

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

THE TRANSFORMATIONAL POWER OF FORGIVENESS WITHIN THE CHURCH

MASTER OF ARTS IN GLOBAL STUDIES

A Thesis Project Submitted to  
Liberty School of Divinity  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ART IN GLOBAL STUDIES

BY

MARY D. MCKENZIE

AUGUST 8, 2018

Copyright 2018 Mary D. McKenzie  
All Rights Reserved

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

THESIS PROJECT APPROVAL SHEET

---

GRADE

---

MENTOR

---

READER

## ABSTRACT

### THE TRANSFORMATIONAL POWER OF FORGIVENESS WITHIN THE CHURCH

Mary D. McKenzie

Liberty University School of Divinity

MENTOR: Dr. Jones Kaleli

READER Dr. Joy Mwendwa

This thesis seeks to explore and describe the concepts and effects of forgiveness within the church. It shows that the roots of violence, suffering, and pain are in the unhealed wounds of the past. It examines biblical, theological, and psychological materials on forgiveness, unforgiveness, and health benefits. Learning about forgiveness and how to use the skills can conceivably enhance mental and physical health through an optimistic and hopeful outlook on life. It highlights the differences of the definition and understanding of forgiveness and forgiveness from an intercultural perspective. Results from participants' from five ethnic groups (African, African American, Asian, Caribbean, and Caucasian) on their experiences on forgiveness are also included. The study underscores how the transformational power of forgiveness will empower Christians to have a greater impact on the world to preach the Gospel and fulfill the Great Commission.

## DEDICATION/ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is dedicated to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, my dearest and closest friend. I honor and adore you with my mind, heart, soul, and body so that you can use me to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom all over the world as a witness to many nations. My prayer is that my life will glorify and magnify Jesus in the earth and more importantly, I will finish strong.

To my parents, the late Matherson and Winnifred Joseph. You have been my rock. I thank God for your unconditional love, prayers, and divine wisdom. I love and miss you. You were not only my spiritual shepherds but my greatest mentors and coaches.

To Linsdale, my beloved husband, my confidant, initiator, and greatest supporter. I thank God for your continual support, unconditional love, prayers, and encouragements. I could not have accomplished this without your help. I pray that our family, the “purpose family” will continue to prosper in God’s sight as we seek to bring souls to Jesus Christ who is our Lord and Savior. Love You!

To my two handsome sons, Denzel and Jason. You are my rock! You are my heart-beat. Thanks for your love, prayers, hugs, kisses, and encouragements which cause me to continue to pursue my dreams and to never give up. My greater joy is to see my sons walk in righteousness and truth. Love you to infinite!

To my pastor, Bishop Barrington Goldson, a pioneer and faithful man of God. You are a pastor of integrity, honor, and unwavering commitment. I pray that you would flourish in the presence of God as you lead and guide God’s people to the throne of Grace.

To my Spiritual Mentor, Bishop Corletta Vaughn, an incredible and powerful woman of God. Our relationship is that of Elizabeth and Mary, words cannot explain how much you mean to me. Your voice is magnetic and transformational. Thank you for introducing me to God the Holy Spirit. My life has never been the same. Our fruit together will be plenteous for the advancement of the kingdom. Much Love!

My Project Mentor, Dr. Jones Kaleli, a brilliant and profound man of God. Thanks for your support during this challenging endeavor. My Reader, Dr. Joy Mwendwa your wisdom, support, and insight are much appreciated.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE .....	i
COPYRIGHT PAGE .....	ii
APPROVAL PAGE .....	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
DEDICATION.....	v
CHAPTER	
<b>1. INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Key Concepts and Definitions of Forgiveness.....	4
Misconceptions of Forgiveness.....	6
Purpose of Study .....	8
Research Methodology .....	9
Role of the Researcher .....	10
Proposed Development of Thesis .....	10
Limitations .....	12
<b>2. FORGIVENESS, UNFORGIVENESS, AND HEALTH.....</b>	<b>13</b>
Benefits of Intrapersonal and Self-Forgiveness .....	14
Forgiveness has Mental and Physical Health Benefits .....	16
Unforgiveness is Associated with Health Risks .....	20
Cancer, A Deadly Consequence of Unforgiveness.....	22
Biblical Meaning of Forgiveness and Unforgiveness.....	22
The Role of Forgiveness in Salvation.....	27

The Role of the Holy Spirit in Forgiveness .....	29
Word of God and Prayer, an Instrument in Forgiveness .....	31
<b>3. A TRANSFORMATIONAL MANUAL ON FORGIVENESS .....</b>	<b>33</b>
Key Concepts and Definitions of Forgiveness & Unforgiveness .....	33
Unforgiveness: A Pathway to Deadly Consequences .....	39
Forgiveness: A Pathway to Emotional and Physical Healing.....	42
<b>4. THE INTERCULTURAL DYNAMICS OF FORGIVENESS.....</b>	<b>46</b>
How Culture Influences Forgiveness.....	47
How Eastern and Western Cultures Characterize Forgiveness.....	48
Cross-cultural Concept and Process of Forgiveness: A South Korea View .....	50
Forgiveness and Unforgiveness Across Cultures: A Japanese and Chinese Views .....	51
Witnessing the Gospel through Forgiveness: Christians in Egypt.....	52
<b>5. RESULTS .....</b>	<b>55</b>
Method Used for Data Questionnaire Collection.....	55
Result of Questionnaire.....	55
Discussion.....	60
Implications and Recommendations .....	62
<b>APPENDIX: QUESTIONNAIRE.....</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>66</b>

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The person who gains the most from forgiveness is the person who does the forgiving.<sup>1</sup> Do you want to spend the rest of your life with a pain that you did not deserve to get in the first place? Or do you want to get rid of it, be healed, and be freed from it, so that you can go on with your life without that painful memory shadowing you?”<sup>2</sup>

Lewis Smedes explains, “We attach our feelings to the moment when we were hurt, endowing it with immortality. And we let it assault us every time it comes to mind. It travels with us, sleeps with us, hovers over us while we make love, and broods over us while we die. Our hate does not even have the decency to die when those we hate die—for it is a parasite sucking OUR blood, not theirs. There is only one remedy for it, “forgiveness.”<sup>3</sup>

Silvio Fillipaldi eloquently writes his views on forgiveness in the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* titled, “Zen-mind, Christian-mind, empty-mind.”

Forgiveness is an attitude of lavishness and utter openness. Forgiveness of sin is the act whereby one is not bound by the brokenness of our life together in the world. A forgiving person is not bound by the quite understandable logic of an eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth and a death for a death. Forgiveness is a focus on the present that frees from the past and opens up the future.<sup>4</sup>

There are many people throughout the world who are suffering and in tremendous pain as a result of past hurts, hatred, violence, and destruction. Today, many are on medication or have turned to drugs, alcohol, and other deadly substances to alleviate the pain and suffering. Family

---

<sup>1</sup> R. T. Kendal, *Total Forgiveness*. Charisma House, Lake Mary, FL, 2007, 11.

<sup>2</sup> Lewis B. Smedes, *The Art of Forgiving: When You Need To Forgive and Don't Know How* (Random House, New York, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Silvio. E. Fillipaldi, Zen-mind, Christian-mind, empty-mind. *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 1982, 75.

relationships and communities are broken because of revenge and resentment, which has such strong grip of the past that it chokes the possibilities of any manifestation of the present. In different parts of the world, such as the Middle East, Russia, and Syria, thousands of people are killed including children because of the inability and unwillingness to forget the past.<sup>5</sup>

The topic of forgiveness is critical to the church and the world in order to cultivate the biblical principle of forgiveness. Forgiveness is a concept that almost everyone is familiar with, believers and non-believers. The practice of forgiveness is one of God's most difficult tasks given to mankind. However, it is essential to uproot the unhealed, unforgiven deadly wounds that so many are transporting with them daily. In the book of Matthew 6:14-15, God explicitly states, "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." This Scripture confirms, although the task of forgiveness may be difficult, God expects mankind to forgive. It is the central concept to the transforming and true healing of God.

Only through the processes of forgiveness can healing occur at its deepest levels to repair broken relationships, and rebuild strong, robust communities. It was Hannah Arendt, a Jewish Philosopher; 13 years after the end of World War II and the Holocaust wrote in her remarkable book, "The Human Condition" the importance of forgiveness and its potential role in the public and political realm:

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 the victims of its consequences forever, not unlike the sorcerer's apprentice who lacked the magic formula to break the spell. If those who hold onto grievance cannot forgive, they will never have the freedom of vision nor the political capacity to create a different society.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Eileen Borris, *Institute For Multi-Track Diplomacy*, Arlington VA, 2003, 3.

<sup>6</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958, 237.

The effects of unforgiveness can lead to physical and emotional manifestations such as high blood pressure, cancer, ulcers, arthritis, anxiety, depression, and heart disease. A healthy mind and body ultimately maximize effectiveness in carrying out the Great Commission. Arendt claims, “The strength of forgiveness lies in the power and the willingness to let go of the past,” explained Arendt.<sup>7</sup> Gilbert Reyes and colleagues point out, “forgiveness can be a way of life.” Its transformational power moves us from being a helpless victim of our circumstances to a powerful co-creator of our reality. We learn how to see people with fresh eyes, seeing them anew every day in terms of their future potential, not their past deeds.”<sup>8</sup>

First, it is important to understand the biblical truth about forgiveness and the application of the truth to true healing. For example, what promotes forgiveness and maintains unforgiveness? A quote from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. reads, “Forgiveness is not just an occasional act; it is an attitude.” Reinhold Niebuhr writes, “Forgiveness is the final form of love.” Considering Dr. King and Niebuhr’s quotes, forgiveness can be characterized as a sign of strength to an individual or group, an act, an attitude, a form of love.

According to Chris Brauns, there is a lack of teaching in the church on the processes and importance of forgiveness. In reality, pastors and counselors disagree profoundly about forgiveness. There is no real consensus as the teachings ranges across a wide spectrum.<sup>9</sup> This thesis reviews the literature regarding the concepts of forgiveness. It examines biblical, theological, and psychological materials on forgiveness, unforgiveness, and health benefits. It focuses on developing a transformational manual on forgiveness to uproot unhealed unforgiven

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Gilbert Reyes and Gerard A. Jacobs, *Handbook of International Disaster Psychology: Refugee mental health*, Westport CT: Praeger, 2006, 93.

<sup>9</sup> Chris Brauns, *Unpacking Forgiveness*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2008), 49.

wounds, which will ultimately lead to wholeness and wellness. This program can also serve as an outreach tool. It focuses in part on the similarities and differences of the values and practices of forgiveness across cultures.

### Key Concepts and Definitions of Forgiveness

Many scholars and psychologists concur and argue on several definitions of forgiveness. Robert Enright and Catherine Coyle argue that forgiveness should be distinguished from pardoning, condoning, excusing, forgetting, and denying. Most agree that forgiveness should be distinguished from related concepts such as reconciliation.<sup>10</sup> This is because reconciliation, which involves “the restoration of trust in an interpersonal relationship through mutually trustworthy behaviors,” is not a prerequisite for forgiveness. For instance, people can forgive people with whom they cannot resume a relationship, for example, someone who is in jail or deceased or an abusive partner whom they do not wish to resume a relationship with.<sup>11</sup> Frederick DiBlasio defines forgiveness as a change in willpower to release the person from malevolent behavior toward an offender. DiBlasio calls forgiveness “decision-based forgiveness”<sup>12</sup>

Everett Worthington and colleagues in the article, “Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology,” explained when a person forgives, positive, love-based emotions such as empathy, compassion, sympathy, and affection replace the negative emotions he or she previously

---

<sup>10</sup> Robert Enright, & Catherine T. Coyle, (1998), Researching the process model of forgiveness within psychological interventions. In Everett L. Worthington, Jr. (Ed.), *Dimensions of forgiveness: Psychological research and theological perspectives* (pp. 139-161). Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press.

<sup>11</sup> Everett L. Worthington, Jr., & N. G. Wade (1999), The psychology of unforgiveness and forgiveness and the implication for clinical practice. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 18, 385-418.

<sup>12</sup> Frederick A. DiBlasio, The use of decision-based forgiveness intervention within intergenerational family therapy. *Journal of Family Therapy*, 20, 77-94.

experienced regarding the transgressors.<sup>13</sup> Likewise, Michael McCullough and William Hoyt in the article, “Personality and Social Psychology” proposed that people forgive when they undergo a suite of motivational changes. Specifically, people who come to experience forgiveness as they become less motivated to avoid and seek revenge against the transgressor and simultaneously become more benevolent toward the transgressor.<sup>14</sup>

A full definition of forgiveness, drawn primarily from the work of Joanna North, she writes, “Forgiveness is the overcoming of negative affect and judgment toward the offender by denying ourselves the right to such effect and judgment, but by endeavoring to view the offender with compassion, benevolence, and love while recognizing that he or she has abandoned the right to them.”<sup>15</sup> North made a few important points about this definition. First, the one who forgives has suffered a deep hurt and loss, such as betrayal or a violation, which elicits anger and resentment. Although it is clear that the offended person has the right to this resentment, he or she chooses to overcome it. As a result of the choice to forgive, a change in perception emerged based on understanding, compassion, and love.

We can conclude from the definitions that the concept of forgiveness is implicit in the meaning of compassion and equanimity. Forgiveness entails and requires a personal release of pain and anger from the burden of the past, bringing inner peace. Reyes and Jacobs profound words, “It takes courage, strength, and spiritual struggle to rise about the battlefield of our emotions and see the world through the eyes of compassion; it takes a spiritual warrior to go

---

<sup>13</sup> Everett L. Worthington, Jr., & N. G. Wade (1999), The psychology of unforgiveness and forgiveness and the implication for clinical practice. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 18, 385-418.

<sup>14</sup> Michael E. McCullough & William T. Hoyt, Transgression related motivational dispositions: personality substrates of forgiveness and their links to the Big Five. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 28, 1556-1573.

