

## Forgiveness: The Missing Piece to the Peace Puzzle

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### 1. Why forgiveness?

A. Prospect for peace: within the person, between people, within families and groups, and between societies and possibly nations.

B. How can a concept like forgiveness, from the virtue-ethics tradition, fit into the social ethics tradition concerned with societal fairness? The case of the sailing ships from C. S. Lewis

### 2. What is forgiveness and what is it not?

3. The science of forgiveness education/therapy: Does it work with adults? (See page 3) What changes?

4. How is change brought about? The process model of forgiving others (See page 4)

5. If forgiveness can transform internal states such as resentment and anger, can it transform relationships, families, communities, and even societies in conflict? What is transformed?

A. **Psychological dimension** to forgiveness: Internal transformations from resentment toward moral goodness regarding an offender.

B. **Social dimension** to forgiveness: Less angry people (those who have forgiven) are more likely to alter the quality of their interactions with others (Knutson, 2003). More forgiving people are more likely to help create more positive social interactions.

C. **Larger social dimension** to forgiveness: People who value forgiveness may be more likely to try to create a better society. Example: Gentilone & Regidor (1986) in Italy.

D. Attempting **to transform the community**: Forgiveness Communities, Lionel Narvaez, Colombia, South America.

E. **Political/large group forgiveness**: Example of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa (Tutu, 1994).

6. What problems arise when forgiveness is brought to the societal/political arena?

A. Confusing *social forgiving* with *absolving wrongdoing* (Simon Wiesenthal, The Sunflower, 1969).

B. Being unaware of differences in rituals or norms regarding forgiveness between two social groups (Rabbi Marc Gopin, 1996)

C. Lack of coordination between a political/religious leader and his/her community. Desmond Tutu and Dutch Reformed Church representatives in 1990 (Tutu, 1994); President Reagan at Bitburg cemetery, 1985 (Shriver, 1998);

D. Lack of coordination between forgiver and forgiven. R. King and the L.A.P.D., 1991/1995 (Pitts, 1995); Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Van der Walt et al., 2003)

Main points: When conflicts arise about forgiveness on the societal level, too often there may be *misunderstandings about what forgiveness is*. **Few attempts are sustained.**

7. How can we deeply educate people with a **readiness** for social dialogue and action regarding forgiveness and mercy? Can we **sustain** the practice of forgiveness in troubled societies?

A. Let us begin with the children: “If we are to reach real peace in this world, and if we are to carry on a real war against war, we shall have to begin with the children” (Gandhi).

B. Do societies want to help their children to become psychologically, philosophically, and theologically sophisticated forgivers? If so, **education** is the vehicle.

C. Our plan in central-city Milwaukee and Belfast: 12 years of forgiveness curricula from grade 1 through 12, progressively more challenging and subtle. *The child’s own teacher delivers the lessons.*

D. More on the plan: Bring two generations of students through forgiveness education.

E. How can this be done? Institutionalize the forgiveness education program. Can it work in the central-city? Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland? Challenges of poverty and violence (Cairns & Darby, 1998)

F. Do the forgiveness programs with children and adolescents work? (See page 5)

8. Interest from the United Nations (see letter dated April 7, 2008)

9. What is the hope? Reduced anger (emotional level); improved relationships in families, at work, and in religious communities (social level), a willingness to entertain the idea that forgiveness, properly understood and practiced, is possible between communities in conflict (political/national level).

## **Examples of Experimental Studies (with Randomized Experimental and Control Groups) in which Adults Participate**

**Incest survivors.** The forgiveness group became emotionally healthier than the control group after 14 months. Differences between the groups were observed for depression, anxiety, hope, and self-esteem. The results were maintained in a 14-month follow-up (Freedman & Enright, 1996).

**Drug rehabilitation.** The forgiveness group became emotionally healthier than the control group, similar to the above study. The experimental participants' need for drugs declined substantially, relative to the control group. Results were maintained at a 4-month follow-up (Lin, Mack, Enright, Krahn, & Baskin, 2004).

**Cardiac patients.** Again, the experimental (forgiveness) group became emotionally healthier than the control group. At a 4-month follow-up, the experimental group had more efficiently functioning hearts than the control group (Waltman, Russell, Coyle, Enright, Holter, & Swoboda, 2009).

**Emotionally-abused women.** Results are similar to the above studies in terms of emotional health (decreased anxiety, depression, PTSD symptoms, increased self-esteem; Reed & Enright, 2006).

**Terminally-ill, elderly cancer patients.** After a 4-week intervention, the forgiveness group showed greater improvement in psychological health (less anger, more hopefulness toward the future) than the control group. Physical indicators of both groups showed declines (Hansen, Enright, Baskin, & Klatt, in press).

**Scientific note:** The therapeutic studies are statistically moderate to strong (Lipsey, 1990), with effect sizes typically in the .59 range for emotional health between groups (Baskin & Enright, 2004).

# **Forgiveness Process Model**

**(Enright, 2001)**

## **PRELIMINARIES**

- Who hurt you?
- How deeply were you hurt?
- On what specific incident will you focus?
- What were the circumstances at the time? Was it morning or afternoon? Cloudy or sunny? What was said? How did you respond?

