



WHY IS IT SO HARD TO FORGIVE?

BASED ON THE WORK OF GREGORY LESTER, PH.D.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO FORGIVE?

- **Forgive** = *for* (utmost/ultimate) + *give* (gift, present)
-

THOUGHTS ON FORGIVENESS

- **People often confuse forgiving with condoning**
 - **People often confuse forgiving with forgetting**
 - **People often confuse forgiving with capitulation:**
 - Capitulation continues to make us a victim of the other.
 - Forgiving is letting go of victimhood and reclaiming our lives.
 - **People often confuse forgiving with weakness:**
 - It actually takes tremendous strength to forgive—the deeper the pain, the more the strength
 - When we hold onto the pain and let it dominate our lives, that weakens us.
-

LUKE 6:27-38

“But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you. “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

“Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”

MICHAEL MORTON



THOUGHTS ON FORGIVENESS

- Forgiving is rooted in generosity as much as it is in love—it's a gift we're called to give that shares God's love with others and spreads God's grace.
 - Often it is a gift we give that others may not deserve or have earned.
 - When we forgive another or others, we are choosing to live in a spiritual way grounded in love and God's desire for us—that's the ultimate gift we are giving ourselves.
 - When we refuse to forgive, we are grounding our lives in resentment, anger, hurt, and self-protectiveness—all states that inhibit love and a connection with God
 - Nelson Mandela: *"Resentment is like drinking poison and then hoping it will kill your enemies."*
-

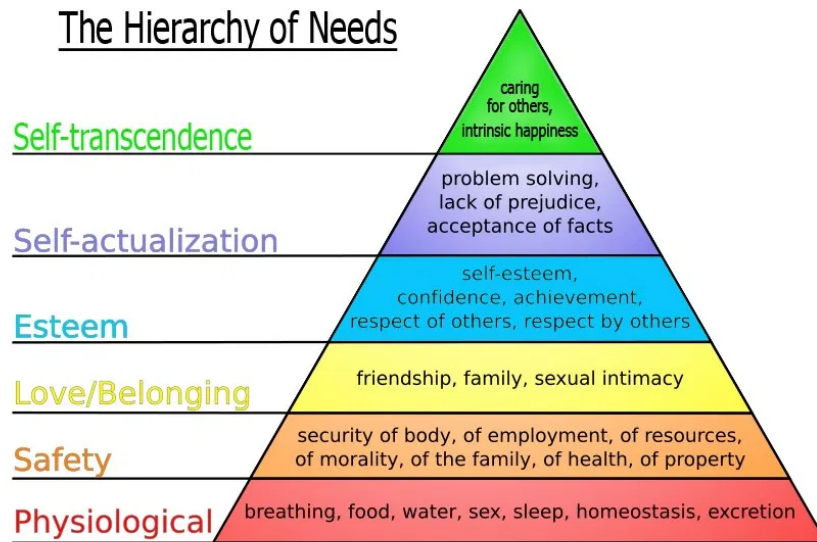
THOUGHTS ON FORGIVENESS

- Forgiving is healing—a healing for ourselves and/or others
 - In the same way, judging, condemning, vengeance, ridicule are all scarring and actually promote sinfulness in ourselves and others.
 - Forgiving is rooted in God and grace
 - *Corrie ten Boom*
-

