



Conversations About  
**FORGIVENESS**

“Life is an adventure  
in forgiveness.”

—Norman Cousins

**PARTICIPANT GUIDE**

# Four Conversations About Forgiveness

## Participant Handbook

*Rather than a favor we do for someone else, forgiveness is, first and foremost, a favor we do for ourselves. The core power of forgiveness is that it returns to us the power to be happy.*

—Robin Casarjian

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### Introducing the Campaign

The Campaign for Love & Forgiveness ([www.loveandforgive.org](http://www.loveandforgive.org)), a project of The Fetzer Institute ([www.fetzer.org](http://www.fetzer.org)), is a community engagement initiative that encourages people to bring love and forgiveness into the heart of individual and community life. Through facilitated conversations in six cities, and a robust Web site that offers activities, reflections, and a thoughtful curriculum, the campaign has touched thousands of people since its launch in 2006. The resources at [loveandforgive.org](http://loveandforgive.org) are available for anyone to use.

The Fetzer Institute’s mission, “to foster awareness of the power of love and forgiveness in the emerging global community,” rests on its conviction that efforts to address the world’s critical issues must go beyond political, social, and economic strategies to their psychological and spiritual roots. This also reflects founder John Fetzer’s belief that “love is the one ingredient that holds us all together.” Forgiveness, a means of removing emotional obstacles to the awareness of love’s presence, is key to this work.

The campaign began in 2006 with a focus on love, and expands now to the exploration of forgiveness and its relationship to love. Through public television programming, targeted local activities, thoughtful conversations, letter writing, online discussions, and personal exploration, we explore the nature of forgiveness—what it is and isn’t, how to practice forgiveness, and the role that forgiveness can play in different aspects of our lives.

# Four Conversations About Forgiveness

## Participant Handbook (continued)

### Introducing the Conversations

This handbook supports four conversations about forgiveness. Three essays serve as background for the conversations, helping to explain why and how to practice forgiveness. Each conversation uses the essays and a film clip from *The Power of Forgiveness*, a PBS documentary that received major funding from the Fetzer Institute, to spark reflection and dialogue.



### Participant's Role

Your willingness to join these conversations indicates that you have an interest in exploring the power of forgiveness in your own life. This handbook includes a suggested list of shared agreements for your group, to keep the conversations safe, respectful, and orderly. We hope that you will feel comfortable sharing your experiences of forgiveness in a way that honors your own need for privacy and discretion, while at the same time offering insights and sharing experiences and stories that will give you opportunities to delve deeper into the topic and inspire others.

You may find during the course of these conversations that you touch upon issues in your life that could benefit from outside counseling. Your facilitator may have referrals or suggestions for following up on those issues.

Also in this handbook are “practices” that you can try at home, to keep the conversations alive for you between meetings and to see what kind of impact they can have on your life in general. In looking at the suggested home practices, you might try picking the ones that most appeal to you and at least one that feels challenging. It is likely that those around you will feel the effects of your involvement in this work, even if you do not discuss it with them, and that it will awaken you to the power of forgiveness to transform your life.

*Forgiveness is love in action.*

—Stephen Post

# Four Conversations About Forgiveness

## Participant Handbook (continued)

*Simply put, there is nothing, nothing in the world, that can take the place of one person intentionally listening or speaking to another.*

—Jacob Needleman

### A Suggested List of Shared Agreements for Four Conversations About Forgiveness

Shared agreements among group members can help to keep conversations orderly, respectful, and conducive to honest sharing. Your group may amend or customize this list, as needed, or you might choose instead to brainstorm your own set of agreements.

You can vote on your shared agreements at the first conversation, and refer to them as needed throughout the remaining conversations. We invite you to also consider the power of listening with focused attention as a way to support all participants in the conversations.

1. We agree to hold confidential what is shared in this room. If we encounter a conversation partner outside this room, we will respect his or her privacy.
2. We intend to balance sharing and listening, allowing everyone to participate, and we'll pass whenever we wish.
3. When someone is speaking, we'll allow him or her to speak uninterrupted, and refrain from giving unsolicited feedback, advice, or commentary.
4. We commit to using "I" statements as often as possible when we share.
5. We will assume good intentions on everyone's part, agree that we may disagree at times, and learn together about respecting differences.
6. If an exercise makes us uncomfortable, we can skip it or ask the facilitator about an alternative.
7. We intend to arrive on time and attend all four conversations, and strive to begin and end our conversations on time.
8. We will listen with focus and attention.

(Add other agreements unique to our group.)

### Listening with Focus and Attention

As a group, you might take a few minutes to discuss the value of listening, and share experiences where you really felt heard or really tuned in to someone who needed to be heard.

A discussion about good listening skills might include these:

- Listening with an open heart and mind
- Allowing the speaker to finish his/her thoughts and sentences, even when we feel impatient to speak
- Accepting that the speaker feels what he or she feels, no matter what we think, and refraining from "correcting" the speaker's feelings
- Listening with no agenda other than to be a sounding board for someone who needs to speak
- Imagining that we are speaking and listening to ourselves
- Listening without trying to solve or fix a problem, unless feedback or advice is sought
- (Other skills, as suggested by our group)

## ESSAY: Why Forgive?

The concept of forgiveness should come naturally to us. Why? Because we are unique and fallible human beings. Because we make mistakes. We see the world differently. Our preferences, foibles, personalities, and needs differ. Our religions, cultures, and world views differ.

These differences, combined with the daily frustrations, hurts, and injustices we witness and experience throughout our lives, can cause us pain and even inflict deep wounds in our hearts and psyches. For those wounds, forgiveness can be a powerful, self-administered salve. In fact, research has revealed that forgiveness can contribute to our health, happiness, and peace of mind.

For some of us, forgiveness isn't something we think much about. For others, it is a central life practice. For many, it is misunderstood. When you think of forgiveness, what is the first thing that arises? A thought? A feeling? A memory? What does forgiveness mean to you? Whatever you think of when you think of forgiveness, it is a starting point for coming to a common understanding of this timeless and powerful practice. That is where we will begin.

If forgiveness is a hard concept for you to grasp, you aren't alone. It's not an easy practice or process, especially if you're just starting out. The first time forgiveness crosses your mind or lips is just one moment in a process to untangle yourself from the pain and repercussions of experiencing a hurt, transgression, or injustice.

You may be afraid that forgiving an offense will diminish the affront itself. It won't. Forgiveness is not forgetting. It is not accepting or justifying the offense. It is not pardoning, excusing, condoning, or even reconciling. And you don't necessarily have to understand the offender or the offense to forgive.

***Forgiveness is a conscious, willful choice to turn away from the pain, hurt, resentment, and wish for revenge that arises from a betrayal, offense, injustice, or deep hurt. Forgiveness involves a willingness to see the transgression and transgressor in a larger context, and to replace negative feelings with compassion and tolerance.***

Robert Enright, PhD, professor of educational psychology at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, points out that by forgiving “we are acknowledging that the offense was unfair and will always continue to be unfair. Second, we have a moral right to anger; it is fair to cling to our view that people do not have a right to hurt us. We have a right to respect. Third, forgiveness requires giving up something to which we have a right—namely our anger or resentment.”<sup>1</sup>

Forgiveness is an opportunity for transformation, both individually and collectively. It not only helps relieve mental and emotional anguish, but it offers the possibility for change, for redemption, for restoration—for hope and even love to blossom from pain and suffering. It can stop a cycle of hurt and create opportunity where there seemed to be none. Most of all, it has the potential to heal and open our hearts to love again and more fully, strengthening and building our capacity for compassion and understanding.