<sup>15</sup> Joanna North, "Wrongdoing and forgiveness." *Philosophy* 62, (1987):499-508.

beyond fear and hatred to see the true soul of the enemy. If we do not forgive, we will remain stuck in the quagmire and our fear, and anger will be our god whom we dutifully obey.”<sup>16</sup>

### Misconceptions of Forgiveness

There are many misconceptions concerning the meaning of forgiveness. These misconceptions are centered on the terms of “pardoning” “reconciliation”, and “condoning” Mawson and colleagues explicitly explain, “Forgiveness is not pardoning, it is an inner emotional release. Thus, pardoning is a behavioral release that takes place publicly. To pardon a person will usually involve the authority of the law by which the degree of punishment is established for each violation.”<sup>17</sup> The authors believe that when a person breaks the law the reduction or suspension of the punishment is considered a pardon. Additionally, to forgive the wrongdoer does not mean that you abolish the punishment for what was done.

“Forgiveness does not mean condoning or accepting someone else’s behavior in order to forgive,” according to Mawson and colleagues.<sup>18</sup> They explained certain behaviors, such as spousal emotional abuse, infidelity, rape, violence, and aggression are totally unacceptable and cannot be ignored in a relationship. Forgiveness is not condoning the behavior which causes pain to a person and others. However, immediate actions must be taken to stop the behavior and prevent the behavior from happening to others. Forgiveness is a process which takes time and happens internally on a personal level.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Gilbert Reyes and Gerard A. Jacobs, *Handbook of International Disaster Psychology: Refugee mental health*, Westport CT: Praeger, 2006, 86.

<sup>17</sup> C. O. S. Mawson & K. A. Whiting, *Roget's pocket thesaurus*. New York: Pocket Books, 1923.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

Mawson and colleagues claim, “Forgiveness is a personal internal release; it is not reconciliation. Forgiveness plays an essential role in bringing people together to reconcile, but it only involves the victim.”<sup>20</sup> The authors argue when you forgive a person, it does not mean you have to reconcile. Reconciliation involves two or more people through communication, having an open mind to listen to the other party with a goal in mind which is freedom.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Kohler defines reconciliation as, “a friendly reunion between former opponents: The reunion supposedly serves to return the relationship to normal levels of tolerance and cooperation.”<sup>22</sup> Kendall explains, “Even if there is not reconciliation, total forgiveness is necessary. This applies to the forgiveness of those who no longer alive. This forgiveness must happen in the heart, and when it does, peace emerges with or without a complete restoration of the relationship.”<sup>23</sup>

According to Robert Enright and E. Gassin, “Forgiveness is complicated and has a deep meaning, and involves several different elements. The first element, forgiveness occurs between two people, not between a person and a lifeless object.”<sup>24</sup> Enright and Gassin illuminate that, “hurt is always associated with a specific situation; the act of forgiveness must follow unjust interaction between humans as opposed to a situation.”<sup>25</sup> For example, a person affected by a hurricane would not have to forgive the hurricane.

---

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> W. Köhler (1925), *The mentality of apes*. New York: Vintage.

<sup>23</sup> R. T. Kendall, *Total forgiveness*. Charisma House, Lake Mary, Florida, 11.

<sup>24</sup> Robert D. Enright, & E. A. Gassin, (1992), Forgiveness: A developmental view. *Journal of Moral Education*, 21(2), 99–114. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0305724920210202> (accessed June 28, 2018).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

“Forgiveness can come from a deep, long-lasting hurt. This hurt can be either physical, emotional, psychological, or moral,” according to Enright and Gassin.<sup>26</sup> The authors believe the process of forgiveness is complex, and for the victim, it can be viewed as a challenging journey. This is based on the offense and the quality of the pre-existing relationship between those involved. The difficulty usually lies in whether the person is able to understand forgiveness.

#### Purpose of Study

This study explores and describes the concepts and effects of forgiveness in the church. To apply the work of biblical scholars, theologians, and psychologists to have a comprehensive understanding of the transformational power of forgiveness. This study seeks to demonstrate that forgiveness originated with God and it flows freely to us. When the church has a comprehensive understanding of the transformational power of forgiveness; this will empower Christians to have a greater impact on the world to preach the Gospel and fulfill the Great Commission. Smedes writes, “One of God’s better jokes on us was to give us the power to remember the past and leave us no power to undo it. We have all sometimes been willing to trade almost anything for a magic sponge to wipe just a few moments off the tables of time. But whatever the mind can make of the future, it cannot silence a syllable of the past. There is no delete key for reality.”<sup>27</sup>

Forgiveness is intended to reduce the occurrence of negative thoughts and convert them into positive thoughts, behaviors, and emotions. According to Everett Worthington, there is a God-intended flow of love moving inevitably downhill. Like water, forgiveness flows from the higher to the lower. We receive it in our heart. From our heart, forgiveness flows into our home

---

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Lewis B. Smedes, *The Art of Forgiving: When You Need To Forgive and Don’t Know How* (Random House, New York, 1996).

and to those with whom we interact daily, including others in the church. Forgiveness may result in improved psychosocial conditions for individuals who harbor negative emotions caused by a lack of forgiveness.<sup>28</sup> While David Montgomery writes, “Forgiveness is something no-one finds easy and yet it is something none of us can live without.”<sup>29</sup>

Forgiveness is the key to freedom. Studies have shown that most people that have forgiven themselves and offender describe having a change in thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. They feel a tremendous burden lifted from their life and clarity of thoughts. They are filled with compassion and love for the offender and no longer focus on revenge. The Word of God and prayer play a significant part in the forgiveness process. It helps to invite divine help to softened one’s heart before the healing takes place. Forgiveness is God’s antidote for anger. The act of forgiveness is the result of God working to demonstrate His love, not in the natural but supernatural way. Robert Enright and Robert Zell believe that forgiveness should include both love and letting go of anger in spite of unjust injury. Misunderstanding still abounds regarding the true meaning of forgiveness.<sup>30</sup>

### Research Methodology

This research evaluates and analyzes materials from Old and New Testament scholars, biblical theologians, and psychologists regarding the transformational power of forgiveness and its tremendous impact on the church. The materials focus on the discussion of unforgiveness and

---

<sup>28</sup> Everett L. Worthington, Jr., *Handbook of Forgiveness*, New York: Routledge.

<sup>29</sup> David, Montgomery, *Forgiveness in the Old Testament*. (Howard House, Ireland 2000).

<sup>30</sup> Robert D. Enright, & Robert Zell. (1989), Problems encountered when we forgive one another. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, 8, 52–60.

its effects on mental and physical health. Some of these materials focus specifically on how forgiveness may differ across cultures.

Using a qualitative research design, this study has sought to understand forgiveness from participants who are members of a local church. The questionnaire answered by the research participants entailed the following parts:

Part I: Demographic Information

Part II: Cultural View on Forgiveness and Unforgiveness

Part III: Personal view on Forgiveness

Part IV: Biblical View on Forgiveness

Responses from the questionnaire was reviewed for themes that is reported in the findings section of this thesis.

#### Role of the Researcher

The topic “The Transformational Power of Forgiveness” was birthed from a spiritual place before I engaged this topic academically. I believe that forgiveness is about freedom, healing, resilience, and reclaiming one’s life. More importantly, I think that forgiveness explains how your past hurts and pain can unlock something greater within you. I’m qualified to research this topic because I have a rich diverse background both from an ethnic and religious perspective. Further, I also struggled with unforgiveness for many years thus I was sensitive in engaging my participants on this topic.

#### Proposed Development of Thesis

The research is divided into the following chapters: Introduction, Process of Forgiveness; Development of a Transformational Manual on Forgiveness, The Intercultural Dynamic of Forgiveness; and Results. The chapters are arranged to provide a comprehensive understanding

of the biblical truth regarding forgiveness and the application of the truth to complex problems, which can result in a significantly positive effect on a person's mental and physical health.

Chapter one, Introduction, introduces the research methods used to present a methodological approach including the data collected from a questionnaire. It also presents an extensive review of the key concepts and definitions of forgiveness.

Chapter two, Forgiveness, Unforgiveness, and Health examines the process of forgiveness, in particular, the association of forgiveness and unforgiveness with mental and physical health. It discusses how a lack of forgiveness can negatively affect both the victim and the transgressor, mentally and physically. A lack of forgiveness is likely to lead to tremendous health issues, such as high blood pressure, cancer, ulcers, arthritis, anxiety, depression, and heart disease. Disease and sickness are no respecter of person, it will kill religious and non-religious people alike.

Chapter three, a Transformational Manual on Forgiveness, discusses effective strategies for churches to put a Transformational Manual on Forgiveness in place to teach and counsel on the processes and importance of forgiveness. This program can also serve as an outreach tool.

Chapter four, The Intercultural Dynamics of Forgiveness, examines cross-cultural similarities and differences. Culture plays a vital role in influencing the process of forgiveness.

Chapter five, Results, a summary of the questionnaire results. In conclusion, participants shared that there is tremendous power in forgiveness, but only when one makes the choice to apply it to one's life. The choice to forgive is a powerful witness to participants' families, friends, and neighbors.

The primary goal of this thesis is to provide a thoroughly sound biblical case of the transformational power of forgiveness which can move a person from being wounded and

helpless to a powerful human being. The development of a Transformational Manual on Forgiveness in the church to teach and counsel on the process and importance of forgiveness. Forgiveness is a vital aspect of mental and physical health.

#### Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the results of this study. First, all participants in this study were over 30 years of age, mature individuals who have experienced past hurts and pain. Secondly, the study potentially resurrected some “shameful” memories by default of the questionnaire. Thirdly, all participants were knowledgeable on the biblical understanding of forgiveness to complete the questionnaire.

## CHAPTER 2

### FORGIVENESS, UNFORGIVENESS, AND HEALTH

The previous chapter presents an extensive review of the key concepts and definitions of forgiveness and unforgiveness, which seeks to answer a wide range of questions, opinions, misconceptions, and ambiguities. It also examined the meaning of forgiveness and unforgiveness from a biblical perspective along with different connotations from the Merriam-Webster Dictionary and Stamford Encyclopedia.

This chapter examines the process of forgiveness, the association of forgiveness and unforgiveness with mental and physical health, in particular, cancer. The author describes the following sections in chronological order: Benefits of Intrapersonal and Self-forgiveness; Forgiveness has Mental and Physical Health Benefits; Unforgiveness is Associated with Health Risks; Cancer, A Deadly Consequence of Unforgiveness; The Role of Forgiveness in Salvation; The Role of the Holy Spirit in Forgiveness, and The Word of God and Prayer, an Instrument in Forgiveness.

It seeks to answer questions such as, is there a relationship between unforgiveness and cancer? Between forgiveness and mental health? How do you really forgive? Does learning and understanding the process of forgiveness promote better relationships with others? At what level of readiness do people enter into the process of forgiveness? Does readiness depend on the circumstances and the sufferings a person endured? Do people who practice conditional forgiveness more likely to die earlier compared to those who practice unconditional forgiveness? Does forgiveness extend a person's life?

### Benefits of Intrapersonal and Self-forgiveness

Intrapersonal and self-forgiveness plays a significant role in the process of forgiveness. Forgiveness is an intrapersonal process that may not be accompanied by reconciliation at the interpersonal level. In contrast, reconciliation with the self is a necessary component of self-forgiveness. Hall and Fincham explicate, “The consequences of not forgiving the self can be more severe than the consequences of not forgiving another. One can avoid an unforgiven perpetrator, but one cannot escape an unforgiven self.”<sup>31</sup>

In a research published in the *Journal of Positive Psychology*, people who asked for forgiveness for a wrongdoing were found to be more likely to feel like it was OK to forgive themselves. The research also showed that in a hypothetical situation, making amends with a friend who they committed a wrongdoing toward increased the likelihood of the study participants self-forgiving.<sup>32</sup> “One barrier people face in forgiving themselves is that they feel they deserve to feel bad. Our study found that making amends gives us permission to let go,” study researcher Thomas Carpenter, of Baylor University’s College of Arts & Sciences, said in a statement.<sup>33</sup>

Most psychologists have discussed the nature of self-forgiveness within the context of interpersonal forgiveness theory, drawing clear parallels between forgiveness of the self and forgiveness of others. Enright defined *self-forgiveness* as “a willingness to abandon self-

---

<sup>31</sup> J. H. Hall & F. D. Fincham, (2005), Self-forgiveness: The stepchild of forgiveness research. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 24, 621–637. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1521/jscp.2005.24.5.621> (accessed June 28, 2018).

<sup>32</sup> Thomas P. Carpenter, Stefanie M. Tignor, Jo-Ann Tsang, Amanda Willett. (2016), Dispositional self-forgiveness, guilt- and shame-proneness, and the roles of motivational tendencies. *Personality and Individual Differences* 98, pages 53-61.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

resentment in the face of one's own acknowledged objective wrong while fostering compassion, generosity, and love toward oneself."<sup>34</sup>

Hall and Fincham full definition of self-forgiveness, "a set of motivational changes whereby one becomes decreasingly motivated to avoid stimuli associated with the offense, decreasingly motivated to retaliate against the self, and increasingly motivated to act benevolently toward self."<sup>35</sup> The goal of self-forgiveness is to lessen the psychological distress related to an incident that has occurred.<sup>36</sup> The absence of self-forgiveness could lead to increased levels of anxiety due to the person worrying about others discovering shameful behaviors that have occurred. Also, self-forgiveness may be more difficult to attain rather than other forgiveness, and lack of self-forgiveness is more damaging to one's health.<sup>37</sup>

"I know God forgave me, but I cannot forgive myself," is a common complaint. It is important that one understand that God forgives all humanity for all reasons and there is no lasting joy in forgiveness without forgiving oneself. God is not happy when humanity does not forgive ourselves. A person may not have learned that self-forgiveness is an essential part of psychological and communal healing. The next section discusses the mental and physical health benefits of forgiveness.

