

## ABSTRACT

### THE IMPACT OF SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES ON PERSONS' ABILITY AND WILLINGNESS TO FORGIVE

by

Ming Li Chiu

The root of unforgiveness is anxiety. When one is anxious about the trustworthiness of one's offender, or when a victim is anxious that another will compete with him or her for limited goods, or when a victim fears that his or her being will be destroyed by another, forgiveness is difficult. On the other hand, recognition of one's belonging to community and desire for communion with God dispels anxiety, thereby opening the way to forgiveness.

The study involved thirty participants answering questionnaires over three months at monthly intervals on their ability to forgive, tendency to forgive, and spiritual well-being. Twenty participants further did devotions from a researcher-designed guide and journaled their thoughts and feelings throughout the period.

The study found that the practice of spiritual disciplines facilitates the development of one's desire for God. As desire for God increases, fear gives way to trust and obedience, and the victim finds forgiveness possible.

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THE IMPACT OF SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES ON PERSONS' ABILITY AND  
WILLINGNESS TO FORGIVE

A Dissertation

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Doctor of Ministry

by

Ming Li Chiu

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **PROBLEM**

#### **Power of Unforgiveness**

While serving in my last parish at Barker Road Methodist Church in Singapore up until June 2002, I was greatly disturbed by the number of families experiencing serious marital conflict. I did not have any statistics of the number of families in pain, but the overarching impression was that far too many families were breaking down. With all the couples I counseled, the history of hurt, neglect, and emotional cruelty began early in their relationships. I agonized over how the stories of their lives together could be different. Wounds inflicted in the past had cut so deeply they were indelibly inscribed into the heart. I wondered where healing could be found for them. I realized how powerful unforgiveness is. The wounds of many years had putrefied over time, and couples were not able to forgive even though they tried.

While I pastored this church, I was also chaplain of the prisons. I discovered that many prisoners saw themselves as victims. They were victims of their parents' neglect and abuse, victims of others' dishonesty, selfishness, and cruelty, victims of their spouses' harshness and infidelity, and victims of circumstances. Often, their alleged victimization seemed to have no connection with their lives of crime except that they were the "product" of their victimization. They were what they were because others had formed them by their abuses and offenses. For example, a gang fighter would explain his vocation by tracing his life of violence to his childhood where his father was physically abusive and harsh towards him. I learned that an offense or a series of offenses went beyond momentarily hurting the victim; it permeated and influenced every aspect of the

victim's life and relationships in the future.

I started to see how I, too, continued to be affected by hurts inflicted in the past. As a child, I perceived my father as a proud and exacting person. I had been hurt many times by his sternness and discipline, many experiences of which continue to linger in my mind. My father's stern discipline went beyond merely affecting my relationship with him. It permeated my perceptions and, hence, my relationships with all persons in authority, with my wife and child, with colleagues and neighbors, and with God. It distorted my understanding of human nature and of God. The ramifications of my father's relationship with me did not stop even there. With each distorted view came more perceived offenses and threats to my already frail ego. These threats had a cumulative effect: they reinforced my fear and hostility towards God and persons I encountered. I had become what I was because I could not erase the hurts I had received from my father early in my childhood. The sins of the past were perpetuated exponentially through the conduit of unforgiveness.

Persons experience conflict daily, with spouses, children, siblings, neighbors, colleagues, and others. Sometimes these conflicts escalate into serious disputes resulting in people attributing all of their misfortunes to others, ultimately excluding others from their lives.

One of the issues in this study is whether the effects of past sins can be stopped before they lead to the mutual destruction of victim and offender. The key to destroying this pernicious network of offenses is forgiveness, and this study examined whether forgiveness is a present reality or merely an ideal, a dream longed for but never attained.



### **Roots of Unforgiveness**

The desire for revenge often reflects a legitimate concern that sin and evil be taken seriously (Jones, Embodying Forgiveness 242). Forgiveness does not preclude one's quest for justice and holiness. In fact, hate is often the first sign that one cares, that one is outraged by the violation of one's or another person's being. Nevertheless, left un-confronted and unresolved, hate can easily turn into the evil that first provoked it (Peterson, Answering God 98).

From a sociological perspective, the issue of "forgiveness" presupposes that moral and societal norms have been violated (McCullough, Sandage, and Worthington 27). When a wrong has been committed, the status of the wronged person is threatened. Revenge is the attempt at restoring the imbalance.

On the other hand, because human beings have the tendency to exaggerate the extent of harm done to them while minimizing the gravity of offenses committed by them, any attempt at vengeance would inevitably result in the original victim perceiving the action as inadequate compensation, and the original offender perceiving the vengeful action as inordinately harsh.

Fear and anxiety are at the center of unforgiveness (Sandage 30). When persons are harmed, they perceive a threat to their safety. Revenge and avoidance are attempts at dealing with anxieties. Persons may feel threatened in several ways: one may experience anxiety over one's lack of knowledge of another person. Anxiety is especially felt when the offender has harmed the victim before and the victim is anxious about whether the offender will perpetuate the offence. Anxiety may also arise over competition for what persons perceive as limited goods, and each person seeks to secure these goods at the

expense of others. A third anxiety stems from the fear of losing oneself if one does not retaliate.

As a reaction to anxieties, injured persons seek to control their environment. Unforgiveness is the manifestation of one's attempt at controlling circumstances and relationships.

Anxieties begin developing at infancy. Attachment researchers have found that children whose primary caregivers were either anxious or negligent grew up to be more anxious and had greater difficulty forgiving than those who experienced nurturing love from their primary caregivers (McCullough, Sandage, and Worthington 62-66). Attachment problems at infancy may result in narcissism where a child learns that "imperfection could be a cause for rejection" (Meyer and Deitsch 204).

Narcissism is said to be the "antithesis of forgiveness" (Emmons 164). Narcissistic persons, while having grandiose illusions, have a very fragile self-esteem. Though they may not display it, they can easily feel shamed (American Psychiatric Association 714-17). This proneness to shame makes a narcissistic person defensive and sensitive to perceived slights. In order to fortify his or her fragile ego, the narcissistic person typically indulges in fantasies of revenge (McCullough, Sandage, and Worthington 165).

Unforgiveness is fear conditioned. Helping a person move from unforgiveness to forgiveness is difficult because the anxieties are impressed into the conscious as well as unconscious areas of a person's mind. Even when a person has decided to forgive an offender, much of his or her responses to the offender may come out as instinctive reactions of self-preservation.

Culture, which glorifies revenge and violence, also helps to entrench unforgiveness as a way of life. The media often portrays human life as a clear dichotomy of good and bad. The good are without fault and the bad, irredeemable. Life is never as clear concerning the good and the bad. Persons may be victims in one instance and victimizers in another; more likely, a person may be both a victim and a victimizer in one situation. As long as persons continue to see themselves only as innocent victims, they will not be able to remove themselves from the cycles of unforgiveness.

One cause of the modern person's unwillingness and inability to forgive is the failure of modern culture to recognize that humans were made to be in communion with God and with one another. Modern persons understand themselves as independent of all others. They, therefore, see no need to forgive, to seek forgiveness, or to move towards reconciliation, all of which are designed to foster communion (Jones, Embodying Forgiveness 37).

### **Forgiveness Interventions**

In recent times, much work has been done to help persons forgive.

#### **Forgiveness Defined**

Although much research has been done on forgiveness, no consensus definition of the term has been reached (Worthington, "Empirical Research" 321-23). Generally though, forgiveness may be said to take place when one is no longer motivated solely by the need to protect oneself but is also motivated to repair the relationship. Most theorists and researchers agree that forgiveness presupposes an injury has been inflicted by another person, that the injured person has a right to retribution, and that the injured person elects to be more positive than negative in his or her response to the offender (McCullough,

Pargament, and Thoresen, "Psychology of Forgiveness" 9).

### **Benefits of Forgiveness**

Holding onto unforgiveness may prolong one's suffering and distress. Recent work suggests that when persons identify themselves as victims, they become more passive, slower, and more willing to give up at the slightest hint of difficulties (Baumeister, Exline, and Sommer 98-99). When one forgives, one chooses to believe that goodness still exists in the world and that one has the power to make a difference (McCullough, Sandage, and Worthington 195).

Forgiveness may also stop the cycles of revenge and reprisals. In a conflict where each party feels wronged by the other, forgiveness or nonretaliation may ease bellicosity and restore social relationships.

### **Models of Forgiveness**

Robert D. Enright, Elizabeth A. Gassin, and Ching-Ru Wu, applying an earlier model on moral development postulated by Kohlberg, constructed a cognitive model of forgiveness comprising six stages and three levels. Their premise is that victims who recognize the dignity of human persons despite the evil they have done are more able to forgive. At the first level, the authors placed persons who forgave only because retribution or restitution had taken place. They did not consider this act true forgiveness as the victims were motivated by a demand for reward or punishment. At the second level were those who forgave because they felt compelled by family or religious and moral institutions to do so. At this level, forgiveness is incomplete as feelings of hurt and anger were retained. At the third level were victims who forgave freely regardless of prior conditions. Complete forgiveness is experienced at this level (99-114).

Enright, Gassin, and Wu's model is helpful in highlighting the many ways in which people forgive; however, it does not account for noncognitive factors such as empathy, humility, humor, relationship between the victim and offender prior and subsequent to the offense, and the victim's personality. Far more factors are involved in forgiveness than just the cognitive.

### **Transformation**

K. I. Pargament and M. S. Rye suggest that persons cope with crisis either through conservation or transformation (59-78). Conservation was often the first preference as it seeks to resolve the crisis while maintaining the status quo. They list anger, fear, hurt, and resentment as conservational means of coping. Less commonly is the response transformational, where persons are open to change both the goals as well as the means. Forgiveness is transformational in that it changes the motivation from pursuing self-protection as the primary goal to pursuing peace. Such a change is very difficult, but once a person has made the change, forgiveness becomes less radical and more a way of life.

### **The Pyramid Model**

Everitt L. Worthington developed a five-step intervention model that seeks to induce states of empathy and humility. The five steps are represented by the acronym REACH: Recalling the hurt (in a nonthreatening setting), Empathizing with the offender, offering the Altruistic gift of forgiveness, Committing to forgive, and Holding on to forgiveness. The focus of this intervention was to help a person recall the hurt in a supportive environment so as to eliminate fear conditioning and then to induce a sense of gratitude, humility, and empathy towards the offender ("Pyramid Model" 112).

## Stories

Research suggests that stories giving hope and building confidence of present desires being fulfilled in the future are associated with greater forgiveness. The confidence found in hope is fostered by memories of promises kept and desires satisfied in the past (McCullough, Sandage, and Worthington 145). Comedy and romance, in particular, are stories that inspire hope because they hold a promise of a good ending.

The brief survey of intervention methods show that forgiveness interventions attempt to deal with fear conditioning and the human tendency to lower the worth of another person as the root causes of unforgiveness. Christian spiritual formation elevates the worth of each individual no matter how evil and deals with fear conditioning.

### **Biblical and Theological Basis for Forgiveness**

The Bible understands human existence as relational: humans are not “individual substances”; one’s relationships are an indispensable dimension of one’s identity (Sandage 14). Humans were made for communion with God and with each other. As such, Christian forgiveness is seen as restoring and building communion with God and each other and focuses on real transformation of relationships.

Christian forgiveness takes as its foundation God, who “desires to embrace the sons and daughters of hell” (Volf 85). In the face of human sin and evil, God is willing to bear the cost of forgiveness and move towards reconciliation (Jones, Embodying Forgiveness xii). The narrative of the incarnation and the cross is a story of God doing what God ought not to be willing or able to do: God becoming vulnerable to the ways in which people diminish, betray, oppress, exclude, and kill each other. Nevertheless, rather than retaliating, God in Christ bears sin away without passing it on. The cross is about

God, the innocent victim, absorbing the aggression of persecutors upon himself, thereby breaking the cycle of violence (Volf 292).

God's forgiveness of the worst of sinners does not ignore judgment or the need for repentance. Rather, God's judgment is at the service of mercy and reconciliation. God judges in the hope that persons will turn from their sin. His forgiveness requires the victimizer to seek forgiveness from the victim. His pardon gives hope that both victim and victimizer may be able to live out their fully human vocation of communion with God and with each other (Jones, Embodying Forgiveness 127).

Forgiveness cannot be achieved through human strength alone. The Christian looks to God for grace to forgive and transform relationships. Forgiveness is especially difficult when the victimizer refuses to repent and instead takes the victim's forgiveness as a sign of weakness. To forgive an unrepentant offender is the most agonizing of all experiences for those learning to forgive.

Christian forgiveness is not passive; it must include resistance to evil. Nevertheless, the nature of the resistance is different. Christian forgiveness takes on responsible action while giving space to the offender to change. It does not seek to control or coerce; it works with the hope that the offender may come to repentance by his or her own volition.

### **Experiencing God's Healing**

Persons who attempt to restore broken relationships are constantly confronted by despair, anxiety, depression, and death. To accomplish the work of healing, they must rely on divine grace (Shults 104).

Christian theology suggests that inherent in each person is a longing for the

presence of God, the face that will not abandon his creation. Epistemic anxiety occurs when persons take their identities from others. Because human relationships are finite and often unreliable, anxiety arises as to whether such a relationship will end up in shameful betrayal or the diminution of the self. Christians find their identities not primarily from the ephemeral human relationships but in their relationship with God the Father. In knowing God, Christians are enabled to open up themselves to God, and to share in the joy of redemptive forgiveness. They no longer need to withhold forgiveness as a way of self-protection (Shults 178).

The agony of ethical anxiety arises from one's need to secure goods that one perceives as necessary for the good life and the fear that others are seeking to secure them at one's expense. Those who know God and are confident that he supplies abundantly lose that anxiety as they now depend on God's infinite resources to provide for them.

Further, when people have the assurance that their future is secured notwithstanding the present circumstances, they are freed to absorb injuries from others and to create space for their offenders to move towards wholeness (Shults 206-11).

### **Transformation by the Holy Spirit**

The Holy Spirit works by shifting one's understanding of and willingness to forgive. First the Holy Spirit transforms one's way of seeing the world and one's life, giving new meanings and insights. Then he causes one to yearn for the transformed life that the new insights have revealed.

The Holy Spirit works in the deepest recesses of a person's being. One of the ways in which he works is through an individual's practice of the spiritual disciplines.



## **Spiritual Disciplines, Spiritual Formation, and Transformation**

As previously described, anxieties and hatreds are deeply ingrained. Persons are formed by experiences and relationships from the past. Because these emotions and habits are so deeply ingrained, they cannot hope to change unless a transformation that reaches into their depths takes place.

Christian spiritual formation begins with the death of the self. Death to self takes place when individuals relinquish control over their lives and hand them over to God. When these persons' lives are organized around God, they begin to discover God's rich providence and loving care. Worship and adoration replace anxiety and the need to be in control. Being dead to self allows individuals to accept that they need not get their way. Instead, they can rest on the assurance that God will take care of them. The spiritual disciplines help to direct people's gaze away from themselves and to focus on God.

**Spiritual reading.** Spiritual reading or formational reading seeks to allow the Word of God to transform its readers. In contrast to informational reading where readers seek to master the text and use it for their own purposes, in formational reading readers submit themselves to the written text. In the hope that God will speak through the text, the readers learn to listen with the heart and spirit as well as the mind. They allow the deeper levels of being to respond, becoming sensitive to deep emotions and inner stirrings. Spiritual reading leads to a growing friendship with God and a greater sense of security and confidence in God.

**Prayer.** The discipline of prayer facilitates God's deepest work in the human spirit. To pray is to allow God to transform the person who prays (Foster, Celebration 30).

The goal of prayer is to know God. It is an ongoing communication with God where a person listens to, questions, laments, pleads with, praises, and thanks God (Barnwell 51). Prayer is the outlet for the pain and anguish that those who suffer experience. In the Psalms, the writers often brought to God their feelings of anguish at the atrocities done towards them. Seldom did they hold back their raw feelings.

By placing one's unedited rage before God, one places both one's unjust offender and one's vengeful self before God who loves and does justice. Before the light of God's love, hatred recedes and the seeds of forgiveness are planted (Volf 124). One learns to empathize with one's offender as well as to see one's own need for forgiveness.

**Journaling.** Journals help persons gather together thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Often, much insight is lost when it is not recorded. Journals also help persons recognize and analyze their emotions. People seldom recognize the full extent of how they feel until they let their emotions spill onto paper. Journaling helps individuals understand themselves.

Journaling enables persons to collect all the various emotions, thoughts, and relationships that make up their complex beings and to bring them to God. God longs to love individuals totally, but individuals often only bring to him what they perceive to be good. Journals help them to see the evil in them and bring those to God, too. In doing so they discover God loves them unconditionally despite all the evil within them.

**Mutual support and accountability.** Allowing God to transform unforgiving, resentful persons into people who love and forgive is very agonizing, and they need the support, encouragement, and chastisement of others seeking transformation. Persons seeking God need to speak with and listen to others about their experiences. They need to

be upheld in prayer and to uphold others in prayer. The support of a group of fellow seekers is essential to transformation.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore changes in the participants' tendency and ability to forgive, after practicing the spiritual disciplines of prayer, spiritual reading, journaling, and meeting in groups for two months. Participants in the study were asked to practice the spiritual disciplines, to record their thoughts, emotions, and observations in a journal, and to answer questionnaires on their spiritual well-being and their ability and tendency to forgive. In this way, I was able to observe changes in participants' spiritual well-being, and their ability and tendency to forgive.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the experiment:

1. What were the relationships participants had with those they had difficulty forgiving, and what were the offenses committed against the participants?
2. What was the nature and extent of the participants' practice of the spiritual disciplines of prayer, spiritual reading, and journaling prior to, during, and at the end of the experiment?
3. What changes in spiritual well-being took place during and after the experiment?
4. What were the significant differences in changes experienced by participants who met in groups and those who practiced the disciplines privately?

## Definitions

**Spiritual disciplines** refer to the practices of meditating on selected passages of the Bible (also referred to as spiritual reading), prayer, meeting in small groups for mutual encouragement, and daily journaling of one's thoughts, feelings, and experiences.

**Forgiveness** when used in this study refers to an individual's positive affective, cognitive, and behavioral responses to a person who has offended the individual. It is closely correlated to one's spirituality (Pargament and Rye 66-68).

**Forgivingness** refers to one's tendency to forgive. This tendency to forgive is not related to any specific offense committed against the individual but is a reference to one's likely response to an offense.

**Forgiven-ness** refers to a state of having been forgiven.

**Spiritual well-being** describes a person's sense of well-being in relation to God as well as a sense of life purpose and satisfaction.

**Measure of correlation** measures whether correlation exists between variables. The measure is able to indicate if two or more variables are correlated but cannot ascertain if one variable is the cause of a corresponding variation in another variable.

## Ministry Intervention

I wanted to know whether participants in the experiment would experience a change in their spiritual well-being and their ability and willingness to forgive when they meditated on and prayed through designer-selected biblical passages for two months, journaled their thoughts, feelings, and experiences, and shared them with others.

## Administration of Experiment and Collection of Data

I decided that for the experiment to be relevant to my continuing ministry in

Singapore, the ministry intervention and the experiment would have to be conducted in Singapore. As I was in Kentucky at the time, I formed a project administration team comprised of four persons to assist in administering the experiment. A project director headed the team. I instructed the project administration team to select participants according to the specifications set out below.

Three sets of participants were selected for the experiment:

1. Participants belonged to a support or accountability group. Every member in the participating group was committed to participating in the experiment and practicing the spiritual disciplines of spiritual reading, prayer, and journaling. In addition, each person in the group was encouraged to share freely from their journals and pray about their struggles and discoveries.