For each person, there is a unique history and set of reasons why we choose to forgive or not to forgive. If you've experienced someone forgiving you, you likely have an idea why this practice is important. If you've forgiven someone who hurt you and you have felt the tension within you begin to ease, you may understand the significance of forgiveness. But there is more.

*Forgiveness is both a decision and a real change in emotional experience. That change in emotion is related to better physical and mental health.*

—Everett Worthington

## ESSAY: Why Forgive? (continued)

### Why People Forgive

According to Robert Enright, the reasons that people forgive fall into the following eight categories:

1. You forgive to quiet your angry feelings.
2. Forgiveness changes destructive thoughts into quieter, more healthy thoughts.
3. As you forgive, you want to act more civilly toward the one who hurt you.
4. Forgiveness of one person helps you interact better with others. Perhaps your anger with your supervisor has spilled over to your relationship with children. Forgiving your boss would be a gift to your children.
5. Forgiveness can improve your relationship with the one who hurt you.
6. Your forgiveness actually can help the one who hurt you to see his or her unfairness and take steps to stop it. Your forgiving can enhance the character of the one who hurt you.
7. You forgive because God asks you to do so. You forgive as an act of love toward God.
8. Forgiveness, as an act of kindness and love toward the one who hurt you, is a moral good regardless of how the other is responding to you. Loving others, while protecting yourself from harm, is a morally good thing to do.<sup>2</sup>

Until fairly recently there was little research to substantiate the tangible benefits of forgiveness. In the past decade, however, interest in the topic has exploded both inside and outside academia. Researchers are exploring the role of forgiveness in our health, well-being, and relationships, and in healing intergroup conflict. Through their research, they are finding effective ways to bring this practice into many aspects of our lives.

Good evidence associates forgiveness with emotional, mental, and physical well-being. Research has shown that forgiveness can reduce depression and anger, increases hopefulness and self-confidence, and helps improve the health of marriages and families.<sup>3</sup> Forgiveness education has also shown promise in preventing crime by reducing vengeful responses that can lead to criminal acts.<sup>4</sup>

In addition, researchers are testing the use of forgiveness training in reducing and healing intergroup conflict such as that experienced by Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland or Tutsis and Hutus in Rwanda. In a study conducted by Fred Luskin, PhD, co-director of the Stanford-Northern Ireland HOPE Project, and Reverend Byron Bland, associate director of the Stanford Center on International Conflict and Negotiation, which brought together Protestants and Catholics from Northern Ireland for group forgiveness training, participants who had family members murdered reported less hurt, anger, stress, and depression after the training, as well as improvement in physical vitality and general well-being.<sup>5</sup> And South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) showed the power of forgiveness to transform a country, help its people heal from their injustices and wounds, and look together toward a brighter future.

## ESSAY:

### Why Forgive? (continued)

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, chair of the TRC, believes that "... to forgive is indeed the best form of self-interest since anger, resentment, and revenge are corrosive of that *summum bonum*, that greatest good, communal harmony that enhances the humanity and personhood of all in the community."<sup>6</sup>

To forgive is also deeply rooted in many of the world's religious teachings, beliefs, and practices. For many, religious beliefs provide a roadmap and a resource for forgiveness—a touchstone that helps to deal with what otherwise might be too overwhelming.

According to authors Michael McCullough and Everett Worthington, PhD, executive director for A Campaign for Forgiveness Research, "The concept of forgiveness has dual natures: a common one and a transcendent one. In the common, material world, forgiveness is just one more social-psychological phenomenon ... But forgiveness has another nature as well. It is spiritual, transcendent, timeless."<sup>7</sup>

In a study by the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research, nearly 60 percent of Americans reported they had forgiven themselves for past mistakes, while almost 75 percent said they felt God had forgiven them.<sup>8</sup> "I think all of us, at one time or another, when we've made the same mistakes over and over again, have felt that we must be a disappointment in God's eyes. Yet there's a remarkably high level of confidence across the country that God forgives us, compared to a much lower level of forgiveness for oneself and others," explained Loren Toussaint, psychologist and author of the study.<sup>9</sup> Religion and spirituality offer a way to see life's experiences in a larger context. Rituals, traditions, and sacred practices help us navigate the forgiveness process with a greater purpose and, for many, are a divine guide.

As long as we remain imperfect beings, there will be a need to forgive ourselves and others. If forgiveness seems like a faraway concept—too hard to contemplate—take heart in the examples of forgiveness all around us, like the Amish community in Pennsylvania who responded to the shooting of 10 Amish schoolgirls by forgiving the man responsible. Or Heidi Coffee, who, when she lost her husband to a car accident, invited the man allegedly responsible to her husband Gavin's memorial service. According to Heidi, Gavin often invoked the saying, "Holding a grudge is like taking poison and waiting for someone to die."<sup>10</sup>

The practice of forgiveness holds hope for transforming not only our individual health and well-being, but also the health of our relationships, schools, workplaces, communities, and beyond. While researchers continue to explore why and how forgiveness works in our lives, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, having witnessed the power of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation process, believes simply "there is no future without forgiveness."

*Forgiveness is not a single magnanimous gesture in response to an isolated offence; it is part of a continuum of human engagements in healing broken relationships.*

—Marina Cantacuzino



## ESSAY: Why Forgive? (continued)

*Forgiveness breaks  
the silos of a  
disconnected  
humanity.*

—Bonnie Wesorick

### Different Beliefs About Forgiveness

“The most basic kind of forgiveness is ‘forgoing the other’s indebtedness’ (*mechilá*). If the offender has done *teshuva* [a process requiring the offender to acknowledge their offence, express remorse, make restitution, and take steps to prevent repeating the behavior], and is sincere in his or her repentance, the offended person should offer *mechila*; that is, the offended person should forgo the debt of the offender, relinquish his or her claim against the offender. This is not a reconciliation of heart or an embracing of the offender; it is simply reaching the conclusion that the offender no longer owes me anything for whatever it was that he or she did ...

“The second kind of forgiveness is ... *selichá*. It is an act of the heart. It is reaching a deeper understanding of the sinner. It is achieving an empathy for the troubledness of the other. *Selicha*, too, is not a reconciliation or an embracing of the offender; it is simply reaching the conclusion that the offender, too, is human, frail, and deserving of sympathy. It is closer to an act of mercy ...

