



THE EMOTIONAL WORK OF FORGIVENESS

Mary Westergren, LCPC, LMHC

Wisdom
Forgiveness
Gratitude
Humility
Hope
Grace

...positive psychology needs the Church...but the Church needs the practical applications that positive psychology have to offer.



**The sacrificial gift we give to the person
who has hurt or wronged us.**

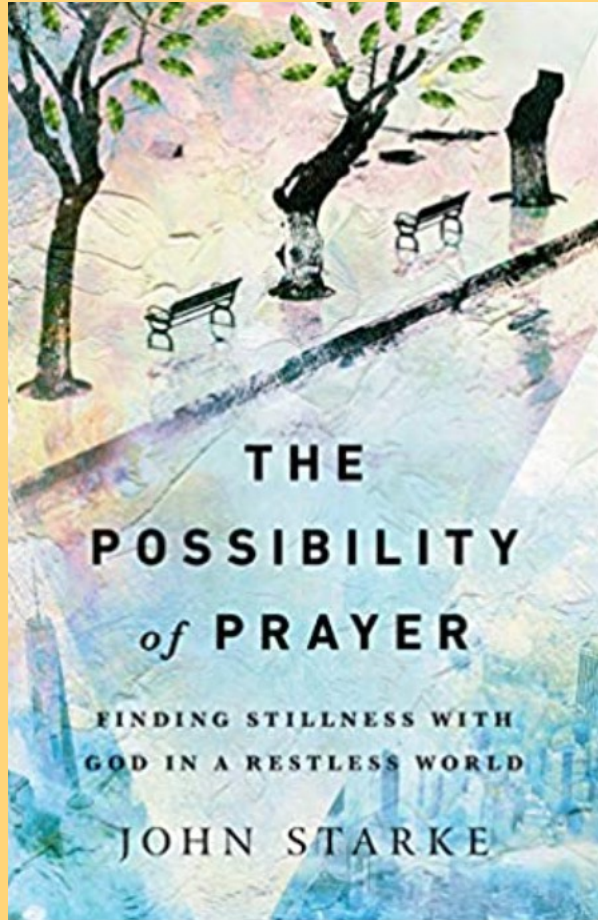
- **A wrong was done. Our sense of justice demands payment. This reflects the image of God in us.**
 - **We are created for connection, and this relationship now feels broken. The offender feels unsafe to us.**
 - **We must now choose to act in Kingdom ways, as Christ did, or not.**
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**Get rid of all bitterness, rage,
anger, harsh words, and slander,
as well as all types of evil behavior.
Instead, be kind to each other,
tenderhearted, forgiving one another,
just as God through
Christ has forgiven you...
Live a life filled with love.**

Ephesians 4:31-5:2

HOW?



“Too often I move on quickly when others cause me pain. I’m not honest about the inner bitterness and anger stewing. I put a pillow over it so that no one sees and hope that maybe it’ll be forgotten. But at some point, it does come out. Eventually, it will find its way out, but it won’t be a prayer or lament. Instead, it will be malice and suffering either in me or toward my neighbor.”

“...forgiveness and healing are difficult and costly. We know we should forgive, but our hearts don’t run as fast as our intellects because they carry heavier baggage. It requires more time and patience, more care and reflection. The psalms teach us we have little control over our emotions. The little power we have is where we take them.”



New York Times bestselling author of THE REASON FOR GOD

TIMOTHY
KELLER

forgive

WHY SHOULD I
AND HOW CAN I?

“To forgive someone’s debt to you is to absorb the debt yourself. If a friend borrows your car, totals it through reckless driving, and hasn’t any ability to remunerate you financially, you may say, ‘I forgive you,’ but the price of the wrong does not evaporate into the air. You either find the money to buy a new car or you go without one. Either way, forgiveness means the cost of the wrong moves from the perpetrator to you, and you bear it. Forgiveness, then, is a form of voluntary suffering.

--Tim Keller, “Forgive”

"A thoughtful guide to working through differences and a vibrant affirmation that, with God, all things are possible." — Ken Sande

CHANGING NORMAL

Break Through Barriers

to Pursuing Peace

in Relationships

"A must-read book for anyone desiring to learn how to navigate conflict biblically and heal broken inter-generational and cross-cultural relationships." — Laurie Stewart, CEO Peacemaker Ministries

JOLENE KINSER, PHD

"...(when in conflict) Christians and non-Christians alike tend to either not turn to anyone at all for help, relying on whatever they have absorbed from sources around them, or turn to family members, friends, and thought leaders on social media for help or guidance, some of whom are Christians. Whether we realize it or not, who we look to for guidance and help directly impacts how we view conflict and choose to respond."