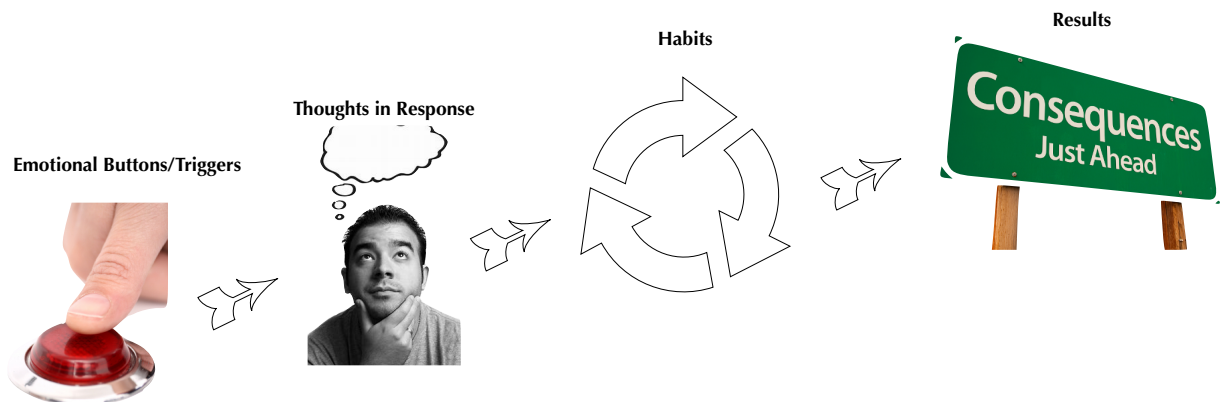
THOUGHTS ON FORGIVENESS

- Forgiving is healing—a healing for ourselves and/or others
 - In the same way, judging, condemning, vengeance, ridicule are all scarring and actually promote sinfulness in ourselves and others.
 - Forgiving is rooted in God and grace
 - *Corrie ten Boom*
-

The Hierarchy of Needs



FORGIVING IS AN INTENTIONAL ACT OF TRANSFORMATION



LUKE 23:32-34, 39-43

Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing..."

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

WHY IS FORGIVING SO HARD?

- IT IS ALL ROOTED IN OUR BIOLOGY AND OUR SURVIVAL INSTINCT:
 - WE ARE HARD-WIRED TO DEFEND OURSELVES AGAINST THREATS, AND FORGIVING OTHERS MAKES US VULNERABLE.
 - THREATS CAN BE BOTH BIOLOGICAL AND CONCEPTUAL (BELIEFS AND IDEALS).
 - WHAT WE HAVE A HARD TIME FORGIVING ARE ACTIONS BY OTHERS THAT HAVE HURT US PHYSICALLY, EMOTIONALLY, AND/OR SPIRITUALLY, AND THAT PIQUE OUR SURVIVAL INSTINCT

WHY IS FORGIVING SO HARD?

- WE ARE AMPHIBIANS, LIVING SIMULTANEOUSLY IN THE BIOLOGICAL AND CONCEPTUAL REALM
 - WE ARE WIRED TO PROTECT OURSELVES AGAINST BIOLOGICAL AND SELF-CONCEPTUAL ATTACKS, WHICH MEANS THAT PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL, OR SPIRITUAL ATTACKS EVOKE OUR SURVIVAL INSTINCT
 - THIS INSTINCT IS POWERFUL, MUCH MORE POWERFUL THAN MOST OF US RECOGNIZE, AND IT INFLUENCES MUCH OF OUR BEHAVIOR, EVEN OUTSIDE OF THE REALM OF FORGIVENESS
 - EXAMPLES: SPORTS, WORK, HOME,...

DEFENSIVE REACTIONS

- WHEN WE HAVE BEEN HURT BY OTHERS, WE USE A VARIETY OF SELF-PROTECTIVE DEFENSE STRATEGIES:
 - SELF-BLAME AND/OR SELF-CRITICISM
 - ATTACK
 - HYPER-AWARENESS
 - GENERALIZATION OF THREATS
 - REPRESSION
 - HYPER-PROTECTIVENESS
- ALL OF THESE DEFENSES PROTECT US FROM FURTHER HURT, BUT ALSO INHIBIT OUR ABILITY TO FORGIVE

HOW THE PAST SHAPES OUR WILLINGNESS TO FORGIVE

- PAST PAINS SHAPE OUR DEFENSIVENESS MUCH LIKE THE IMMUNE SYSTEM USES PAST ILLNESSES TO PREVENT FUTURE ILLNESS.
- PAST PAINS AND CONFLICTS ARE REMEMBERED NOT ONLY WITH A PARTICULAR PERSON, BUT WITH PEOPLE IN GENERAL, SO PAST PAINS ARE PROJECTED ONTO OTHER PEOPLE AND TO SIMILAR FUTURE EVENTS
- ULTIMATELY THE IDEA OF FORGIVING THOSE WHO HAVE HURT US MAKES US VULNERABLE TO BEING HURT AGAIN, AND OUR DEFENSE SYSTEMS SCREAM OUT FOR US NOT TO BE VULNERABLE