“The third kind of forgiveness is ‘atonement’ (*kappará*) or ‘purification’ (*tahorá*). This is a total wiping away of all sinfulness. It is an existential cleansing. *Kappara* is the ultimate form of forgiveness, but it is only granted by God.”<sup>11</sup>

—Rabbi David Blumenthal

“In the act of forgiveness we are declaring our faith in the future of a relationship and in the capacity of the wrongdoer to make a new beginning on a course that will be different from the one that has caused the wrong. We are saying here is a chance to make a new beginning. It is an act of faith that the wrongdoer can change. According to Jesus [Matthew 18:22], we should be ready to do this not just once, not just seven times, but seventy times seven, without limit—provided, it seems Jesus says, your brother or sister who has wronged you is ready to come and confess the wrong they have committed yet again.”<sup>12</sup>

—Archbishop Desmond Tutu

“Why is compassion so important? Someone must take the initiative to move beyond the cycle of old choices and responses that brings more pain and suffering and recognize the opportunity for a healing response to life itself. This is also true of the forgiveness that results from a compassionate heart. Today we face many problems, and the time has come for us to think on a deeper human level where we understand and respect the humanness of everyone. Though we might regard someone as an enemy, this enemy is also a human being who is trapped by his or her own demons and who has a right to happiness.”<sup>13</sup>

—His Holiness, The Dalai Lama



## ESSAY:

### Why Forgive? (continued)

“To receive forgiveness from God there are three requirements:

1. Recognizing the offense itself and its admission before God.
2. Making a commitment not to repeat the offense.
3. Asking for forgiveness from God.

“If the above three conditions are met in sincerity, forgiveness from God is assured. Sincerity protects a person from repeating the same offense. If a person is sincere he will be helped by God not to repeat; in addition, God will change his punishment for the offense into a reward.”<sup>14</sup>

— M. Amir Ali, PhD, founder, Institute of Islamic Information and Education

“The first step towards forgiveness is to understand the negativities that are created by non-forgiveness and become aware of the futility and irrationality of nursing grudges. We need to understand the law of karma and know that the non-forgiveness is against God, and then sincerely decide to forgive. Merely understanding the need to forgive is not enough. It is crucial to take a decision to forgive, because it is only then that the whole process of unraveling begins. Forgiveness is not an action or emotion, it is something much deeper. It is the state of my being. When forgiveness happens there is no need to say anything. It is a state where there is no hatred or sense of revenge that remains.”<sup>15</sup>

—Swami Nikhilananda, director, Chinmaya Miss

*The giant pine tree grows from a tiny sprout. The journey of a thousand miles starts from beneath your feet.*

—Lao Tzu



## CONSIDER THIS ... Suggested Home Practices

### What Is the Nature of Forgiveness?

### Why Forgive?

1. Reflect on the following questions. You may choose simply to think about them, write, draw a picture, or make a collage. Find the way that allows you to best consider these issues. Refer to your responses from time to time as you continue your home practices on forgiveness.
  - What messages about forgiveness did you receive as a child?
  - What situations occurred in your family, your community, or the world that were unfair, unjust, and/or caused you pain?
  - What situations were you able to forgive?
  - Which were you not able to forgive and why?
  - What experiences from your childhood are you still carrying with you?
  - Are they weighing heavily on you?
  - What benefit might you receive from offering or receiving forgiveness?
2. Choose one experience from your childhood or the present that is hard for you to forgive. What is holding you back? Is it anger, hurt, a wish to understand or to exact revenge? How is it serving you to not forgive? What is the impact on your body, mind, and spirit? What would you need to do to forgive in this situation?
3. Over the next month, make a note of times when a story about forgiveness comes up in your life—in a film or television program, a news story, magazine or book, your work or family life, or in your community. What impact does it have on you to hear these stories?
4. If you have children in your life, what messages are you sending to them about forgiveness? What messages would you like to send? Are the messages the same? If not, what steps can you take to send the messages you wish to send? Write them down on the next page.
5. The essay makes note of some religions' views about forgiveness. How does your religion, spiritual practice, or personal philosophy approach forgiveness?
6. Can you think of someone you know who you believe is a "forgiving" person? Describe that person's personality, behavior, and the impression she or he leaves on you? What aspects of that person do you admire? If you like, put a picture of that person on your desk to remind you of those aspects that you would like to emulate.
7. Start a conversation with friends, co-workers, family members, or others about love and forgiveness. Use the "Conversation Starters" later in this handbook to spark your discussions.

## Journaling/Drawing/Scrapbook Page

A large rectangular area with horizontal lines for journaling or drawing. The lines are evenly spaced and cover most of the page's width and height.

*It's not a quick fix. We can't give someone a forgiveness pill and then they smile and hug each other.*

—Robert Enright in *The Power of Forgiveness*

*Forgiveness is the fragrance that the violet sheds on the heel that has crushed it.*

—Attributed to Mark Twain

## CONSIDER THIS ... Conversation Starters

Use the following “Conversation Starters” to initiate conversations with friends, co-workers, family members, or others about love and forgiveness. Feel free to adapt these and add your own.

*What does forgiveness mean to you?*

*What different kinds of love (e.g., love of animals, nature, family) do you have in your life?*

*Describe a loving thing someone did for you recently at work, at home, or in public.*

*What effect has NOT forgiving someone had on you?*

*What do you think is the connection between love and forgiveness?*

*What makes it hard for you to forgive?*

*What is a loving thing that you did recently for someone you know? Someone you don't know?*

*What effect has forgiving someone had on you?*

*Forgiving is not having to understand. Understanding may come later, in fragments, an insight here and a glimpse there ...*

—Lewis B. Smedes

## ESSAY:

# The Journey to Forgiveness

Imagine meeting a man for coffee to help you prepare for a presentation. You find out that as teenagers you both hung out at the same hamburger stand. Then, as you look into his eyes, it dawns on you—he and his friends beat you unconscious 25 years ago—because you are gay.

What would you do? Could you forgive him?

In this case, Matthew Boger did. Boger, floor manager for the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles, inadvertently came face-to-face with his attacker, former skinhead Tim Zaal, a volunteer at the museum, who had since turned his life around. After their first dramatic meeting, the two didn't speak for awhile. Then, Boger said, he realized that forgiveness provided the only way to move forward. Zaal apologized and, over time, the two developed a friendship. They now speak to groups about their experience, both hoping to help end hatred and invoke tolerance.<sup>16</sup>

Admittedly this is a dramatic example of forgiveness. Not all of us would forgive such a painful act. As a result of Boger's gesture, however, the two men provide a moving example of the transformative power of forgiveness.

Forgiveness is more difficult for some of us than others. Psychologists who have studied people's tendency to forgive note that there are personality traits—such as being empathic and emotionally engaged with others—that predispose some people to forgiveness. Our genetic makeup, our upbringing, and our personality, all contribute to our proclivity to forgive. Regardless of our starting point, however, we each can learn the steps to forgiveness or how to forgive, and reap the benefits of better physical and emotional health and well-being.

Fred Luskin suggests you start by forgiving small things. "Practicing forgiveness," he writes, "allows us to develop forgiveness muscles in the same way that going to the gym develops physical muscles."<sup>17</sup>

Where can you start to incorporate forgiveness in your life? Perhaps you might forgive a friend who didn't keep a confidence, a spouse who did something hurtful, or a stranger who spoke harshly.

