is hard before it's easy." "Most things that succeed looked, in the middle, as if they were going to fail." When we learned to walk, we fell a lot. That wasn't important. It was important that we learned to walk, not how many times we fell. Tom Watson, CEO of IBM, called in an executive who had just lost IBM \$10M. Watson asked, "Do you know why I called you here?" "To fire me, I suppose," said the exec. Watson replied, "Fire you? Certainly not! I just spent \$10M to educate you." Use an analogy. Abilities and virtues are like muscles. They are built with exercise. Remember, building virtue requires facing trials, tests, and temptations.
20. It is easy to get overwhelmed with many, many options. Becoming a more forgiving person is not about putting all of these into play at one time. That is really too much choice. That will tend to paralyze us. Pick one for this week. Start it in motion. Then next week (hopefully at a regular time you have set up) review the week and pick ONE other and put it into play. Keep your efforts limited and focused.

Let's Take an Example

Your Plan. You plan three different four-part sermon series, which take a quarter. You also intend to run REACH Forgiveness groups in two mid-week groups, have one of the three adult Sunday School classes have a quarter curriculum on forgiveness involving teaching using the DVD *The Power of Forgiveness* (Journey Films; one week) and two weeks of teaching, followed by an six-week psychoeducational component using REACH Forgiveness and a recommended do-it-yourself workbook to accompany the group, a guest speaker on forgiveness, and two weeks of discussion. One nighttime group will discuss forgiveness films and books for the quarter.

Your premortem, FMEA, and Short-circuit plan. Your leadership committee identified the following as potential reasons for failure and disappointment.

1. People tire of the sermons, so they are truncated to one five-part sermon series. Likely=3; Severity=3. FMEA Score=9. Take an internet poll regarding the sermons at week 4.
2. Cannot recruit leaders for mid-week groups who wish to spend time being trained in REACH Forgiveness. Likely=4; Severity=5. FMEA Score=20. Begin to recruit leaders ahead of time. Interest leaders by describing the benefits of forgiving on health, mental health, relationships, and spirituality and telling them that by undergoing the training, they are getting an extra boost. Recruit leaders in pairs. Have a series-ending party for the leaders.
3. Rector tires of sermon topic. Likely=2; Severity 7. FMEA Score=14. Break the sermons up differently. Organize three-sermon series instead of four. Ask associate rector to preach on a non-forgiveness topic at the fourth, eighth, and twelfth weeks.

Appendix A

My Personal Theological, Scientific, and Clinical Pedigrees

In this resource booklet, I will describe an understanding of forgiveness that I have developed over (a) my 50 years as a Christian who has studied various theologies in my life journey, (b) my 40 years as a clinician and interventionist who has helped many people forgive—as individuals, couples, parents, psychoeducational groups, church classes, public talks, media interviews, and even movies, and my over 25 years studying it scientifically (my first writing on forgiveness was in my book, *Marriage Counseling: A Christian Approach to Counseling Couples* (Worthington, 1989, IVP). I think it is important for you to understand where I am coming from so you can evaluate the teaching I'll be sharing regarding forgiveness.

First, I am not a theologian. I have no degree in theology. I am at best a talented amateur, who has had an interest in theology for almost 50 years now (and who reads and studies regularly). For years, I read the theology that supported my particular beliefs. But in almost 50 years as a Christian, I have been exposed to scholars and writing in most theological traditions, and over the last 15 years I have sought to read even more widely than I did before.

Second, I am a psychologist, but psychology is disciplinary. Clinical psychologists talk to other clinical psychologists and not often to counseling psychologists, rehabilitation psychologists, and even less to basic psychologists like developmental psychologists, health psychologists, social psychologists, personality psychologists, cognitive psychologists, neuropsychologists, and psychologists of religion and spirituality. And perish the thought that we would talk to psychiatrists, social workers, or prevention scientists.

At least that is the way it was during much of my twentieth century practice. But over the last twenty years or more, psychology has changed. It has become hugely interdisciplinary. Not only do we work side-by-side in big multidisciplinary research and practice teams, but we seek out the interdisciplinary contact because we have seen how it strengthens the understanding and treatment we can provide.

So in theology and psychology my experiences have converged. Here are some of my experiences in both theology and psychology.

Personal exposure to different denominational experiences. I have spent time in a Southern Baptist church early in my life, and attended Roman Catholic masses for a couple of years. I became a Christian in a Lutheran Church of America congregation that had a Charismatic flavor in the early days of the Charismatic renewal in California. I then attended an Evangelical Free Church when I was in psychology graduate school, and when moving to Richmond, I was in the Presbyterian Church US, later became PCUSA, and now we have moved to the Presbyterian Church ECO. For a period of four months in Cambridge, England, I attended an Anglican church. I have been privileged to be exposed to many theologies, which has given me great empathy for the difficulties of doing theology. I have spoken in churches, seminaries, and Christian organizations worldwide with almost every theological commitment, from Anglican to Pentecostal to Reformed Protestant, to Mainline, to Baptist, to Roman Catholic, to Orthodox.

These are just a quick overview of just the personal Christian worship experiences I have had. Throughout I have sought to read about, think about, and discuss the theology with each denomination. In addition, I have participated in many meetings (readings, conversations, lectures) involving theologians of every Christian denomination, but also involving Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, Jews, and other faith perspectives.