2. Participants in the second set were not known to belong to any support or accountability group. They committed themselves to practicing the spiritual disciplines of spiritual reading, prayer, and journaling privately and were neither encouraged to nor discouraged from disclosing journal entries to anyone.

3. Participants in the third set were neither asked to practice the spiritual disciplines nor to keep a journal. They were only asked to answer the questionnaires.

I prepared letters for participants in each of the groups and transmitted them to the project manager via electronic mail, with instructions to mail them to the respective participants. Participants in sets one and two were asked to meditate on selected passages from the Gospel of John for a period of sixty days and to record their thoughts, feelings, events of the day and their responses to these events, and observations throughout the sixty-day period in a journal.

The Forgiveness Scale, Forgiveness Likelihood Scale, and the Spiritual Well-Being Scale were administered to all the participants before the experiment, in the middle of the experiment, at the conclusion of the experiment, and six weeks after the experiment had concluded. In addition, a survey to ascertain the devotional habits of the participants was administered prior to the experiment. The surveys were mailed to participants several days before they were due to be completed. Participants then answered the survey questions and returned them via stamped self-addressed envelopes, which I had sent along with the surveys.

For set A, two groups, totaling ten persons who were already meeting for Bible study and fellowship were selected. The members were asked to continue meeting as a group for the duration of the study and encouraged to incorporate a time of sharing and prayer over their discoveries made in the course of the exercise. The groups met weekly, and their feelings and observations made at the meetings were recorded in their respective journals.

For set B, ten participants were selected randomly, based on their willingness to participate in the study. They were not encouraged to share their discoveries, nor were they discouraged from doing so.

A set C was comprised of ten persons, randomly selected, and not asked to participate in the practice of the spiritual disciplines but only to answer the questionnaires.

A pretest researcher-designed questionnaire was administered together with the Forgiveness Scale, the Forgiveness Likelihood Scale, and the Spiritual Well-Being Scale.

The participants were given a list of passages from the Gospel of John on which

to meditate with simple instructions as to how to meditate. They were also instructed to record their emotions, thoughts, and observations in their journals.

The Forgiveness Scale, Forgiveness Likelihood Scale, and the Spiritual Well-Being Scale were administered one month into the experiment to ascertain the participants' tendency and ability to forgive at the middle of the experiment.

The Forgiveness Scale, Forgiveness Likelihood Scale, and the Spiritual Well-Being Scale were administered at the end of the study period. The journals were collected and analyzed.

The Forgiveness Scale, Forgiveness Likelihood Scale, and Spiritual Well-Being Scale were administered six weeks after the conclusion of the exercise to evaluate the long-term effects of the experiment.

At the conclusion of sixty days, participants sent their journals to the project manager in stamped self-addressed envelopes provided by the project manager. The names of each of the participants were written on the envelopes. Upon receiving the envelopes, the project manager noted that she had received their returns. The project manager mailed the unopened envelopes containing the surveys and journals to me in Kentucky.

### **Sample**

Thirty participants were selected purposively from Barker Road and Ang Mo Kio Methodist Churches. Their ages were 18 years and above, and they were professing Christians. All were of Chinese descent but received education in English.

**Variables**

One independent variable was the discipline of spiritual reading and prayer and recording thoughts and insights in a journal. The other independent variable was the gathering into groups to share, comfort, encourage, and pray over the discoveries made during the study period.

The dependent variables were the changes in the participants' willingness and ability to forgive, their tendency to be forgiving, and their spiritual well-being.

Intervening variables that might have affected outcomes were the age, gender, temperament, life experiences, and gravity of the conflicts experienced (Worthington, "Empirical Research" 109-12).

**Confidentiality and Anonymity**

Confidentiality was ensured by the use of assigned codes. Participants were selected by the members of the research reflection team without disclosing their names to me. Four laypersons who were involved in the project comprised the research reflection team, evaluating and giving helpful insights and suggestions for the project. At the administration of the pretest questionnaire, participants were assigned a code. This code was used throughout the study to identify the participants for administrative purposes. Further, only I had access to the questionnaire answers and the journal entries. The journals were returned to the participants at the conclusion of the study and no copies were kept.

**Delimitations and Generalizability**

The main limitation of this study was the brevity of the study period; however, this method was selected because I was concerned that a longer study period would



amass an amount of journal entries so great as to render the examination of the data difficult. I was also concerned that the conflicts the participants faced at the start of the study would have been drastically altered, forgotten, or resolved with the passage of time.

This study involved Christians facing conflict in a middle-class, Asian society. I may generalize similar outcomes with persons in the same demographic makeup.

### **Overview of Dissertation**

Chapter 2 of this work establishes the psychological, social, and theological context for the study. The research design is presented in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 reports the research findings. Chapter 5 provides an interpretation of the findings and makes suggestions for further inquiry.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE**

This chapter looks at literature from the fields of psychology, sociology, theology, and the Bible pertaining to this study.

#### **Roots of Unforgiveness**

In any study of forgiveness as a virtue, one is tempted to lay a heavy burden of guilt on those who have difficulties forgiving a wrong done to them. At the outset of this study, I wish to clarify that the struggles people have in relation to their desire for revenge is not only real, but they reflect a legitimate concern that sin and evil be taken seriously. People's desire for retributive punishment should stir in everyone a seriousness to uphold justice and defend those who have been victimized. The cry for retribution signifies a commitment that "order is better than disorder" (Jones, Embodying Forgiveness 242).

#### **A Sociological Perspective**

The issue of forgiveness presupposes that moral norms have been violated (McCullough, Sandage, and Worthington 27). Sociologists use the phrase "conspecific congruence" to denote a horizontal or nonhierarchical relationship between a given individual and others in a group. Conspecific congruence creates a balance within the social group such that all members of the group understand their role and relationship with each other (Newberg, d'Aquili, Newberg, and Marici 94). When a wrong is committed, the status of the victim as a person of equal status is placed in question (McCullough, Sandage, and Worthington 27). Imbalance in the relationship occurs. Revenge is the active approach of restoring congruence. Studies have shown that persons

who retaliate when wronged are less likely to be victimized again (Newberg, d'Aquili, Newberg, and Marici 97). Revenge and its cultural and derivative manifestation, justice, are instrumental in preserving societies and cultures (95). Hence, in dealing with the issue of forgiveness, one needs to be mindful that the desire for revenge may “reflect a morally significant attitude” toward justice and the preservation of society (Jones, Embodying Forgiveness 242).

On the other hand, while the desire for revenge may reflect a commitment to social order, vengeance, when left unchecked, will inevitably lead to chaos. Peter L. Steinke argues that while persons or systems need to protect themselves from harm, they run the risk of becoming trapped in their own reactions, thus depriving themselves of other resources:

It is not a sign of defectiveness or evil for a system to protect itself against what it cannot accommodate. Reactivity is in service of survival. But what is automatic is intended to be temporary, not permanent. If anxiety is reinforced and takes hold, it is locked into the system. After a while the system may even become loyal to its own reactivity.... When anxiety is high, resilience is low. Behaviors are extreme and rigid; thoughts are unclear and disjointed... [I]t is one thing for a system to be shattered by shocking events and another to be shackled by its own reactive tremors. Once a system fortifies its stability by its reactivity, it cannot get what it needs most: time and distance, calm and objectivity, clarity and imagination... [A] relationship system does not live by reaction alone but by every resource at its disposal. Therefore a system that maintains its stability by reactivity alone will not be stable in the long run. (43)

Self-defense is a necessary response to threats. Nevertheless, for persons to continue to survive and thrive, they must eventually move away from hypervigilance to use other resources at their disposal.

Humans have a tendency to exaggerate the self, as well as the gravity of the offense committed against them, and to minimize the motives and seriousness of their

offenses against others. When an offense is committed, the victim will perceive the offense as far more serious than it is while the offender will tend to see the offense as less significant than it is. Revenge, in this case, could never restore the equilibrium because retaliation would invariably be far greater than what the offender perceives as justifiable. The offender now becomes the perceived victim and resorts to revenge to redress the disequilibrium. If left unchecked, this cycle of retribution will spiral into chaos (Newberg, d'Aquili, Newberg, and Marici 98).

The great danger of the sociological construct of unforgiveness and forgiveness is that "it seduces us into thinking that the world is filled with more light than it really is" (Jones, Embodying Forgiveness 68). It overlooks the power and destructiveness of evil. It avoids the difficult question of dealing with real evil that continues to be perpetuated in the face of forgiveness.

### **Anxiety**

Fear and anxiety are at the center of unforgiveness and estranged relationships (Sandage 30) and are more basic to unforgiveness than anger and hostility (48). When one is mistreated, one perceives the mistreatment as an attack on one's dignity and security in life. The perceived attack may symbolize a deeper threat to one's existence and bring about fears of death and loss (47). Hypervigilance takes place as one begins to believe that this world is a dangerous place in which to live (McCullough, Sandage, and Worthington 194). Such fears give rise to defense mechanisms such as anger, a desire for revenge, or avoidance (Sandage 47) in an attempt to cope with the anxieties. These defense mechanisms may seriously distort the realities of self and others. For example, one may project one's anger and aggression onto the intentions of another, thus creating a

subjective need to hate, exclude, or punish that other as an enemy (48).

Revenge, then, is a fear-induced defense response that seeks to demonstrate to the offender the following:

1. The victim is not afraid of the offender;
2. The victim has greater worth and value than the offender believes and cannot be pushed around;
3. The offender cannot get away with hurting the victim; and,
4. The offender will be punished with the hope that the offender will repent of the harmful deed (McCullough, Sandage, and Worthington 81).

F. Leron Shults postulates that humans face three anxieties—epistemic anxiety, ethical anxiety, and ontological anxiety (173-221)—that stand in the way of forgiveness.

**Epistemic anxiety.** One finds forgiving difficult because one is anxious about one's knowledge of one's offender. Each person is created with the need for trustworthy and faithful communion with others. When someone breaks faith, individuals need to forgive in order to reestablish communion. Forgiveness is difficult when victims do not know if the offender will break faith again. Victims feel powerless in their lack of knowledge, and if knowledge of the offender's fidelity is a precondition for forgiving, they will never forgive (Shults 173-75).

**Ethical anxiety.** Most persons are concerned to act in such a way as to secure for themselves what they perceive as giving them a good life. People act intentionally because they love objects they believe to be good for them and seek to acquire them. Ethical anxiety arises because individuals do not have the power to secure all they desire. Persons are constantly engaged in a struggle with each other to compete for finite and

limited goods. Despite the fact they were created for community and called to give and receive freely from each other, they do not do so; rather, they seek to secure their lives at the expense of others (Jones, Embodying Forgiveness 114). The fear that another will acquire these goods at one's expense leads to ethical anxiety (Shults 189 ff).

**Ontological anxiety.** Within each person is a longing for transcendence, a desire to be in a future reality where that person belongs in harmonious relationships with others. Residing in the same person, however, is a corresponding fear that one will be annihilated, violently destroyed, or absorbed so that one loses the particularity of existence. Being human, one lacks the “metaphysical weight to establish himself in the systems of the lived world” (Shults 206). One buries this ontological anxiety, this fear of imminent “not-being,” under all sorts of busyness in order not to face the dreaded loss of existence. On the other hand, one cannot suppress one's longing to belong to a glorious future, to find one's place in ultimate reality without losing the particularity of one's being. Persons are faced with a dilemma: a longing for future glory and a dread of future annihilation. This overhanging dread of the peril to being often leads to violence. Persons destroy the beauty in others in a desperate attempt to preserve their own particularity. Whenever one's dignity is diminished or one shamed by another, one's dread of potential nonbeing stirs one to action, often moving one violently to returning the evil to the offender.

Paul Jensen suggests that “to forgive means to exhaust in one's own being the consequences one has suffered so that those consequences will not cause further damage ... to the victimizer” (154). He further notes, “When God forgives, God determines to absorb into His own being the consequences of human sin and thus exhaust its virulence”

(154). Human beings, however, do not have enough metaphysical weight to absorb sin without the fear of being violently destroyed by evil and sin. Persons' ontological anxiety prevents them from absorbing and thus exhausting the consequences of another's sin for fear that this very act will result in their own destruction.

### **Need for Control**

Anxiety arises from the need to be in control. According to M. Robert Mulholland, Jr., "[I]n a world where such order and control are partial at best, anxious care can become a consuming passion that misshapes all relationships, all events and all activities of one's life" (Invitation 86). Anxiety-driven persons erect defenses to keep the unexpected and unpredictable from intruding into their carefully ordered world. Such persons demand, above all things, "certitude," the removal of ambiguity and unpredictability (Crysdale 121). They will manipulate and dehumanize relationships with others so as to maintain control over their own lives.

Paradoxically, the more one seeks to control, the less one is able to feel that one is in control. Research has shown that when persons withhold forgiveness in an attempt to retain control, they remain bound to the consequences of the offenses committed against them (McCullough, Sandage, and Worthington 201-02). An ever-spiraling quest for even greater control results.

Miroslav Volf concludes, "[W]e exclude because we want to be at the center and be there alone, single-handedly controlling 'the land'" (79). "We add conquest to conquest and possession to possession; we colonize the life-space of others and drive them out, in order to control—if possible everything, alone" (79).

### **Anxiety Developed from Infancy**

Attachment researchers postulate that each person develops a working model of relationships from early experiences with primary caregivers. Attachment means the bonding between two persons. If their caregivers were distant, rejecting, or smothering, persons would understand relationships as threatening and would approach the prospect of bonding with much anxiety. They may believe that others will treat them in the same way; hence, their working model of relationships will be negative. They may become avoidant, hostile, or cling to others in an attempt to allay their insecurities and anxieties (McCullough, Sandage, and Worthington 62).

Attachment theorists have identified three main attachment styles, each stemming from the infant-primary caregiver relationship: anxious ambivalent, avoidant, and secure (Sandage 52 ff.).

Anxious-ambivalent styles are developed in babies whose care was inconsistent and interrupted. In adulthood, these persons experience difficulty in seeing things from another person's perspective (McCullough, Sandage, and Worthington 66). They are often clingy and demanding (Sandage 52). Though they tend to fear abandonment in close relationships, they may also have low levels of commitment in their relationships and are preoccupied with conflict within the relationships. They may be angry or passive towards their primary caregivers but fear losing these established relationships. These persons fall in love easily and feel intense jealousy (McCullough, Sandage, and Worthington 66) and require a great deal of reassurance from others (Sandage 52).

The avoidant attachment style is developed when the infant experiences rejection from the primary caregivers. Rejection reinforces a sense of independence. They feel



anxiety over the separation and rejection but respond by avoiding contact (Sandage 52). In adulthood, these persons often feel isolated and lonely but deny their feelings of grief and anger. Because they learned from infancy that they could never get the love they need, they often detach themselves from deep emotions of any kind (McCullough, Sandage, and Worthington 67). They deny the impact others have on them and the impact they have on others, dismissing the importance of relationships (Sandage 52). They are compulsively self-reliant and competent but tend to be hostile, provocative, and emotionally out of touch (McCullough, Sandage, and Worthington 67) and struggle with trust and commitment in relationships (Sandage 52).

The infant who received relatively consistent caregiving develops a secure attachment style. The infant perceives the caregiver to be a “reliable source of warmth and protection and a secure base for exploring the environment” (Sandage 52). Such a person grows up with a healthy approach towards closeness, distance, loss, and conflict and the ability to form and maintain most relationships. They also have a propensity to forgive others and themselves.

### **Narcissism and Shame**

According to Robert A. Emmons, “[T]he construct of narcissism has much to offer scientists intent on a deeper understanding of dispositional influences on the process of forgiveness” (160). The construct of narcissism is multifaceted, having certain characteristic interpersonal orientations and chronic emotional reactions and attitudes towards the self and others. Emmons suggests these orientations make narcissism the “antithesis of forgiveness” (164).

The fourth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders

(DSM-IV-TR) describes the essential feature of Narcissistic Personality Disorder as “a pervasive pattern of grandiosity, need for admiration, and lack of empathy” (American Psychiatric Association 714). Persons with this disorder believe that they are superior to others, are preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, devalue the contributions of others, and feel a sense of entitlement to favorable treatment (714).

R. Raskin and H. Terry describe narcissism as “self-admiration that is characterized by tendencies toward grandiose ideas, exhibitionism, and defensiveness in response to criticism; interpersonal relationships that are characterized by feelings of entitlement, exploitativeness, and a lack of empathy” (890).

Narcissistic persons have very fragile self-esteem. They often ruminate upon how they are regarded by others. Because their self-esteem is so vulnerable, they are very sensitive to criticism or defeat. Though they may not display their vulnerabilities, criticisms often leave them feeling humiliated, degraded, hollow, and empty. When criticized, they may counterattack or withdraw and mask their hurt with an air of humility. Personal relationships are invariably impaired with such persons (American Psychiatric Association 714-17).

Characteristics of narcissism are found in all individuals to varying degrees, depending on their developmental histories and culture. They are especially pronounced in a culture that orients itself toward personal gratification and self-enhancement (Emmons 162) and where inordinate attention to being “number one” is rife (Meyer and Deitsch 201). In such an environment, they may become magnified and take preponderance over one’s overall personality structure. Narcissism then serves as the “central organizing construct” overwhelming and suppressing other forgiveness-related

traits such as humility, empathy, and generosity (Emmons 162).

Pathological narcissism develops from childhood through the primary caregivers' failure to empathize and provide secure emotional attachment. Children experience this as rejection, which leads to a sense of shame about personal needs (Sandage 56). Narcissism may also come about when children have received "total-indulgent love" or where "submissive nurturance" (where children were allowed to pull their weight) existed and where they learned that imperfections could result in rejection (Meyer and Deitsch 204). Narcissistic families often perpetuate narcissism when parents do not provide a "healthy, supportive or reality-based mirror for their children" (204). Instead, what is reflected are the narcissistic needs of the parents, with the implicit demand that the children meet those needs. Because the children can never fully meet those needs, the shame of failure is internalized (Sandage 80). Underlying narcissism is the "projection of bad self-representation," the perception that "I am hateful," onto others (57).

A number of theorists and researchers have noted that shame tends to initiate, rather than curb, angry reactions and violence (Meyer and Deitsch 68). Shame begins with hostility toward the self, owing to a sense of the disapproving other. Volf describes shame as a "hatred of ourselves, a discomfort over the strangeness within ourselves" (78). This self-hatred can become so threatening and aversive that the shame-prone individual turns the hatred outward in an attempt to defend the ego. The individual, in order to save impaired self from self-condemnation, turns anger and hostility towards others (Sandage 69). This defensive reflex has been responsible for persons' hatred and dehumanizing treatment of others (Volf 78).

A narcissistically vulnerable person, hypersensitive to offenses, would likely

respond to perceived violations with maladaptive emotional and relational reactions that could prolong and exacerbate the conflict. When persons are wronged or rejected by others, they experience a violation of their sense of justice, followed by a loss of esteem (Emmons 167). Often in a conflict, contempt on the faces of the combatants instigates further feelings of shame and loss of esteem (Sandage 68). For narcissistic and shame-prone individuals, such a violation brings about ontological anxieties of nonbeing. The faces of those with whom they are in conflict “represent faces of the void and underlying anxieties of non-being” (57). In an attempt to negate the void and potential nonbeing, to “save social face,” the narcissistic or shame-prone person would have to fortify existing ego structures (93). Theorists speculate that “narcissistic fantasies protect, restore, and repair the person’s sense of self-esteem. Fantasies of revenge can be a powerful means of salving narcissistic wounds” (McCullough, Sandage, and Worthington 165). Holding grudges and entertaining fantasies of vengeance can protect victims from being hurt by the same person in the same way. Such memories inspire anger, which give the illusion of power. By lowering the esteem of the person who has hurt them, victims create a mirage of raising their self-esteem (78). A threatened ego often leads to aggressive and violent behavior as a strategy for defending a favorable view of oneself against ego threats (165).