---

<sup>34</sup> Robert D. Enright & The Human Development Study Group. (1996), Counseling within the forgiveness triad: On forgiving, receiving forgiveness, and self-forgiveness. *Counseling and Values*, 115.

<sup>35</sup> J. H. Hall & F. D. Fincham, (2005), Self-forgiveness: The stepchild of forgiveness research. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 24, 621–637. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1521/jscp.2005.24.5.621> (accessed June 28, 2018).

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ellis A. Albert. (1962), *Reason and emotion in psychotherapy*. Secaucus, NJ: Lyle Stuart.

### Forgiveness has Mental and Physical Health Benefits

“Anytime a heart that is hardened by hatred is transformed into a heart of flesh, it is a miracle,” explained Michael Barry.<sup>38</sup> Forgiveness is a vital aspect of mental and physical health, and the inability to forgive can lead to the deterioration of a person’s wellness. A 2005 Journal of Behavioral Medicine study showed that “forgiveness is associated with a whole range of health measures, including medications taken, sleep quality and fatigue.”<sup>39</sup> The health benefits of forgiveness seem to come largely from its ability to reduce negative affect (feelings of tension, anger, depression, and fatigue), researchers found. With forgiveness, “the victim relinquishes ideas of revenge, and feels less hostile, angry, or upset about the experiences,” the University of Tennessee researchers wrote. “The present study suggests that this pathway most fully mediates the forgiveness-health relationship. Thus, health consequences of lack of forgiveness may be carried by increased levels of negative emotion.”<sup>40</sup>

The lack of forgiveness is a hindrance to fulfilling God’s ordained purpose. Genesis 50:17-20 reads, “Thus you shall say to Joseph: “I beg you, please forgive the trespass of your brothers and their sin; for they did evil to you.” ’ Now, please, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of your father.” And Joseph wept when they spoke to him. God asked Joseph to forgive his brothers for the sins they committed by throwing him into a pit and then selling him to the Egyptians. Joseph did not focus on the horrible things they did to him; he chose to

---

<sup>38</sup> Michael S. Barry, The Forgiveness Project. *The Startling Discovery of How to Overcome Cancer, Find Health, and Achieve Peace*. Kregel Publications: Grand Rapids, MI.

<sup>39</sup> Kathleen A. Lawler, “The Unique Effects of Forgiveness on Health: An Exploration of Pathways” *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, Vol. 28, No. 2, April 2005.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

forgive. Joseph would not have fulfilled God's ordained purpose for his life if he had stayed in the pit of bitterness, retaliation, resentment, and unforgiveness.

Many people hold on to the hurt and pain waiting for the other person to acknowledge his or her wrongdoing. By doing so, we hold ourselves hostages to the very person who wronged us. We have wounds that can be healed, only by forgiving the one who caused the wound. According to a study conducted by Johns Hopkins University, "lack of forgiveness doesn't just weigh down the spirit, it can lead to physical health issues as noted earlier. Move toward forgiveness and experience better health."<sup>41</sup> We see an example in the Scripture where forgiveness unleashes healing. Pharaoh quickly summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "I have sinned against the LORD your God and against you. Now, therefore, please forgive my sin only this once, and entreat the Lord your God, that He may take away from me this death only" (Exodus 10:16-17 NKJV). After Moses prayed, the plague of locusts was gone and healing was restored to the land.

Barbara Elliott advocates that forgiveness interventions are an effective way of treating chronic illnesses, addictions, and other mental health issues.<sup>42</sup> Likewise, Albert Ellis explains, "working on the ability to forgive is an option that can be used when a transgression has occurred or there is a perceived sense of injustice."<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> Johns Hopkins, *Forgiveness Your Health Depends on It*, <http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/healthyaging/healthyconnections/forgiveness-your-health-depends-on-it> (accessed May 28, 2018).

<sup>42</sup> Barbara Elliott, (2011), Forgiveness therapy: A clinical intervention for chronic disease. *Journal of Religion & Health*, 50, 240–247. doi:10.1007/s10943-010-9336-9.

<sup>43</sup> Albert A. Ellis. (1962), *Reason and emotion in psychotherapy*. Secaucus, NJ: Lyle Stuart.

Ann Macaskill also immensely contributed to the understanding that a range of mental health issues could be processed with forgiveness and could potentially be helpful to the person dealing with psychological hurt.<sup>44</sup> Deborah Finley writes,

Doctors have found that there is a huge relationship between forgiveness and health. The fact is after being hurt, angry, suffering loss, real or false guilt, or envy, the blocked love flow profoundly affects the way your body functions, thus your health. This can cause an alteration in the pattern of chemicals and electricity in your body. It also disrupts the harmony of the brain waves, making you less able to think clearly and to make good decisions.<sup>45</sup>

“Forgiveness is intended to reduce the occurrence of negative thoughts and convert them into positive thoughts, behaviors, and emotions,” according to John Klatt and Robert Enright.<sup>46</sup> While Richard Balkin and colleagues also argue, “forgiveness concepts are applied in counseling, a client can improve both mental and physical health.”<sup>47</sup> They discussed that fewer researchers have studied the effectiveness of forgiveness instruments and how such interventions affect clients as they process issues of forgiveness and conflict.

Loren Toussaint and colleagues concur, “Forgiveness may result in improved psychosocial conditions for individuals who harbor negative emotions caused by a lack of forgiveness toward the person who committed a transgression.”<sup>48</sup> Toussaint and colleagues are

---

<sup>44</sup> Ann Macaskill. (2005), The treatment of forgiveness in counseling and therapy. *Counselling Psychology Review*, 20, 26–32.

<sup>45</sup> Deborah K. Finley, *What Your Future Holds and What You Can Do To Change It*. (Xulonpress, 2007), 84.

<sup>46</sup> John S. Klatt, & Robert D. Enright, (2011), Initial validation of the unfolding forgiveness process in a natural environment. *Counseling and Values*, 56, 25–42. doi:10.1002/j.2161-007X.2011.tb01029.x.

<sup>47</sup> Richard S. Balkin, S. J. Freeman, & S. R. Lyman, S. R. (2009), Forgiveness, reconciliation, and mechila: Integrating the Jewish concept of forgiveness into clinical practice. *Counseling and Values*, 53, 153–160. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-007X.2009.tb00121.x>.

<sup>48</sup> Loren L. Toussaint, A. D. Owen & A. Cheadle (2012), Forgive to live: Forgiveness, health, and longevity. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 35(4), 375-386. doi:10.1007/s10865-011-9362-4

also cited in a study aptly called “Forgive to Live,” shows that people who can make this mental shift and forgive may benefit in ways they didn’t anticipate—namely, by living longer. They investigated the relationships among forgiveness, religiousness, spirituality, health, and mortality in a national U.S. sample of 1500 adults age 66 and older. The study, published in the *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, was the first to test the benefits of forgiveness to a long life.<sup>49</sup>

“A lack of forgiveness can negatively affect people, both the victim and the transgressor, mentally and physically; however, forgiving a transgressor or transgression can decrease symptoms such as anxiety and depression,” according to McFarland and colleagues.<sup>50</sup>

According to a profound survey by the nonprofit Fetzer Institute, studies have found that some people are just naturally more forgiving. Consequently, they tend to be more satisfied with their lives and to have less depression, anxiety, stress, anger, and hostility. People who hang on to grudges, however, are more likely to experience severe depression and post-traumatic stress disorder, as well as other health conditions. But that doesn’t mean that they can’t train themselves to act in healthier ways. In fact, 62 percent of American adults say they need more forgiveness in their personal lives.<sup>51</sup> While forgiveness plays a significant role in mental and physical health, unforgiveness is associated with tremendous health risks to the body, which will be examined in the next section.

---

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Michael J. McFarland, C. A. Smith, Loren Toussaint, & P. A. Thomas, P. A. (2012), Forgiveness of others and health: Do race and neighborhood matter? *The Journals of Gerontology*, 67B (1), 66–75. doi:10.1093/geronb/gbr121.

<sup>51</sup> Johns Hopkins, *Forgiveness Your Health Depends on It*, <http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/healthyaging/healthyconnections/forgiveness-your-health-depends-on-it> (accessed June 28, 2018).

### Unforgiveness is Associated with Health Risks

Timothy Smith writes, “A core component of unforgiveness is anger, hostility, blame, and fear. These have been associated with health and disease outcomes.”<sup>52</sup> Smith defines anger as “an emotional response to a perceived mistreatment that may range in intensity from irritation to rage, and hostility as a set of negative attitudes, beliefs, and appraisals concerning others as likely source of frustration, mistreatment, and provocation.”<sup>53</sup>

There are physiological, psychological, behavioral, and social paths through which unforgiveness may impact health. Michael E. McCullough proposed that “unforgiveness does not refer to the immediate transgression related experience of negative emotions but rather the delayed experience of resentment, blame, bitterness, hostility, hatred, anger, and fear that may be fostered through rumination.”<sup>54</sup> McCullough presents an argument, “there is no direct evidence exists that either situational or dispositional unforgiveness is related to long-term health or disease.”<sup>55</sup> He explains that the lack of direct evidence is not surprising, given that the notion of unforgiveness and the means to measure it are fairly recent developments.

Similarly, B. S. McEwen argument rests on the assumption that, “transgressions are like other health-endangering stressors and that unforgiveness produces a similar, chronically hyperarousal stress response. Given the substantial evidence that extreme and chronic stressors

---

<sup>52</sup> Timothy W. Smith (1992), Hostility and health: Current status of a psychosomatic hypothesis. *Health Psychology, 11*, 139–150.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Michael E. McCullough & William T. Hoyt. Transgression related motivational dispositions: personality substrates of forgiveness and their links to the Big Five. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 28*, 1556-1573.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

negatively impact health, unforgiveness has been conceptualized as a stress response to a significant stressor, the notion that unforgiveness is linked to health risks is a small leap.”<sup>56</sup>

Macaskill agrees with other scholars that unforgiveness can be related to poorer mental health as well as lower life satisfaction.<sup>57</sup> Deborah K. Finley explains,

Unforgiveness distresses your muscular-skeletal system by increasing forehead muscle tension, thereby producing headaches, and by also producing other symptoms such as stomach aches, muscle tension, joint pain/aches, dizziness, and tiredness. For example, your muscles may tighten, causing imbalances or pain in the neck, back, and limbs. There is decreased blood flow to the joint surfaces. This makes it more difficult for the blood to remove wastes from the tissues. It reduces the supply of oxygen and nutrients to the cells. This increases chances of delayed or inadequate repair during sleep, impairing recovery from injury, arthritis, etc. It can cause the teeth to clench at night contributing to problems with the teeth and jaw joints. Injury through inattention, accident, or violence is more likely. The peptide and hormonal chemical “messengers” are altered in every system of the body. The blood flow to the heart is constricted. The digestion is impaired.<sup>58</sup>

Your breathing is restricted. Since your immune system doesn’t function as well, you become more vulnerable to infections, and perhaps malignancy. You feel bad, and your mind is less able to see its way through difficulties. The list goes on. Indeed it becomes a list of many of the diseases seen by doctors all over the world. And while unforgiveness may not be the sole cause of all of them, it increases a person’s vulnerability.<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup> B. S. McEwen (1998), Protective and damaging effects of stress mediators. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 338, 171–179.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Deborah K. Finley, *What Your Future Holds and What You Can Do To Change It*. (Xulonpress, 2007), 84.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

## Cancer, A Deadly Consequence of Unforgiveness

Unforgiveness is classified in medical books as a disease. According to Dr. Steven Standiford, chief of surgery at the Cancer Treatment Centers of America, refusing to forgive makes people sick and keeps them that way. With that in mind, forgiveness therapy is now being used to help treat diseases, such as cancer. “It’s important to treat emotional wounds or disorders because they really can hinder someone’s reactions to the treatments, even someone’s willingness to pursue treatment,” Standiford explained.<sup>60</sup>

Of all cancer patients, 61 percent have forgiveness issues, and of those, more than half are severe, according to research by Dr. Michael Barry, a pastor and the author of the book, *The Forgiveness Project*. “Harboring these negative emotions, this anger and hatred creates a state of chronic anxiety,” he said. “Chronic anxiety very predictably produces excess adrenaline and cortisol, which deplete the production of natural killer cells, which is your body’s foot soldier in the fight against cancer,” he explained. Barry said the first step in learning to forgive is to realize how much we have been forgiven by God.<sup>61</sup> Unforgiveness has deadly consequences; however, Jesus paid the prize on the cross that sins may be forgiven. According to Galatians 3:13, because of His Blood, man is redeemed from sickness and diseases. The next section explains the biblical meaning of forgiveness and unforgiveness.

## Biblical Meaning of Forgiveness and Unforgiveness

We hear so much about forgiveness in the Christian world, yet there is a wide range of opinions, misconceptions, ambiguities, and unanswered questions regarding the topic. Is

---

<sup>60</sup> The Deadly Consequences of Unforgiveness:  
<http://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/healthscience/2015/june/the-deadly-consequences-of-unforgiveness> (accessed June 20, 2018).

<sup>61</sup> Michael S. Barry, *The Forgiveness Project. The Startling Discovery of How to Overcome Cancer, Find Health, and Achieve Peace. Kregel Publications: Grand Rapids, MI.*

forgiveness conditional or unconditional? Do you forgive for your good or based on the good of the offender? God’s forgiveness is unconditional and because He commanded us to follow his example, our forgiveness toward others must also be unconditional. The Bible reminds us that if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9 NKJV). This verse says that God is faithful, it is referring to His unshakeable faithfulness to His covenant promises to forgive believers of their sins.