## **PHASE I—UNCOVERING YOUR ANGER**

- How have you avoided dealing with anger?
- Have you faced your anger?
- Are you afraid to expose your shame or guilt?
- Has your anger affected your health?
- Have you been obsessed about the injury or the offender?
- Do you compare your situation with that of the offender?
- Has the injury caused a permanent change in your life?
- Has the injury changed your worldview?

## **PHASE 2—DECIDING TO FORGIVE**

- Decide that what you have been doing hasn't worked.
- Be willing to begin the forgiveness process.
- Decide to forgive.

## **PHASE 3—WORKING ON FORGIVENESS**

- Work toward understanding.
- Work toward compassion.
- Accept the pain.
- Give the offender a gift.

## **PHASE 4—DISCOVERY AND RELEASE FROM EMOTIONAL PRISON**

- Discover the meaning of suffering.
- Discover your need for forgiveness.
- Discover that you are not alone.
- Discover the purpose of your life.
- Discover the freedom of forgiveness.

## **Scientific Findings of Children's and Adolescents' Anger and the Forgiveness Interventions Intended to Reduce that Anger**

**Comparison of first grade children's levels of anger in Milwaukee's central city, Belfast, Northern Ireland, and Madison, WI.** Both Milwaukee and Belfast showed a pattern of the *average* child being close to or in the excessive level of anger. The children who presented with the greatest amount of anger were in the Milwaukee sample (Enright et al., 2007).

### School interventions to reduce anger in the children:

**First-grade and fifth-grade children in Milwaukee's central city.** Those in the forgiveness group became less angry relative to those in the control group at a one-month follow-up assessment. Randomization is by group; analyses are on each individual. Instruction was by the classroom teachers (Holter et al., 2008).

**Third-grade children in Milwaukee's central city.** Those in the forgiveness group became less angry from pretest to the one-month follow-up. The control group also became less angry from pretest to the one-month follow-up. Instruction was by the classroom teachers. We found that the teachers in the forgiveness group and teachers from the same schools in the control group frequently team-taught so that the control participants were indirectly introduced to forgiveness (through bulleting boards and discussions of social issues; Holter et al., 2008).

**First-grade (Primary 3) children in Belfast, Northern Ireland.** Those in the forgiveness group became less angry relative to those in the control group at a one-month follow-up. Instruction was by the classroom teachers (Enright et al., 2007).

**Third-grade (Primary 5) children in Belfast, Northern Ireland.** Those in the forgiveness group became less angry and depressed relative to those in the control group at a one-month follow-up. Instruction was by the classroom teachers (Enright et al., 2007).

**At-risk middle school students in Wisconsin.** Those in the forgiveness group not only improved more in emotional health than those in the control group, but also they improved more in academic achievement than the control counterparts. These results held at a 4-month follow-up in the next grade-level. Instruction was by the school counselor (Gambaro et al., 2008).

**At-risk middle school and high school students in Seoul, Korea.** The findings are similar to the above study. Instruction was by a counselor and a graduate student (Park, 2004).

### Intervention in a mental health institute to reduce aggression in adolescents:

**Incarcerated youth (ages 12-18) in a mental health facility** in Wisconsin were randomly assigned to either a typical intervention at the institution or to a forgiveness intervention plus the typical intervention at the institution. Those in the forgiveness condition, relative to the other group, improved more in forgiveness and reduced more in aggression. There was virtually no change in the control group's level of forgiveness or aggression. Instruction was by professionals employed by the institution (Klatt, 2008).

**Scientific Note.** The *teacher-led initiatives* have effect sizes (between groups) in the .28 to .73 range for anger. The teacher-led programs involve *group instruction* rather than *individual treatment*. There is no direct therapy, but instead there is instruction primarily on *learning about forgiveness* rather than *forgiving*. From a developmental perspective, the children are less advanced in their thinking than are the adults in our therapeutic programs.

#### Forgiveness Curriculum Guide Information

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Dear Bob,

Thank you for our recent email exchanges which have given me the opportunity to learn more about forgiveness education and its relevance to areas of the world recovering from conflict and violence. It was very impressive to know that your forgiveness programs with children and adults have been scientifically evaluated and found to be effective in improving emotional health. From my personal experience observing the effects of war and conflict on people and their societies, I believe that your approach would complement and add to the work of the UN in reconciliation and peacebuilding. I hope that in the long-term forgiveness, when embedded deeply in communities, can help forge a more long-lasting peace than has been the case in too many regions of the world. As I mentioned, the UN is grappling with the statistics that almost 50% of countries coming out of violent conflict will revert back into conflict within ten years. Perhaps by imparting forgiveness education as part of a comprehensive peace strategy, we could help more societies sustain peace.

As we discussed, I would be interested in working with the International Forgiveness Institute to provide training in forgiveness education for both for UN staff and national counterparts who could then deliver the curriculum to the stakeholders we serve. I want to share with you that we are planning a conference in Accra, Ghana in July on experience-sharing in managing conflicts. It will bring together government officials, NGO leaders and other experts working on peacebuilding in this volatile region. If it would be possible for you to attend, this might be a good place for you to share your work and get feedback on how forgiveness education may be applicable and adaptable to West Africa. We organize similar regional meetings in other locations which could be similarly be utilized.

I would hope that this kind of introduction could lead to more targeted opportunities for forgiveness education to be introduced in a variety of situations where it is needed around the world. The concept appears to be sound and the opportunity to work together for vulnerable communities is exciting. Let us keep talking so that we can turn our plans into reality.

Yours sincerely,



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