--Dr. Jolene Kinser, "Changing Normal"

Cheap Grace

Pressure for the one who was wronged to forgive without conditions...the power differentials between the abuser and abused remain unchanged...no justice is pursued.

Little Grace

A transactional-forgiveness model. All emphasis is on the wrong-doer meriting forgiveness. The one wronged gives up anger *only if* the wrongdoer satisfies the subjective sense of “enough.”

No Grace

Forgiveness is disregarded, seen as an abusive model in and of itself, the only concern is on the pursuit of justice for the perceived victim. This can include our current “cancel culture” and encouragement to respond with outrage to even slightest of offenses.

Costly Grace

Forgiveness that considers both the horizontal (person-to-person) dimension, the vertical dimension (God-to-person), and the characteristics of empathy, shared humanity and humility.

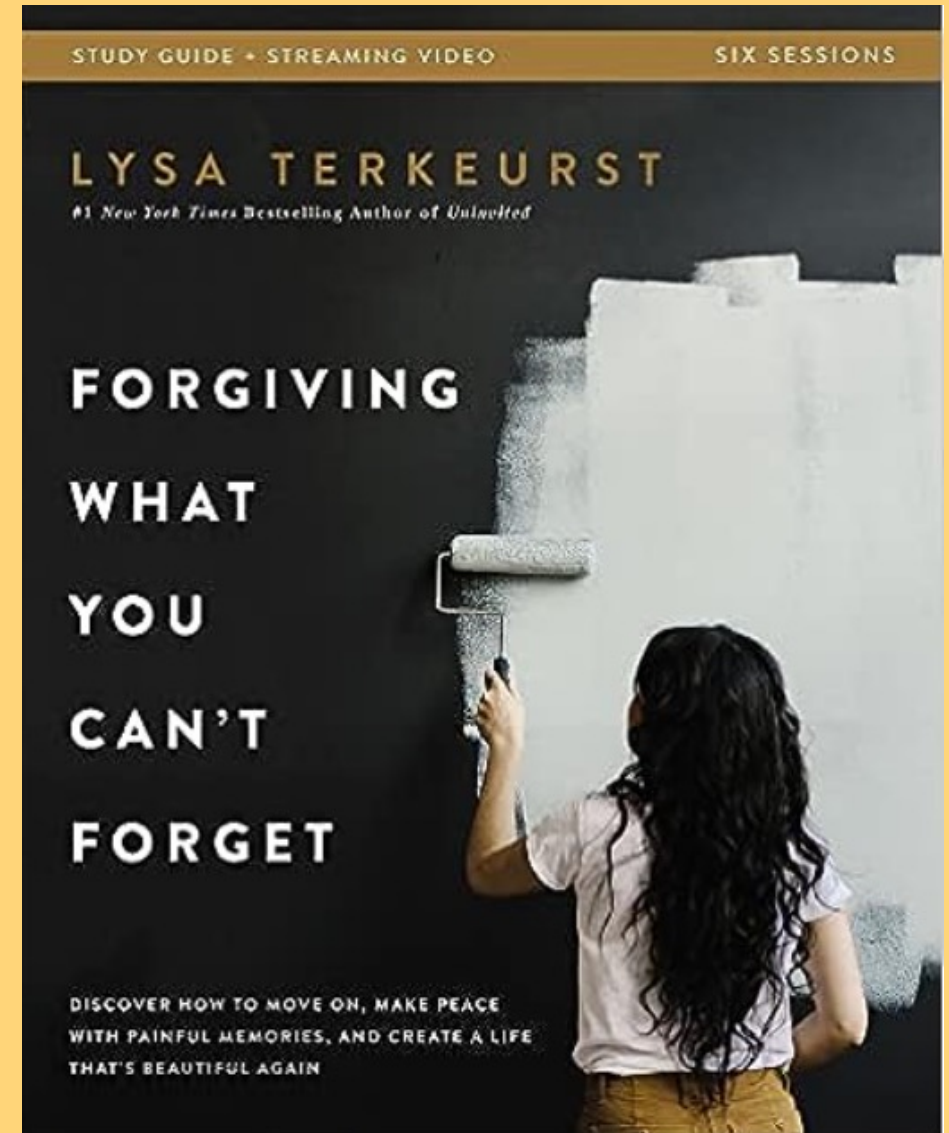
Forgiveness-the heartfelt decision to graciously release the person who hurt you from the moral obligation incurred when you were mistreated.