The word “forgiveness” has multiple meaning and different connotations. It also evokes many different images, from weakness and passivity to noble moral standards. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines forgiveness as “the act of forgiving someone or the attitude of someone who is willing to forgive other people.”<sup>62</sup> According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy the term “forgive” derives from “give” or to “grant,” as in “to give up,” or “cease to harbor.” More specifically, “forgive” refers to the act of giving up a feeling, such as resentment, or a claim to requital or compensation. And the term “forgiveness” is defined as the action of forgiving, pardoning of a fault, remission of a debt, and similar responses to injury, wrongdoing, or obligation.<sup>63</sup> We can infer from the meaning, forgiveness is an attitude which allows a person to let go of anger and resentment. A voluntary act to cease or harbor the past.

In the Old Testament, there are two primary Hebrew words which are translated as “pardon”, “pardoned” “forgive”, “forgiveness”, “forgiven” or “forgiving”. These are “nasa” and “salah”. Harris, Archer, and Waltke explain that “nasa” means “the taking away, forgiveness or pardon of sin, iniquity, and transgression. The characteristic of the action of taking away sin is

---

<sup>62</sup> Merriam Webster Online. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/forgiveness> (accessed May 20, 2018).

<sup>63</sup> Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/forgiveness/> (accessed May 20, 2018).

listed as one of God's attributes throughout the Scriptures. Exodus 34:7 reads, "Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing *the guilty*, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation." Numbers 14:18 tells us that the LORD is longsuffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He by no means clears *the guilty*, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth *generation*. Micah 7:18 reads, "Who *is* a God like You, Pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights *in* mercy." This verse explains that God delights in showing mercy, which means, God enjoys doing it. He does not pardon our sins begrudgingly.

Sins can be forgiven and forgotten because it is taken up and carried away."<sup>64</sup> There are four main words used in the original Greek New Testament in relation to the forgiveness or pardon of our sins or crimes against God. These are the verb "aphiemi", its associated noun "aphesis", "charizomai" and "apoluo". The word "aphiemi" means "to send forth, send away, to remit or forgive debts and sins." W. E. Vine explains that "aphiemi" "like its corresponding noun (aphesis), signifies the remission of the punishment due to sinful conduct, the deliverance of the sinner from the penalty divinely, and, therefore righteously, imposed. It also involves the complete removal of the cause of the offense; such remission is based upon the vicarious and

---

<sup>64</sup> R. Laird Harris, Gleason I. Archer, Jr. and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Workbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago Moody Press. 1999), 626.

propitiatory sacrifice of Christ”<sup>65</sup> Walter Bauer points out that “aphiemi” means “cancel, remission of the guilt (debt) of sin divine forgiveness”<sup>66</sup>

Biblical forgiveness involves “letting go” of bitterness or revenge and “graciously giving” pardon to those who ask. Ephesians 4:31, and emphasis in Colossians 3:13 reads, “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger, clamor, and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.” This is one of the most important passages for explaining forgiveness. In this passages, God is clearly aligning our forgiveness with His. In this Scripture, Paul uses the word forgiveness as “giving graciously” or giving something to a person not deserving of it or even requesting for it. Paul also emphasizes that God is commanding forgiveness to each other in a tender-hearted way, even when a person does not deserve forgiveness, just as God in Christ also has forgiven us.

God is faithful; He offers forgiveness of sin to all men everywhere, Jews, Muslims, and Hindus who will repent and put their faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38 NJKV). There are two main channels to God’s forgiveness. First through the Gospel, which is preached to all nations. Second, by grace, all those who actually repent and believe in Christ for salvation will automatically receive forgiveness. Similarly, our forgiveness is defined by those same two elements.

A simple definition of unforgiveness is “*a grudge against someone who has offended you.*” Another definition is not having the compassion to forgive. Unforgiveness is a sin that

---

<sup>65</sup> W. E. Vine, *New Testament Greek Grammar*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1965, 250.

<sup>66</sup> Walter Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, “BDAG” (3rd Edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 125.

causes a person to think and do evil things.<sup>67</sup> An example of unforgiveness can be found in the book of Genesis, the story of Esau and Jacob, “And Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him: and Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob” (Genesis 27:41 NJKV). Based on the story, Esau had all reasons to hold a grudge against Jacob because he had offended him deeply by taking his father’s blessing. Esau could not continue to love his brother and therefore harbored unforgiveness in his heart.

Berit Ingersoll-Dayton defines unforgiveness as feelings of resentment, bitterness, and even hatred.<sup>68</sup> Another well-known teaching on unforgiveness is the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant. In this parable, the king moved with compassion and forgives a large debt of his servants but the servant refused to forgive a small debt of his servant (Matthew 18:21-35 NKJV).

Worthington and colleagues define unforgiveness as a combination of delayed negative emotions, such as resentment, bitterness, hostility, hatred, anger, and fear toward a transgressor. They view unforgiveness essentially as stress response with potential health consequences. Unforgiveness can be viewed as getting stuck in negative emotions and a hyperarousal stress response through rumination.<sup>69</sup>

Throughout the Old and New Testaments, God has been active in forgiveness. The promise of Genesis 3:15, this is the first reference to God’s mercy after the fall. The defeat of

---

<sup>67</sup> What is the Biblical Definition of Unforgiveness? <http://access-Jesus.com/unforgiveness-definition-html/> (accessed June 20, 2018).

<sup>68</sup> Berit Ingersoll-Dayton, Cynthia Torges, & Neal Krause (2010). Unforgiveness, rumination, and depressive symptoms among older adults. *Aging & Mental Health*, 14(4), 439-449. doi:10.1080/13607860903483136.

<sup>69</sup> Everett L. Worthington, Jr., Sandage, S. J., & Berry, J. W. (2000). Group interventions to promote forgiveness: What researchers and clinicians ought to know. In M. E. McCullough, K. I. Pargament, & C. E. Thoresen (Eds.), *Forgiveness: Theory, research, and practice* (pp. 228–253). New York: Guilford Press.

Satan by Jesus Christ at the cross is a fulfillment of God's promise that the Seed of the woman will crush the Serpent's head. This is what has been referred to as proto-evangelium i.e. the First Gospel. Also, the story of Noah, the subsequent covenant with Noah (Genesis 8:21-22 NKJV), and the story of Abraham (Genesis 12ff). In Genesis 50:17, Joseph had to forgive his brothers for throwing him into a pit and selling him to the Egyptians. These are all early examples of God's determination to save and restore his people into fellowship with him. From the beginning, the Bible presents a clear picture of God actively involved with his people for the healing and restoration of broken relationships.

In the New Testaments, we see a greater emphasis on forgiveness. In Mark 11:25, we see a condition for answered prayer, "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. Alistair McFadyen writes, "Jesus proclaimed and practiced forgiveness of God and encouraged His followers to forgive even their enemies, as some accounts of His death show He did, thereby giving an example in 1 Peter 2:21-25. It is this example which has inspired the kind of Christianity found in peace churches."<sup>70</sup> The next section explains the role of forgiveness in salvation.

#### The Role of Forgiveness in Salvation

Jesus is the transforming power of forgiveness because He died on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. On the cross, Jesus stated, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do," (Luke 23:34 NKJV). Jesus asked the Father to forgive those who had physically crucified him. Henry writes, "As soon as Christ was fastened to the cross, he prayed for those

---

<sup>70</sup>McFadyen, Alistair and Sarot Marcel, *Forgiveness and Truth*, (Cromwell Press, Trowbridge, Wiltshire, 2001), 17.

who crucified him. The great thing he died to purchase and procure for us, is the forgiveness of sin.<sup>71</sup> We can see from this Scripture that Jesus prayer is complete manifestation of unselfishness. Instead of thinking of himself and his suffering, He is concerned for the people who are responsible for crucifying him that God will forgive them. This exemplifies Jesus unconditional love at its extremity.

Forgiveness plays a significant role in salvation. Salvation and forgiveness are closely linked. There is no salvation without forgiveness. Salvation is God delivering us from the consequences of sin. While forgiveness is God erasing our sin. When a person accepts Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, he or she receives salvation and forgiveness. The Bible tells us, in addition to salvation, we also receive justification, redemption, atonement, propitiation, and regeneration.

The Greek word for salvation is *sozo*, which means “to be delivered, rescued.” According to Romans 6:23 and Matthews 25:46, salvation is God rescuing his people from deserved destruction and deliverance from the penalty of sin. Salvation removes the “judicial” penalty or debt from past, present, and future sin. When a Christian sins, even though the “judicial” penalty is taken care of (1 John 2:1 NKJV), he or she still receive a debt of tremendous “guilt” and a debt, which leads to a lack of fellowship with God. Therefore, the confession of our sins is not necessary for removal of “judicial” penalty for sin, but to remove the guilt and restoration of fellowship with God.

The Greek word for forgiveness is *aphiemi*, which means “to let go, to give up, to keep no longer.” When Jesus forgives our sins, he will never hold it against us. He completely erases our trespasses, iniquities, and transgressions. The forgiveness of sin is parallel to erasing our

---

<sup>71</sup> Matthews Henry, *Concise Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Thomas Nelson: Nashville, 949.

financial debts. Forgiveness is a choice but we cannot afford not to forgive. Forgiveness is a command from God. Paul says, “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Eph. 4:31-32 NKJV). Paul is telling us that unforgiveness is actually committing a sin against God. Salvation is necessary for the process of forgiveness and so is the work of the Holy Spirit. The chief way to grieve the Holy Spirit is by bitterness and unforgiveness. Avoiding bitterness, holding no grudge, and not losing one’s temper come by living in love, and keeps no record of wrongs (1 Cor. 13:5 NKJV). The next section discusses the role of the Holy Spirit in forgiveness.

#### The Role of the Holy Spirit in Forgiveness

The role of the Holy Spirit is critical in forgiveness. Forgiveness is tied to receiving the power of the Holy Spirit. While we are not in a position to forgive people’s sins towards God, God the Holy Spirit in us makes it possible for us to forgive the offenses against us. Jesus final words to his disciples, “And when He had said this, He breathed on *them*, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the *sins* of any, they are retained” (John 20:22-23 NKJV). D. A. Carson explains the reception of the Spirit is linked with forgiveness and retention of sins. It is the result of the preaching of the Gospel which brings men to repentance as they hear of the ready and costly forgiveness of God.<sup>72</sup>

Unforgiveness, on the other hand, hinders the flow of the Holy Spirit. It cools the fire of the Holy Spirit within a person. God dwells in us by His Spirit, which makes it possible for us to

---

<sup>72</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*. Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans, 1991. Kindle Edition, 655.

forgive the offenses against us. It is the work of the devil to fight the believer not to forgive so that they will not receive the Holy Spirit power in their lives. Henry Matthew explains, “All lying, and corrupt communications, that stir up evil desires and lusts grieve the Spirit of God. Corrupt passions of bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, evil-speaking, and malice grieve the Holy Spirit.”<sup>73</sup>

Romans 12:19 reads, “Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but *rather* give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.” R. T. Kendal reminds us that vengeance is the Lord and we only hurt ourselves when we dwell on what happened and fantasized about the punishment. This causes the Holy Spirit to be grieved and we lose our sense of peace.<sup>74</sup>

In Galatians 5:16, Paul states, “Walk in the Spirit and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.” Succinctly, in order to have a forgiving heart, one must walk in the Spirit. Leon Wood writes in his book *The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament*, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (Psalm 51:17-18 NKJV). This passage shows that God had long wanted a change of heart of his people not merely sacrifices.”<sup>75</sup> Wood believes that the change of heart, such as unforgiveness can only come when the Holy Spirit imparts regeneration. Likewise, Sherwood Lingenfelter states, “when we find ourselves angry with people, frustrated and annoyed beyond conform to their behavior, we need the help of

---

<sup>73</sup> Matthews Henry, *Concise Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Thomas Nelson: Nashville, 1151.

<sup>74</sup> R. T. Kendall, *Total forgiveness*. Charisma House, Lake Mary, Florida, 6.

<sup>75</sup> Leon J. Wood, *The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1998.

the Holy Spirit to reframe our expectation.”<sup>76</sup> It is the work of the Holy Spirit that makes the greatest impact on the life of a believer to forgive. Also, the infallible Word of God and prayer make it possible to forgive. The next section highlights the importance of the Word of God and prayer in the process of forgiveness.

#### Word of God and Prayer, as Instrument in Forgiveness

Forgiveness is one of the consistent topics in the entire Bible, yet people avoid the topic. The Word of God and prayer play an integral role in the process of forgiveness. Larry Dossey in his book, “Prayer is a Good Medicine,” made a remarkable point that “prayer is a good medicine for the nourishment of the body, mind, and spirit. No matter what form your faith takes, prayer is good medicine and will inspire you with a new appreciation on how prayer can bring about healthful changes.”<sup>77</sup>

Forgive and forgiveness appear one hundred and one times in the Bible, fifty-two times in the New Testament. Prayers and offerings can be hindered because of the lack of unforgiveness. The Bible teaches, “If you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First, be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Matthew 5:23-24 NKJV). This text is often interpreted as only monetary gifts but God is also referring to spiritual and ministry gifts. God will not touch your offering if your heart is not clean. Another central point, if you are in ministry and there is unforgiveness in your heart, stop serving and make amends before you continue to help others. One of the fundamental messages of the gospel is

---

<sup>76</sup> Sheerwood G. Lingenfelter, and Marvin K. Mayers, *Ministering Cross-Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Personal Relationships*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016, 22.

<sup>77</sup> Larry Dossey, *Prayer Is Good Medicine: How to Reap the Healing Benefits of Prayer*. 1st ed. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996.

total forgiveness. Jesus forgave His accusers totally and He expects believers to do the same. Forgiveness unleashes tremendous healing whereby you can step into a new dimension of incredible freedom and inner peace.