### **The Allure of Violence and Unforgiveness**

In a world where justice is upheld and truth respected, persons might be more willing to foreswear violence and vengeance. Nevertheless, in a place where interests clash and power is wielded against power, individuals secretly enjoy doing violence (Volf 276-77). Violence, though not as hopeful as forgiveness, seems more realistic and

effective and more truthful about the way the world really is (Jones, Embodying Forgiveness 73). In a violent world, people seek a Messiah who will “make our wills unbending, our arms strong and our swords sharp” (Volf 276).

Cynthia S. W. Crysedale traces the origins of “redemptive violence,” the belief that the world can be saved through violence, to the ancient Babylonian empire where the *Enuma Elish* depicts the creation of the world through conflict, combat, and violence. This myth has continued today. The basic structure of this myth comprises the “good and the bad guys.” The evil characters are irredeemably evil, and such a belief justifies the use of violence against them. The good persons invariably overcome the evil ones. No ambiguity about rightness and wrongness exists and no repentance, confession, tragedies, or difficult decisions are to be made. Most of all, evil is always projected outward onto the other (44). Walter Wink describes redemptive violence as basic to socialization.

[It is] the simplest, laziest, most exciting, uncomplicated, irrational, and primitive depiction of evil the world has ever known. Furthermore, its orientation toward evil is one into which all modern children are socialized in the process of maturation. Once children have been indoctrinated into the expectation of a dominator society, they may never outgrow the need to locate all evil outside themselves. (22)

The myth of redemptive violence perpetuates people’s propensity toward vengeance and violence.

### **Intractable Nature of Unforgiveness**

Many who have tried to forgive have discovered to their dismay that hurtful memories cannot be erased despite even commitments to forgive. Others who thought they had forgiven a long time ago discover that “forgiveness cannot be confined to a moment—even a moment at the conclusion of a long timeful process” (Jones, Embodying Forgiveness 237). Forgiveness has to be embodied into life in the future. C.

S. Lewis in Letters to Malcolm notes, “To forgive for a moment is not difficult; but to go on forgiving, to forgive the same offense every time it recurs to the memory—there’s the real tussle” (29-30).

Unforgiveness is experienced in the mind as fear conditioning. When fear conditioning occurs, it remains stubbornly in the mind. Persons forgive their abusers. When they see their abusers again, recovery of memories of the past events and the fears associated with them occur. Even if such recovery ceases to occur, if abused persons are hurt by someone else, the old hurts return. Under stress, old wounds are reopened. Very little additional hurt from the original offenders are needed to reactivate the fear conditioning (Worthington, “Pyramid Model” 116).

Fear conditioning is experienced through a complex network involving at least eight sources. These sources create a memory of the event and anticipatory responses to protect persons from being hurt again. The sources include

- Facial muscles,
- Skeletal muscles,
- Viscera—pounding heart, twisted gut,
- The particular hormone signature for the emotional experience—fear, anger, depression,
- Neurochemical stimulation to the brain,
- The environment—people’s reactions, changing conditions,
- The content of thinking about the issue and associations made with other events and issues, and
- The flow of consciousness, including the flow of feelings, through the

memory (Worthington, “Pyramid Model” 120).

Broadly speaking, the brain comprises three parts: the brain stem, which controls basic survival; the midbrain limbic system, a web of structures that govern emotion, motivation, and much of memory; and, the cortex of two hemispheres, which directs sensation, motor behavior, and higher order thinking. The left cortex largely controls language, and the right governs visual imagery. The various structures of the brain account for rational thought, images, and emotions. The networking of these thoughts, images, and emotions at the conscious and unconscious levels make up the mind (McCullough, Sandage, and Worthington 100).

When a person is hurt, the left cortex, which is responsible for rational thinking, understands the person as one who is injured. The right cortex creates images of the painful event. Each time the person is hurt, the images and interpretations of the events and emotions are etched into the mind.

Persons’ minds collect data from the left and right cortical hemispheres and from the midbrain and integrate the words, images, and emotions at the conscious and unconscious levels. Consciousness provides interpretations and understanding for the experience, which help the persons predict. The unconscious mind protects itself out of fear and pride (McCullough, Sandage, and Worthington 100-01).

When “contradictory information,” perhaps a kindness done to a victim by the offender, reaches the mind from the rational left cortex, the victim suppresses this information with contrary reasoning. The victim fears that to change his or her story of unforgiveness would disable him or her from predicting the future and protecting himself or herself (McCullough, Sandage, and Worthington 104).

This defense mechanism makes changing from being unforgiving to forgiving extremely difficult for persons. To do so would require more than a commitment to forgive and would involve a transformation of thoughts, images, emotions, and memories (McCullough, Sandage, and Worthington 105).

### **Fundamental Attribution Error**

Persons' emotional responses to hurts are governed by their interpretation and attribution of the offender's culpability. When offended, persons automatically attribute to the offender motives and intentions. Attributing malice to the offender will make abused persons less likely to forgive and will cause them to contemplate revenge or avoidance, or both. If victims attribute the offender's act to an accident or a mistake, they will be much more magnanimous and willing to forgive. People will feel less outraged and have less need to defend against future attacks. How victims attribute blame plays a large part in determining the process of forgiveness (Sandage 81).

People tend to attribute the causes of their behavior according to different guidelines from those they use to attribute the causes of another person's conduct (McCullough, Sandage, and Worthington 134). They tend to attribute their reprehensible conduct to exclusively external causes (Sandage 81), to some terrible circumstances they have suffered (McCullough, Sandage, and Worthington 135), or to other extenuating and mitigating circumstances (Baumeister, Exline, and Sommer 83). At the same time, they downplay the gravity and consequences of their offense, divide blame among many parties, and explain their conduct as arising from understandable and often legitimate motives (83).

On the other hand, in interpreting the motivation of others, people tend to attribute



their behavior to exclusively internal causes (Sandage 81), to personality flaws (McCullough, Sandage, and Worthington 135), as part of an ongoing pattern of misbehavior, as gratuitous, inexcusable, and immoral with severe consequences (Baumeister, Exline, and Sommer 83).

The tendency of the victim to exaggerate the magnitude of the hurt and the culpability of the offender and the corresponding tendency of the offender to downplay the gravity of the offense and mitigate its motivations is known as the fundamental attribution error. This tendency is pervasive and, in large part, explains the difficulties people face in finding forgiveness, as well as the escalation of conflict. Volf comments that persons have a tendency to downplay the gravity of their offenses:

A descent into the conflict-ridden underworld of evil reveals a strange but persistent anomaly. If we listen to what its inhabitants tell us about their enemies, we are overwhelmed by the ugliness and magnitude of wickedness. If we let these same enemies talk about themselves, the ugliness mutates into beauty and the wickedness into innocence; the magnitude remains the same. In a world so manifestly drenched with evil everybody is innocent in their own eyes. Those who do accept the blame hasten to mount equal or greater blame on the shoulders of others. And since in the twisted arithmetic of sin, blame on the one side and blame on the other do not add up but cancel each other, acceptance of blame amounts to a clandestine proclamation of innocence. (79)

Because each person is right in their own eyes and the enemy absolutely wrong, combatants often are unable to see possibilities of peace.

### **The “Victim” Role**

At the heart of sin is the refusal to *tolerate* sin, so that people deny wrongdoing and minimize their culpability in any wrongful act. Associated with the fundamental attribution error is people’s tenacity in maintaining their innocence (Volf 80). The tenacity to maintain innocence leads to what Gregory L. Jones calls “the cult of the

victim” (Embodying Forgiveness 46). Whoever is able to lay claim to the status of victim wins because this status projects the image of innocence against all others who are in some way guilty (46).

In a discussion on the disposition to forgive, one cannot ignore the importance of one’s willingness to seek and receive forgiveness. In fact, a willingness to seek forgiveness may be more important to ending conflict than the willingness to forgive. In many situations, parties to a conflict have sacrificed the possibility of reconciliation because they came prepared to forgive but unprepared to seek forgiveness (Jones, Embodying Forgiveness 148).

Forgiveness invariably involves power and the dynamics of power relationships. Whoever holds the right to grant or withhold forgiveness wields power (Jones, Embodying Forgiveness 148). Society often attempts to divide persons into victims and offenders, oppressors and the oppressed. This dichotomy, however, oversimplifies the complexities of sin and evil. While the truth is that many people have suffered much through abuse and violence, no one is free from being both victim and victimizer (116). The closer one looks at a conflict, the more one will realize that the line between the guilty and innocent blurs, and one sees a network of “hatreds, dishonesties, manipulations, and brutalities, each reinforcing the other” (Volf 81). Paul unmask the myth of the innocent “victim.” He describes all people:

Their throats are open graves, their tongues practice deceit, the poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood and there is no fear of God in their eyes. (Rom. 3:11, )

Though persons appear innocent in their own eyes, each person is in reality evil within.

While holding oneself as a victim may appear to give the person power over

others who are guilty, Worthington suggests that clinging to the victim role would entail relinquishing possibilities for happiness. Recent research suggests that the victim role leads to passivity and failure. Simply thinking of being a victim tends to make people more passive, slower, and more willing to give up as soon as they encounter difficulties (Baumeister, Exline, and Sommer 98). Such an adoption of the victim role, in turn, may exacerbate the hurt one holds towards abusers, blaming them for all problems (McCullough, Sandage, and Worthington 82).

### **Escalation of Conflict**

Unforgiveness tends to intensify and escalate conflict. The fundamental attribution error leads to a perpetual state of disequilibrium. When people are hurt, their perception of the injuries, as well as the offenders' culpability, is exaggerated. They then attempt to redress the wrong by taking revenge. Because the offenders are also human, they experience an exaggerated perception of the redress and see this already excessive redress as even more excessive. With this mechanism operating, every subsequent attempt at restoring equilibrium results in the ever intensification of the conflict (Newberg, d'Aquili, Newberg, and Marici 98).

People's attempts to establish justice and truth through violence and revenge will inevitably result in greater violence and vengeance. If those who are perceived to be guilty of deception and oppression are brought to insight by violence and conflict, they will invariably take to violence and conflict to establish their truth and justice. The sword that is used to root out violence ends up fostering it (Volf 277).

### **Evil Creates Abusers of the Abused**

The tragedy of unforgiveness is that "evil-doers fashion victims in their own ugly

image” and the practice of evil is perpetuated (Volf 81). Victims all too often mimic the behavior of their oppressors, allowing themselves to be shaped in the image of the enemy (117). According to Jones, that people who are physically abused often become abusers is an established fact (Embodying Forgiveness 71). People who have been violated often internalize these injuries, making them increasingly unable to trust or love. Those who have suffered greatly find extreme difficulty in escaping this cycle of violence. One of the most horrifying effects achieved by those who abuse others is that they incapacitate their victims’ ability to take responsibility for their lives (72).

### **Failure to Recognize “Identity-in-Communion”**

One of the root causes leading to persons’ refusal and inability to forgive is the failure of modern culture to recognize that human beings derive their identity not as individuals but in communion with each other and with God. Human beings were made in the image of the triune God, characterized by perfect communion. As such, they were created for loving communion with God, with one another, and with all creation. Nevertheless, human beings have consistently rejected that communion, believing instead that domination and violence is their destiny. Instead of trusting one another and freely giving to and receiving from one another, they continue to secure their lives at the expense of others (Jones, Embodying Forgiveness 114-15).

Psychologist Philip Cushman observes that post-war culture has created a self that de-emphasizes finding meaning in relationships and institutions that persons hold in common (599-611). Instead of finding meaning in a self that is grounded in community, modern persons understand themselves as ungrounded entities and find meaning only by indulging in desires to spend and consume and by seeking personal fulfillment

(McCullough, Sandage, and Worthington 163).

Lewis in The Great Divorce depicts hell as a place where people have the freedom to choose to stay apart from others and do indeed stay apart from each other. Implicit in this parable is the assertion that hell is where communion with one another is broken and remains unrestored. As long as people continue to strive towards individual autonomy, forgiveness and reconciliation, which are designed to foster community, become of little importance (Jones, Embodying Forgiveness 37).

### **Forgiveness Intervention**

This section examines what scientists and philosophers have discovered about what forgiveness entails.

#### **Forgiveness Defined**

Although a solid platform of empirical research on forgiveness has been established, no consensus definition of forgiveness has yet been developed (Worthington, “Empirical Research” 321, 323).

Nevertheless, many overlaps in understanding of the concept of forgiveness exist. Most theorists agree about what forgiveness is not. Forgiveness may be differentiated from “pardoning,” which is a legal term, “condoning,” which implies that the offense is justifiable, “excusing,” which implies the offender had good reasons for his or her conduct, “forgetting,” which implies that the memory of the offense has diminished, or “denying,” which implies an unwillingness to acknowledge that injuries have been received (McCullough, Pargament, and Thoresen, Forgiveness 8). While many definitions have reconciliation as a goal toward which to move, most theorists agree that “forgiveness” may be differentiated from “reconciliation” (8).

Robert D. Enright and Catherine T. Coyle describe forgiveness as the choice that an unjustly injured person makes to “abandon his or her right to resentment and retaliation, and instead offer mercy to the offender” (140). Choice implies that it is voluntary and unconditional, neither motivated by pressure from a third party nor dependent on the apology or acknowledgement of wrongdoing on the part of the offender (142).

McCullough, Sandage, and Worthington define forgiveness as “the increase in our internal motivation to repair and maintain the relationship after the relationship has been damaged by the hurtful action of the other person” (22). Forgiveness takes place when persons are no longer motivated solely by the need to protect themselves but are also motivated to repair the relationship. “When we forgive, we hope and work for a day when we might experience the healing of the relationship” (21).

Most theorists and researchers agree that forgiveness presupposes an injury has been inflicted by another person, the injured person has a real or perceived right to retribution, and the injured person elects instead to be more positive and less negative in his or her response to the perceived offender (McCullough, Pargament, and Thoresen, “Forgiveness” 9). Many theorists also agree that the victim will move towards the healing or maintenance of the relationship that has been damaged by the offense or offenses.

Forgiveness may take place at three levels of specificity: offense-specific, dyadic, and dispositional (McCullough, Hoyt, and Rachal 67).

At the offense-specific level, forgiveness is related only to the specific offense at hand. One is concerned only in dealing with the one particular offense within the relationship (McCullough, Hoyt, and Rachal 67).

Nevertheless, much unforgiveness is the result of an accumulation of many hurts. The dyadic level is concerned with forgiving not an offense but another person for all the hurts and injuries he or she has inflicted (Worthington, “Empirical Research” 323).

Forgiveness may also be understood as a personality trait, a propensity or disposition to forgive across situations and over time. This dispositional level of forgiveness may be termed “forgivingness” (Worthington, “Empirical Research” 323).

Emmons defines “forgivingness” as the capacity or disposition to forgive, as contrasted with the act or process of forgiving. He regards forgivingness as a virtue, the disposition to let go of anger against offenders by seeing them in benevolent terms. Forgiving persons have certain personality characteristics such as awareness of anger-mitigating circumstances, highly developed emotional management skills that enable them to regulate anger, a consistent concern to be benevolent to others, an ability to take the viewpoint of others as well as to detach themselves from the personal experience of having been harmed. Emmons terms forgivingness as “an element of spiritual intelligence” (160).

Forgivingness may be seen as an ethos, a fundamental value of the Christian faith, in which the forgiving person is a “respondent or transmitter of divine activity” (Marty 15). Persons who learn forgiveness in a specific context would not compartmentalize it but would integrate it into other areas of their lives and into their worldview (Enright and Coyle 155).

### **Benefits of Forgiveness**

Holding on to unforgiveness may entail sacrificing possibilities for happiness. When people count themselves as victims, they embrace and prolong suffering,

weakness, and distress as part of who they are. Identifying themselves as victims could undermine their functioning in areas that have no direct relation to the hurt experienced because the victim role is associated with misfortune and passivity. Recent work suggests that identification with victimization appears to make the victim more passive, slower, and more willing to give up at the slightest hint of difficulties (Baumeister, Exline, Sommer 98-99).

When a person has hurt another, the victim's thoughts, attitudes, expectations, and ways of seeing the world are altered. Victims become hypervigilant as they survey their surroundings, seeing the world as a threatening place.

When people forgive, they opt to return to normalcy. They dispute the negative beliefs that they hold about other people, the world, and their ability to make a difference. Forgiveness helps them believe once again that good people exist in the world (McCullough, Sandage, and Worthington 194-95).

Offenders too, when receiving forgiveness, experience an altered perception of who they are. When people feel guilty about hurting others, they evaluate themselves more negatively. They feel worthless and bad. The feelings and beliefs affect their worldview, and they begin to view their surroundings as dreary. Being forgiven disputes the idea that they are bad or worthless. Persons begin to see hope in the future (McCullough, Sandage, and Worthington 195).

The paradox of forgiveness is that as people relinquish control and their demands that life turn out as they wish it to, they gain control of life and find themselves empowered to make a difference in their lives and circumstances. Theologians and philosophers have long known that individuals regain control of their lives by giving up



the search for control (McCullough, Sandage, and Worthington 202).

Sociologically, forgiveness has the effect of easing bellicosity. In some circumstances, the easing of bellicosity could mean restoring the equilibrium within a community. The operation of the fundamental attribution error could escalate a conflict to the point of chaos where each wronged party inflicts even greater damage to the other. When one party finally refuses to continue the exchange of violence, the opposing party often eases his or her stance, too. The mutual easing could avert mutual destruction (Newberg, d'Aquili, Newberg, and Marici 98).

Moreover, non-retaliation observed by others often generates warm feelings for the pacifist victim, which can have significant social consequences. The third century Christian dictum that “the blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians” illustrates the profound effect a refusal to retaliate had on onlookers (Newberg, d'Aquili, Newberg, and Marici 98).

In a discussion of the benefits of forgiveness, practitioners advise that in some circumstances forgiveness may be inappropriate. M. E. McCullough and E. L. Worthington, Jr. suggest that forgiveness may be ill advised when the wounds from a personal assault are too fresh, when a violation is too severe, or when the mistreatment is ongoing (4).

Further, from a therapeutic point of view, forgiveness may not be the goal or the preferred mode of coping for some individuals. In such a case, then, forgiveness may not be of significance (Pargament and Rye 70).

### **Models of Forgiveness**

Psychologists working with persons with issues of forgiveness have formulated

models of forgiveness.

### **Cognitive and Developmental Models of Forgiveness**

Enright, Gassin, and Wu constructed a cognitive model of forgiveness presupposing that people have the ability to empathize, to see things from another's point of view. Their premise is that forgiveness is guided by the understanding that despite all the offender was and had done, he or she is a human being of inherent worth.

The Enright, Gassin, and Wu model of forgiveness has six stages and three levels:

*Stage 1: Revengeful forgiveness.* The victim is only willing to forgive if the offender is punished at least to the extent of the harm he or she has inflicted.

*Stage 2: Restitutional forgiveness.* The victim is willing to forgive either out of guilt for holding a grudge or if the offender has offered restitution.

Enright, Gassin, and Wu do not consider stages 1 and 2 a part of forgiveness as they are motivated by the demand for reward or punishment.