WHY DOES FORGIVING OTHERS FEEL LIKE CONDONING OR FORGETTING,

- WHEN WE FORGIVE WE HAVE TO BE WILLING TO FEEL VULNERABLE (EVEN THOUGH FORGIVING ACTUALLY MAKES US STRONGER) TO THE OTHER WHO HAS HURT US, WHICH FEELS LIKE WE ARE FORGETTING AND CONDONING.
- FORGIVING ALSO CALLS ON US LET GO OF THE POWER WE "FEEL" WHEN WE HOLD ONTO RESENTMENT. ANGER, BITTERNESS, AND RESENTMENT ACTUALLY MAKE US FEEL MORE POWERFUL
- WITNESS HOW WE TEND TO PAINT OURSELVES AS HEROES OF OUR STORIES.

WHAT LIFE CONDITIONS MAKE FORGIVING HARD?

- THOSE WHO HAVE A MORE POSITIVE DISPOSITION TOWARD LIFE ARE OFTEN QUICKER TO FORGIVE PAINS, EVEN EGREGIOUS ONES.
- PEOPLE WITH A GREATER SENSE OF SELF-ESTEEM ARE GENERALLY MORE WILLING TO FORGIVE, WHILE HOLDING ONTO PAINS AND SLIGHTS BOTH REFLECT A LOWER SELF-ESTEEM AND POSSIBLY CONTRIBUTE TO IT
- THOSE WITH A STRONG SENSE OF "JUSTICE" ARE OFTEN SLOWER TO FORGIVE (IS IN AN "EYE FOR AN EYE" MENTALITY?), AS WELL AS APOLOGIZE AND SEEK FORGIVENESS FROM OTHERS

WHAT DOES FORGIVENESS DO?

- FORGIVENESS CALLS ON US TO TREAT OTHERS AS EQUALS--BRINGING DOWN TO OUR LEVEL THOSE WHO INTIMIDATE US BECAUSE OF WHAT THEY'VE DONE, AND LIFTING UP THOSE WE LOOK DOWN ON BECAUSE OF WHAT THEY'VE DONE.
- IT ENGAGES US IN "I-THOU" RELATIONSHIPS RATHER THAN "I-IT" RELATIONSHIPS
- FORGIVENESS CALLS ON US TO ADOPT A SPIRITUAL RESPONSE TO EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL PAIN--IT LEADS US TO BE ROOTED IN WHAT GOD WANTS FOR US, RATHER THAN IN WHAT OUR MORE BASE INSTINCTS WANT FOR US.

FORGIVENESS

JILL HAAK ADELS

FORGIVENESS SPRINGS FROM HUMILITY, IN THE REALIZATION OF OUR OWN WEAKNESS, IMPERFECTION, AND SINFULNESS. IF GOD, WHO IS PERFECT, CAN FORGIVE SINNERS, HOW MUCH MORE SHOULD HUMANS DO SO. "JUDGE NOT, AND YE SHALL NOT BE JUDGED: CONDEMN NOT, AND YE SHALL NOT BE CONDEMNED: FORGIVE, AND YE SHALL BE FORGIVEN" (LUKE 6:37)

IT IS PERHAPS EASIER TO RISE TO A CHRIST-LIKE LEVEL OF FORGIVENESS IF ONE'S MURDERERS, EXECUTIONERS, OR TORTURERS, ONCE AND FOR ALL, THAN IT IS TO FORGIVE THOSE WHO TRY US IN SMALL WAYS, EVERY DAY. FORGIVENESS WITHIN THE FAMILY, FORGIVING THOSE WHOM WE HAVE LOVED AND TRUSTED, IS A STRINGENT TEST.