The **FACT** of what happened

FACT of wrong-doing → *a decision to forgive*

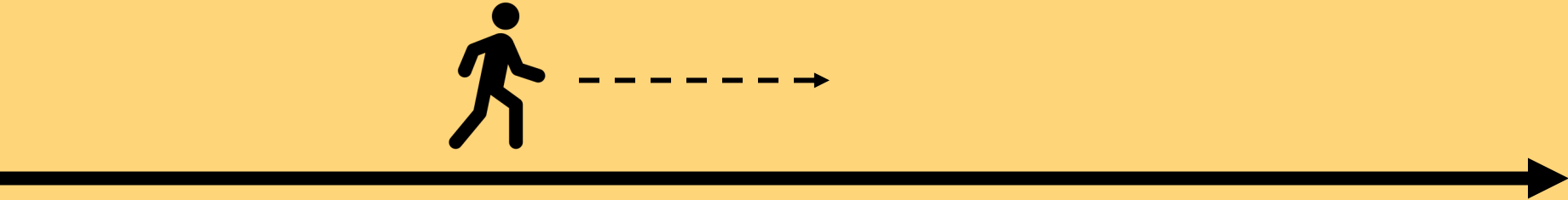
The **IMPACT** of what happened

IMPACT of wrong-doing → *a process involving time and intentional work with the Spirit.*



Decision to forgive

Full release, healing







Denial or distraction

Hurt for hurt

Over-spiritualizing

Letting go too quickly

Forgiveness does not deny that the offense occurred or that the offense was wrong.

Forgiveness does not mean we will forget.

We do begin to remember differently.

The healing process is not necessarily quick.



The Relationship

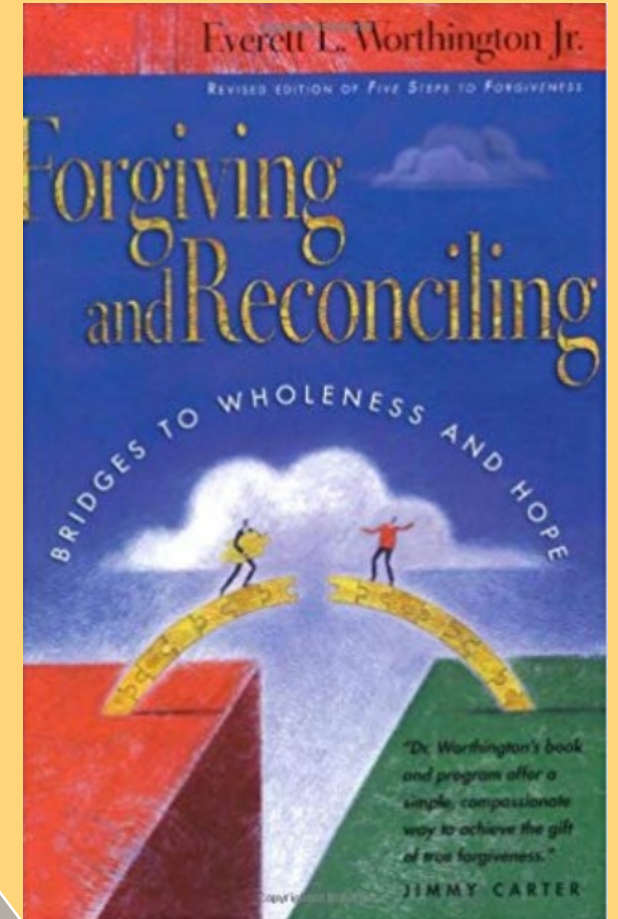
**Problems to be
Solved**

Our interpersonal
relationship

My intrapersonal
narrative;
Things that trigger
me

REACH Model

R-E-A-C-H





Recall the hurt





When we think of our offender, we must try not to think of that person as the personification of evil or ill will.

Recalling the hurt...