*Stage 3: Expectational forgiveness.* The victim offers to forgive because of pressure from family and peers.

*Stage 4: Lawful expectational forgiveness.* The victim offers to forgive out of pressure to conform to the norms or requirements of moral and religious institutions.

Enright, Gassin, and Wu suggest that forgiveness in the third and fourth stages is incomplete, and persons falling into these categories continue to hold on to feelings of hurt and anger.

*Stage 5: Forgiveness as social harmony.* At this stage, the victim forgives in order to restore social harmony. Unlike the earlier stages where certain conditions were required to be fulfilled before forgiveness was offered, at this stage, the person expects

social harmony to take place after forgiveness has been offered.

*Stage 6: Forgiveness as love.* Forgiveness is offered without conditions because it fosters love and increases the possibility of reconciliation. This form of forgiveness is complete forgiveness. Forgiveness is offered regardless of prior conditions being met or the certainty of the consequences of forgiveness.

**Evaluation of the cognitive/developmental approach.** Enright, Gassin, and Wu's approach focuses on how persons think. Whether or not a person forgives another is, however, influenced by many other factors besides the cognitive. For example, most theorists and researchers agree that the presence of humility and empathy is essential to forgiveness. Nevertheless, humility and empathy do not develop simply by thinking correctly. The emotions determine if a person is able humbly and empathically to approach a hurt that has been inflicted (McCullough, Sandage, and Worthington 60). For example, Steven J. Sandage found that shared laughter and positive emotions contribute to forgiveness. He also notes that how persons face each other and the attitudes they adopt towards others determine whether or not they will forgive (41-47).

The attachment theory suggests that how people respond to perceived injury is governed to a great extent by how they were treated by their primary caregivers at infancy. The fears, anxieties, confidence, and self-esteem developed in their early years predispose them towards or away from forgiveness (McCullough, Sandage, and Worthington 62).

Everett L. Worthington, summarizing the results of research done on the factors inhibiting or promoting forgiveness, suggests three factors associated with forgiveness: personality factors, relational factors, and event factors. In personality factors, he lists

traits such as sensitivity to sensory stimulation, rumination, narcissism, self-monitoring, susceptibility to fear, trait anxiety, trait anger, chronic hostility, neuroticism, introversion, reactivity to stress, and shame proneness as factors prohibiting forgiveness. Personality traits such as humility, gratitude, empathic concern, interpersonal trust, openness, agreeableness, and guilt proneness tend to foster forgiveness (“Pyramid Model” 109-11).

The dynamics and nature of the relationship between victim and offender, such as closeness, commitment, beliefs about the relationship (for example, whether it is viewed as sacred), length of time, degree of love, and history of conflict, and conflict resolution between the parties, all contribute to whether forgiveness will take place. The nature of the injuring event as well as circumstances following it such as apologies with verbal commitment not to repeat offense or a buildup of additional hurts also influence the occurrence of forgiveness (Worthington, “Pyramid Model” 109-11).

A further limitation of Kohlberg’s and Enright, Gassin, and Wu’s models is that they place individual rational development above the influences of community and spiritual realities. The models assert the influence of religion and the community is below that of one’s personal desire to forgive. Nevertheless, research shows that even though persons may understand stage six perfectly, they may still think that the beliefs of their religious community have a greater influence on their ability and willingness to forgive (McCullough, Sandage, and Worthington 71). Further, other researchers suggest that the construct of forgiveness cannot be done without placing great importance on religious and spiritual realities (Pargament and Rye 69, 72).

### **Transformational Model**

In stressful times, such as when an injury is inflicted, a person searches for the

significance and value in the event. The search for significance and value is known as coping. Most of the time, the first reaction is conservational, which is the attempt to resolve the problem without shifting the status quo. Less frequently is the response transformational, which is the letting go of previously cherished objects and finding new objects of value. K. I. Pargament and M. S. Rye list anger, fear, hurt, and resentment as conservational means of coping and self-protection and justice as the conservational ends of coping. When a person is attacked, anger can be a source of energy and power that counters feelings of powerlessness. Fear and suspicion serve to protect the person from repeated attacks. Feelings of hurt can be a source of comfort, assuring the person that he or she is deserving of better treatment. Resentment can help explain the person's present predicament. The intended goals of conservational coping are self-protection and the restoration of justice (59-78).

These strategies of coping, however, may not be effective. Anger may bring about a realization that the victim was once powerless. Fear could bring a reminder that terrible things could happen again; feelings of hurt might question the victim's value; and, resentment brings about underlying shame. In each of these expressions of hurt, the pain of the past continues to haunt the present (Pargament and Rye 59-78).

Transformation involves changing both the goals and means of coping. Forgiveness is transformational. It seeks to change the motivation from pursuing self-protection as the primary goal to pursuing peace. Forgiveness offers the possibilities of peace of mind and peace with others (Pargament and Rye 59-78).

The means of forgiving are also transformational. To relinquish justified anger, to surrender the well-deserved right to retaliate, and to think of the offender in a new light,

all call for change at many levels: cognitive, affective, relational, behavioral, volitional, and spiritual (Pargament and Rye 62). Because radical change is so difficult, Pargament and Rye question if a person may achieve such change on his or her own (64).

Nevertheless, once a person has made this change, forgiveness may become less radical and more a way of life. It may become an automatic response that quickly mitigates the effects of offensive acts (Pargament and Rye 64).

Forgiveness is a form of religious coping. Theologies offer possibilities of finding meaning in the midst of meaningless acts of evil (Pargament and Rye 65). The power of religion goes beyond the belief in and worship of God. Objects that appear to have no relation to the divine, take on divine-like qualities by virtue of their association with the divine. Once made sacred, these objects may possess extraordinary power (66). For example, couples who saw their marriages as sacred experienced greater commitment and satisfaction in their marriages and had better strategies for resolving conflicts than couples who regarded marriage as less than sacred.

In the same way, forgiving may be given a sacred meaning. Many religious traditions consider human relationships as representing God's relationship with humanity. An un-mended breach in human relationships would signify an offense against God. Repairing the breach is thus regarded as both spiritual as well as interpersonal healing (Pargament and Rye 67).

Another object relating to forgiveness that may be sanctified is that of being human. R. D. Enright argues forgiveness is based on the view that people are fundamentally human despite their differences. Being human, they are to be accorded respect, dignity, and love regardless of their conduct (63).

A religious worldview can provide a radically different way of thinking that helps the victim spiritualize rather than demonize the hurtful experience as well as the offender. It also provides insight on the offense that will move towards healing rather than fragmenting the community (Pargament and Rye 68).

The decision to forgive is transformational in that it no longer relies on methods of self-protection but instead is based on faith, opening the person's perspective to a larger context of hope, trust, surrender, and goodwill (Pargament and Rye 68).

### **Psychological Models**

Realizing that the rational approach to forgiveness has limitations in that forgiveness is a transformation involving the cognitive, behavioral, affective, and spiritual faculties, Worthington and McCullough developed an intervention to induce psychological states conducive to such transformation. In the Pyramid Model of Forgiveness, they sought to induce states of empathy and humility (Worthington, "Pyramid Model" 112).

The five steps of this intervention are represented by the acrostic REACH: Recalling the hurt, Empathizing with the offender, offering the Altruistic gift of forgiveness, Committing to forgive, and Holding on to forgiveness.

**Recalling the hurt.** Fear conditioning is the beginning of unforgiveness. Persons are hurt by others. Afterward, the un-forgiving persons see the offenders again. First, they become tense. Second, the stress-response system is activated. Third, they try to avoid the offenders. Fourth, if withdrawal is not possible, anger, retaliation, and defensive fighting occurs. Fifth, if fighting is unwise, futile, or not possible, depression takes over. Research shows that fear conditioning, once it occurs, is stubbornly maintained. Very little

additional hurt by the original offenders is needed to bring back the fear conditioning (Worthington, “Pyramid Model” 116).

Under the Pyramid Model, unforgiving persons are helped to recall the injuries in a “supportive, nonhurtful atmosphere” (Worthington, “Pyramid Model” 117). The aim is to help the person recall the events without experiencing the pain associated with the incident. While this initial step does not eliminate fear conditioning, it is the beginning of forgiveness (118).

**Empathy.** Because fear conditioning is an emotional response, the intervention required to counter it would have to activate other emotional systems. The aim in this step is to create a state of empathy for the offenders. Unforgiving persons are helped to develop empathic compassion, the ability to think and feel for the offending parties. Developing empathic compassion would change their emotions and experiences of unforgiveness.

**Altruistic gift.** In order to draw persons to offer the altruistic gift of forgiveness, the team strove to induce a state of *humility* in them. Humility involves three other states: guilt, gratitude, and gift. Guilt is the realization that one is capable of both inflicting as well as desiring to inflict harm on others, including the offending person. When persons realize that they, too, are capable of inflicting similar or other harm, humility and empathic identification toward the offenders are enhanced. *Gratitude* is experienced when persons recall the times when they were forgiven and what that felt like. When the sense of gratitude is vividly recalled and elaborated, people’s emotional state changes to one of joy, love, and positive emotions. They attempt to project the good feelings to other persons; an emotional projection of “one-ness,” or “we-ness,” between them and others



occurs. Empathy and the guilt and gratitude of humility create an aroused motivational state in people, and they identify with the offenders and see the needs of the offenders. Facilitators then invite people to offer the offenders the altruistic gift of forgiveness (Worthington, "Pyramid Model" 125).

**Commitment to forgive.** Because unforgiveness is largely motivated by fear conditioning, the conditioned fear, when aroused, will lead people to deny or reinterpret their experiences of empathy and humility. In order to make this denial more difficult, people are asked to share their experiences of forgiveness with others, write letters of forgiveness to offenders *as if* they were going to send the letters (and perhaps consider sending edited versions of them to the offenders). Making a public commitment to forgive produces in people a stronger sense of forgiveness (Worthington, "Pyramid Model" 126-27).

**Holding onto forgiveness.** Maintaining forgiveness is very difficult, given the fear-conditioned response at work in people. Facilitators, therefore, need to remind people that recalling the hurt and pain of the experience does not amount to unforgiveness, is transient, and cannot be stopped by their efforts. People are taught to imagine pleasant scenes with the offenders and to concentrate on the accomplished task of forgiveness. Sometimes people may be asked to work through the forgiveness pyramid again for the particular hurt or for additional hurts (Worthington, "Pyramid Model" 127-28).

The forgiveness pyramid affects not only the rational and cognitive faculties of the person. It also seeks to stir the emotions, evoking feelings of empathy, humility, and oneness with the offender and with others. Approaching forgiveness at both the rational

as well as affective levels is more effective in combating fear-conditioned responses that maintain unforgiveness.

### **Stories and Forgiveness**

Human experience does not come as disconnected actions or events but as a network of interconnected narrative. The narrative form gives movement and continuity to life and links people and events together. Stories give meaning and interpretation to people's lives and help them understand the present and anticipate the future. They not only tell about the world in which people live; they tell how that world relates to persons (Anderson and Foley 4-6). This effect of stories is why stories are so powerful and easy to remember. People remember stories of the past and dream up stories of the future. They want to know where they have come from and where they will be going (McCullough, Sandage, and Worthington 145).

Psychologist Paul Vitz suggests that comedy and romance contribute to a greater ability to forgive because both give hope. Hope is the belief or confidence that present desires will be fulfilled in the future. The confidence found in hope is fostered by memories of promises kept and desires satisfied in the past (11).

People also love to hear stories of others with the hope that as they listen they may find clues that will help them unravel their own stories. They want to hear stories that give them the assurance that their own stories will have a good ending.

The narrative of Jesus is of utmost importance to forgiveness because it models life in relationship with God and with others, and it gives the assurance of a glorious ending to life stories.

### **Biblical and Theological Basis for Forgiveness**

The previous two sections dealt with the causes and nature of unforgiveness and how persons may be helped to forgive through therapeutic interventions. This section looks at what forgiveness means to the Christian, and how God, through his intervention with humankind and through the community of believers, leads a person from fear and unforgiveness to a life embodied in forgiveness and reconciliation.

#### **Definition of Christian Forgiveness**

The biblical language associated with forgiveness and salvation is about the healing of relations in community (Shults 158). The Bible understands human existence as substantially relational: human beings, contrary to the modernist definition of persons, are not “individual substances.” One’s relationships, social identity, and communal affiliations are an important dimension of one’s true self (14). Human beings, made in the image of the triune God who is characterized by perfect communion, were created for communion with God, with one another, and with the whole of creation (Jones, Embodying Forgiveness 114). People need each other in order to fulfill their destiny in life, which is communion in God’s kingdom (61). As such, forgiveness must bear on the real transformation of relationships (Shults 155).

Fundamentally, Christian forgiveness does not aim simply at absolving individual guilt but at the restoration of broken communion with God and with one another (Jones, Embodying Forgiveness xii). Forgiveness should, thus, not be confined to the analysis of specific isolated acts but seen as an embodied way of life (218). It is a way of life that grows into an ever-deepening friendship with God and others (xii) and involves the reality of encountering the God of peace so that individuals are able to face themselves

and others peaceably. Within the embrace of God, persons learn to live without anxiety, freely risking themselves in living in joyful relations with God and neighbor (172). This growing into friendship with God is essential to Christian forgiveness, for Christian forgiveness is, at its core, a response to God's forgiving love by building communities of forgiven and forgiving people ("Crafting Communities" 122).

As a commitment to a way of life in an ever-deepening friendship with God, the person learning to live a life of forgiveness is unceasingly seeking to "unlearn" sin and to learn the ways of God (Jones, Embodying Forgiveness 230). Sin is fundamentally understood as ruptures in communion with God and others, rather than individual guilt (169), and the ways of God are understood as growing into communion with God, one another, and all of creation. Christians are called to critique prophetically all situations and lives where communion is undermined (165).

Christian forgiveness, rather than looking backwards as the cancellation of sins committed, points forward as a possibility of new life. It is the refusal to be trapped in the cycles of violence and offers a way of escape from the conviction that death and destruction are humanity's ultimate destinies (Jones, Embodying Forgiveness 88).

Although Christian forgiveness aims at living peaceably with others, it is by no means a refusal of strength, nor is it avoiding submission, the slave mentality of conflict (Sandage 72) or the repression of hurt and anger that often results in internalized guilt and further diminution of the self. Rather, it is the exercise of an alternative power, the power of love, where anger and hatred are confronted, overcome, and transcended and the heart of brokenness truthfully engaged (Jones, Embodying Forgiveness 246).

Forgiveness is not a substitute for justice; rather, it enthrones justice because it

highlights the injustice precisely by refusing its legitimate claims to vengeance. Only those who are forgiven and are willing to forgive are capable of tenaciously pursuing justice without themselves ultimately falling prey to the temptation to pervert justice in the pursuit of it (Volf 123).

The life of forgiveness is a call to persons to love their enemies. This difficult call forces individuals to face the truth about others and yet to struggle to love them (Volf 260). At the core of Christian forgiveness is the conviction that persons do not love others only when they are innocent but that they are to be embraced even when perceived to be wrongdoers (85).

### **The God Who Forgives**

Volf portrays God as one who stands with open arms, a gesture of the body reaching for the other. The open arms signify God's desire for the other to be a part of him and him to be a part of the other. They reveal God as creating space within himself for the other to come in (141). The triune God, who is characterized by self-giving love, loves his creation and wills communion with creation (Jones, Embodying Forgiveness 61).

The story of the cross is about God "who desires to embrace the sons and daughters of hell" (Volf 85). In the face of human evil and sin, God is willing to bear the cost of forgiveness and move towards reconciliation (Jones, Embodying Forgiveness xii). Even when faced with the severest of betrayals, God refuses to be dominated by hatred, which can be seen in God's struggle with "adulterous" Israel in the book of Hosea. Even though God is "fiercely angry" at Israel's unfaithfulness, his compassion nevertheless "grows tender" (260).

The narrative of the cross is an incredible story of God doing what God ought not to be willing or able to do: a story of “God who died because God’s all too human covenant partner broke the covenant” (Volf 155). Rather than allowing the covenant to be undone because of humanity’s breach, God, who will not be without humanity, sacrifices himself and pays the heavy price of repairing the breach (155).

God’s desire to embrace humanity, however, does not coerce persons. Rather, God postpones his desire until the desire for embrace arises in people (Volf 141). Having created free human beings, God submits to their freedom to judge, reject, and murder him (Jones, Embodying Forgiveness 123).

In the Incarnation, Jesus becomes vulnerable to the ways in which people diminish, betray, oppress, exclude, and kill each other. Though vulnerable, he does not allow himself to be defined by or to participate in the cycles of violence and revenge (Jones, Embodying Forgiveness 120). Rather, he bears humanity’s sin and evil judgment away without passing it on. The cross is about God, the innocent victim, absorbing the aggression of persecutors upon himself, thereby breaking the cycle of violence. Jesus sought to overcome evil with good at the cost of his life (Volf 292).

Jesus’ option for nonviolence is not self-abnegation. It is self-assertiveness, refusal to be ensnared by his enemies’ evil and be reshaped into their image (Volf 292).

Precisely by allowing humans to judge Jesus, God judges them. Their judgment of Jesus is an indictment upon their rejection of God (Jones, Embodying Forgiveness 123). It is a judgment of the destructiveness of their lives. God’s forgiveness does not overlook their sin and evil; rather, it forces them to confront their sin and evil in all its awfulness (146). Persons who gaze upon the cross for but a moment will realize the godlessness of

the world and the awesomeness of their own sins (Bonhoeffer, Spiritual Care 28). In so doing, God exposes all of humanity's wounds (Jones, Embodying Forgiveness 146).

God's judgment is real, and human sin is forgiven only because it is confronted. God's judgment is solely for the purpose of extending mercy, reconciliation, and new life (Jones, Embodying Forgiveness 15). His judgment is to forgive sins and heal wounds (146). "Condemnation is neither God's first nor God's final word" (107). God's compassion continues to grow warm and tender, longing to overcome human sinfulness with mercy. God's judgment and punishment are real, but they are in the service of reconciling persons to God and each other (107).

God's all-embracing forgiveness of the worst of sinners is not unjust or inhuman. In forgiving, God does not ignore the need for persons to repent; rather, he requires that victimizers turn to seek forgiveness from and reconciliation with their victims. God's pardon gives hope that both victim and victimizer may be able to live out the fully human vocation of communion with God and each other as they participate in the practices of God's kingdom (Jones, Embodying Forgiveness 127).

### **God's Forgiveness Leading to Repentance**

While God's forgiveness is unconditional, repentance is necessary in order to appropriate this forgiveness (Jones, Embodying Forgiveness 146). All too frequently, Christians assume that God's forgiveness may be received without cost and without repentance (159). At the center of God's forgiveness is the call to repentance, so Christians may live as forgiven and reconciled people (47). Learning to accept forgiveness from God and from one another is difficult because receiving forgiveness requires that individuals also accept God's judgment of them. This invitation to

reconciliation and friendship helps people view the world and themselves more truthfully (47). Judgment and repentance are necessary because no matter how much people try to forget the past, unacknowledged and un-confronted sin and bitterness will always find a way to affect their lives. God's judgment of grace, this judgment that enables them to recover the past, involves moving from a third-person stance of holding another responsible to a first-person position of accepting responsibility (147). An urgent need exists for persons to be more forgiving, and granting forgiveness is probably easier than accepting forgiveness because forgiveness invariably involves the dynamics of power relationships (148). Nevertheless, forgiveness begins with acknowledging that people are in need of God's forgiveness and can only take place when they embody the meaning of being forgiven people, a people reconciled with God (47).