The Word of God and prayer are vital for forgiveness. When you do not forgive, you provoke God not to forgive you. The Bible contains all the secrets for deliverance, healing, and salvation. Proverbs 4:20-22, states that the word of God brings healing to flesh. Therefore, when the word of God is applied, forgiveness becomes easy. The only infallible rule for defining forgiveness is in the Word of God, which means healing must take place before a person can go out to the mission field to help others. Healing precedes helping. According to an article from Johns Hopkins Medicine, *Forgiveness Your Health Depends on It*, studies have found that the act of forgiveness can reap huge rewards for one's health, lowering the risk of heart attack; improving cholesterol levels and sleep reducing pain, blood pressure, and levels of anxiety, depression, and stress.<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>78</sup> Johns Hopkins, *Forgiveness Your Health Depends on It*, <http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/healthyaging/healthyconnections/forgiveness-your-health-depends-on-it> (accessed June 28, 2018).

## CHAPTER 3

### A TRANSFORMATIONAL MANUAL ON FORGIVENESS

Chapter two discusses the process of forgiveness and unforgiveness. The chapter provided research that underscores how forgiveness can benefit a person's mind and body. For example, forgiveness reduces anxiety and depression, contributes to better sleep, and lowers blood pressure and cholesterol. While unforgiveness brings about negative symptoms such as depression and anxiety; it puts a strain on the heart, mind, and body, which can negatively impact a person's health.

This chapter provides an outline for a Transformational Manual on Forgiveness for the church, which can also serve as an evangelistic tool to bring souls into the church. The central goal is to help people in the church and throughout the world to understand the importance of forgiveness. A Transformational Manual on Forgiveness is a necessary ministry for the church because forgiveness is the key to freedom; forgiveness is a magnet for healing.

A Transformational Manual on Forgiveness will help the church to become more aware of the significance of forgiveness within the church and in society.

#### Key Concepts and Definitions of Forgiveness & Unforgiveness

#### **What is Forgiveness?**

Forgiveness is a conscious, deliberate decision to release feelings of resentment or a desire for revenge against someone who has hurt you. Forgiveness is often given to someone who does not want or deserve your forgiveness. Forgiveness means that, regardless of whether the offender deserves or desires to be forgiven, you are ready to release the desire for revenge or for bad things to come to the person who hurt you and to move on with your life. The offender does not have to accept your forgiveness, apologize, or admit that they hurt you for forgiveness

to take place. Forgiveness is ultimately about you. It is a pathway to transformational power and emotional healing.

- You have to make the choice daily to release resentment and let go of past hurts.
- You have the power to decide to forgive.
- You are the one who can be freed from hurt, anger, resentment, and vengeance by giving the gift of forgiveness.

### **What is Unforgiveness?**

Unforgiveness is a reaction to a transgression. It is a combination of emotions, including resentment, hostility, hatred, bitterness, anger, and fear. Our initial fear (of being hurt again) and anger (for being mistreated by someone) are not unforgiveness. These are natural, emotional reactions to being hurt. Unforgiveness develops over time, as we ruminate on our hurt and fear. Everett Worthington describes unforgiveness as an emotion served “cold” (or delayed) because it develops over time as we meditate on those feelings of resentment and bitterness.

### **Why Do We Forgive?**

First, we forgive because it is a command from God. Paul reminds us of God’s command to get rid of anger, bitterness, malice, and resentment. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Eph. 4:31-32 NKJV). We see numerous examples in the Scripture where sin is tied to sickness and diseases. Forgiveness is the magnet for healing. Moses exemplified true leadership when he was delayed in the mountain with God and the Children of Israel quickly made themselves an idol and sinned against God. Although he was angry and had every right to be angry, he was not unforgiving, bitter, and resentful instead he was willing to lay down his life and seek God’s face on behalf of the people. Moses returned to the LORD and said, “Oh, these people have committed a great sin, and have

made for themselves a god of gold! Yet now, if You will forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written” (Exodus 32:31-32).

Second, when people experience the pain and anger associated with being hurt by someone, the question of “Why should I forgive?” often comes to mind. The idea of letting go of the anger and hurt and moving forward often seems both impossible and illogical. However, there are several good reasons to release those feelings of resentment and anger and to resist the temptation of allowing them to develop into unforgiveness. In this Scripture, Jesus talks about the grace of forgiveness and why it is essential, “If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying “I repent,” you must forgive them” (Luke 17:4 NIV).

Forgiveness leads to freedom. Forgiveness means different things to different people. Generally, however, it involves a decision to let go of resentment and thoughts of revenge. The issue that caused the hurt or offended you might always be with you, but forgiveness can lessen its grip on you and help free you from the control of the person who harmed you. Forgiveness can even lead to feelings of understanding, empathy, and compassion for the one who hurt you. Forgiveness doesn't mean forgetting or excusing the harm done to you or making up with the person who caused the harm. Forgiveness brings a kind of peace that helps you go on with life.

### **Is Unforgiveness a Hindrance to Fulfilling God's Purpose?**

Unforgiveness is a massive hindrance to professional elevations and fulfilling God's purpose. It is also an obstacle to the growth of churches and businesses. It impacts families; the cause of divorce and prodigal sons and daughters. Paul says, “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Eph. 4:31-32 NKJV). It is

impossible to get rid of all these negative attitudes without forgiveness. These negative attitudes will have a tremendous hindrance to personal and professional relationships. More importantly, God will not expand our territories when we have unforgiveness in our heart along with bitterness, anger, rage, slander, and every form of malice.

### **What are the Benefits of Forgiving Someone?**

Toussaint and colleagues (2001) published results from a national survey suggesting that physical health will be negatively affected if people are chronically unforgiving and positively affected if they practice regular forgiveness.<sup>79</sup> Letting go of grudges and bitterness can make way for improved health and peace of mind. Forgiveness can lead to:

- Healthier relationships
- Improved mental health
- Less anxiety, stress, and hostility
- Lower blood pressure
- Fewer symptoms of depression
- A stronger immune system
- Improved heart health
- Improved self-esteem/image

### **Why is it so Easy to Hold a Grudge?**

Being hurt by someone, particularly someone you love and trust, can cause anger, sadness, and confusion. If you dwell on hurtful events or situations, grudges filled with resentment, vengeance, and hostility can take root. If you allow negative thoughts and feelings to

---

<sup>79</sup> Loren L. Toussaint, A. D. Owen & A. Cheadle, (2012). Forgive to live: Forgiveness, health, and longevity. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 35(4), 375-386. doi:10.1007/s10865-011-9362-4.

crowd out positive feelings, you might find yourself swallowed up by your own bitterness or sense of injustice. Some people are naturally more forgiving than others. But even if you're a grudge holder, almost anyone can learn to be more forgiving.

### **What are the Effects of Holding a Grudge?**

If you're unforgiving, you might:

- Bring anger and bitterness into every relationship and new experience
- Become so wrapped up in the wrong that you can't enjoy the present
- Become depressed or anxious
- Feel that your life lacks meaning or purpose, or that you're at odds with your spiritual beliefs
- Lose valuable and enriching connectedness with others

### **How do I Reach a State of Forgiveness?**

Worthington claims that forgiveness is a commitment to a personalized process of change.<sup>80</sup> To move from suffering to forgiveness, you might:

- Recognize the value of forgiveness and how it can improve your life
- Identify what needs healing and who needs to be forgiven and for what
- Consider joining a support group or seeing a counselor
- Acknowledge your emotions about the harm done to you and how they affect your behavior, and work to release them
- Choose to forgive the person who has offended you
- Move away from your role as victim and release the control and power the offending person and situation have had in your life

---

<sup>80</sup> Everett Worthington, Jr., *Handbook of Forgiveness*, New York, NY: Routledge, 2005.

- Allow God to deal with the revenge as He admonishes us in his word,” Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but *rather* give place to wrath; for it is written, “**Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,**” says the Lord” (Romans 12:19 NJKV).

As you let go of grudges, you’ll no longer define your life by how you've been hurt. You might even find compassion and understanding.

### **How would I know that I have Total Forgiveness?**

- Don’t discuss with anyone what he/she has done to you.
- Don’t let the person feel afraid of you.
- If possible, help he/she to forgive themselves.
- When you do not get angry when you think about what happened

### **Reasons Forgiveness will work for you**

It is biblical, you will learn how to apply the biblical principles to your life. The Bible is the absolute truth. Jesus said by knowing the truth, the truth shall make you free (John 8:31:32). Also, John 17:17 underscores the same truth, “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth “(NIV). It is personal, you will learn how to design your individual healing plan. You must understand that the battle begins in the mind; therefore, fill your mind with the Word of God. Constantly choose to allow your mind to be subjected to the Lordship of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). It is incremental, you will learn how to choose small baby steps that will slowly lead you to a life of freedom.

### **What Happens if I can't Forgive Someone?**

Forgiveness can be challenging, especially if the person who's hurt you doesn't admit wrong. If you find yourself stuck:

- Practice empathy. Try seeing the situation from the other person's point of view.

- Ask yourself why he or she would behave in such a way. Perhaps you would have reacted similarly if you faced the same situation.
- Reflect on times you've hurt others and on those who've forgiven you.
- Write in a journal, pray or use guided meditation — or talk with a person you've found to be wise and compassionate, such as a spiritual leader, a mental health provider, or an impartial loved one or friend.
- Be aware that forgiveness is a process, and even small hurts may need to be revisited and forgiven over and over again.
- If you cannot forgive someone who has hurt you, you risk losing God's forgiveness as admonished in the Lord's Prayer.

### **Does Forgiveness Guarantee Reconciliation?**

If the hurtful event involved someone whose relationship you otherwise value, forgiveness can lead to reconciliation. This isn't always the case, however, reconciliation might be impossible if the offender has died or is unwilling to communicate with you. In other cases, reconciliation might not be appropriate. Still, forgiveness is possible — even if reconciliation isn't.

### **Unforgiveness: A Pathway to Deadly Consequences**

#### **Cancer, A Deadly Consequence of Unforgiveness!**

Unforgiveness is classified in medical books as a disease. According to Dr. Steven Standiford, chief of surgery at the Cancer Treatment Centers of America, refusing to forgive makes people sick and keeps them that way. With that in mind, forgiveness therapy is now being used to help treat diseases, such as cancer. "It's important to treat emotional wounds or disorders

because they really can hinder someone's reactions to the treatments, even someone's willingness to pursue treatment,” Standiford explained.<sup>81</sup>

Of all cancer patients, 61 percent have forgiveness issues, and of those, more than half are severe, according to research by Dr. Michael Barry, a pastor and the author of the book, *The Forgiveness Project*. “Harboring these negative emotions, this anger and hatred create a state of chronic anxiety,” he said. “Chronic anxiety very predictably produces excess adrenaline and cortisol, which deplete the production of natural killer cells, which is your body's foot soldier in the fight against cancer,” he explained. Barry said the first step in learning to forgive is to realize how much we have been forgiven by God.<sup>82</sup>

### **Can Unforgiveness Cause Cancer?**

There is a story of an India woman healed from cancer after she forgave.

My heart was so full of bitterness, resentment, and anger. These feelings were rooted in me against people who had hurt me over the years. The hurt was too deep and intense, and I had bottled it all up. Unforgiveness weighed me down, but I did not know how to deal with it.

That night I asked Jesus to help me forgive and to help me let go of all the resentments buried in the depths of my being, unknown to any human being but known only to our God. It was as if a dam burst inside me and I wept through the night, reliving the agony of my unforgiving heart and as I did so, I placed all my negative feelings at the feet of Jesus. In the early hours of dawn, I experienced a peace, which passes all understanding. Jesus had cleansed me, as only He can. I felt light as if a heavy weight had been removed. Thereafter, I said a simple one-line prayer for the healing of my cancer. After which I thanked Jesus, accepted His healing. The next day, and for the next 3 weeks, my body was tested and retested. The doctors were puzzled. There was not a cell or trace of cancer in my body.

---

<sup>81</sup> The Deadly Consequences of Unforgiveness:  
<http://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/healthscience/2015/june/the-deadly-consequences-of-unforgiveness> (accessed June 20, 2018).

<sup>82</sup> Michael S. Barry, *The Forgiveness Project. The Startling Discovery of How to Overcome Cancer, Find Health, and Achieve Peace. Kregel Publications: Grand Rapids, MI.*

This happened 10 years ago. Deep-rooted unforgiveness had become a physical cancer and Jesus set me free through His Word. He healed me physically and spiritually, changing my life and my way of thinking.<sup>83</sup>

### **Can Anger and Unforgiveness Cause Cancer?**

Cancer absolutely has emotional roots. There is evidence suggesting that repressed anger, hatred, anxiety, and resentment play a crucial role in the development of cancer. Increased stress hormones caused by emotional triggers suppress the immune system, which can lead to cancer.

A team of researchers at Stanford University in California concludes:

Women who repressed their emotions were more likely to show disruptions in the normal balance of the stress hormone cortisol, compared with those who did not. Earlier studies have shown that the unbalanced cortisol fluctuations can predict early death in women with breast cancer that has spread to other areas of the body. The concept is of unexpressed anger. If one doesn't let it out, that could have adverse consequences.

According to the National Cancer Institute,

Extreme suppression of anger was the most commonly identified characteristic of 160 breast cancer patients who were given a detailed psychological interview and self-administered questionnaire. Repressing anger magnified exposure to physiological stress, thereby increasing the risk of cancer. Extremely low anger scores have been noted in numerous studies of patients with cancer. Such low scores suggest suppression, repression, or restraint of anger. There is evidence to show that suppressed anger can be a precursor to the development of cancer, and also a factor in its progression after diagnosis.<sup>84</sup>

---

<sup>83</sup> Can Unforgiveness Cause Cancer?

<http://www.bsgulf.org/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=91&Itemid=2> (accessed June 10, 2018).

<sup>84</sup> Can Anger and Unforgiveness Cause Cancer? <https://www.midlandscbd.com/articles/can-anger-and-unforgiveness-cause-cancer-9010> (accessed June 20, 2018).

## Forgiveness: A Pathway to Emotional and Physical Healing

### What if the Person I'm Forgiving doesn't Change?

Getting another person to change his or her actions, behavior or words isn't the point of forgiveness. Think of forgiveness more about how it can change your life — by bringing you peace, happiness, and emotional and spiritual healing. Forgiveness can take away the power the other person continues to wield in your life.

