



Gratitude and Forgiveness

Lesson workbook

Your companion guide

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Part 1: What is Forgiveness?

Many points of view...

Professor Michael McCullough describes how people typically have two responses to a perceived hurt: *revenge* or *avoidance*. Meaning, we either seek retribution or simply distance ourselves from the perpetrator of the offending act. Yet the outgrowths of these common reactions are overwhelmingly negative. Revenge leads to more violence and hurt. And avoidance precludes the possibility of any constructive psychological rewards arising out of the conscious decision to forgive. McCullough claims that true forgiveness offers a positive alternative to interpersonal conflict beyond the revenge/avoidance paradigm.

Katherine Piderman of the Mayo Clinic supports this notion that acts of real forgiveness demand more of us than sticking our heads in the sand. She describes forgiveness as a conscious decision to let go of resentment and thoughts of revenge. According to Piderman, the act that caused the hurt or offense may always remain a part of your life. But a commitment to forgive can lessen its grip on you, and will enable you to focus on other, more positive developments going forward. Optimally, Piderman states that the process of forgiveness can even end up generating feelings of understanding, empathy, and compassion for those who have hurt you.

Psychologists Robert Enright and Richard Fitzgibbons, in fact, argue that true forgiveness *requires* that the injured party endeavor to replace negative feelings with such positive feelings toward the offender. However, true forgiveness does *not* mean that you deny the other person's responsibility for hurting you. Nor does it doesn't entail minimizing or justifying the wrongness of the action. You see the transgression clearly. And without excusing it, you demonstrate a willingness to move beyond it.



Part 1: Forgiveness

Exercise 1

While this exercise may not be comfortable for you to do or think about, it is a very useful way to begin the process of forgiveness. Do the best you can with it.

Make a list of all the people (or institutions) who have hurt you in the past, or are hurting you now. The perceived transgression could be minor- or it could be life altering. The list can include relatives, friends, acquaintances, the driver who cut you off yesterday, the company who left you on hold for 30 minutes, etc.

Next, indicate the “status” of this situation. Your answers in this column could include:

- a. It was minor- I’ve already forgotten the incident
- b. I’ve forgiven
- c. I haven’t forgiven, but I am moving on with my life
- d. I haven’t forgiven; I’m ruminating over the event
- e. I haven’t forgiven; I won’t be happy until it’s resolved to my satisfaction
- f. Other status:

Who/What caused me hurt:

Status:

Adapted from exercises presented in the book, *Forgiveness* by Dr. Sidney B. Simon and Suzanne Simon.