Psychological perspectives. I have been a psychologist since 1978, when I received my PhD from the University of Missouri-Columbia in Counseling Psychology and joined the Counseling faculty at Virginia Commonwealth University. I have had numerous affiliations while there, and I am affiliated with the Social Psychology, Health Psychology, and Developmental Psychology programs. I am also a licensed Clinical Psychologist in the Commonwealth of Virginia. So, I've come at the field of forgiveness from many standpoints since I started writing about it in the mid-1980s.

Development of REACH Forgiveness. I have developed one of the two (equally) most-used treatments. That treatment is aimed at helping people forgive. It is called REACH Forgiveness, and it has been tested in numerous experiments worldwide. I want to share with you in this packet how you might use REACH Forgiveness and the understanding of forgiveness it is based on, which is informed by my Christian and psychological studies.

The first intervention was clinically motivated and focused on helping couples reconcile with each other by talking about (and experiencing) forgiveness. Graduate student Don Danser, later a private practitioner Clinical Psychologist, created an intervention. I shared it with Fred DiBlasio, who was a colleague on VCU's faculty, though he was in Social Work, not Psychology. Fred was supervising an agency in Richmond, which was run out of Stony Point Reformed Presbyterian Church. He used the intervention. In those days, I was supervising his agency (as well as maintaining a private practice and supervising another Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation agency), and sometimes

we had couples come in for marathon, 3-hour intervention sessions. Fred kept using that intervention, and sometimes begins couple counseling with a three-hour forgiveness session. I moved more toward using forgiveness interventions shortened to the REACH Forgiveness model and working it into one or two hours of therapy (couple, family, or individual), but supplementing it with a psychoeducational group of about 6 to 8 hours.

The first study on the REACH Forgiveness model really did not resemble the method today. Mike McCullough and myself (1995) published a one-hour group intervention to promote a decision to forgive. Then, Mike, myself, and Chris Rachal (1997) published an empathy-based model, which might be thought of as involving the RE and a little bit of A. I added humility within the A step when Steve Sandage completed his dissertation in 1999 (published as Sandage & Worthington, 2010), and Jen Ripley and I used an REA treatment with couples in 2002. By 2004, the REACH Forgiveness model was complete and at a study done at John Brown University, we tested the entire model. We have used it in over 10 randomized clinical trials since then, and we have adapted it to do-it-yourself workbooks and internet as well as used it in marriage enrichment with couples, couple therapy, individual psychotherapy, and family therapy (for cases see Worthington & Sandage, 2015).

As you see, my approach has crossed a lot of theological boundaries and has also crossed many psychological and clinical boundaries. At this point, I believe it has been tested in the laboratories of the research lab, the clinic, the church, and public square, and the approach has even been used internationally in peace efforts.

Appendix B

The Dance between Psychology and Theology

Uneasy Dance Partners

Science and Christianity have had an off-again, on-again relationship. In fact, even today there are people who treat science as anathema to Christianity. But from the rise of modern science, starting with Francis Bacon, many have seen science as part of God's general revelation, which complements God's special revelations in Jesus and Scripture. "All truth is God's truth," the saying goes. Metaphors have been employed like plundering the Egyptians. Such metaphors have suggested that sometimes secular treasures can be appropriated for use by God's people.

In *Coming to Peace with Psychology: What Christians Can Learn from Psychological Science*, I have argued that science and theology are both human enterprises that relate to each other like dance partners (Worthington, 2010). Sometimes one leads and at other times the other leads. Both are open to correction. They play off of each other, each maintaining a frame. As long as they maintain their frames, as one moves forward, the other can step back in concert. Unlike the understanding that people often have, one partner does not always lead and the other always follow. Leading is more like suggesting than making demands. Following is about taking (or not) the leader's suggestions. Things work well as long as both partners are responsive to each other, watching each other, and reacting to nuances.

Married Partners

Theology and psychology also relate like married partners, locked in a relationship that (due to the modern condition of life in which religion and science co-exist) they have to get along and make the best of their relationship. They must have conversations. Conversations are organic things that develop, grow, and move in directions that are not always predictable, indeed not even comfortable.

Disagreements Are Inevitable

Disagreements will happen. Science is always about what is new. It is about disconfirming hypotheses and offering tentative support for other hypotheses. It is about accumulating evidence until theories can be articulated. Theories are not guesses but, in science, theories are well supported statements that integrate massive amounts of data and hypotheses about data. Science has, within it, many disagreements because one hypothesis might be supported at the cost of not supporting another. Later, two theories might come into conflict and one must give way to the other or a third formulated that does away with both earlier ones. We might be tempted to think of theology as more stable than science, but that might be illusory. Theologians often disagree about the correct theology. That has led over the years to the formation of the myriad denominations. But theological points continually rise and fall as a fit with culture (including science). New theological answers are formulated for age-old theological questions—like the problem of evil. New interests emerge, and new theological reflections must address those. Medical and scientific advancements—think the nuclear bomb, genetic advances, cloning, ability to keep people alive for longer periods (sometimes long after the person does not want to live)—force new theological reflections.

If science and theology keep changing, and if scientists cannot agree among themselves, and if theologians also cannot agree, then it is not surprising that sometimes theologies and psychologies disagree. So, the fact that they might at times contradict each other is merely a stimulus to more conversation so that we can find a way of speaking into the modern cultures we live in.

In this resource booklet, I will describe an understanding of forgiveness that I have developed over my 50 years as a Christian who has studied various theologies in my life journey, and who has studied this scientifically and worked with people clinically. You might think it is important for you to understand where I am coming from so you can evaluate the teaching I'll be sharing regarding forgiveness. If so, I invite you to read Appendix A, which shares my personal journey.