### What if I'm the one who needs Forgiveness?

The first step is to honestly assess and acknowledge the wrongs you've done and how they have affected others. Avoid judging yourself too harshly. If you're truly sorry for something you've said or done, consider admitting it to those you've harmed. Speak of your sincere sorrow or regret, and ask for forgiveness — without making excuses. Remember, however, you can't force someone to forgive you. Others need to move to forgiveness at their own pace and time. Whatever happens, commit to treating others with compassion, empathy, and respect.

### Five-Step Process of Forgiveness

As noted earlier, forgiveness is important but not always easy. The following is an example of a five-step process of forgiveness. Figure 1 depicts these steps and below the table, a write up of the process.

STEP	ACCOMPANYING ACTION
1	Recall the hurt
2	Empathize with the offender
3	Offer the offender the altruistic gift of forgiveness
4	Commit publicly to forgive
5	Hold on to forgiveness

Figure 1: Process of Forgiveness

The first step is to recall the hurt. It is important for allowing yourself to experience and acknowledge the pain and anger that accompany the offense. The next step is to empathize with the offender by allowing yourself to see things from their perspective and understand the circumstances they may have been facing when the offense occurred. Next, you must choose to offer the offender the altruistic gift of forgiveness, whether or not it is sought or earned by the offender. Forgiveness is not about the offender, but about you choosing to release them from your anger and pain. The next step is to commit to telling a trusted friend, family member, or counselor that you have chosen to forgive your offender. The purpose of committing publicly to forgiveness is to help you remember your decision and stand by it. The final step is to hold on to forgiveness. Once you have decided to forgive someone, stand firm in your decision, even when waves of pain and anger resurface.<sup>85</sup>

#### **Four-Step Process of Reconciliation**

The following is an example of the process of reconciliation depicted via four-steps; first in a pictorial format and then expounded upon in writing below.

STEP	ACCOMPANYING ACTION
1	Decide to reconcile
2	Discuss and forgive past hurts
3	Commit to healing
4	Devote to rebuild the relationship

Figure 2: Process of Reconciliation

---

<sup>85</sup> Everett Worthington, *Steps to REACH Forgiveness and to Reconcile*. Boston, MA: Pearson Custom Publishing, 2009.

Imagine that you are on a bridge with you on one side and the other person you are reconciling with on the other side. The initial stage of reconciliation is where both individuals are “standing their ground.”

The first step represents the mutual decision made by both people to reconcile the relationship. Both individuals must decide whether, how, and why they want to reconcile the relationship. This is the first step toward reconciliation. Next step, both individuals need to talk about the transgressions they have committed against each other. Both people may feel that they are the victim and that the other person is wrong. By speaking softly and with humility, honestly, and openly expressing their hurts, the individuals can forgive each other and move on to the next step of healing. At this point in the process, it is time to work on the relationship. Both parties need to commit to “healing” the relationship by eliminating negative habits of interacting with one another (being critical, defensive, self-centered, and prideful, etc.) and negative or hurtful behaviors toward one another and set clear expectations for what the newly rebuilt, healthy relationship will look like.

Finally, after deciding to reconcile, discussing and forgiving past hurts, and commit to healing the relationship, it is time for both people to devote themselves to continuing to rebuild the relationship by empathizing with one another, decreasing negative (painful or angry) emotions within the relationship, and increasing positive emotions toward one another.<sup>86</sup>

In summary, the results from a Transformational Manual on Forgiveness is that more people will make the choice to forgive to live and experience an abundance of joy, peace, and happiness which does not come from the world but only from God who forgives and loves us as

---

<sup>86</sup> Everett Worthington, *Steps to REACH Forgiveness and to Reconcile*. Boston, MA: Pearson Custom Publishing, 2009.

we forgive others. In GOD's eyes, love is never absent. In GOD's heart, forgiveness is never impossible. In GOD's embrace, no one is ever alone or forgotten. The next chapter delves into the intercultural dynamics of forgiveness and unforgiveness.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE INTERCULTURAL DYNAMICS OF FORGIVENESS

This chapter focuses on the cross-cultural dynamics of forgiveness and unforgiveness. An extensive body of literature exists on the topic of forgiveness. However, the literature on forgiveness is limited when it comes to empirically defining forgiveness. Also, little work has been done cross-culturally to assess how the understanding and experience of forgiving may differ in various cultures. There are many questions which remain largely unaddressed in contemporary social science. For example, is forgiveness valued and practiced in similar ways across cultures? How do cultural factors influence individual and group processes of forgiveness?

The 21st century world has become a global village according to Marshall McLuhan and Bruce Powers.<sup>87</sup> We live in a day when happenings in one part of the world immensely affect people living in distant lands. David Livermore of the CQ-Cultural Intelligence Center has divided the world into twelve different cultural blocks which must explore and learn how to live with one another in harmony. In our internet digital virtual world nothing can be done in isolation anymore.<sup>88</sup> Livermore states, “Cultural Intelligence measures the ability to effectively reach across the chasm of cultural difference in a way that is loving and respectful.”<sup>89</sup> Likewise, Soon Hng and Linn Dan Dyne define Cultural Intelligence as an individual’s capability to function and manage effectively in culturally diverse settings.<sup>90</sup> As we continue to widen our

---

<sup>87</sup> Marshall McLuhan and Bruce R. Powers, *The Global Village*, New York, NY: Oxford University, 1986.

<sup>88</sup> Cultural Intelligence Center. “What Is CQ?” <https://culturalq.com/what-is-cq/> (accessed July 28, 2018).

<sup>89</sup> David A. Livermore, *Cultural Intelligence*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009, 13.

<sup>90</sup> Soon Hng & Linn Dan Dyne, *Handbook of Cultural Intelligence*, New York, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2005, 3.

lens to include what's going on within us, we will be able to interact more lovingly by effectively expressing love with our ethnically different neighbors.

The following sections detail how culture influence forgiveness, how Eastern and Western cultures characterize forgiveness, the cross-cultural study of the concept and process of forgiveness and unforgiveness across cultures, and witnessing the Gospel through forgiveness.

According to Sandage and Williamson, forgiveness is a concept that can be traced and studied in connection with diverse streams of literature from cultures around the globe.<sup>91</sup> Forgiveness represents a scholarly landscape that is much stronger in variety than orderly coherence. R. Wuthnow concludes:

Forgiveness is a culturally available category that people associate with a loosely defined set of attitudes and behavior that often includes making sense of or giving a new interpretation to a past action, overcoming anger or guilt, gaining a feeling of cleansing or wholeness, and being able to think about or interact with an offending or aggrieved person in a new way.<sup>92</sup>

#### How Culture Influences Forgiveness

This study underscores the way in which culture influences the process of forgiveness. Paul G. Hiebert defines culture as, “the integrated system of learned patterns of behavior, ideas and products characteristic of a society.”<sup>93</sup> Hiebert believes that the first step in learning about a culture is observing the behavior of the people and looking for patterns in the behavior. For example, two American men on meeting grasp each other's hand and shake it. In Mexico, they will embrace. In India, each would put his hands together and raise them towards his forehead

---

<sup>91</sup> Steven J. Sandage & Ian Williamson (2005). Forgiveness in cultural context. In Everett L. Worthington, Jr. (Ed.), *Handbook of forgiveness* (pp. 41-56). New York: Brunner-Routledge.

<sup>92</sup> R. Wuthnow, (2000). How religious groups promote forgiving: A national study. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 39, 125–139.

<sup>93</sup> Paul G. Hiebert, *Cultural Anthropology*. Baker Books. Grand Rapids, MI. 1983.

with a slight bow of the head, a gesture of greeting that is efficient.<sup>94</sup> This is why missiologist Jones Kaleli argues that, "...culture as the pattern of observable behavior is rooted in the subjective conscience of human beings. In other words, the external behavior in persons has its origin in the governing conceptual world of the inside."<sup>95</sup>

The American Psychological Association (APA, 2003) multicultural guidelines define culture as "the belief systems and value orientations that influence customs, norms, practices, and social institutions, including psychological processes (language, caretaking practices, media, educational systems) and organizations." These APA guidelines further describe culture as "the embodiment of a worldview" and say that "all individuals are cultural beings and have a cultural, ethnic, and racial heritage"<sup>96</sup>

#### How Eastern and Western Cultures Characterize Forgiveness

Given that the current state of cross-cultural forgiveness research is deficient, this research examines the similarities and differences in how people of Eastern and Western cultures characterize forgiveness. What might contribute to culturally-specific understandings of forgiveness? One of the central and most well-researched differences between Eastern and Western cultures is individualism and collectivism.<sup>97</sup>

H. C. Triandis defines individualists as, "those who tend to favor personal interests over the interests of collectives, and collectivists are those who are likely to place collective interests

---

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Kaleli, Jones, *Theological Reflection in An African Christian Worldview Vol.1*. Eldoret Kenya: Utafiti Foundation.2014:57

<sup>96</sup> American Psychological Association. (2003). Guidelines for multicultural education, training, research, practice, and organizational change for psychologists. *American Psychologist*, 58, 377-402.

<sup>97</sup> H. R. Markus & S. Kitayama, (1991). Culture and the self: Implications for cognition, emotion, and motivation. *Psychological Review*, 98, 224-253.

ahead of personal interests, or not distinguish between personal and collective interests.”<sup>98</sup> As a result of being part of an individualistic or collectivistic society, people become focused on different aspects of their self and others. “People of Western cultures tend to develop an independent self-construal and become focused on personal goals and autonomy of self. These individuals tend to view the self as separate from others and define the self largely in terms of personality traits, abilities, and attitudes” according to Markus and Kitayama.<sup>99</sup> In contrast, people of Eastern cultures tend to develop a “collective or interdependent self-construal and become focused on interdependence and relationships. These individuals tend to view the self as linked to others and define the self largely in terms of social relationships.”<sup>100</sup> Whereas S. J. Sandage and colleagues argue that, “forgiveness is a personal decision,” the highly collectivistic Hmong culture construes forgiveness as a communal process that serves to eliminate tension and restore harmony among the different clans.<sup>101</sup> It is for this reason individuals from the individualistic Western societies speak of individual offenses and personal guilty while those of Eastern or African collectivistic societies speak of communal offenses and shame.

In collectivistic societies, it is common for a family or group to offer forgiveness to the offender. Consequently, forgiveness serves to restore closeness and group harmony rather than confer personal benefits.<sup>102</sup> The Rwandan genocide is a case in point. Survivor shares,

---

<sup>98</sup> H. C. Triandis, (1989). The self and social behavior in differing cultural contexts. *Psychological Review*, 96, 506-520.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> S. J. Sandage, P. C. Hill, & H. C. Vang, (2003). Toward a Multicultural Positive Psychology: Indigenous Forgiveness and Hmong Culture. *Counseling Psychologist*, 31, 564-592.

<sup>102</sup> S. J. Sandage, & I. Williamson (2005). Forgiveness in cultural context. In E.L. Worthington, Jr. (Ed.), *Handbook of forgiveness* (pp. 41-56). New York: Brunner-Routledge.

“Forgiving was not just as easy as I’m saying ... and it’s never easy to forgive, but I forgave these people because I want to show peace is possible.”<sup>103</sup>

#### Cross-cultural Concept and Process of Forgiveness: A South Korea View

A cross-cultural study of the concept and process of forgiveness were conducted wherein the study investigated forgiveness among forgivers in the U.S. and South Korea. Participants were 50 U.S. university students (31 women and 19 men, mean age 21.00) and 36 Korean university students (17 women and 19 men, mean age 21.14). Both cross-cultural similarities and differences were found in the concept and process of forgiveness. Results indicated cross-cultural agreement that reconciliation, decreases in negative responses, and increases in positive responses to the wrongdoer were important to the concept of forgiveness (particularly decreases in negative affect), and that forgetting, excusing, justifying, and condoning the wrong were generally not important to the concept of forgiveness.<sup>104</sup>

Improvements in the wrongdoer's behavior and trustworthiness were also found to be significantly more important to forgiveness for Korean than U.S. participants. Reported processes of forgiveness for Korean and U.S. participants correlated significantly and reported processes of forgiveness from each culture correlated significantly with the Process Model of Forgiveness. Participants particularly in Korean, reported that a number of the units in the theorized Process Model of Forgiveness did not occur for them. Findings are compared with the definition and theory of Enright and colleagues.<sup>105</sup>

---

<sup>103</sup> The Heights: <http://bcheights.com/2016/11/06/rwandan-genocide-survivor-shares-story-tragedy-forgiveness/> (accessed June 20, 2018).

<sup>104</sup> Amy Dianne, Owen, *A Cross-Cultural Study of the Concept and Process of Forgiveness*. 2008.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

### Forgiveness and Unforgiveness Across Cultures: A Japanese and Chinese Views

Forgiveness plays a significant role across cultures. In Japan cultural setting, confession or admission of a fault is a form of self-shaming and thus not common. Japanese would never say, “I forgive you.” is a common sentiment in Japan. Forgiveness becomes problematic because to say “I forgive” implies that you affirm the other person badness. Thus it is far easier to overlook, excuse, or forgive than to confess and forgive. The Japanese word *yurusu* is translated to “forgiveness,” which means to excuse, indulge, or permit.”<sup>106</sup>

In the book, *Cross-Cultural Servanthood*, Duane Elmer, shared a story of forgiveness, the Chinese and American styles. Elmer writes, “A Singapore woman’s father had made mistakes that had hurt her. “I pushed him to just say, “I’m sorry,” but he never would. If he would just say those words, then everything would be all right.” Often he would want to give me gifts, and I would refuse to accept them until he said he was sorry.”<sup>107</sup> Elmer explains, the young woman adamantly insisted that she must hear the words, “I’m sorry” from her father in order for forgiveness to be genuine and the relationship to be restored. They both remained entrenched in their positions because of their cultural beliefs. As a result, the father-daughter relationship suffered. In America, forgiveness is saying, “I’m sorry” is a verbal exchange. Whereas in Singapore, an apology and forgiveness are expressed through actions. Base on the Singapore culture, her father was expressing his apology by the acts of the gift-giving.<sup>108</sup> From Elmer’s perspective, forcing or requiring someone to say “I am sorry” would only work best in

---

<sup>106</sup> Mark D. Baker and Joel B. Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011.