Jesus called to repentance not only those who were oppressors but the victims of oppression, too. Jesus' listeners cannot be neatly divided into two groups with the conclusion that to the oppressed, his message signaled hope while to oppressors his message called for change. The truly revolutionary nature of Christ's message was that at the same time as it gave hope to the oppressed it also called them to radical change. Though they had suffered at the hands of others, they had also committed sins of their own. To these he offered the gift of divine forgiveness (Volf 124).

Jesus was not a prophet of inclusion, to whom the highest virtue was acceptance of all and to whom the worst sin was intolerance; rather, he was the bringer of grace. Not only did he rename those who had been falsely labeled as sinful and made outcast, his mission was also in the remaking of those who had actually sinned. His double strategy of renaming and remaking was rooted in his commitment to both the outcast and the



sinner, to the victim and the offender (Volf 73). In so doing, Jesus pronounced judgment upon the world where the innocent were labeled guilty and the guilty were excluded and not sought out (74).

At the very least, victims need to repent of having a diminished self. God's forgiveness may be seen as a bestowal of a true identity where one was lost or where the identity has been dehumanized. Repentance from a diminished self is especially urgent for those who have been victims of systemic violence and injustice (Jones, Embodying Forgiveness 164).

Victims also need to repent of the fact they often mimic the evil of their oppressors, allowing themselves to be shaped into the image of their abusers. They also need to repent of their desire to excuse their own reactive behavior either on the grounds that they were not responsible or that their behavior was necessary under the circumstances. Without repenting of these sins, victims will not realize their full dignity (Volf 117).

Receiving God's forgiveness elevates persons from the narrative of hopelessness and sin to another narrative—the narrative of reconciliation with God. In this new narrative, individuals can learn to be holy by living lives of repentance and forgiveness (Jones, Embodying Forgiveness 159).

### **Participation with God**

God does not perform the work of healing and restoration alone. Rather, persons are called to live out their lives so as to be witnesses to and to embody God's re-creating and transforming work (Jones, Embodying Forgiveness 163). Contrary to the commonly held view that forgiveness is part of the individualistic *ordo salutis*, or the order of

salvation, forgiveness is really the dynamic following of the way of salvation found in and taught by Jesus (Shults 171). The deepest truth about human beings is not that they are infallible or that they are weak and needy, that they were created for loving communion with God and with one another. People can only fulfill their destinies when they exercise their God-given capacity to love (Jones, Embodying Forgiveness 61). If divine forgiveness is the faithful and loving presence of God, then humanity's sharing in it is not the grasping of God's grace but a redemptive restoration of relationship with God and with others (Shults 170). Jesus' pardon calls sinners, as those who receive forgiveness from God, to seek forgiveness from those they have offended and to offer forgiveness to those who have injured them (Jones, Embodying Forgiveness 127).

The apostle Paul's understanding of forgiveness is not primarily that of a legal transaction; it is the presence of divine grace that heals broken relationships. Paul writes of salvation more in terms of reconciliation. Overall, Scripture leans towards an understanding of divine forgiveness as God manifesting his grace and human forgiveness as sharing in that grace (Shults 138-39). Salvation takes place in communal living where Christians live as ministers of reconciliation and participate in the manifestation of divine grace, sharing God's forgiveness with the world (172).

People do not have the resources to forgive others on their own. Divine forgiveness opens the opportunity for them to share in the grace and joy of God's Trinitarian love, which provides infinite resources for human forgiveness. Christians are called to look at and respond to others in ways that manifest grace and forgiveness as they look upon the gracious face of God (Shults 169).

Luke's account of the story of the sinful woman who anointed Jesus in Luke 7:36-

50 illustrates how God's grace helps people forgive. The woman demonstrates gratitude in response to the grace offered by Jesus. Disregarding possible humiliation from onlookers, she enters a party uninvited and washes Jesus' feet. Psychologists link this behavior to psychological and spiritual health and to virtues such as hope, empathy, and forgivingness. The woman's conduct is in contrast to the lack of empathy and air of superiority, which psychologists link to narcissism, on the part of Simon the host, (Shults and Sandage 247).

Undoubtedly the call to love one's enemies is difficult; it requires one face the truth about others yet struggle to love them. Having received God's forgiveness and responded to God's loving embrace, one's horizons have been extended so that one no longer views forgiveness as merely absolving past sins but more broadly as embodying forgiveness (Jones, Embodying Forgiveness 267). The work of forgiveness and reconciliation proceeds on the assumption that no matter how deplorable or even demonic the conduct of a person is, that person is not to be excluded from the will to embrace because at the deepest level, the relationship with others does not rest on their moral performance and cannot, therefore, be jettisoned by the lack of it (Volf 85). As God does not abandon the wicked but gives himself for them in order to draw them into communion with him, so also are Christians called not to abandon their enemies (23).

When one looks at the cross, one sees Christ was stricken yet wholly trusted God. One is reminded of one's own suffering and rejection and the death of one's longings. One is called to bind oneself to the "cruciform" way of life, to forgive others and allow them room so that they, too, may become whole. Christians are called to participate in Christ's suffering as they manifest divine grace. As they learn to trust the Spirit of God to

uphold their own spirit, they cease to fear death (Shults 117). Redemptive forgiveness is infinitely agonizing, but it opens the person's life to the infinite pleasure of sharing in divine grace (171).

### **Forgiving the Unrepentant**

A difficult issue is how Christians respond to the refusal of some to repent after being forgiven. The answer comes in the call to Christians to focus on the priority of God's forgiveness to their own "forgiven-ness" and repentance. The fact of God's prior forgiveness calls attention to the significance of loving enemies as an indispensable part of the life of Christian forgiveness. If people refuse to repent in response to forgiveness, the best that Christians can do is to acknowledge they are enemies of the cross, enemies whom Christians are called to learn to love (Jones, Embodying Forgiveness 160).

Christians are to pray fervently that God may bring all their enemies to the cross of Christ (Bonhoeffer, "Vengeance and Deliverance" 278).

The ultimate scandal of the cross is the fact that all too often one person's sacrifice for the sake of another not only does not bear fruit but also establishes the power of the abuser and perpetuates the violence that threatens to destroy the person making the sacrifice. When this abuse happens, the act of self-sacrifice is confronted by the darkness and silence of God. This darkness is the ultimate scandal. One's only options are to reject the cross and with it the core of the Christian faith or to follow the crucified Lord and be scandalized ever again. The first disciples were scandalized again and again as they gave themselves in service to others, weeping in the midst of God's silence, as they shared in the sufferings of their crucified Lord. Nevertheless, in the midst of this scandal they discovered the promise. In the empty tomb, they saw proof that their cry of desperation

would turn into a song of joy, and the face of God would shine upon the redeemed world (Volf 27).

Another issue is whether evil and victimization should simply be accepted without any effort to change it. Living the cruciform life must include resistance to evil. The nature of the resistance is different. Crysdale describes the motivation of such resistance as the “ethic of risk.” An ethic of risk is “responsible action within the limits of bounded power” (42). The ethic of risk recognizes that though one cannot guarantee decisive changes resulting from one’s actions, the actions are nevertheless undertaken because not to risk would mean death (42). An ethic of risk is characterized by (1) a redefinition of responsible action as risk taking rather than control, (2) a grounding in community, and (3) strategic risk taking (42).

**Redefinition of responsible action as risk taking rather than control.** An ethic of control insists that moral action results in clear consequences. It leaves little room for ambiguity and involves controlling events to bring about predictable responses. One is not vulnerable to evil. A clear plan that will overcome evil and at the same time protect one from further threats exists. In contrast, an ethic of risk assumes the goal of moral action to be the creation of conditions whereby transformation may take place. It neither insists on nor expects complete success. It accepts vulnerability but takes the risk for the sake of life-affirming dignity (Crysdale 42).

**A grounding in community.** One needs a community to sustain and give meaning to such actions. One aspect of such a community is its historic narratives. By retelling these communal stories of hope, one sustains a vision of change. One is empowered by the recalling of these memories (Crysdale 43).

**Strategic risk taking.** Unlike the ethic of control, one does not calculate the likelihood of a successful outcome; rather, one assesses the degree of risk that will yield hope instead of further destruction. The measure of the action's worth is based on how the action will inspire the imagination and courage of the community (Crysdale 43).

Because an ethic of control seeks to resolve conflict on its terms, it will inevitably lead to coercion. The ethic of risk, on the other hand, leaves freedom intact. It is not a final solution but a provisional one, setting conditions that increase the possibility of authentic living. On the other hand, it is permanent, not in the sense that it will forever rid the world of evil but that it forever leaves the conditions of transformation available (Crysdale 150).

Jean-Pierre Caussade affirms that the Christian's humble submission to abuses lies in his or her loving fear of God and in a confidence in his will. This unassuming modesty is not a sign that the Christian fears the abuser:

The whole principle on which the simple soul bases its life is to do God's will, and he respects its working even in the wicked deeds which the arrogant man commits to affront it. Such a man despises a humble soul, in whose eyes he is a mere cipher, for it sees only God in his person and his deeds. The man of pride often imagines that the unassuming modesty of the simple soul is a sign that it fears him, although it is merely the sign of the loving fear of God and his will, as shown to it by this haughty fellow. No, poor fool, the simple soul has no fear of you. You fill it with pity. It is answering God when you think it is talking to you. It knows it is dealing with God and considers you only as one of his slaves or rather as a shadow that disguises him. The haughtier the tone you take, the more softly does it answer you, and when you think to take it by surprise, you are the one to be startled. For it, all your cheating and violence come as favors from heaven. A proud soul is a riddle which a simple soul enlightened by faith solves easily. (116)

While the Christian appears meek and helpless, such a demeanor is not one of weakness and helplessness, but of confidence and trust in God who protects him.

As much as the Bible writes of the crucified savior, it also boldly proclaims divine anger and God's monopoly on violence. Christians are called not to take up positions under the banner of the rider on the white horse but to take up their crosses and follow the crucified savior. This distinction is telling. Without entrusting oneself wholly to God who judges justly, following the crucified savior and refusing to retaliate when abused would be virtually impossible. The certainty of God's judgment at the end of history is the basis for the renunciation of it before that time. Divine judgment is not the flip side of human violence but a necessary component to human nonviolence (Volf 302). For the sake of the peace of God's creation, Christians need to affirm divine anger and violence, while at the same time hoping and praying that, in the end, even the most obstinate sinner will come to the foot of the cross (299).

### **Experiencing God's Healing Embrace**

The work of restoring broken relationships cannot be achieved by human efforts alone. Persons who attempt to do this work are constantly confronted by despair, anxiety, depression, and finally by death itself. To accomplish the work of healing, they are wholly reliant on divine grace (Shults 104).

The Israelites sought healing and salvation by seeking the face of God (Shults 106). By fixing their gaze upon the "smiling face of God," they found security in their relationship with the living God. As they discovered God's attentiveness towards them, they felt free to attend to the needs of their neighbors (112).

Christian theology suggests that inherent in each person is a longing for the presence of God, the face that will not abandon them. Their perception of what the face of God is (whether God is warm and responsive or cold and rejecting), however, is

significantly influenced by their early experiences with caregivers (Shults 87). Those who saw in their caregivers anxiety, hostility, and rejection would have great difficulty seeing God as accepting, available, and forgiving. They may represent God as intrusively controlling or unresponsive and withholding of love, affection, and forgiveness. Even worse, they may see God as dangerously violent (90).

For these persons who have been traumatized by evil, especially from those who purportedly cared for them, finding the true face of God may prove very challenging. Their search for the holy face of God may be further hindered when they are coerced into prematurely forgiving their abusers (Shults 91). Such persons would be better helped in their search, not with exhortations to forgive or to entrust themselves to God, but with the church standing in solidarity with and feeling compassion for those who have suffered much (Jones, Embodying Forgiveness 295).

As those who have suffered abuse stand in the company of those who embody the forgiveness of Christ, they discover, first of all, as they gaze upon the cross, not the fact that they need forgiveness as crucifiers of Christ; rather, they see Christ the crucified as their friend and ally who has been victimized and slain with them. God the Father is the grieving parent who experiences the pain of all his children who suffer (Crysdale 8). Christ did not suffer for himself alone but for and in solidarity with the poor and the weak. On the cross, Christ identifies God with the victims of violence and the victims with God. They are assured of God's protection and with Jesus, who has been raised to glory, assured of all the rights of which they have been deprived (Moltmann 130).

As they contemplate the cross, the story of Jesus and, ultimately, their own story begin to make sense. The first Christians initially thought the story of Jesus and their



lives was one of painful betrayal, grief-stricken helplessness, and the victory of evil over God's presence in the world. Nevertheless, as they pondered the empty tomb, they realized the story was really quite different. It was a story of God's victory over evil, the forgiveness of sins, and the healing of wounds (Crysdale 89).

To victims of crime, abuse, and oppression, whose identities have been diminished or dehumanized, God's forgiveness, signified particularly in baptism, is first seen as the conferral of a true identity. Repentance is then understood as the turning away from a diminished and dehumanized self and the retelling of one's life story as a journey from despair to hope. To these persons, such insight is urgent (Jones, Embodying Forgiveness 169).

As people contemplate the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, healing and the assuaging of anxieties begin to take place. Epistemic anxiety occurs because humans take their identities from their relations with others. Persons need to know and be known by others in relationships of faithful, promising love. As long as self-identification depends entirely on relations with finite others, however, the particularity of the self will always be in danger of being crushed or abandoned. Epistemic anxiety arises because humans cannot be assured their relations with finite others, their knowing and being known by others, will not end in shameful betrayal and the diminution of self. Only when persons find their identity in relation to the Infinite Other can they become themselves peacefully (Shults 179). Like Christ, Christians do not find their identity primarily in their relations to the angry and shameful facing of others but in their relation in the Spirit to the gracious face of the Father (182). As Christians grow in the Christian faith, they learn not to depend on their own epistemic power to secure their identity. By finding their identity in

the Father of Jesus Christ through life in the Spirit, Christians are enabled to open up themselves and share in the joy of redemptive forgiveness. They no longer need to withhold forgiveness as a way of protecting themselves (178).

The agony of ethical anxiety is largely due to persons not being able to secure all they deem to be good for them. They act in ways so as to secure things that can provide them with the “good life.” Because the goods they seek are finite, they struggle with their neighbors and become anxious when they perceive their chances of attaining all they desire as slipping away.

Like Christ, Christians who have given up control of their lives receive a new life from God, a life infinitely secure in divine love. This new life shares in God’s goodness and receives generously from God’s superabundance of joy. Thomas Merton asks rhetorically, “Why should I fear anything that cannot rob me of God, and why should I desire anything that cannot give me possession of Him?” (159). Christian lovers are enabled through knowing God in the Spirit to be vulnerable to their neighbors (Shults 189-97).

Ontological anxiety is the human fear that if individuals were to absorb the sins of others, the particularity of their lives would be violently absorbed or destroyed in the process. Humans lack the “weight of glory” to secure themselves in eternity. This “ontic weightlessness” terrifies them (Shults 209).

Coming into God’s presence dissolves persons’ ontological anxiety. In the New Testament, salvation is described as sharing in divine glory. Christians are called to an ever-intensifying share in the relation of the Son to the Father in the Spirit. The New Testament promises a life of ultimate ontological peace where nothing, not even death,

can separate believers from divine love.

When Christians have the assurance of ontological peace, the assurance of their place with God in the future, they no longer fear the violent destruction of their particularity by others. They are thus freed to absorb in their own beings the consequences of other persons' sin without passing those consequences on to others. They are freed to forgive, to create space and time for the other to move towards wholeness and salvation (Shults 206-11).

### **The Work of the Holy Spirit and Divine Grace**

The Holy Spirit guides, judges, and consoles persons as they seek to embody Christ's forgiveness in their lives. Christians need the Spirit to guide, judge, and console them as they discern what the life of forgiveness means in each situation and what repentance is called for (Jones, Embodying Forgiveness 157). Jesus commands and authorizes his disciples to forgive and be forgiven in God's name. They are empowered to do so by the Holy Spirit. Indeed as Christians seek to live out lives of forgiveness, they learn to identify truthfully sins that have brought about histories of sin and evil. Hence, as Christians begin to live out the art of forgiveness genuinely guided by the Holy Spirit, they are enabled to start the slow and often painful process of unlearning habits of sin and evil that have led to their brokenness (131).

The Holy Spirit works by shifting understanding and willingness, knowing and deciding. First, the Holy Spirit enables persons to grasp new meanings, giving them insights that open up new interpretations of the world, themselves, their relationships, and their actions. A transforming encounter with God involves some kind of "aha," where believers come upon a new comprehension of some hitherto evasive truth (Crysdale 132).

Second, especially in dysfunctional and oppressive situations, but also in the course of everyday life, persons may not necessarily have the will to follow through and do what their renewed understanding has grasped (Crysdale 132). The Holy Spirit intervenes in people's cycles of alienation by shifting their appetites. A taste of this deep desire stirs up power, courage, deeper yearnings, and the pursuit of this desire for communion with God: hunger overtakes fear. This shifting of appetites, in turn, opens persons up to insights they had previously avoided, and the new insights shift the bases of their feelings and decisions (35).

In addition to affecting people's understanding and deciding, the Holy Spirit as divine grace operates to heal and elevate victim and victimizer. God heals the injured and the perpetrator alike, making reconciliation possible. Such reconciliation generates even more gifts of forgiveness and repentance. The Holy Spirit, however, does not only heal; he also elevates. On their own, people are limited in their reach for truth, value, and love. The Holy Spirit elevates their minds to grasp what they could not otherwise comprehend. God's presence touching on their desire opens new horizons for relationships and enables them to value true beauty and love. God's drawing them to communion with him touches the *eros* of their spirits, fulfilling their deepest desires (Crysdale 153).

While the Holy Spirit, this wonderful gift of God, works powerfully in persons, the Spirit does not "fix" anything. He operates not on the ethic of control but by the ethic of risk. An ethic of control assumes that human ideas can fix all the world's ills. Humanity is the master of grace and the Spirit. Through spiritual disciplines, persons with an ethic of control believe they can manipulate outcomes; Nevertheless, the theology of grace operates on the ethic of risk. It accepts that grace cannot guarantee the

transformation of insights or desires but only heightens the likelihood of their occurrence (Crysdale 135). Dependence on the Spirit is humanity's only hope for the healing of broken relationships.

### **Spiritual Formation, Spiritual Disciplines, and Forgiveness**

God is actively at work in re-creating, healing, and restoring human brokenness. He requires believers to live out their lives as witnesses to his re-creating, healing, and restoring work. In the process of their practicing forgiveness, they are transformed into holy people (Jones, Embodying Forgiveness 162).

One of the signs of holiness is the ability to absorb evil without perpetuating it in return. It is a commitment to pattern lives after the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who stopped the cycles of violence and vengeance by refusing to pass them on to others. Those who follow Christ discover, at the heart of salvation and communion with God and with each other, forgiveness and healing (Jones, Embodying Forgiveness 299).

The desire for revenge is such a powerful emotion, rational arguments, though valid, may not be enough to motivate a person to forgive. Without a doubt forgiveness is invariably good for one's mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical health, and that given the world as it is, a person would be wiser to forgive than to fall prey to the cycles of vengeance. Nevertheless, whether these arguments alone can get at the powerful emotions involved in revenge is questionable. More significantly, these rational arguments may overlook the fact that the desire for revenge, far from being the irrational emotion of a sick or maladjusted personality, derives from the need to restore a sense of integrity that has been violated by the wrong (Volf 123).