One of the seemingly most difficult places to start is with yourself. We are often hardest on ourselves, and that can spill out into how we approach most aspects of our lives and our relationships. According to Luskin, "... forgiveness of self emerges when we understand that even with our own actions we do not have total control. Everybody makes mistakes. We all make bad decisions and act from poor information ... Being human allows us to offer forgiveness to ourselves, never forgetting that we have resources at our disposal to improve ourselves and help others."<sup>18</sup>

Researchers have established a variety of effective approaches and specific steps to achieve forgiveness. The bottom line: it begins with and requires a willingness to change. It is important to find the unique approach that best fits you. The good news is that studies have shown that there is more than one road to forgiveness.

## Making a Decision to Forgive

Luskin frames it as a choice, a decision to reclaim and reframe your story, moving from the role of victim to the story's hero—a person who, despite suffering, chooses to forgive. You may come to this choice, as Matthew Boger did, because it seems the best option, or to end your own suffering, or for some other reason altogether. Whatever the reason, it marks the start of your journey.

## Changing Your Emotions

Everett Worthington encourages forgiveness by getting in touch with emotions and gaining empathy for the person who hurt you. "Forgiveness occurs," he notes, "by emotional replacement,"<sup>19</sup> substituting the emotions of unforgiveness—anger, bitterness, resentment—with emotions of forgiveness, such as empathy and compassion.

*A typical saying, repeated many times in Amish culture, is "Forgive, forget, and move on."*

—Donald Kraybill,  
author of *Amish Grace*

## ESSAY:

# The Journey to Forgiveness (continued)

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

—Martin Luther King, Jr.

Worthington himself used the process he developed and studied to forgive an overwhelming personal tragedy—his mother’s murder. In his book *Five Steps to Forgiveness*, he explains, “... trauma seems to cause the emotional centers of the brain to become extremely active, and it changes emotional experience strongly. Imagining a traumatic scene and pairing it with the emotion of compassion most likely reprogrammed my emotions of rage and fear.”<sup>20</sup>

There are common elements to the various approaches to forgiveness that researchers have developed. Clearly, we must acknowledge the transgression, the hurt, anger, and other emotions that arise in response to it. Denying or ignoring any part of our experience inhibits our ability to move beyond the pain of the event itself.

Depending on the magnitude of the transgression, forgiveness frequently requires finding people to support you. Our culture, particularly popular media, often feeds and glorifies the notion of revenge. Family and friends may be overly protective, suffer from hurt and anger for what was done to you, and seek revenge on your behalf. Finding people who can listen without judgment and help you consider forgiveness as an option is important to the process.

Worthington points out that “people who hurt or offend us often do so because they’re conditioned by their past.”<sup>21</sup> Looking at the offender as a whole person, with a history that led them to behave the way they did and immediate circumstances that may have fueled their behavior, allows a seed of empathy to be planted. When we can see others’ vulnerability, pain, and difficulties, it’s easier to build a context for their actions and, perhaps, see that all of us are capable and guilty of hurting others in some way at some time. Trying not to judge the other person’s behavior, and recognizing that their primary motivation was likely not to cause you pain, but rather reflects their own issues and needs, can be helpful.

This doesn’t mean that forgiveness supplants justice or condones what was done. Seeking reconciliation and justice are separate choices you can make at any point along the way.

When it comes to reacting to devastating events in our lives, it’s important to be gentle with ourselves.

Dark feelings may arise in response to hurt or betrayal, which is perfectly normal. Holding on to or feeding these feelings is what causes us to remain stuck in a pattern of pain and anger.

Forgiveness is one of the first steps to our healing as we try to move on with our lives after a painful or traumatic event.

It’s also important to understand that recovering from the pain you experienced takes time. Neither emotional recovery nor forgiveness can be rushed. Sometimes we feel the need to take the high road and put on a strong front, only to find later that the hurt is still there; we just built a moat around it. Instead, the fortification we constructed keeps the hurt inside and, ironically, prevents us from being able to receive support.

If talking about what happened is too difficult, journaling may help. According to studies by psychologist James W. Pennebaker and his colleagues, writing about difficulties in our lives correlates with improved health and mood, even raising immunity.<sup>22</sup> Journaling might provide a way to get another perspective on emotions and events.

Whatever road you choose to travel, forgiveness is possible. Find a road map that fits you, and begin. It may be one of the greatest gifts you give yourself. And the results of your efforts may surprise you.

## ESSAY:

# The Journey to Forgiveness (continued)

### Steps to Forgiveness from Leading Researchers

The following provides a glimpse into the forgiveness processes put forth by experts in the field. We encourage you to consult their books, listed below, for complete details.

### Nine Steps to Forgiveness

(From Fred Luskin's, *Learning to Forgive* Web site, [www.learningtoforgive.com](http://www.learningtoforgive.com). See also *Forgive for Good: A Proven Prescription for Health and Happiness*.)

1. Know exactly how you feel about what happened and be able to articulate what about the situation is not OK. Then, tell a trusted couple of people about your experience.
2. Make a commitment to yourself to do what you have to do to feel better. Forgiveness is for you and not for anyone else.
3. Forgiveness does not necessarily mean reconciliation with the person that hurt you, or condoning of their action. What you are after is to find peace. Forgiveness can be defined as the "peace and understanding that come from blaming that which has hurt you less, taking the life experience less personally, and changing your grievance story."
4. Get the right perspective on what is happening. Recognize that your primary distress is coming from the hurt feelings, thoughts, and physical upset you are suffering now, not what offended you or hurt you two minutes—or 10 years—ago. Forgiveness helps to heal those hurt feelings.
5. At the moment you feel upset, practice a simple stress management technique to soothe your body's flight or fight response.
6. Give up expecting things from other people, or your life, that they do not choose to give you. Recognize the "unenforceable rules" you have for your health or how you or other people must behave. Remind yourself that you can hope for health, love, peace, and prosperity and work hard to get them.
7. Put your energy into looking for another way to get your positive goals met than through the experience that has hurt you. Instead of mentally replaying your hurt, seek out new ways to get what you want.
8. Remember that a life well lived is your best revenge. Instead of focusing on your wounded feelings, and thereby giving the person who caused you pain power over you, learn to look for the love, beauty, and kindness around you. Forgiveness is about personal power.
9. Amend your grievance story to remind you of the heroic choice to forgive.

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

—Mahatma Gandhi

# ESSAY:

## The Journey to Forgiveness (continued)

### Guideposts for Forgiving

(From Robert Enright's *Forgiveness Is a Choice: A Step-by-Step Process for Resolving Anger and Restoring Hope*, pp. 78, 79.)

Phase 1: Uncovering your anger. To forgive, you must be willing to examine how much anger you have as a result of someone else's unfairness toward you.

Phase 2: Deciding to forgive. Forgiveness requires a decision and a commitment.

Phase 3: Working on forgiveness. Simply making a decision to forgive isn't enough. People need to take concrete actions to make their forgiveness real. This phase culminates with the giving of a moral gift to the one who hurt you.