<sup>107</sup> Duane Elmer, *Cross-Cultural Servanthood: Serving the World in Christlike Humility*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006, 148-149.

<sup>108</sup> Elmer, 148-149.

individualistic communities as opposed to collectivistic societies. It is important to be aware of the cultural worldview dynamics when dealing with forgiveness and unforgiveness in intercultural contexts.

### Witnessing the Gospel through Forgiveness: Christians in Egypt

The Lausanne Global Analysis describes a living example from the persecuted Christians in Egypt witnessing the Gospel through forgiveness. These extraordinary Christians responded to the violent attacks that have taken place since 2013 as an opportunity to witness to the Gospel.

While many Christians struggle to choose between leaving the country or enduring more suffering, these extraordinary Christians responses were a renewed sense of mission to the larger community. These Egyptian Christians did not seek revenge; instead, they extended forgiveness to those who murdered their loved ones. Many Christian families embrace martyrdom as a gift from God and to God while keeping a balance between their love for life and their willingness to die for Christ. As one of the bishops put it at a mass funeral of the martyrs:

True, we love martyrdom. But we also love life. We don't hate life on earth. God created us on earth to live, not die. The fact that we accept death doesn't mean our blood is cheap, and it doesn't mean that it doesn't matter to us. We do not commit suicide. But we witness for Christ, whether by our lives or by our transition to heaven. If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord.<sup>109</sup>

Social media and other media reported such extraordinary attitudes of Christian forgiveness, interviewing members of the families who have lost loved ones. They openly spoke about their Christian faith and what it means to extend God's forgiveness. Such powerful Christian testimonies had a lasting impact on the larger Muslim community that was stunned by the Christian response. In many instances, Muslims were outraged at the blind and evil hatred

---

<sup>109</sup> Lausanne Global Analysis. <https://www.lausanne.org/content/lga/2018-01/witnessing-gospel-forgiveness> (accessed May 28, 2018).

behind these atrocities, expressing their astonishment at Christians' emphasis on love and forgiveness.<sup>110</sup>

This powerful Christian testimony to the gospel of love and forgiveness amid hatred had a positive impact on the attitudes of many Muslims towards Christianity and the Christians. It raises curiosity about the Christian faith and the gospel of forgiveness prompting many to ask themselves, "what kind of faith is this?" Meanwhile, many Christians have been empowered by the testimonies of those who boldly extended love and forgiveness, giving them a renewed sense of mission amid suffering.<sup>111</sup>

What is happening in Egypt is not a remote event in church history, but a living testimony to the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Global Church is enriched by the faithful witness of many Egyptian Christians whose faith exemplifies the true meaning of hope. The Global Church is being reminded anew that at the heart of the Christian witness is a capacity to suffer for Christ. "For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him but also to suffer for him" (Phil. 1:29). Life in Christ is also a call to faithfulness until death. (Rev.2:10).

Being faithful witnesses, Christians not only suffer for Christ but also hope for a glorified future with God. The Palm Sunday Egyptian martyrs instantly exchanged their bloodied earthy robes for martyrs' robes washed white in the blood of the Lamb, and their earthly palm branches were exchanged for heavenly ones as they stood worshiping the Lamb seated on the throne (Rev 7). The global church is called to faithfully pray for the church of the martyrs, as the Christians

---

<sup>110</sup> Lausanne Global Analysis. <https://www.lausanne.org/content/lga/2018-01/witnessing-gospel-forgiveness> (accessed May 28, 2018).

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

of Egypt seek faithfully to live the gospel of love and forgiveness during times of suffering and persecution.<sup>112</sup>

---

<sup>112</sup> Lausanne Global Analysis. <https://www.lausanne.org/content/lga/2018-01/witnessing-gospel-forgiveness> (accessed May 28, 2018).

## CHAPTER 5

### RESULTS

#### Method Used for Data Questionnaire Collection

The research method used in this study was qualitative in nature with the use of a questionnaire. The researcher first completed a CITI training after which approval to conduct the study was submitted to Liberty University's IRB office. Upon approval, the researcher emailed the questionnaire to 10 participants along with an informed consent form. The questionnaire was a series of 27 questions designed with four parts to ensure that each question provides the information needed (See Appendix below). The parts are as follows: Demographics, Cultural View on Forgiveness and Unforgiveness, Personal View on Forgiveness, and biblical View on Forgiveness. The researcher collected data in a span of four weeks. Upon receiving responses to the questionnaires, the researcher read each questionnaire and analyzed the data to find common themes.

#### Result of Questionnaire

This questionnaire was completed by 12 participants from five ethnic groups between the ages of 30-70.

#### **PART I: Demographics**

Demographic information was obtained from all participants. The demographic information included the following items: name, age, gender, religious background, home and parent country, and length of time in the USA.

A total of 16 potential participants were sought out and the final total of participants who completed the questionnaire were 12. Of the 12 participants, 8 were female and 4 were male and the ages ranged from 30 – 70 years old. The 12 participants represented five ethnic groups namely;

Africans, African Americans, Asians, Caribbean, and Caucasians. The religious backgrounds represented by the participants are Christian who lived in the USA for more ten years.

To protect the identifying information of the participants, the researcher assigned numbers to participants categorized by their ethnic background to represent their corresponding demographic data as displayed in the figure below.

<b>Participant Number Categorizes by Ethnic Group (see Key below)</b>	<b>Gender (F; M)</b>	<b>Age Range (30 –39; 40-49; 50 - 59; 60 -69)</b>
AA1	F	60 -69
AA2	M	50 – 59
AA3	F	40-49
AF1	F	30 –39
AF2	F	30 –39
AS1	F	40-49
AS2	F	50 - 59
CB1	M	40-49
CB2	F	40-49
CB3	M	50 - 59
CAU1	M	60 -69
CAU2	F	60 -69

Figure 3: Participants' Demographic Data

Ethnic Group Key: *Africans (AF), African Americans (AA), Asians (AS), Caribbean (CB), and Caucasians (CAU)* Gender: *F = female; M = Male*

## PART II: Cultural View on Forgiveness and Unforgiveness

1. How does your culture define forgiveness?

AF1 succinctly stated, “Forgiveness is defined as the ability to move past wrongdoing and not retaliate. It is symbolized by the Adinkra symbol “*hye wo nhye*” ~~303~~ meaning “the one who burns you not be burned. A message that provides encouragement to turn the other cheek and not repay evil for evil.” AA2 defines forgiveness, “as the act of saying and showing you are truly sorry and remorseful for something you wrongfully contributed too.” CB1 defines forgiveness, “as pardoning a person who has done you wrong; not having “hurt” or “ill will” against that person.”

2. How is forgiveness/unforgiveness handled in your culture?

AF1 stated, “the magnitude of the wrongdoing determines how it is handled in the Ghanaian culture particularly among the Ashanti tribe. At times, it may take the head of the extended family “*Abusuapanyin*” and some elders to resolve the issue. And other times, it may take the Chief of the town or even the King of the tribe to handle the situation.” AS1 says it is handled quietly through prayers, seldom discussed verbally. All participants agreed that unforgiveness is handled by silent treatment, physical and emotional distance, and showing outward contempt or hostility towards the offender.

3. What if any are matters that are considered hard to forgive in your culture?

AS2 stated, “matters relating to the Ten Commandments are hard to forgive.” African American, Caribbean, and Caucasian claim murder, witchcraft, sexual abuse, and infidelity.

4. Traditionally speaking, (a) how does your culture reconcile two parties that were “at war”/enemies? (b) Who takes on the role of facilitating reconciliation between the two parties/enemies?

AF1 noted, “Typically, the head of the family “*Abusuapanyin*” who is a permanently designated elderly man in the extended family charged with leading the family in all matters summons a meeting with the two parties and the older members of the family who are deemed the wiser ones based on their age.” All other ethnic groups seek some type of counseling from a clergy member, or at times an older family member that is mutually respected by both parties.

5. Traditionally speaking, give an example of the means used to explain forgiveness/unforgiveness in the community?

All ethnic groups agreed that the means used to explain forgiveness\unforgiveness are usually done in church, Catholic school, Sunday school, and discuss with family members.

### **PART III: Personal View on Forgiveness**

1. Have you ever struggled to forgive or receive forgiveness? If yes, how did the struggle to forgive or receive forgiveness impact your physical, mental, spiritual, and social (relationships) wellness?

All participants have struggled with forgiveness, in some cases, it has resulted in mental and physical health.

2. How do you handle emotions that contradict your choice to forgive?

AS2 noted, “I handle emotions to forgive by remaining quiet. Also, feels uncomfortable to have a discussion or face the person.” AF2 says, “I do a lot of self-talk.” CAU1 stated, “I put the emotions in the background until comfortable enough to have a logical healthy mindset.” Similarly, CB2 believes timing is usually the best method.

3. What, if at all, are the benefits or the drawbacks of forgiveness?

All groups agree that some of the drawbacks are unhappiness, health risks, and irrational thinking.

4. How do you know that you have forgiven or not forgiven?

All participants said when internally and externally there's no feeling of animosity angry, bitterness, and hatred towards the party involved.

5. Describe, if at all, an example of a cultural misunderstanding of forgiveness/unforgiveness that you and/or a member of your community experienced while in America.

AF1 noted, "A cultural misunderstanding occurred when my husband was diagnosed with a brain tumor back in 2010. I called his brother and sister who live in America to convey the news to them knowing that they will tell their parents in Ghana. Weeks into the treatment and surgery, I learned that my husband's parents were angry because I had not called them personally to deliver the news of their son's diagnosis."

CB2 explicitly stated, "A prime example of misunderstanding was when someone in the church was offended by an individual and presumed that a leader knew of the situation and didn't take any action to resolve the problem. As a result, the person left the church. It was later revealed that the leader had no idea that the situation had occurred."

#### **PART IV: Biblical View on Forgiveness**

1. Do you believe forgiveness is a necessity for salvation? YES or NO

All participants agreed that forgiveness is necessary for salvation because Jesus died on the cross for the remission of our sins. By His blood, we are forgiven so we can forgive ourselves and others.

2. Are there sins that cannot be forgiven? Most participants agreed that the only sin that cannot be forgiven is Blaspheming against the Holy Spirit. However, AA2 believes, "infidelity cannot be forgiven." AS2 and CAU1 reported, "there are no sins that cannot be forgiven."

3. What is the biblical view of the cause of pain and suffering? The common theme among all groups is sin and unforgiveness.
4. How have you approached God in the moments when you were hurt? All participants approach God in a moment of hurt and pain through prayer.
5. Please share an example of a prayer to God on forgiving someone who has hurt you? All participants pray to the Sovereign and Holy God asking for forgiveness of sins for themselves and the person(s) who has hurt them. Praying for the ability to love as God loves his children.

#### Discussion

The results of the questionnaire aligned with the research on forgiveness in several ways. First, all participants shared that it was hard to forgive. Participants further shared that prayer is a powerful tool in the process of forgiveness as had been discussed by previous research on forgiveness. Another main agreement from the study's results to current forgiveness literature was linked to the cultural influences on forgiveness. The views of the West versus the East coincided with the results about how one who is hurt views the offender and the offense. The Western idea that some sins cannot be forgiven and from an individualistic stance, one may fit the unforgiveness category was seen in the results.

#### **Researcher's Takeaway**

As previously mentioned, this started off as a research paper but eventually turned into a powerful tool to privately help me to understand that I was still struggling with unforgiveness.

Echoing from Paul's words, I was holding on to resentments, bitterness, rage, and anger, not forgiving as Jesus Christ has forgiven me (Eph. 4:31-32 NKJV). I have learned through this

study that forgiveness is God's antidote for anger. The act of forgiveness is the result of God working to demonstrate His love, not in the natural but in a supernatural way.

God is intentional and His timing is impeccable. This study was purposely designed by God for my complete healing. You see, our greatest assignment is hidden behind our pain. Like Moses, his assignment was hidden behind the burning bush.

My prayer is that this thesis would be a tremendous blessing to those that are struggling with unforgiveness. A Transformational Manual on Forgiveness seeks to help let go of the past and embrace the future because forgiveness unleashes healing. Forgiveness takes a person into a new dimension of incredible freedom and inner peace. The Bible tells us, when we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:8-9). Also, Isaiah succinctly states, "I am the one who blots out your transgression for my own sake, and I'll remember your sins no more" (Isaiah 43:25 NIV). Theologically, this means when God forgives our confessed sins, He completely erases our trespasses, iniquities, and transgression. He no longer remembers or reminds us of it. It is our flesh and Satan that brings to our remembrance our past hurts and pain. This is Satan's strategy to weaken and destroy God's people.

Forgiveness is a choice, when you choose to forgive, your impact will be greater for Jesus. A person with a forgiving heart is unstoppable. You will have influence and power to impact those you interact with daily in various relationships. More importantly, you will be healthier and physically able to carry out the Great Commission with a holistic body, soul, mind, and spirit.

## Implications and Recommendations

This study has several implications for the church and humanity at large. For the church, this study acknowledged the importance of understanding the process of forgiveness and also talked about what might hinder this process. The manual developed from this study contains relevant information for those serving in the church and the body of Christ to use when exploring areas of forgiveness or unforgiveness. Further, this study indicated that since cross-cultural differences in understanding forgiveness and its process exist, those serving diverse communities in the church or outside the church, need to be sensitive to their congregants, counseling clients, or community members from diverse cultural backgrounds.