The life of forgiveness is a gradual process that needs to be habituated so that it

becomes less and less of a struggle and the person grows to delight in it. It needs to be a habit that transforms, by God's love, one's sin and evil into signs of communion with God and with one another (Volf 165). It is a commitment to the cruciform life of holiness where one strives to unlearn sin and learn the ways of God and how one can live in communion with God and with each other. In its broadest context, a life of forgiveness is a means where God works reconciliation in the face of sin and alienation. Living a life of forgiveness is an ongoing habit that develops over time (230). People's response to a crisis, provocation, or injury depends heavily on how they have practiced and developed forgiveness leading up to the crisis. Persons just beginning to learn to forgive would tend more towards "cheap grace" or "vengeance," while those more skilled at forgiving would find the task of discerning and living out appropriate forgiveness easier to do (234).

Learning to forgive is a lifelong process. As people grow in their ability to forgive, they develop greater discernment about what the appropriate response ought to be in any given situation or what would be best for a particular person. Discerning the appropriate response for each situation involves growing in attentiveness to the Spirit of God. Learning to forgive is a twofold process: on the one hand, it is learning what about persons need transformation; on the other, it is learning to discern what forgiveness entails in any given situation or with a particular person (Volf 227).

Sadly the church at present has lost any sense of how a Christian must live. It has lost sight of the fact that developing a willingness and ability to forgive is a realistic and predictable part of following and being like Christ (Willard, Spirit 16).

The problem of spiritual transformation among Christians is not that spiritual transformation is impossible or that the means are ineffectual. The problem is that such a

transformed life is not lived intentionally and that Christians have not disciplined themselves to live as Christ lived (Willard, Renovation 91).

People tend erroneously to think that individuals can follow Christ by loving one's enemies, turning the other cheek, and suffering patiently and hopefully, while living the rest of their lives just as everyone else around them does (Willard, Spirit 5). People are prone to believe in the power of effort-at-the-moment-of-action alone to accomplish what they hope for and to ignore completely the need for character change. They want what they believe to be good and important but are unwilling to commit to the kind of life needed to produce that result.

People fail to recognize they cannot behave "on the spot" as Jesus did and taught if in the rest of their lives they live as everybody else lives. The habits of sin are so ingrained in each that such on-the-spot episodes are not the places where they can, even by the grace of God, redirect un-Christlike responses toward Christlikeness. Their stubborn efforts at this practice will fail so miserably and prove that being a Christian has nothing to do with loving or forgiving one's enemies (Willard, Spirit 7).

The secret to following Christ lies in living as Christ lived in the entirety of his life. The gospel narratives reveal that the humility, compassion, and faith of Christ are found in the context of his immersion in the practices of spiritual disciplines. His followers must do likewise (Willard, Spirit 29). The disciplines are activities of mind and body undertaken to bring one's entire being into cooperation with God (68).

After people have, through divine grace, become alive to God, the practice of the disciplines enable Christians to allow the Holy Spirit ever-increasing sway over their beings. The disciplines assist the ways of God to replace the habits ingrained in them

(Willard, Spirit 86).

The potential of these disciplines is immense. The disciplines poise persons to depend on and interact with the power of the living God, resulting in their being able to bless those who curse them and to overcome evil with good (Willard, Spirit 157).

The human character, including its willingness and ability to forgive, derives from the experiences and choices through which people have lived or made in the past. Their lives and how they see the world now and in the future is entirely the result of what they have become in the depths of their beings (Willard, Renovation 13).

If Christians would follow Jesus, they must walk with him in that deep level. Jesus saves persons by restoring their hearts to God and then by dwelling there with the Father through the Holy Spirit (Willard, Renovation 18). Christian spiritual formation is the “Spirit-driven process of forming the inner world of the human self in such a way that it becomes like the inner being of Christ Himself” (22).

Spiritual formation is, in essence, Christ living in and through his people. It is the way of rest for the weary, the easy yoke and the light burden. The primary transformation involved is not in the actions; it is in thoughts, feelings, dispositions, and choices. Transformation at this level will bring about outward changes (Willard, Renovation 24).

For example, a person may attempt to act lovingly towards another. To persevere in doing so without a corresponding transformation in one’s thoughts and feelings, however, would lead to despair, anger, and hopelessness. By contrast, taking God’s love into the depths of one’s being through spiritual formation will enable one to love in a way that goes beyond what was thought possible (Willard, Renovation 24).

Coming into the presence of God, the follower of the crucified Messiah develops



the twin personality traits of empathy and humility. Empathy involves the ability to overcome narcissistic tendencies and to face one's enemies with compassion. Humility involves the capacity to transcend shame by facing oneself non-defensively and others redemptively (Sandage 58).

When persons are hurt, they tend to demonize their offenders as a way of self-protection, psychologically distancing themselves from their offenders and justifying their offenders' exclusion from their own internal sense of community (Sandage 59). Forgiving empathy or compassion is the capacity to be aware of one's offenders' suffering and weakness while still holding them responsible for their wrongdoing. Empathy allows people to see their abusers in context, not to overlook their offenses, but to overcome their tendency to totalize them through global attribution (95).

Learning to forgive also requires people to abandon their pretense of being morally superior. Humility helps persons face their own failures and need for forgiveness. Ego-humility refers to a flexible ego that is willing to acknowledge one's strengths and weaknesses. It facilitates open, non-defensive engagement with others that does not involve anxious face-saving strategies (Sandage 93).

Humble persons tend to see themselves as small compared to God and the universe, yet valuable and secure. They are also likely to have stores of gratitude for forgiveness received as well as hope that broken relationships can be restored (Sandage 60).

The goal of Christian spiritual formation is that as God restores persons, more and more facets of their lives will be organized around God, to the end that such persons will love God with all their hearts, minds, souls, and strength, and the neighbor as themselves

(Willard, Renovation 31).

According to Dallas Willard, the root cause of sin, anxiety, and unforgiveness is that human beings believe they are gods. Thus deluded, they think they are in charge of their lives and responsible for their destinies (Renovation 56). The unbearable burden of being responsible for one's destiny leads to epistemic, ethical, and ontological anxieties.

Christian spiritual formation rests on the foundation of death to self, and until that foundation is established, no transformation of the person into the image of God can proceed (Willard, Renovation 64). When Jesus said those who love their lives will lose them (John 12:25), he is pointing out the truth that those who seek to control their lives will discover they are at the mercy of forces within and beyond them. Only when they surrender control of their lives to God and allow him to give them life can they hope to live (65).

When Christians organize lives around God and experience his care, they begin to develop love, admiration, and confidence in God. Persons are released from the burden of looking out for themselves (Willard, Renovation 70). Being dead to self allows people to accept their need not get their way because they rest in the confidence that God is in charge (71). No longer will they be slaves to anger, unforgiveness, and the need to retaliate (74).

Transformation of the inner being cannot be attained through human effort alone. It is a work of grace (Willard, Renovation 23); however, it is not irrational and mysterious. It must be developed methodically. Grace does not rule out method; nor method grace (24).

Christians are not able, on the spot, to do a good thing if their inner beings are

filled with the thoughts, feelings, and habits characteristic of their fallen nature. They can, on the other hand, retrain their thoughts by meditating on teachings about God, and especially on Jesus. They can then become people for whom looking out for “number one” is no longer the framework of their lives (Willard, Renovation 90).

As Christians meditate on Scripture, they develop a vision of life in God’s kingdom. Their image of God is transformed from one where God is a tyrant depriving them, by his commands, of all that is good to one where God can be relied upon for all of life’s needs. They no longer see the need to take matters into their own hands (Willard, Renovation 100).

Spiritual formation requires thinking: Christians must apply their minds to the Word of God, dwell upon it, ponder its meaning and explore its implications, especially as it relates to their lives (Willard, Renovation 104). As one thinks of God as he is, one cannot help but worship, and worship is the single most powerful force in transforming a person (107).

In practicing the spiritual disciplines, Christians must not be deluded into thinking they are transforming themselves. No one can raise “dead bodies” except the One who raised Christ from the dead. What one does in practicing the disciplines is to offer to God the disciplines with no strings attached. The Christian should set no conditions, no time limits, and no expectations as to how God is to work out one’s transformation (Mulholland, Invitation 131).

The process of forgiveness must move beyond forgiving in a particular situation or a specific individual to becoming the theme of one’s life narrative (Sandage 97). Ultimately the way of forgiveness is to be an embodied way of life in an ever-deepening

friendship with the triune God and with others. The focus of forgiveness becomes no longer the absolution of guilt but the restoration of communion with God and with each other (Jones, Embodying Forgiveness xii).

### **Discipline of Spiritual Reading**

The biblical basis for spiritual reading is found in the reality that God continues to speak to people as he did with the people of Israel through Moses and the prophets and as Jesus Christ in his Incarnation. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus continues to teach and act. “He is alive and among us as our Priest to forgive us, our Prophet to teach us, our King to rule us, our Shepherd to guide us” (Foster, Meditative Prayer 3-7).

In spiritual reading, Christians grow into a “familiar friendship with Jesus” (Foster, Meditative Prayer 8). In this discipline, Christians create space within themselves for Christ to commune with them (9). Out of this inward communion with Jesus, two things happen. First, the inner personality is transformed. Desires and aspirations become more conformed to his way. Second, Christians develop a greater and more balanced perspective of the ordinary events of their lives. They learn to discern between the significant and the trivial (10).

Spiritual reading is a form of Bible reading where the heart and mind of the reader are drawn into the love and goodness of God (Foster, Meditative Prayer 23). People are more accustomed to “informational reading” where they seek to master the text before them (Mulholland, Shaped by the Word 19). They then manipulate what they have read to fit into their agendas, purposes, and intentions. Where the text does not fit into their agendas, they distance themselves from it. All they read is evaluated for its ability to enhance their false selves (51-53).

By contrast, in spiritual reading or “formational reading,” readers allow the text to master them. They seek to let the text probe the deeper levels of their beings, disclosing deeper dimensions of their flawed selves and shaking the foundations of the false self (Mulholland, Shaped by the Word 56). Readers are open to hear, receive, respond, and be a servant of the Word rather than to be its master (57).

In spiritual reading, one’s will moves towards willing the heart of God, not simply willing to do God’s will without losing control of oneself, but becoming radically available to God. With respect to one’s enemies, becoming available to God means yielding one’s being to the enemy for God (Mulholland, Shaped by the Word 102).

In spiritual reading, readers’ top priority is to listen for God. They begin to allow the text to become the instrument of God’s grace in their lives. God’s agenda takes priority over personal agendas (Mulholland, Shaped by the Word 20).

Readers learn to listen with the heart and spirit as well as with the mind. The human tendency in encountering a text is to stand back, evaluate, and decide how to deal with what is read. The danger of detached evaluation is that when what is read is from God, readers, by deciding the text is not for them, close the door to the opportunity of listening to God (Mulholland, Shaped by the Word 21). When reading spiritually, readers allow the deeper levels of their beings to respond. Readers ask questions such as, “How do I feel?” or “What is stirring deep within me?” and “Why do I feel this way?” (22).

Christians throughout most of the centuries have engaged in this form of reading. This form of reading is the way of lovers and friends, where the lingering words of the Beloved deepen into intimacies. Readers are not after information but companionship; they are shaped by what is heard. Spiritual reading becomes a delightful time of keeping

company with Jesus, lover and friend (Peterson, Praying with Jesus Introduction).

**Story.** Story is the primary means whereby the revelation of God is given to humankind. The Christian Scriptures are largely written in the form of story. The reason is that life is narrative; it has a beginning and end, plot and characters, conflict and resolution. Life is not a collection of abstractions such as love and truth, sin and salvation, atonement and holiness. It is a reality of particular details joined in narrative form. Story is the most adequate way people have for accounting for their lives. The obscure details, subtle accents of color, combine to give meaning and coherence to actions and feelings, encounters and relationships. Thus, God does not reveal himself as a metaphysical formula but through earthy stories that people can understand and relate even to children (Peterson, Leap over a Wall 3). All prayer is prayed in the form of story, the story of a particular person in particular circumstances. No prayer exists, no relationship with God is established, without story (Answering God 47).

### **Discipline of Prayer**

The discipline of prayer is the deepest work in the human spirit. To pray is to allow God to transform persons (Foster, Celebration 30). The goal of prayer is to know God. It is an ongoing communication with God where a person listens to, questions, laments, pleads with, praises, and thanks God (Barnwell 51).

Persons commonly remove expressions of anger from their prayers, perhaps because of a false assumption God would not be pleased with their angry emotions (Kelsey 170). For many, bringing to God the dark emotions of their hate is impossible. For them prayer is to be spiritualized, filled with praise, while removing any negative emotions that offend piety or disturb the peace (Peterson, Answering God 100).

Spiritualized prayer, however, is denatured prayer in which all the details of life have been distilled away. It is escapist prayer. It ignores the fact that life must be lived in all its irregular and inconvenient details (48).

Historically, the ancient Hebrews and their derivatives, the Christians, engaged in lament when faced with oppression and injustice. Lament means complaint and refers to the spiritual practice of bringing to God honest expressions of anguish, despair, questions, or doubts. The imprecatory psalms gave voice to raw emotions of anger, shame, and sadness (Sandage 94).

The imprecatory psalms were not well-manicured prayers but pre-reflective outbursts of raw emotions issuing from the depths of the soul (Volf 124). Reading these psalms, one finds that prayerful people have lots of enemies and spend much of their praying time dealing with them. Their intense worship of God goes alongside an inordinate preoccupation with enemies (Peterson, Answering God 95).

Psalms 137, a lament against Babylonian inhumanities, describes as “blessed” or “happy” the one who “seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks” (Ps. 137:8-9). This lament is an expression of raw hate. Hate is an expression of outrage that holiness has been violated. It is often the first sign that people care. It brings to their awareness that evil is far more extensive than they had ever imagined (Peterson, Answering God 98).

Nevertheless, hate is also the ugliest and most dangerous of human emotions. It is not a promising step towards establishing justice in the world (Peterson, Answering God 98). Rage and hatred, if left in the dark chambers of human souls, would infect everything with its hellish will to exclude (Volf 124).

In prayer, hatred is the first step into the presence of God where he shows he has ways to deal with injustice and the violation of holiness (Peterson, Answering God 100). By placing violated persons' unedited rage before God, they place both their unjust offenders and vengeful selves before God who loves and does justice. Illuminated by the light of the just and loving God, hatred recedes, and the seeds of forgiveness are planted. Forgiveness will be difficult when people exclude their enemies from the community of humans and exclude themselves from the community of sinners. Instead, when people come into the presence of God and the crucified Messiah, bringing with them their abusers, they cannot but transpose their enemies from the sphere of monstrous inhumanity into the sphere of shared humanity and themselves from the sphere of proud innocence into the sphere of common sinfulness (Volf 124). Violated persons learn, empathically, to see the humanity of their offenders and humbly to realize their own sinfulness and need for forgiveness.

### **Discipline of Journaling**

According to Morton T. Kelsey, inner transformation is nearly impossible without journal keeping (27). A journal is a guidebook by which people discover who they are and find their way home to the Father (70). Keeping a journal is important, first of all, because in it persons record their experiences with God who seeks and loves them through their encounters with others, through rituals, and through their inner thoughts. Persons devalue these experiences when they fail to record them (19).

In a journal, individuals are able to pour out their deepest emotions in strictest confidence without fear of embarrassment or hurting another person. Emotions and passions are hard to understand unless they are recorded and reviewed. Persons do not



realize how angry they are or how much they love until they allow their emotions to spill onto paper. Dealing with inner stirrings is nearly impossible unless they are recorded.

Without a journal, people lose touch with a large part of themselves (Kelsey 23).

Keeping a journal helps in the healing process. It allows space to deal with inner turmoil by bringing into the open all fears and burdens (Kelsey 27). A journal is one important place where people can gather all of who they are to bring themselves totally to God. God longs to pour his love into their lives in entirety. God will not pour his love into people's lives when they do not bring all of themselves to him. In journaling, Christians bring all of themselves, the beautiful as well as the putrid, the noble as well as the base, to God. They remain open to God despite seeing the sin and ugliness within them. Only then can they discover that God loves every part of them (Kelsey 72).

### **Discipline of Mutual Support and Accountability**

Learning to forgive is costly because it involves acknowledging and experiencing the painful truth of human sin and evil at its worst. In the midst of the worst of human sin and evil, God moves to reconcile humanity to himself and to one another, healing wounds and restoring communion. Learning to be a part of God's healing and reconciling work needs to be practiced within the community of believers because the practice of forgiveness entails unlearning the habits and practices that destroy communion and learning to live as forgiven and forgiving persons within communities (Jones, Embodying Forgiveness 163-64). Even as persons receive God's forgiveness and are initiated into his kingdom, they need to appropriate this initiation by continually seeking to live out their forgiveness in the context of a community of persons forgiven by God (172).

Christian forgiveness is not a gift from God bestowed on persons individually;

rather, it calls people into communion with God and with one another. The Holy Spirit guides Christian communities as to how to appropriate the significance of Christ's forgiveness in their personal as well as corporate lives (Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness* 172). Corporately, the Spirit uses various persons within the community to help each Christian unlearn the habits that destroy community (173).

One of the central problems of contemporary Christian life is the failure of Christians to "discern the body" (Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness* 178). Too many Christians have regarded each other as strangers and become estranged from one another. The practice of the forgiven life calls for mutual confession among believers of their sins as well as the work God has done in their lives. Christians need each other to help them know the truth about themselves. Persons on their own lack an accurate perception of both the gravity of their sins as well as the extent of God's redeeming work in their lives. They need each other to help them truthfully narrate their stories (183).

Furthermore, practicing the spiritual disciplines is hard work, and as one perseveres, one will discover that much warfare takes place within. The believer needs the support of fellow believers to uphold and bear the burdens together (Mulholland, *Invitation* 133).

Studies on the influence of groups on people's ability and willingness to forgive suggest the people who belong to religiously oriented small groups that meet for Bible study and prayer have been helped by their groups to forgive. The group's focus is important. Groups focussing on spiritual and emotional activities such as prayer and the sharing of personal problems were more strongly associated with forgiveness than were groups whose activities centered on eating or the discussion of books (Sandage 40).

As persons gather together, a sense prevails of a greater presence of God in their midst than with scattered individuals (Willard, Spirit 186). Where persons begin to explore their deepest weaknesses and failures in the presence of other trusted persons, each person in the group is nourished in his or her faith in God's provision, the sense of being loved is deepened, and humility before others is developed (187). This mutual confession makes transformation possible.

Persons seeking God need to speak with and listen to others about their experiences in order to understand themselves. Often, in reading their journal entries to others, they grasp the full range of emotions involved in the events they have encountered. If one is to listen to the depths of oneself, one must also learn to listen to others sensitively and nonjudgmentally as they relate their pain, anger, and joy over their experiences. In this mutual listening, seekers learn to discern the many voices within themselves (Kelsey 85-87).

The practice of forgiveness presumes that no one has a monopoly on the best or most truthful perspective of life or the situation at hand. In seeking to discern the most appropriate response to each crisis, people need one another to help them narrate truthfully the story of their lives, and they need to learn to submit to the wisdom of the believing and forgiving community (Jones, Embodying Forgiveness 187). As people learn to narrate their stories and to listen so as to help others narrate theirs, they are unlearning the destructiveness, violence, and depression and learning the forgiving love and reconciliation characteristic of those seeking to live the cruciform life. People need to listen attentively and to know another person's joys and griefs, hopes and fears and sin for which they need to repent (168).