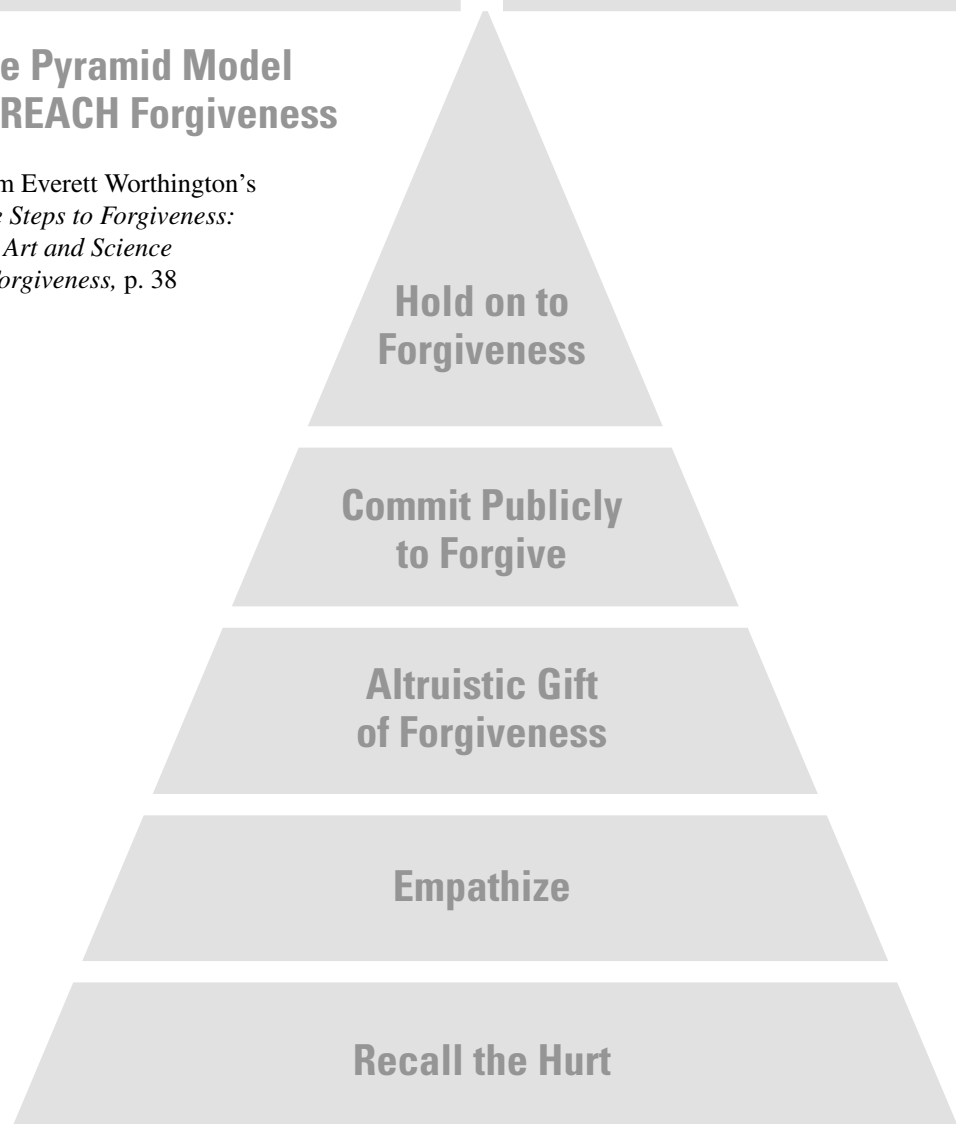
Phase 4: Discovery and release from emotional prison. Unforgiveness, bitterness, resentment, and anger are like the four walls of a prison cell. Forgiveness is the key that opens the door and lets you out of that cell.



Dr. Worthington conducts "two chairs" activity with students

### The Pyramid Model of REACH Forgiveness

From Everett Worthington's *Five Steps to Forgiveness: The Art and Science of Forgiveness*, p. 38





## CONSIDER THIS ... Suggested Home Practices

1. Write down one thing from the essay that you would like to learn or think more about. How and when will you do it?
2. Think of a situation in your life where you would like to be forgiven or would like to forgive. Write or record a short description of the situation from your perspective. Now imagine that you are the other person in the situation and describe the situation from that person's perspective. How are the two stories different? Have you ever thought about the situation from the other person's perspective? Does it make you more willing to consider forgiveness in this situation?
3. Use the chart on the next page to analyze the costs and benefits to you in forgiving.
4. Learn to practice the skills of forgiveness by consciously deciding to practice "small forgivenesses" each day for a week. Notice the everyday situations, such as a driver cutting you off or a person in the market behaving rudely, and take a moment to consider what in that person's life is making him or her behave that way. Make a choice to forgive that person. How does it make you feel to practice these small forgivenesses?
5. Think of a place or area in your home or community that you find especially peaceful. It may be a park or garden, a spot by the water, a museum or library. In your mind, designate that area as the place you will go when you want to think about forgiveness. Consider making a corner of your home or garden into that area. What sights, scents, and sounds will it contain? What color represents forgiveness to you? Consider having something that color in your environment.
6. Make a list of people you have hurt—intentionally or unintentionally. Choose one person and write him or her a letter asking for forgiveness. If you choose, send it. If not, you may keep it or even burn it, imagining that the forgiveness you seek is yours. Use the letter-writing tips in this handbook to help you write your letter.
7. Research the different steps involved in forgiveness that have been outlined by the authors mentioned in the previous essay. Use the worksheet in this section to make a list of the steps that could work for you.
8. Are there things for which you would like to forgive yourself? Is it easier or harder to forgive yourself or others? What steps can you take toward forgiving yourself?

*We usually think of people who have hurt us as evil people. We see them in black capes, intent on inflicting pain. In most cases, though, people are simply caught up in the situation.*

—Everett Worthington

# CONSIDER THIS ... Cost/Benefit Worksheet

## The Costs and Benefits of Forgiveness

Think of a situation in your life where you find it hard to forgive or are struggling to forgive. Now use the questions below and your responses to assess the potential impact on you if you choose to forgive in this situation.

### Costs: If I don't forgive the person:

- I feel \_\_\_\_\_ when I think of the person and the situation.
- The effects on my physical health are \_\_\_\_\_.
- I think about the person and the situation \_\_\_all the time \_\_\_often  
\_\_\_ sometimes \_\_\_never.
- I believe that the person deliberately intended to hurt me through his or her action and did not have any other reason to do what he or she did. Yes\_\_\_No\_\_\_
- I feel like I'm the only person this has happened to. Yes\_\_\_No\_\_\_
- I find it hard to move on with my life. Yes\_\_\_No\_\_\_
- It is difficult for me to make good decisions because of the presence of that person/situation in my life. Yes\_\_\_No\_\_\_
- I seek opportunities to tell other people about the person/situation as I see it. Yes\_\_\_No\_\_\_

### Potential Benefits: If I forgive the person, I will:

- Stop blaming the other person and be able to spend time on activities that move my life forward. Yes\_\_\_No\_\_\_
- Take responsibility for the part I played in the situation Yes\_\_\_No\_\_\_
- Change my expectations for other people's behavior so that I don't take future situations personally. \_\_\_Yes\_\_\_No
- Learn strategies and skills that make me better able to cope with future hurts. Yes\_\_\_No\_\_\_
- Stop focusing so much on the situation/person. Yes\_\_\_No\_\_\_
- Feel a physical sense of relief. Yes\_\_\_No\_\_\_
- Find peace. Yes\_\_\_No\_\_\_
- Become a more forgiving person in the future. Yes\_\_\_No\_\_\_

# Steps to Forgiveness Worksheet

## My Steps to Forgiveness

Use the resources mentioned in the previous essay to develop a forgiveness process that makes sense to you. List the steps below.