As a researcher, this study impacted me in two ways. First, the awareness that there are many people throughout the world who are suffering and in tremendous pain as a result of past hurts, hatred, violence, and destruction. In different parts of the world, thousands of people are killed daily including children because of the inability and unwillingness to forgive and forget the past.

Secondly, the association of forgiveness and unforgiveness with mental and physical health, in particular, cancer. Standiford noted, “cancer is a deadly consequence of unforgiveness”.<sup>113</sup> Many people are on medication or have turned to drugs, alcohol, and other deadly substances to alleviate the pain and suffering, which has such strong grip of the past that it chokes the possibilities of any manifestation of the present.

---

<sup>113</sup> The Deadly Consequences of Unforgiveness: <http://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/healthscience/2015/june/the-deadly-consequences-of-unforgiveness> (accessed June 20, 2018).

I recommend that more research is done in the following three areas. First, research into the number of significant gaps exist in our understanding of the ways in which forgiveness is important for families and family functioning. For example, what types of events or interpersonal transgressions arise in families that most often call for one person to forgive another? Without intervention, how do families typically negotiate the process of forgiveness? How does this process vary for different types of families? Finally, and perhaps most important, how does forgiveness or lack of forgiveness following relational injuries relate to the overall functioning and well-being of a family?

Secondly, further research could examine the difference between forgiveness and repentance. Forgiveness is a deeply religious concept for people from many faiths and cultures. Issues of guilt, reconciliation, salvation, and redemption are common to many religions and many cultures.<sup>114</sup> Therefore, further research will be helpful on forgiveness and religion.

Finally, future researchers could investigate the particular transgression that occurred by an offender. Focusing on certain types of abuse could further help to understand the recovery process of forgiveness for a particular victim. Overall, this will help to enhance the knowledge of forgiveness.

---

<sup>114</sup>Michael E. McCullough, & G. Bono. Religion, forgiveness, and adjustment in older adulthood In K. W. Schaie, Neal Krause, & A. Booth (Eds.), *Religious influences on health and well-being in the elderly*. New York: Springer.

## **APPENDIX: QUESTIONNAIRE**

### **The Transformational Power of Forgiveness within the Church**

#### **PART I: Demographics**

1. Name:
2. Age range:
3. Gender:
4. Religious Background:
5. Home country:
6. Parent's home country:
7. How long have you lived in the USA:

#### **PART II: Cultural View on Forgiveness and Unforgiveness**

6. How does your culture define forgiveness?
7. How is forgiveness/unforgiveness handled in your culture?
8. What if any are matters that are considered hard to forgive in your culture?
9. Traditionally speaking, (a) how does your culture reconcile two parties that were "at war"/enemies? (b) Who takes on the role of facilitating reconciliation between the two parties/enemies?
10. Traditionally speaking, give example of the means used to explain forgiveness/unforgiveness in the community?

#### **PART III: Personal View on Forgiveness**

6. Have you ever struggled to forgive or receive forgiveness? If yes, how did the struggle to forgive or receive forgiveness impact your physical, mental, spiritual, and social (relationships) wellness?
7. How do you handle emotions that contradict your choice to forgive?
8. What, if at all, are the benefits or the drawbacks of forgiveness?

9. How do you know that you have forgiven or not forgiven?
10. Describe, if at all, an example of a cultural misunderstanding of forgiveness/unforgiveness that you and/or a member of your community experienced while in America.

**PART IV: Biblical View on Forgiveness**

6. Do you believe forgiveness is a necessity for salvation? YES or NO
7. Are there sins that cannot be forgiven?
8. What is the biblical view of the cause of pain and suffering?
9. How have you approached God in the moments when you were hurt?
10. Please share an example of a prayer to God on forgiving someone who has hurt you?

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- American Psychological Association. (2003). Guidelines for multicultural education, training, research, practice, and organizational change for psychologists. *American Psychologist*, 58, 377–402.
- Arendt, Hannah, *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958, 237.
- Baker Mark D. and Green Joel B., *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011, 233.
- Balkin, Richard S., S. J. Freeman & S. R. Lyman (2009). Forgiveness, reconciliation, and mechila: Integrating the Jewish concept of forgiveness into clinical practice. *Counseling and Values*, 53, 153–160. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-007X.2009.tb00121.x>.
- Barry, Michael S. The Forgiveness Project. *The Startling Discovery of How to Overcome Cancer, Find Health, and Achieve Peace*. Kregel Publications: Grand Rapids, MI.
- Bauer, Walter. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, “BDAG” (3rd Edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).
- Borris, Eileen. *Institute For Multi-Track Diplomacy*, Arlington VA, 2003, 3.
- Brauns, Chris. *Unpacking Forgiveness*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2008), 49.
- Carpenter, Thomas P., Stefanie M. Tignor, Jo-Ann Tsang, & Amanda Willett (2016). Dispositional self-forgiveness, guilt- and shame-proneness, and the roles of motivational tendencies. *Personality and Individual Differences* 98, pages 53-61.
- Carson, D. A. *The Gospel According to John: The Pillar New Testament Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1991.
- Can Unforgiveness Cause Cancer?  
<http://www.bsgulf.org/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=91&Itemid=2>  
(accessed June 10, 2018).
- Can Anger and Unforgiveness Cause Cancer? <https://www.midlandscbd.com/articles/can-anger-and-unforgiveness-cause-cancer-9010> (accessed June 20, 2018).
- Cultural Intelligence Center. “What Is CQ?” <https://culturalq.com/what-is-cq/> (accessed July 28, 2018).
- Dianne, Amy Owen. *A Cross-Cultural Study of the Concept and Process of Forgiveness*. 2008.

- DiBlasio, Frederick A. The use of decision-based forgiveness intervention within intergenerational family therapy. *Journal of Family Therapy*, 20, 77–94.
- Dossey, Larry. *Prayer Is Good Medicine: How to Reap the Healing Benefits of Prayer*. 1st ed. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996.
- Elliott, Barbara, (2011). Forgiveness therapy: A clinical intervention for chronic disease. *Journal of Religion & Health*, 50, 240–247. doi:10.1007/ s10943-010-9336-9.
- Ellis Albert A. (1962). *Reason and emotion in psychotherapy*. Secaucus, NJ: Lyle Stuart.
- Elmer, Duane. *Cross-Cultural Servanthood: Serving the World in Christlike Humility*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2006, 148-149.
- Enright, Robert & Catherine T. Coyle (1998). Researching the process model of forgiveness within psychological interventions. In Everett L. Worthington, Jr. (Ed.), *Dimensions of forgiveness: Psychological research and theological perspectives* (pp. 139.161). Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press.
- Enright, Robert D., & E. A. Gassin (1992). Forgiveness: A developmental view. *Journal of Moral Education*, 21(2), 99–114. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0305724920210202> (accessed June 28, 2018).
- Enright, Robert D., & Robert Zell (1989). Problems encountered when we forgive one another. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, 8, 52–60.
- Enright Robert D. The Human Development Study Group. (1996). Counseling within the forgiveness triad: On forgiving, receiving forgiveness, and self-forgiveness. *Counseling and Values*, 115.
- Fillipaldi, E. Silvio. Zen-mind, Christian-mind, empty-mind. *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 1982, 75.
- Hall J. H. & F. D. Fincham (2005). Self-forgiveness: The stepchild of forgiveness research. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 24, 621–637. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1521/jscp.2005.24.5.621> (accessed June 28, 2018).
- Harris R. Laird, Gleason I. Archer, Jr. and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Workbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago Moody Press. 1999), 626.
- Henry, Matthews. *Concise Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Thomas Nelson: Nashville, 949.
- Hiebert, Paul G. *Cultural Anthropology*. Baker Books. Grand Rapids, MI. 1983.
- Hng, Soon & Dyne Linn Dan. *Handbook of Cultural Intelligence*, New York, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2005, 3.

- Ingersoll-Dayton Berit, Cynthia Torges & Neal Krause (2010). Unforgiveness, rumination, and depressive symptoms among older adults. *Aging & Mental Health*, 14(4), 439-449. doi:10.1080/13607860903483136.
- Finley, Deborah K. *What Your Future Holds and What You Can Do To Change It*. (Xulonpress, 2007).
- Johns Hopkins, *Forgiveness Your Health Depends on It*, <http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/healthyaging/healthyconnections/forgiveness-your-health-depends-on-it> (accessed May 28, 2018).
- Kaleli, Jones, *Theological Reflection in An African Christian Worldview Vol.1*. Eldoret Kenya: Utafiti Foundation.2014:57.
- Kendal, R. T. *Total Forgiveness*. Charisma House, Lake Mary, FL, 2007.
- Klatt, John S. & Robert D. Enright (2011). Initial validation of the unfolding forgiveness process in a natural environment. *Counseling and Values*, 56, 25–42. doi:10.1002/j.2161-007X.2011.tb01029.x
- Köhler, W. (1925). *The mentality of apes*. New York: Vintage.
- Lausanne Global Analysis. <https://www.lausanne.org/content/lga/2018-01/witnessing-gospel-forgiveness> (accessed May 20, 2018).
- Lawler, Kathleen A. “The Unique Effects of Forgiveness on Health: An Exploration of Pathways” *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, Vol. 28, No. 2, April 2005.
- Lingenfelter, Sheerwood G., and Marvin K. Mayers. *Ministering Cross-Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Personal Relationships*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016, 22.
- Livermore, David A. *Cultural Intelligence*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009, 13.
- Markus, H. R. & S. Kitayama (1991). Culture and the self: Implications for cognition, emotion, and motivation. *Psychological Review*, 98, 224-253.
- Mawson, C. O. S. & K. A. Whiting. *Roget's pocket thesaurus*. New York: Pocket Books, 1923.
- Macaskill, Ann. (2005). The treatment of forgiveness in counseling and therapy. *Counselling Psychology Review*, 20, 26–32.
- McCullough, Michael E. & William T. Hoyt. Transgression related motivational dispositions: personality substrates of forgiveness and their links to the Big Five. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 28, 1556-1573.

- McCullough, Michael E., & G. Bono. Religion, forgiveness, and adjustment in older adulthood In K. W. Schaie, Neal Krause, & A. Booth (Eds.), *Religious influences on health and well-being in the elderly*. New York: Springer.
- McEwen, B. S. (1998). Protective and damaging effects of stress mediators. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 338, 171–179.
- McFadyen, Alistair and Sarot Marcel. *Forgiveness and Truth*, (Cromwell Press, Trowbridge, Wiltshire, 2001), 17.
- McFarland, Michael J., C. A. Smith, Loren, Toussaint, & P. A. Thomas (2012). Forgiveness of others and health: Do race and neighborhood matter? *The Journals of Gerontology*, 67B (1), 66–75. doi:10.1093/geronb/gbr121.
- McLuham, Marshall and Bruce R. Powers. *The Global Village*, New York, NY: Oxford University, 1986.
- Merriam Webster Online. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/forgiveness> (accessed May 20, 2018).
- North, Joanna. "Wrongdoing and forgiveness." *Philosophy* 62, (1987):499-508.
- Montgomery, David. *Forgiveness in the Old Testament*. (Howard House, Ireland 2000).
- Reyes, Gilbert and Gerard A. Jacobs. *Handbook of International Disaster Psychology: Refugee mental health*, Westport CT: Praeger, 2006, 93.
- Sandage, Steven J. & Ian Williamson (2005). Forgiveness in cultural context. In Everett L. Worthington, Jr. (Ed.), *Handbook of forgiveness* (pp. 41-56). New York: Brunner-Routledge.
- Sandage S. J., P. C. Hill, & H. C. Vang (2003). Toward a Multicultural Positive Psychology: Indigenous Forgiveness and Hmong Culture. *Counseling Psychologist*, 31, 564-592.
- Smedes, Lewis B. *Forgive and Forget: Healing the Hurts We Don't Deserve*, New York: HarperOne, 2007.
- Smedes, Lewis B. *The Art of Forgiving: When You Need To Forgive and Don't Know How* (Random House, New York, 1996).
- Smith Timothy W. (1992). Hostility and health: Current status of a psychosomatic hypothesis. *Health Psychology*, 11, 139–150.
- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/forgiveness/> (accessed May 28, 2018).

The Deadly Consequences of Unforgiveness:

<http://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/healthscience/2015/june/the-deadly-consequences-of-unforgiveness> (accessed June 20, 2018).

The Heights: <http://bcheights.com/2016/11/06/rwandan-genocide-survivor-shares-story-tragedy-forgiveness/> (accessed June 20, 2018).

Toussaint, Lauen L., Owen, A. D., & Cheadle, A. (2012). "Forgive to Live: Forgiveness, Health, and Longevity." *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 35(4), 375-386. doi:10.1007/s10865-011-9362-4.

Triandis, H. C. (1989). The self and social behavior in differing cultural contexts. *Psychological Review*, 96, 506-520.

Vine, W. E. *New Testament Greek Grammar* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1965).

Walter, A. & A. Bauer. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, "BDAG" (3rd Edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 125.  
Wood, Leon J. *The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1976).

What is the Biblical Definition of Unforgiveness? <http://access-Jesus.com/unforgiveness-definition-html/> (accessed June 20, 2018).

Wood, Leon J. *The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1998.

Worthington, Everett L., Jr., S. J. Sandage, & J. W. Berry. (2000). Group interventions to promote forgiveness: What researchers and clinicians ought to know. In M. E. McCullough, K. I. Pargament, & C. E. Thoresen (Eds.), *Forgiveness: Theory, research, and practice* (pp. 228–253). New York: Guilford Press.

Worthington, Everett L. Jr. *Handbook of Forgiveness*, New York, NY: Routledge, 2005.

Worthington Everett L., Jr., & Wade N. G., (1999). The psychology of unforgiveness and forgiveness and the implication for clinical practice. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 18, 385-418.

Worthington, Everett. *Steps to REACH Forgiveness and to Reconcile*. Boston, MA: Pearson Custom Publishing, 2009.

Wuthnow R. (2000). How religious groups promote forgiving: A national study. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 39, 125–139.