Pray! *Lord, be my protector. Holy Spirit, be my comforter. God of truth, be my witness to the truth.*

Slow down. Monitor your emotions.

Identify your emotions with accurate labels.

Understand the different emotions that you felt or feel.

At first, I was really **confused** that she would say something so mean.
I wondered, “What just happened?”

Then, I felt really **hurt** by her words. She said some pretty awful things about me.

The more those words played through my mind the more **ashamed** I felt.
“Really, did she think of me in that way?”

But now I guess I just feel so **hateful** towards her. She never apologized.
She acted like nothing ever happened.

And truthfully, I also feel **really sad** that it has come to this!



Recall

Begin to write out a narrative of the impact something hurtful has had on you. This will not be shared with anyone.

Use precise emotion words describing how the hurt has impacted you and may still be impacting you.



**Empathize
with the offender**

Recall the hurt

- I'm the one who got hurt! He (or she) should empathize with me!
- Are you saying that is OK?!
- If I empathize, that might be the first step towards forgetting and I don't want to to forget!
- But what about other people who might have been hurt?
- No way...not that!! I cannot empathize with that!

**But I don't want
to empathize!**

First steps of Empathy

Soft emotions are usually behind hard emotions.

People are influenced by their situations.

People are hard-wired for survival.

People are conditioned by past experiences.

People don't think things through when they are hurting.

An Attempt at Empathy

Pray. God, be my Helper in this!

What do you believe to be true about your offender and how might these things have contributed to the offense?

If he or she could understand how they hurt you, and what it cost you, what might they say?





Altruistic Gift
of Forgiveness

Empathize with the
offender

Recall the hurt

“Even if reconciliation is not possible, we move forward to a place where we recognize our yearning for reconciliation. This involves a yearning for reconciliation with our individual offender as well as a larger awareness of how deeply we need reconciliation amidst our faith communities.

(Jones and Musakura)

“Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, ‘Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?’ ‘No, not seven times,’ Jesus replied, ‘but seventy times seven!’ ‘Therefore, the Kingdom of Heaven can be compared to a king who decided to bring his accounts up to date with servants who had borrowed money from him. In the process, one of his debtors was brought in who owed him millions of dollars. He couldn’t pay, so his master ordered that he be sold—along with his wife, his children, and everything he owned—to pay the debt. But the man fell down before his master and begged him, ‘Please, be patient with me, and I will pay it all.’ Then his master was filled with pity for him, and he released him and forgave his debt. But when the man left the king, he went to a fellow servant who owed him a few thousand dollars. He grabbed him by the throat and demanded instant payment. His fellow servant fell down before him and begged for a little more time. ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay,’ he pleaded.

“But his creditor wouldn’t wait. He had the man arrested and put in prison until the debt could be paid in full. When some of the other servants saw this, they were very upset. They went to the king and told him everything that had happened. Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, ‘You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. Shouldn’t you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?’ Then the angry king sent the man to prison to be tortured until he had paid his entire debt. That’s what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart.”

--Matthew 18:21-35

A transactional view of debt

A relational view of debt



We are first forgiven,
and secondly, we are forgivers.



Decisional Forgiveness-involves one person; I agree to control my negative behavior toward another person; located in the past.

Emotional Forgiveness- involves one person; I seek to replace my negative emotions with the Fruit of the Spirit; located in the past, affecting the present.

Reconciliation- involves **two or more persons**; apology or acknowledgement of wrongdoing or a need for change is likely necessary; located in the present.

Trust-Located in the future; I must analyze the risk of this happening again and what I will open myself up to; we behave ourselves back into a trusting relationship.

The Center for Healthy Churches
Dr. Bill Wilson, founder

Hold On to
Forgiveness

Commit to
Forgive

Altruistic Gift

Empathize

Recall

A few good things to remember...

We will get hurt again by the person we forgive

We will remember the offense we wish we could forget,
and we will wonder if we truly forgave

Awkwardness is just awkwardness...
that feeling doesn't mean you haven't forgiven.

Hard wired to remember

Forgiveness does not replace hurtful memories;
it replaces the negative emotions attached
to those memories.

We are hard-wired to remember serious hurts
and offenses...

The memory keeps us from recklessly trusting
where trust may not yet be possible.

1. Practice gratitude.
2. Discipline yourself not to criticize.
3. Discipline yourself not to gossip.
4. Describe the positive.
5. Keep working out the problems that must be solved.