*forgiveness is man's deepest need  
and highest achievement.*

—Horace Bushnell

## ESSAY: Forgiving the Unforgivable

*... almost never do we hear public leaders declaring their belief that forgiveness can bring people together, heal their wounds, and alleviate the bitterness and resentment caused by wrongdoing.*

—Robert D. Enright  
and Joanna North

Sometimes the enormity and brutality of an offense overwhelm us, and we deem such acts unforgivable. Events such as the Holocaust, 9/11, or the Rwandan massacres spill out and touch many lives beyond those directly affected. The pain and repercussions of even the most personal transgressions often cannot be contained. Perhaps it is because we are so interconnected that we consider the merit in forgiving the “unforgivable.”

In Simon Wiesenthal’s now-classic book *The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness*, he shares his experience as a prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp when a dying SS soldier, guilty of a horrific war crime, asked Wiesenthal for forgiveness. Wiesenthal asks religious leaders, scholars, and other distinguished thinkers to mentally put themselves in his place and answer the question, “What would I have done?”<sup>23</sup>

The question of whether to forgive atrocities, institutionalized injustice, murder, and other horrific acts triggers strong emotions, controversy, deep discussions, and collective soul searching. The carefully thought out and complex responses to Wiesenthal’s question explore whether and/or when it’s appropriate to offer forgiveness, whether it can be offered on others’ behalf, and whether atrocities of the magnitude of the Holocaust should be forgiven at all.

Are there actions that are unforgivable under any circumstances? If not, are there any limits to forgiveness? If so, is there redemption from the darkest part of our souls?

In his response to Wiesenthal’s challenge, Hans Habe, writer, reporter, and news editor, wrote, “One of the worst crimes of the Nazi (sic) regime was that it made it so hard for us to forgive. It led us into the labyrinth of our souls. We must find a way out of the labyrinth—not for the murderers’ sake, but for our own.”<sup>24</sup>

What, if anything, does forgiving horrific, murderous acts or injustices offer us? Can such blights on our humanity as slavery, apartheid, the Holocaust,

atrocities of Cambodia, Rwanda, 9/11, rape, murder, or even the Enron debacle be forgiven? Should they? What would forgiveness accomplish in such situations?

In *No Future Without Forgiveness*, Archbishop Desmond Tutu writes about “ubuntu”—an African worldview of interconnectedness—and its role in the development of South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). “A person with ubuntu,” Tutu writes, “... has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are.”<sup>25</sup>

South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission provided a forum for people’s experiences of the horrors and injustices of apartheid to be heard and, ostensibly, for the seeds of national unity and reconciliation to be planted. In that forum some spoke eloquently—in words and actions—of forgiveness. Offers of forgiveness have arisen, too, from where some of the most hideous reflections of human failings have been played out. Sometimes these gestures are met with awe and sometimes with anger and disbelief.

One such story is that of Beth Savage, who survived a deadly grenade attack by the Azanian People’s Liberation Army (APLA), the armed wing of one of South Africa’s liberation movements, the Pan Africanist Congress. Badly injured in 1992, she endured months in intensive care and a difficult recovery. Four years later her father died from what she believes was a broken heart. Still, she said the experience had enriched her life. And when asked how she felt about amnesty for a member of the APLA, Savage said, “It’s not important to me, but ... what I would really, really like is ... to meet that man that threw that grenade in an attitude of forgiveness and hope that he could forgive me too for whatever reason.”<sup>26</sup>

## ESSAY:

# Forgiving the Unforgivable (continued)

Many may find that story hard to believe. How could she ask the perpetrator to forgive her? Why does she think she needs to be forgiven? It is easy to stand in judgment. Especially when it comes to others' travesties. And when we are injured, or someone we love is injured, we are often blinded by our pain and outrage. Part of our judgment may be a wish to separate ourselves from those who are capable of horrific transgressions. That is human. Yet how many of us are immune to our shadow side? In the heat of the moment, do we know what we would do? Living in an unsafe, unjust, or violent environment, do we know what we would do?

Forgiveness requires us to traverse mental, emotional, ethical, and, for many, spiritual territory. It cannot stand apart from the need for justice, grieving, emotional healing, and, in some cases, reconciliation and restitution. And it does not and should not trivialize, condone, or absolve the wrongdoing. Whether it can help heal the pain, anger, hatred, and destruction left in its wake is, however, an important question to ponder.

The experience of South Africa's TRC, many believe, did help begin the process of healing. "We have survived the ordeal and we are realizing that we can indeed transcend the conflicts of the past, we can hold hands as we realize our common humanity ..." Tutu wrote. "The generosity of spirit will be full to overflowing when it meets a like generosity. Forgiveness will follow confession and healing will happen, and so contribute to national unity and reconciliation."<sup>27</sup> South Africa's example allowed a peaceful transition to a democratic state while acknowledging and providing a forum for its citizens to express their pain, hurt, and forgiveness for the injustices of the past. While not all agree with Tutu or the success of the TRC in achieving reconciliation, he held and still holds a vision of hope and healing.

For Immaculée Ilibagiza, a Tutsi survivor of the Rwandan genocide, forgiveness grew from a deep faith. Her father, mother, and two brothers were killed by Hutus while she and seven other women

hid, crammed in a tiny bathroom in the home of an Episcopal priest. For three months she survived in that bathroom, hearing murderous Hutu gangs threatening to kill her. While on the floor of the bathroom, she fought feelings of hatred and prayed for forgiveness.

According to Ilibagiza, "The people who'd hurt my family had hurt themselves even more and they deserved my pity. There was no doubt that they had to be punished for their crimes against humanity and against God ... But I prayed for compassion as well. I asked God for the forgiveness that would end the cycle of hatred—hatred that was always dangerously close to the surface."<sup>28</sup> Even while fleeing machete-wielding Hutus after leaving the priest's home, Ilibagiza prayed for God to forgive her stalkers. And when, after his capture, she came face to face with the man who killed her mother and brother and would likely have killed her, she offered forgiveness.<sup>29</sup>

Forgiving horrific acts does not require religious faith, nor is it just for the saints among us. For some, however, it has been too trivialized in a culture that popularizes and commodifies even the most personal and sacred. For some it seems to demean the victim and downplay the crime.

What role could forgiveness play in stopping present-day horrors such as Darfur? State-sponsored torture or terrorism? Entrenched conflicts such as those between Palestinians and Israelis? Indians and Pakistanis? How could forgiveness help people affected, either directly or indirectly, by acts of terror or injustice? Forgiveness for the unforgivable? It's a question that deserves contemplation.