The community needs to support one another as well as to hold each other accountable. Practicing the spiritual disciplines as well as learning to forgive is difficult and often painful. As one perseveres, one discovers much within oneself that militate against being transformed into Christ's image. To remain faithful, believers need the support, encouragement, loving correction, and chastisement of brothers and sisters in Christ (Mulholland, Shaped by the Word 115).

### **Empirical Data on Spiritual Formation and Forgiveness**

In a study of 196 college students in the United States, Edwards et al. found significant, positive correlation between individuals' level of faith and forgiveness. Her findings meant that religious faith and tendency to forgive varied correspondingly.

Tina M. Bedell arrived at a somewhat different result. She found that among African-Americans, while significant associations existed between religiosity and thoughts on forgiveness as reported by their partners, no significant associations existed between religiosity and thoughts on forgiveness as reported by self. More importantly, she found no significant associations between religiosity and both feelings and behaviors related to forgiveness. Among Caucasians, she found significant associations between religiosity and feelings of forgiveness but no corresponding significance on the thoughts and behavior sub-domains of the forgiveness measure. Her findings suggest that while religious African-Americans thought about being forgiving and religious Caucasians felt forgiving, neither actually forgive.

C. W. Ellison suggests that spiritual well-being is significantly associated with fundamental personality orientations such as trust/anxiety, optimism/pessimism, self-acceptance/self-rejection, and intimacy/isolation. Ellison also found that those who

consider themselves “born again,” by virtue of their self-selected statement emphasizing their acceptance of Jesus as personal Savior and Lord, typically have more positive spiritual well-being than “Ethical Christians,” who describe themselves primarily as those who adhere to the ethical and moral teachings of Jesus. He also found that the frequency with which one has devotions is not significantly associated with spiritual well-being, but the amount of time spent in devotions is significantly associated with spiritual well-being.

These studies suggest that while religiosity may not be significantly associated with forgiveness, a healthy relationship with God is significantly associated with spiritual well-being, which, in turn, is significantly associated with the constructs of forgiveness, such as trust, self-acceptance, optimism, intimacy (Ellison), interpersonal sensitivity (Plante and Boccaccini), and hope (Rye et al.; Plante and Boccaccini).

### **Research Design**

The research design adopted for this study combined the pretest-posttest, nonequivalent control group design with ethnographic research. In the pretest-posttest nonequivalent control group design, pretest scores measure variables strongly related to the dependent variables and the pretest aids in checking the similarity of the groups prior to conducting the experiment. Pretest scores can then be used for statistical control and also for generating gain scores (Wiersma 132).

Ethnographic research is phenomenological in nature: it focuses on the careful description of phenomena from the perspective of persons experiencing the phenomena. The presupposition in ethnographic research is that reality consists of the meaning that persons under study place on their experiences of phenomena.

The phenomenological nature of ethnographic research has certain implications

for its design:

- *A priori* assumptions about the phenomenon are avoided as far as possible;
- Reality is viewed holistically and phenomena are not reduced to several

variables;

- An openness to alternative explanations of phenomena; and,
- Theory should emerge from the data rather than from preconceived theories

(Wiersma 238-39).

This study combines the pretest-posttest nonequivalent control group design with the ethnographic research design. Empirical data is taken to measure the changes in participants' willingness and ability to forgive as a result of their practicing the prescribed spiritual disciplines. At the same time, participants' journals are studied to record qualitative changes, if any, the participants perceive to have taken place in the course of the experiment.

### CHAPTER 3

#### METHODOLOGY

Unforgiveness is due, in large part, to epistemic, ethical, and ontological anxieties. Persons withhold forgiveness from others because they are afraid to trust those who have betrayed them. They also fear others will compete with them for worldly goods they deem necessary for the good life and are anxious that their absorption of others' offenses will result in their annihilation in the future.

A friendship with God through the Holy Spirit dissolves these anxieties. In the face of God, Christians find a face that will never abandon nor betray them, a love that transcends all other desires, and a security that promises to last through eternity. An ever-deepening friendship with the triune God frees Christians to care for their neighbors.

Christians' commitment to the cruciform life, their being drawn into communion with the triune God, is a call to a life of seeking to bring others into reconciliation with God and with one another. As God seeks to embrace even the most evil person, they are called to receive from and offer to one another forgiveness. Embracing and forgiving their abusers does not mean they are blind to the magnitude of sin and evil committed against them; rather, Christians are called to acknowledge the extent of hurt done against them yet pay the cost of not passing the consequences of the offenses on to others.

This commitment to the cruciform way of life is dependant not only on the Holy Spirit but also on the believing community. Christians need the community of believers to encourage and to hold each other accountable.

The practice of the spiritual disciplines of spiritual reading, prayer, journaling, and mutual support and accountability is designed to draw one into the presence of God

and be transformed by God's love.

The purpose of this research was to explore changes in the participants' tendency and ability to forgive after practicing the spiritual disciplines of spiritual reading, prayer, journaling, and meeting in groups for two months and to observe the process of change that took place.

### **Research Questions**

The first research question focused on the type of relationships in which participants faced difficulty in forgiving prior to the experiment. The second research question established what spiritual disciplines the participants were practicing prior to the experiment. The third research question looked at whether and in what ways the practice of spiritual disciplines affected the participants' hearts and minds. The fourth question asked if those who met together in groups to share experiences and pray over them had differing experiences from those who did not do so.

#### **Research Question #1**

What were the relationships participants had with those they had difficulty forgiving, and what were the offenses committed against the participants?

The question was designed to give insight into the types of relationships where participants had relational conflicts and found difficulty in forgiving. Were the conflicts of a life-threatening nature? Did they threaten primary relationships such as marriages and parent-child relationships? Were they vocation related? Were they a mix of all of the above, with conflict in one sphere of relationships affecting relationships in another sphere?

Answers to this research question also provided a basis for observing changes in



the participants' relationships subsequent to the study.

### **Research Question #2**

What was the nature and extent of participants' practice of the spiritual disciplines of prayer, spiritual reading, and journaling prior to, during, and at the end of the experiment?

I wanted to ascertain if participants were already practicing some form of spiritual discipline regularly. I wanted to know if the implementation of the spiritual disciplines of prayer, spiritual reading, and journaling was an introduction of a new independent variable or simply the recording of the process of an ongoing exercise. I could then compare the changes in tendency and ability to forgive observed in participants who had and those who had not previously practiced the spiritual disciplines. I hoped the various practices by the participants of the spiritual disciplines would provide clues to help explain the type and magnitude of conflicts reported by them prior to the study.

### **Research Question #3**

What changes in spiritual well-being took place during and after the experiment?

This question sought to identify the effects of the practice of the spiritual disciplines on the participants. Theoretically, the practice of spiritual disciplines facilitated the deepening of communion with God. Deepening of communion with God resulted in changes in understanding and perception as well in willing and desiring. Persons often made momentous discoveries, had some "aha" experiences. Cognitive and affective changes are frequently followed by behavioral changes. Such changes are evidences of the work of divine grace, showing that the person is being drawn into

communion with God. Of particular importance to this study was whether changes to the participants' tendency and ability to forgive were observable.

The Forgiveness Likelihood Scale measured the participants' tendency to forgive under hypothetical circumstances while the Forgiveness Scale measured the extent real forgiveness had taken place. The Spiritual Well-Being Scale allowed me to determine if participants' religious and psychological well-being had changed as a result of their practice of the spiritual disciplines. Journal entries and interviews with some participants helped explain and give insight and clarity to the changes observed.

One of the obstacles to answering this question was the brevity of the study. I wondered if discernable changes could take place in two months. On the other hand, the shortness of this period allowed me a snapshot of the effects of the practice of spiritual disciplines on the participants' tendency and ability to forgive over a brief period of time. This momentary snapshot of a lifelong process is important in understanding the immediate effects of the practice of spiritual disciplines.

#### **Research Question #4**

What were the significant differences in changes experienced by participants who met in groups, and those who practiced the disciplines privately?

The theory of spiritual formation and forgiveness suggests that learning to forgive must take place within a community of faith where each person is supported by and made accountable to the community.

#### **Measures**

Measures were taken for forgiveness, forgiveness likelihood, and spiritual well-being. These measures were selected from a larger pool of measures used by researchers

on forgiveness. They were preferred because of their brevity and because their conceptualization fitted in with my thesis.

**Forgiveness scale.** The Forgiveness Scale was designed by Mark S. Rye et al. It is a fifteen-item Likert-type scale designed to measure forgiveness toward an offender and contains two subscales measuring absence of negative and presence of positive responses. Both subscales for the Forgiveness Scale were found to be significantly correlated with measures of forgiveness, religiousness, anger, hope, religious well-being, existential well-being, and social desirability.

The Forgiveness Scale has the advantage of brevity over the Enright Forgiveness Inventory (Subkoviak et al.), which has sixty items, and the Wade Forgiveness Scale (Wade, Gorsuch, and Rosik), which has eighty-three items, in that it has only fifteen items. Besides its brevity, the scale was chosen mainly because it measures positive and negative thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Christian forgiveness presupposes the absence of negative responses and the presence of positive responses. I also preferred Rye et al.'s Forgiveness Scale to the Heartland Forgiveness Scale (Snyder and Thompson) because the conceptualization of the latter does not include compassion and empathy as necessary components of forgiveness (302). The scale developed by Terry D. Hargraves and James N. Sells includes love and trust in its conceptualization (43), with reconciliation as its implicit goal (Snyder and Thompson 306). I considered, however, that this scale, with forty-four questions, was too long and that because it was designed to measure forgiveness within families, it was not general enough for my project. The strength of Rye et al.'s scale to this project is their understanding of forgiveness as a form of religious coping. According to Pargament and Rye, persons' willingness and ability to

forgive have strong correlations to their religiousness and spirituality (66-68).

The Forgiveness Scale was designed to measure forgiveness toward a particular offender. Three hundred and twenty-eight psychology students from a Midwestern Catholic university were tested. Participants were asked to think of an individual who had wronged them in the past and to describe the nature of the wrongdoing. They were then asked about how they would respond to the person who offended them. The questions were created to measure affective, cognitive, and behavioral responses and could assess both positive and negative responses. Higher scores on this scale reflect greater forgiveness.

Both subscales of the Forgiveness Scale were found to have adequate internal consistency and test-retest reliability. In addition, both subscales were significantly related to the Enright Forgiveness Inventory and to other measures previously shown to be related to forgiveness.

**Forgiveness likelihood scale.** The Forgiveness Likelihood Scale was also created by Rye et al. and is a ten-item Likert-type scale designed to measure tendency to forgive across situations. The Forgiveness Likelihood Scale has a single factor and was found to be significantly correlated with measures of forgiveness, religiousness, trait anger, religious well-being, and social desirability.

Ten scenarios were developed involving hypothetical wrongdoing to which college students as well as other populations would likely be able to relate. Respondents were instructed to imagine that the scenarios happened to them and then consider the likelihood that they would be willing to forgive the offender. Higher scores on this scale reflect increased willingness to forgive.

The original study by Rye et al. showed that this scale was inversely correlated with trait anger. In other words, the more likely persons were to forgive across situations, the less likely they were to harbor anger across situations. The scale was not significantly correlated with state anger, suggesting that this scale measures a trait rather than a state.

**Spiritual well-being scale.** The Spiritual Well-Being Scale was developed by Ellison. The scale has two subscales measuring religious well-being and existential well-being. It consists of twenty items, ten items measuring religious well-being and ten measuring existential well-being, presented on a seven-point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Scores for the two subscales are summed to provide an overall measure of spiritual well-being.

According to Ellison, spiritual well-being involves a religious component and a social-psychological component, the vertical and horizontal components. The vertical dimension refers to a sense of well-being in relation to God, while the horizontal dimension refers to a sense of life purpose and satisfaction. Both dimensions involve transcendence and both affect and reinforce the other. A person who is spiritually healthy will generally feel alive, purposeful, and fulfilled but only to the extent that he or she is also psychologically healthy.

While spiritual well-being is not the same as spiritual health, it may be a good indicator and expression of spiritual health. Spiritual well-being may not be the same as spiritual maturity. A new Christian may show positive spiritual well-being while still at a lower level of maturity; nevertheless, over time, spiritual maturity would certainly be a by-product of strategies to promote spiritual well-being.

## Methodology

This study explored changes in participants' tendency and ability to forgive after practicing the spiritual disciplines of prayer, spiritual reading, journaling, and meeting in groups for two months and observed the process of change that took place. The participants were asked to meditate on selected passages from the Gospel of John for a period of sixty days and record their thoughts, feelings, events of the day, responses to these events, and observations throughout the sixty-day period in a journal.

The experiment had three sets of participants.

**Participants belonging to a support or accountability group (Set A).** Every member in the participating group was committed to participating in the experiment and practicing the spiritual disciplines of spiritual reading, prayer, and journaling. In addition, each person in the group was encouraged to share freely from their journals and pray about their struggles and discoveries.

**Participants not known to belong to any support or accountability group (Set B).** The participants in the second group committed themselves to practicing the spiritual disciplines of spiritual reading, prayer, and journaling privately and were neither encouraged to nor discouraged from disclosing journal entries to anyone.

**Participants not asked to practice the spiritual disciplines (Set C).** The participants of the third group were only asked to fill out the researcher-designed questionnaire on devotional habits, the Forgiveness Scale, the Forgiveness Likelihood Scale, and the Spiritual Well-Being Scale.

The Forgiveness Scale, Forgiveness Likelihood Scale, and the Spiritual Well-Being Scale were administered before the experiment, in the middle of the experiment, at

the conclusion of the experiment, and six weeks after the experiment had concluded. In addition, a questionnaire to ascertain the devotional habits of the participants was administered prior to the experiment.

### **Sample**

The participants for the study, thirty in total, were professing Christians purposefully selected from Barker Road Methodist Church and Ang Mo Kio Methodist Church. These are English-speaking churches. Participants had to be 18 years or above and proficient enough in the English language to make entries in a journal. They would be largely above the average Singaporean in educational training.

I noted that while the sample comprised English-educated Chinese Singaporeans, the questionnaires were designed by Americans, as was most of the theoretical framework for this study. I believed this study would still be valid and appropriate for the sample. English-educated Chinese Singaporeans are very much exposed to American culture through the mass media. Most of the religious, psychological, professional, and fictional books they read are written for the American public. Cable television broadcasts a mix of English language shows from the United States and Great Britain. Worship style in a typical English-speaking church in Singapore is similar to that in America. Most theological concepts are derived from the west. In a real sense, English-speaking Chinese Singaporeans are familiar with and immersed in the American culture.

A popular belief exists that persons of Asian, and particularly of Chinese, descent are especially prone to feelings of shame. The need to save face is popularly believed to be more pronounced among the Chinese people than among any other people groups. On the other hand, Sandage argues that the loss of face and consequent need to save face is

“at the core of the human predicament” (65). Working with prisoners in an American prison, Sandage concludes that the commission of public offenses by criminals could be traced to their need to save face (65). While one may argue that a typical Chinese person manifests a need to save face differently from an American, the need to react to counter one’s feelings of shame and self-diminution is a universal human trait.

Ten of the participants (set B) were picked from a pool of individuals who were not known to belong to any support or accountability group, while another ten comprised members of support and accountability groups meeting regularly for prayer and Bible study (set A). A third group of ten (the control group, set C) was selected randomly from members of the two churches who did not participate in any support or accountability group. The control group did not participate in the practice of the spiritual disciplines.

### **Instrumentation and Data Collection**

Participants in sets A and B were sent packages comprising instructions (see Appendix D), researcher-designed pretest questionnaire (see Appendix E), the Rye Forgiveness Scale (see Appendix F), the Rye Forgiveness Likelihood Scale (see Appendix G), the Spiritual Well-Being Scale (see Appendix H), and a journal containing a list of biblical passages for spiritual reading (see Appendix I). These items were sent with a cover letter (see Appendixes A and B)

The researcher-designed pretest questionnaire, the Forgiveness Scale, the Forgiveness Likelihood Scale, and the Spiritual Well-Being Scale were filled out prior to the commencement of the study. The questions in the researcher-designed questionnaire sought to ascertain the participants’ practices of spiritual disciplines. These were open-ended questions that allowed the participants to describe in some detail their habits of



spiritual discipline.

The participants were asked to meditate daily on a prescribed passage taken from the Gospel according to Saint John. This Gospel was selected for its content on Jesus' life and teaching, death, and resurrection. The passages were changed on alternate days.

The participants were then asked to enter into the journal their thoughts concerning the passage in the form of a prayer to God. They were also asked to record in their journals the conflicts they faced each day, also in the form of a prayer. I anticipated this form of journaling would facilitate a deeper friendship with and greater trust in God.

For set A, two groups totaling ten persons that were already meeting for support and accountability were selected. The members were asked to continue meeting as groups for the duration of the study and to incorporate a time of sharing and prayer over their journal entries made in the course of the experiment. The groups met weekly, and their feelings and observations made at the meetings were recorded in their respective journals.

For set B, ten participants were selected randomly from those who were not known to belong to any support and accountability group, based on their willingness to participate in the study. They were not encouraged to share their discoveries, nor were they discouraged from doing so.

A third group, set C, comprised ten persons randomly selected from among those who were not known to belong to any support or accountability group. Persons in this group were not asked to practice the spiritual disciplines of spiritual reading, prayer, journaling, and mutual accountability but only to answer the questionnaires.

A pretest, researcher-designed questionnaire was administered together with the Forgiveness Scale, the Forgiveness Likelihood Scale, and the Spiritual Well-Being Scale.

The participants in sets A and B were given a list of passages from the Gospel of John on which to meditate, with simple instructions as to how to meditate. They were also instructed to record their emotions, thoughts, and observations in the journal.

At the end of a one-month period, the Forgiveness Scale, the Forgiveness Likelihood Scale, and the Spiritual Well-Being Scale were administered to participants in all three sets to measure changes in participants' spiritual well-being as well as their willingness and ability to forgive midway through the experiment.

At the end of the two-month period, participants in all three sets were again asked to answer questions in the Forgiveness Scale, the Forgiveness Likelihood Scale, and the Spiritual Well-Being Scale.

The journals were collected, and I studied them.

Six weeks after the conclusion of the experiment, I administered the Forgiveness Scale, the Forgiveness Likelihood Scale, and the Spiritual Well-Being Scale to participants in all three sets again to measure the longer-term effects of the experiment.

Participants in groups A and B were given a further option of an unstructured interview concerning their experiences and journal entries.

### **Data Analysis**

To analyze the data, I cross-tabulated offenses with relationships between offenders and victims. The cross-tabulation enabled me to observe the relationships victims had with their offenders and how these victims were victimized within the context of their relationships.

Next, I looked at the frequency distribution of participants' respective practice of the spiritual disciplines. The frequency distribution gave insight into whether participants' practice of the spiritual disciplines had changed in the course of the

experiment. I then observed the correlations between participants' practice of the spiritual disciplines with their spiritual well-being and ability and tendency to forgive. I also analyzed the correlations among participants' spiritual well-being, ability to forgive, and their likelihood of forgiving.

I immersed myself in the participants' journals, reading each entry numerous times. This immersion in the journals enabled me to enter into the participants' worlds and feel with them. In the process, I was able to reach conclusions concerning their spiritual well-being.

### **Variables**

The project had two independent variables: the practice of the spiritual disciplines of prayer, spiritual reading, and journaling and belonging to a support and accountability group.

The dependant variables were the participants' willingness and ability to forgive, their tendency to be forgiving, and their spiritual well-being.

Intervening variables were the age, maturity, gender, personal histories, experiences, and the nature of the conflicts of the participants (Worthington, Dimensions 109-12).