*Forgiveness is about healing suffering for ourselves and others. Until we develop compassion within ourselves and a concern about the welfare of others, we cannot truly forgive.*

—His Holiness,  
The Dalai Lama

## CONSIDER THIS ... Suggested Home Practices

1. Copy the list of quotations on the next page. Cut them apart and pick a different one to focus on and think about each day of the week.
2. Talk with a friend, family member, or someone in the community about things that person thinks are unforgivable. Use the questions on page 10 as a guide.
3. Is there an act you would be unable to forgive under any circumstances? Why?
4. Think of an image that represents what it's like not to forgive. Some people have described it as a sack of potatoes that they feel they are carrying around; others describe it as a bitter taste in the mouth. What does it represent to you? Draw a picture of it, or collect images and paste them on a board. If you like, create another drawing or collage that represents what it's like to experience the relief that comes with forgiveness.
5. Jean Vanier, founder of L'Arche Communities, which bring people with developmental disabilities and those without together in faith-based communities, once said *"I discovered something which I had never confronted before, that there were immense forces of darkness and hatred within my own heart. At particular moments of fatigue or stress, I saw forces of hate rising up inside me, and the capacity to hurt someone who was weak and was provoking me! That, I think, was what caused me the most pain: to discover who I really am, and to realize that maybe I did not want to know who I really was! I did not want to admit all the garbage inside me. And then I had to decide whether I would just continue to pretend that I was okay and throw myself into hyperactivity, projects where I could forget all the garbage and prove to others how good I was. Elitism is the sickness of us all. We all want to be on the winning team. That is the heart of apartheid and every form of racism. The important thing is to become conscious of those forces in us and to work at being liberated from them and to discover that the worst enemy is inside our own hearts, not outside!"*

Does this quote affect your idea of forgiveness? Why? How?

## CONSIDER THIS ... Forgiveness Quotations

*The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is an attribute of the strong.*  
—Mahatma Gandhi

*By hanging on to things that are unpleasant, we create more anguish for ourselves. When you forgive someone, you free yourself from an oppressive load of negativity. Forgiveness allows you to create peace in your life.*  
—<http://friendsacrossamerica.com/load.html>

*You forgive by challenging the rigid rules you have for other people's behavior and by focusing your attention on the good things in your life as opposed to the bad.*  
—Fred Luskin

*The forgiveness of sins makes a person whole.*  
—Xhosa hymn

*We usually think of people who have hurt us as evil people. We see them in black capes, intent on inflicting pain. In most cases, though, people are simply caught up in the situation.*  
—Everett Worthington

*It is never too early or too late to forgive.*  
—Gerald Jampolsky

*One forgives to the degree that one loves.*  
—Francois de La Rochefoucauld

*Forgiveness breaks the silos of a disconnected humanity.*  
—Bonnie Wesorick

*Forgiveness is not a single magnanimous gesture in response to an isolated offence; it is part of a continuum of human engagements in healing broken relationships.*  
—Marina Cantacuzino

*If you judge people, you have no time to love them.*  
—Mother Teresa

*Those who have wronged must be ready to make what amends they can. They must be ready to make restitution and reparation. If I have stolen your pen, I can't really be contrite when I say, "Please forgive me," if at the same time I still keep your pen. If I am truly repentant, then I will demonstrate this genuine repentance by returning your pen. Then reconciliation, which is always costly, will happen.*

—Archbishop Desmond Tutu

## Endnotes

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- 6 Tutu, Desmond, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 35.
- 7 McCullough, Michael E. and Everett L. Worthington, Jr., "Religion and the Forgiving Personality," *Journal of Personality* 67:6 (December 1999): 1141, 1142.
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- 13 Borris-Dunchunstang, Eileen R., *Finding Forgiveness: A 7-Step Program for Letting Go of Anger and Bitterness* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2006), 67–68.
- 14 Ali, M. Amir, "Forgiveness," The Institute of Islamic Information and Education, <http://www.hawaiiiforgivenessproject.org/library/Forgiveness-in-Islam.pdf>.
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- 16 Gorman, Anna, "Unlikely allies join to fight hate," *The Seattle Times*, July 18, 2006, A5.
- 17 Luskin, Frederic. *Forgive for Good: A Proven Prescription for Health and Happiness* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2002), 184.
- 18 Ibid, 198, 199.
- 19 Worthington, Everett, *Five Steps to Forgiveness: The Art and Science of Forgiving* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2001), 35.
- 20 Ibid, 60.
- 21 Ibid, 75.
- 22 "Open Up! Writing About Trauma Reduces Stress, Aids Immunity," APA Online, Psychology Matters, <http://www.psychologymatters.org/pennebaker.html>.
- 23 Wiesel, Simon. *The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness* (New York: Schocken Books, 1997), 98.
- 24 Ibid, 157.
- 25 Tutu, Desmond. *No Future Without Forgiveness*. (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 31.
- 26 Ibid, 147.
- 27 Ibid, 120.
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- 29 Ibid. 204.



# Additional Resources

## Additional Resources

We are grateful for the many organizations and resources that promote love, forgiveness, and compassion. We invite you to explore the list below and to add your own to the pages that follow.

### Conversation Resources

#### Conversation Cards

[www.fetzer.org/resources](http://www.fetzer.org/resources)

Each of the 52 cards provides a quote to ponder, questions to discuss, and a suggested action for incorporating more love, forgiveness, and compassion in your life. The deck can be used for personal inspiration; to spark conversations among family, friends, or colleagues; for book discussion or support groups; and/or to challenge you to be more loving, forgiving, and compassionate. Free from the link above while supplies last.

#### Conversation Facilitators Share Tips via Podcast

[www.fetzer.org/resources](http://www.fetzer.org/resources)

Two seasoned conversation facilitators share tips on how to lead conversations on love and forgiveness, including how to manage group dynamics, creating a safe space for sharing, using the conversation cards mentioned above, and how young people respond to the conversations.

#### Forgiveness Experts via Podcast

[www.fetzer.org/resources](http://www.fetzer.org/resources)

In separate podcasts, forgiveness experts share research, experience, and thoughts on the power of forgiveness. The podcasts feature Frederic Luskin, PhD, author of *Forgive for Good* and director of the Stanford Forgiveness Projects, and Everett Worthington, Jr., PhD, author of *Five Steps to Forgiveness: The Art and Science of Forgiving*. Dr. Worthington is a licensed clinical psychologist and professor of psychology at Virginia Commonwealth University.

#### Let's Talk About It: Love and Forgiveness

[www.programminglibrarian.org/ltai/discussion-themes.html](http://www.programminglibrarian.org/ltai/discussion-themes.html)

This program from the American Library Association examines contemporary life and

culture through literature, offering selections from our culture's most outstanding works. Be sure to check out the full list of themes and corresponding resources, including these three that were developed with the Fetzer Institute in support of conversations about love, compassion, and forgiveness.

- Love and Forgiveness in the Light of Death
- Love and Forgiveness in the Presence of the Enemy
- Love, Forgiveness, and Wisdom

#### Love, Forgiveness, and Compassion Conversation Guides

[www.fetzer.org/resources](http://www.fetzer.org/resources)

These guides are designed to help group facilitators and individuals explore the power of love, forgiveness, and compassion. Each resource includes suggested questions, essays, videos, home practices, and resources for further exploration.

### Media

#### *Forgiveness: A Time to Love and a Time to Hate*

[www.helenwhitney.com](http://www.helenwhitney.com)

Scheduled to air on PBS in 2011, this documentary's dramatic and moving stories introduce real people who have faced a horrific tragedy and have struggled in their hearts to forgive. Produced by Paul Dietrich and award-winning producer, director, and writer Helen Whitney, with major funding provided by the Fetzer Institute.

#### *Krista Tippett On Being* (previously *Speaking of Faith with Krista Tippett*)

[www.onbeing.org](http://www.onbeing.org)

*On Being* is a new kind of conversation about religion, spirituality, and large questions of meaning in every aspect of life. Hosted by Krista Tippett on public radio, this weekly show is also available by podcast.

#### *The Mystery of Love*

[www.themysteryoflove.org](http://www.themysteryoflove.org)

A documentary exploring love in marriage, family, community, science, forgiveness, the search for the divine, friendship, even war. Actor, playwright, and author Anna Deavere Smith hosts this two-hour special produced by the Independent Production Fund, with major funding provided by the Fetzer Institute.

### ***The Power of Forgiveness***

[www.journeyfilms.com](http://www.journeyfilms.com)

This documentary examines the power of forgiveness in alleviating anger and grief caused by the most dramatic transgressions imaginable and those that are more commonplace. Among its subjects the film features families of victims from the tragedy of 9/11 and forgiveness education in Northern Ireland, where forgiveness has been a way of life for generations. Produced by Journey Films, with major funding provided by the Fetzer Institute.

### **Websites**

#### **Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education**

[www.ccare.stanford.edu](http://www.ccare.stanford.edu)

This center, housed at Stanford University, undertakes rigorous scientific study of the neural, mental, and social bases of compassion and altruistic behavior. It draws from a wide spectrum of disciplines, especially neuroscience, psychology, economics, and contemplative traditions.

#### **Center for Investigating Healthy Minds**

[www.investigatinghealthyminds.org](http://www.investigatinghealthyminds.org)

Located at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, the center conducts rigorous interdisciplinary research on healthy qualities of mind such as kindness, compassion, forgiveness, and mindfulness. The CIHM engages in research and outreach with the goal of cultivating healthy qualities of the mind at the individual, community, and global levels.

#### **Charter for Compassion**

[www.charterforcompassion.org](http://www.charterforcompassion.org)

Using her TED Prize, author Karen Armstrong is making her wish to help create, launch, and propagate a Charter for Compassion come true. This website is one of the tools that is bringing that wish to fruition.

#### **Fetzer Institute**

[www.fetzer.org](http://www.fetzer.org)

The Fetzer Institute engages with people and projects around the world to help bring the power of love, forgiveness, and compassion to the center of individual and community life. Find project information, resources, videos, news, and upcoming events on this site.

#### **Forgive for Good**

[www.learningtoforgive.com](http://www.learningtoforgive.com)

The website of Dr. Fred Luskin, director of Stanford's Forgiveness Projects, provides information and resources on the benefits of forgiveness.

#### **Greater Good Science Center**

[www.greatergood.berkeley.edu](http://www.greatergood.berkeley.edu)

Based at the University of California, Berkeley, the center studies the psychology, sociology, and neuroscience of well-being and teaches skills that foster a thriving, resilient, and compassionate society. This site highlights groundbreaking scientific research on compassion and altruism.

#### **The Institute for Research on Unlimited Love**

[www.unlimitedloveinstitute.org](http://www.unlimitedloveinstitute.org)

The Institute focuses on the science and spirituality of the unselfish love that shapes the lives of people who find energy and joy in the compassionate service of others. Information about the institute's activities, publications, and funding is available on this site.

#### **Self-Compassion: A Healthier Way of Relating to Yourself**

[www.self-compassion.org](http://www.self-compassion.org)

This site, developed by Dr. Kristin Neff, associate professor of human development and culture at the University of Texas, Austin, provides information and resources on self-compassion, including exercises, meditations, and research.

#### **Spirituality & Practice**

[www.spiritualityandpractice.com](http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com)

This site shares ways to practice spirituality in everyday life and includes book, audio, and film reviews; ideas and links for 37 essential practices; and e-courses for spiritual growth and self-improvement. Spiritualityandpractice.com offers resources from multiple faiths and belief systems.

# Tips for Writing Loving and Beautiful Letters

## Tips for Writing Loving and Beautiful Letters

We encourage you to take a pause from e-mails, voice mails, and phone calls to write a note to someone you care about. Express your thanks for a kindness, share how you miss them, or recall a memory or story. A handwritten note, no matter the length, may deepen, renew, or mend relationships . . . and maybe even make someone's day! A letter written from the heart can be a thoughtful practice capable of making a difference to friends, family, even your community.

When writing your letter, consider these tips from Lilia Fallgatter, author of *The Most Important Letter You Will Ever Write*, and the people at Paper Source:

- Before you even pick up a pen, create surroundings that will evoke the inspiration to write.
- Make a deliberate effort to clear and quiet your mind, and focus on the person to whom you are writing.
- Create a list of words or phrases that describe the person to whom you are writing.
- Create a list of memories or significant occasions and events you have shared with this person.
- Using the lists you've created, write the first draft of the letter. Review and edit the first draft; then re-write the letter with the changes you made.
- Write from the heart, tell a story, remind them of your history together, a favorite time. Share one thing about that person that you admire—everyone loves a compliment.
- Hand write your letters. Your penmanship, no matter how eccentric, is a piece of you. Hand writing your letters and notes gives the recipient something special.
- E-mail has made it easy to jot down a few words, spell check, and hit "Send." But when hand writing a special note, use a scratch pad and draft your letter first. Check spelling and grammar. Save your good stationery or a handmade card until you have a clean draft to copy.
- Choose beautiful paper to write on and a pen you enjoy writing with. Embellish with ribbons, snaps, brads, glitter, or hole punches—the possibilities are endless. Coordinate your postage stamp with your envelope color or the theme of your letter. If you can draw, sketch, or doodle, add something from yourself.
- Enhance your letters and notes by including a favorite poem, a beautiful prayer, song lyrics, personal mementos, or keepsakes. Consider sharing a photo your recipient might have forgotten about or never seen, a ticket stub from the play you saw together (special original material can be photocopied, rather than sending the original), or a leaf you picked up while walking together. Line your envelope with giftwrap from the present you are thanking them for.
- Encourage a response by sending a pre-stamped card.
- Don't let any of the above frighten you—the most important thing of all is to just do it.

## Writing a Letter of Forgiveness

If you want to forgive someone or ask for forgiveness, putting your thoughts in writing can be a good place to start. It will give you the opportunity to thoughtfully consider what you want to say, why, and how to say it. And the recipient will have time to absorb the contents of your letter before responding.

When **asking for forgiveness**, some things you might want to put in writing are:

- What your intention was (most people don't set out deliberately to hurt others)
- How you are feeling about what happened
- Why you want to be forgiven
- What, if anything, you are willing to do to apologize and/or make restitution
- What you have learned from what happened and how that might affect your future relationship with this person

When **offering forgiveness**, consider letting the person know:

- Your reason for offering forgiveness
- Your feelings toward the person, as opposed to the action he or she took
- What, if anything, you would like the person to do to make restitution
- What you hope will happen (or not happen) in your future relationship with this person



# Contact Information From Our Conversations

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone [     ] \_\_\_\_\_  
E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone [     ] \_\_\_\_\_  
E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone [     ] \_\_\_\_\_  
E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
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