### **Confidentiality and Anonymity**

To encourage participants to record honestly and intimately their innermost thoughts and feelings, confidentiality and anonymity had to be maintained and assured.

I was not privy to the names of the participants. Participants were selected by members of the research reflection team (RRT) and issued an identification number. I could only refer to the participants by their identification numbers. Participants were told

to return the completed questionnaires and journals to my assistants in sealed envelopes that disclosed only their identification numbers. This way, both confidentiality and anonymity were assured.

The participants were given an option to waive their rights to anonymity and be interviewed at the conclusion of the experiment.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **FINDINGS**

Unforgiveness is linked to anxiety, the inability to trust an offender, the fear of losing out on life's goods, and the terror of losing oneself to the offender. When a person's spiritual well-being is improved, when that person is able to entrust himself or herself to God, that person is better able to forgive and has a greater tendency to be forgiving. The purpose of this study was to explore the effects of spiritual disciplines on persons' spiritual well-being and their tendency and ability to forgive.

Three research questions guided this study: What were the relationships participants had with those they had difficulty forgiving, and what were the offenses committed against the participants? What was the nature and extent of the participants' practice of the spiritual disciplines of prayer, spiritual reading, and journaling prior to, during, and at the end of the experiment? What changes in spiritual well-being took place during and after the experiment? What were the significant differences in changes experienced by participants who met in groups and those who practiced the disciplines privately?

#### **Profile of Subjects**

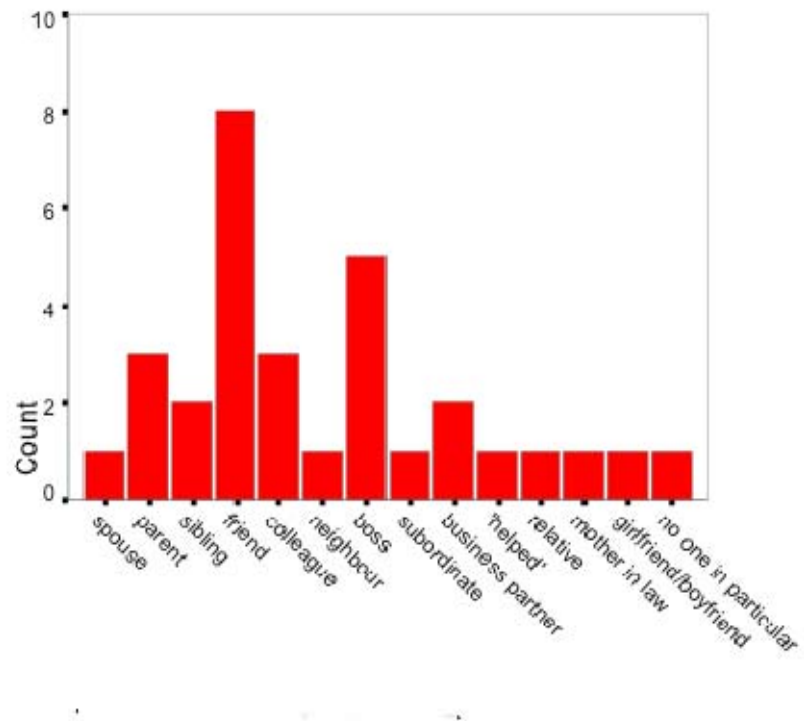
Thirty-one participants took part in the fourteen-week experiment. Questionnaires on forgiveness, likelihood of forgiveness, and spiritual well-being were administered at the pretest stage, on the fourth and eighth weeks of the experiment, and posttest on the fourteenth week. Twenty-one participants were required to journal their thoughts and experiences during the experiment. Sixteen participants (51.6 percent) were female, and twelve participants (38.7 percent) were male. Three participants did not disclose their

gender. Eleven participants ( ) were between the ages of 46 to 55, eight participants (25.8 percent) were over the age of 55, and three participants (9.7 percent) were between the ages of 18 to 25, 26 to 35, and 36 to 45 respectively. Three participants did not disclose their ages. Seventeen participants (54.8 percent) were married, eight (25.8 percent) had never been married, and three (9.7 percent) were divorced. Three participants did not disclose their marital status.

### **Relationship between Victim and Offender and Type of Offense**

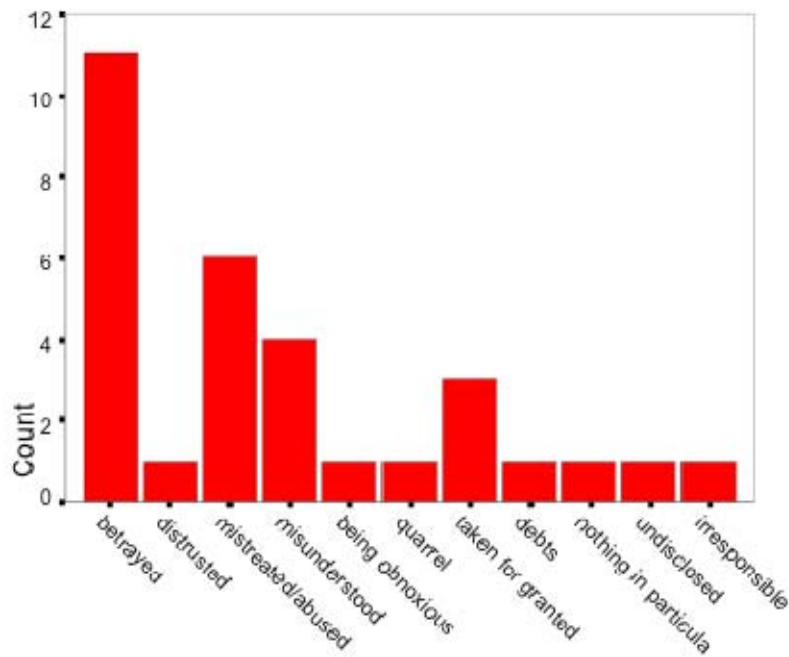
The descriptive data answered research question #1. The research question was designed to give insight into the types of relationships where participants had relational conflicts and found difficulty in forgiving.

Of significance were conflicts at the workplace, where five had conflicts with their bosses, three with colleagues, two with business partners, and one with a subordinate at work. Friendships were also the context for many of the conflicts. Eight of the conflicts were between friends. Three disclosed conflict with a parent, and two with a sibling. One participant each disclosed conflict with a spouse and a boyfriend/girlfriend (see Figure 4.1).



**Figure 4.1. Relationship of victim to offender.**

“Betrayal” was most frequently cited, with eleven participants, as an offense where participants had difficulty forgiving. Six participants reported mistreatment and abuse, four reported being misunderstood, and three reported being taken for granted as offenses where they had difficulty forgiving.



**Figure 4.2. Offenses committed.**

Crosstabulation of data between relationships and type of offenses reveal that betrayal at work was a major source of conflict with two each citing betrayal by colleagues and bosses and one by a business partner. Betrayal by friends was also significant, with three responses. Two reported abuse by a parent. Of these, one withdrew from the experiment, giving the reason that journaling about the abuses meted out by her parent was too painful .



**Table 4.1. Types of Relationships and Offenses**

Relationship of victim to offender	Offense Committed					
	Parent	Sibling	Friend	Colleague	Boss	Business partner
Betrayed			3	2	2	1
Distrusted	1					
Mistreated/abused	2			1	2	
Misunderstood			3		1	
Being obnoxious			1			
Taken for granted		1	1			
Debts						1
Irresponsible		1				
Total	3	2	8	3	5	2

Twenty-one participants continued to report on the same relationship and the conflict from pretest to posttest. Among those who described different relationship conflicts in the course of the experiment, three changed from being abused in one relationship, to being abused in another relationship.

### **Practice of Spiritual Disciplines**

A questionnaire on participants' practice of spiritual disciplines was administered at the pre-, mid-, and posttest stages, together with the questionnaires on forgiveness, forgiveness likelihood, and spiritual well-being. Participants were asked about the frequency with which they had devotions, the frequency with which they prayed, whether they meditated on what they had read during their devotions, whether they kept a journal, and whether they participated in small groups. The results answered research question #2. The purpose of this question was to ascertain any changes in participants' practice of the

spiritual disciplines and any corresponding changes to their spiritual well-being, ability to forgive, and tendency to be forgiving.

### **Frequency of Devotions**

At the onset of the experiment, eleven participants had daily devotions, fifteen had devotions between two to five times a week, three had devotions at least once a week, and two rarely ever had devotions (see Table 4.2).

**Table 4.2. Frequency of Devotions Pretest**

<b>Response</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
Daily	11	35.5
2-5 times weekly	15	48.4
Once a week	3	9.7
Hardly ever	2	6.5
Total	31	100.0

One month into the experiment, twelve participants had daily devotions, thirteen had devotions between two to five times a week, three had devotions at least once a week, one had devotions less than once a week, one hardly ever had devotions, and one participant left the experiment (see Table 4.3).

**Table 4.3. Frequency of Devotions Month One**

<b>Response</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
Daily	12	38.7
2-5 times weekly	13	41.9
Once a week	3	9.7
< once a week	1	3.2
Hardly ever	1	3.2
Total	30	96.8

**Mean Scores for Frequency of Devotions**

Slight fluctuations in frequency of devotions were recorded from the second month through the posttest. On a Likert scale with 5 representing daily devotions and 1 representing “hardly ever,” the mean increased by .07 from pretest to month one with a decrease in standard deviation of .06. Change in mean from month one to month two was .03 with a standard deviation increase of .14. Change in mean from month two to posttest was an increase of .04 with a standard deviation decrease of .05 (see Table 4.4). The fluctuations from measurement to measurement were likely due to chance.

**Table 4.4. Mean Scores for Frequency of Devotions**

	How regular your devotions 1?	How regular your devotions 2?	How regular your devotions 3?	How regular your devotions 4?
Valid	31	30	29	29
Missing	0	1	2	2
Mean	4.06	4.13	4.10	4.14
Std. Deviation	1.03	.97	1.11	1.06

**Form of Meditation**

At the onset of the experiment, nine persons meditated on biblical passages throughout the day, seventeen spent several minutes thinking and praying about what they had read, and four forgot the passages immediately (see Table 4.5).

**Table 4.5. Form of Meditation Pretest**

Response	n	%t
Meditate throughout the day	9	29.0
Spend several minutes thinking and praying	17	54.8
Forget right away	4	12.9
Total	30	96.8

The number of persons who spent several minutes thinking and praying increased by 1, one month into the experiment (see Table 4.6).

**Table 4.6. Form of Meditation Month One**

<b>Response</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
Meditate throughout the day	9	29.0
Spend several minutes thinking and praying	18	58.1
Forget right away	2	6.5
Total	29	93.5

Those who spent several minutes thinking and praying decreased by 1, two months into the experiment (see Table 4.7). This remained constant at the posttest.

**Table 4.7. Form of Meditation Month Two**

<b>Response</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
Meditate throughout the day	10	32.3
Spend several minutes thinking and praying	17	54.8
Forget right away	1	3.2
Total	28	90.3

### **Mean of Forms of Meditation**

On a Likert scale with 1 representing “forget right away” and 3 representing “meditate throughout the day,” the mean increased from 2.17 to 2.24 and settled at 2.32 during pretest, month one, month two, and posttest respectively. Standard deviation decreased from .65 to .55 (see Table 4.8).

**Table 4.8. Mean of Forms of Meditation**

	What form of meditation do you take 1?	What form of meditation do you take 2?	What form of meditation do you take 3?	What form of meditation do you take 4?
Valid	30	29	28	28
Missing	1	2	3	3
Mean	2.17	2.24	2.32	2.32
Std. Deviation	.65	.58	.55	.55

### Frequency of Prayer

On the question of how frequently participants prayed, at the onset of the experiment, 12 reported that they prayed throughout the day, 13 at specific times of the day, 1 several times a day, 2 when in need, and 3 occasionally (see Table 4.9).

**Table 4.9. Frequency of Prayer Pretest**

Response	n	%
Throughout the day	12	38.7
Specific times of the day	13	41.9
Several times a day	1	3.2
When in need	2	6.5
Occasionally	3	9.7
Total	31	100.0

One month into the experiment, fourteen reported praying throughout the day and eleven at specific times (see Table 4.10).

**Table 4.10. Frequency of Prayer Month One**

<b>Response</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
Throughout the day	14	45.2
Specific times of the day	11	35.5
Several times a day	1	3.2
When in need	2	6.5
Occasionally	2	6.5
Total	30	96.8

At the end of the second month, fifteen prayed throughout the day, eight at specific times of the day, three when in need and two occasionally (see Table 4.11).

**Table 4.11. Frequency of Prayer Month Two**

<b>Response</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
Throughout the day	15	48.4
Specific times of the day	8	25.8
When in need	3	9.7
Occasionally	2	6.5
Total	28	90.3

At the end of the second month, fifteen prayed throughout the day, ten at specific times of the day, three when in need, and two occasionally (see Table 4.12).

**Table 4.12. Frequency of Prayer Posttest**

<b>Response</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
Throughout the day	14	45.2
Specific times of the day	10	32.3
When in need	3	9.7
Occasionally	2	6.5
Total	29	93.5

### **Journaling**

Data collected on whether participants journaled revealed that fifteen kept journals and sixteen did not journal pretest (see Table 4.13).

**Table 4.13. Journaling Pretest**

<b>Response</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
yes	15	48.4
no	16	51.6
Total	31	100.0

After the experiment commenced, twenty of the participants journaled (see Table 4.14).

**Table 4.14. Journaling Month One to Posttest**

<b>Response</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
yes	20	64.5
no	10	32.3
Total	30	96.8



### Changes in Ability and Tendency to Forgive, and Spiritual Well-Being

The following data answers research question #3.

#### Forgiveness

On the Likert scale where 5 represented “most positive” and 1 represented “most negative,” the mean increased by 0.29 one month after commencement of the experiment, and the standard deviation shifted from 0.7861 to 0.7450, a decrease of 0.041. Into the second month, the mean increased by 0.0622 to 3.6692. The posttest mean was 3.95, an increase of 0.281 (see Table 4.15).

**Table 4.15. Forgiveness Scores**

	<b>F1</b>	<b>F2</b>	<b>F3</b>	<b>F4</b>
N	31	29	26	28
Mean	3.33	3.62	3.67	3.95
Median	3.47	3.93	3.93	3.97
Std. Deviation	.79	.75	.82	.66
Minimum	1.40	1.87	1.80	2.00
Maximum	4.53	4.87	4.93	5.00

Twenty-seven participants’ test data were considered. One participant withdrew several days after commencing the experiment, giving the reason that the pain she was experiencing from conflicts with her father was too painful to contemplate forgiveness. Three participants’ survey returns could not be used as they had cited different offenses and persons with whom they had conflict at each test. I was unable to measure change in their ability to forgive.

Of the twenty-seven responses considered, twenty-one showed positive changes towards forgiveness. Five showed positive change of more than 1 point on the Likert scale from pretest to posttest. Twelve had positive change of between 0.5 and 1 point on the Likert scale. Four showed a change of less than 0.5 points on the Likert scale.

Six respondents had negative changes towards forgiveness from pretest to posttest. One had negative change of more than 1 point on the Likert scale. Five showed a negative change of less than 0.5 points on the Likert scale.

**Forgiveness Likelihood**

The Forgiveness Likelihood scale rose by 0.1621 one month after the commencement of the experiment. Standard deviation increased by 0.1. The scale increased by 0.234 in the second month, and at posttest, increased by a further 0.17 (see Table 4.16).

**Table 4.16. Forgiveness Likelihood Scores**

	<b>FL1</b>	<b>FL2</b>	<b>FL3</b>	<b>FL4</b>
N	24	27	24	25
Mean	2.91	3.07	3.30	3.48
Median	2.95	3.00	3.25	3.60
Std. Deviation	.72	.82	.89	.86
Minimum	1.70	1.40	1.50	1.90
Maximum	4.50	5.00	4.90	5.00

**Spiritual Well-Being**

The Spiritual Well-Being index increased by 0.19 one month after commencement of the experiment. The standard deviation decreased by 0.04. On the

second month, the index rose by 0.12, and standard deviation rose by 0.014. At posttest, the index increased by 0.086. Standard deviation rose by 0.18 (see Table 4.17).

**Table 4.17. Spiritual Well-Being Scores**

	<b>SWB1</b>	<b>SWB2</b>	<b>SWB3</b>	<b>SWB4</b>
N	28	28	25	25
Mean	4.78	4.97	5.09	5.17
Median	4.80	5.08	5.00	5.30
Minimum	3.30	3.85	3.80	3.60
Maximum	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.90
Std. Deviation	.68	.64	.65	.83

### **Correlations**

The measure of correlation indicates whether a correlation exists between variables. This measure cannot indicate causation. In studying correlations, the researcher is able to tell if two or more variables are correlated but is unable to ascertain if one variable caused the corresponding variation in the other variable.

### **Spiritual Well-Being, Forgiveness, and Likelihood of Forgiveness**

At the pretest, a positive correlation existed between forgiveness and spiritual well-being (correlation=0.673, significant at the 0.01 level). Correlation between actual forgiveness and the likelihood of forgiveness was not significant. Negative correlation was recorded between spiritual well-being and the likelihood of forgiveness (see Table 4.18).

**Table 4.18. Correlations of Forgiveness, Forgiveness Likelihood, and Spiritual Well-Being Pretest**

		<b>F1</b>	<b>FL1</b>	<b>SWB1</b>
<b>F1</b>	Pearson Correlation	1.000	.323	.673
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.	.062	.000**
	N	31	24	28
<b>FL1</b>	Pearson Correlation	.323	1.000	-.043
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.062	.	.426
	N	24	24	21
<b>SWB1</b>	Pearson Correlation	.673	-.043	1.000
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000**	.426	.
	N	28	21	28

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

One month after the commencement of the experiment, correlation between spiritual well-being and forgiveness was significant at the 0.01 level, and correlation between spiritual well-being and likelihood of forgiveness was significant at the 0.05 level. Correlation between forgiveness and the likelihood of forgiveness was significant at the 0.01 level (see Table 4.19).

**Table 4.19. Correlations of Forgiveness, Forgiveness Likelihood, and Spiritual Well-Being Month One**

		<b>F2</b>	<b>FL2</b>	<b>SWB2</b>
<b>F2</b>	Pearson Correlation	1.000	.577	.633
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.	.001**	.000**
	N	29	26	28
<b>FL2</b>	Pearson Correlation	.577	1.000	.414
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.001**	.	.020*
	N	26	27	25
<b>SWB2</b>	Pearson Correlation	.633	.414	1.000
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000**	.020*	.
	N	28	25	28

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

Two months into the experiment, correlations among forgiveness, likelihood of forgiveness, and spiritual well-being were significant at the 0.01 levels (see Table 4.20).

**Table 4.20. Correlation of Forgiveness, Forgiveness Likelihood, and Spiritual Well-Being Month Two**

		<b>F3</b>	<b>FL3</b>	<b>SWB3</b>
<b>F3</b>	Pearson Correlation	1.000	.543	.734
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.	.005**	.000**
	N	26	22	24
<b>FL3</b>	Pearson Correlation	.543	1.000	.647
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.005**	.	.000**
	N	22	24	23
<b>SWB3</b>	Pearson Correlation	.734	.647	1.000
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000**	.000**	.
	N	24	23	25

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

At posttest, correlations among spiritual well-being, forgiveness, and the likelihood of forgiveness were significant at the 0.01 levels (see Table 4.21).

**Table 4.21. Correlation of Forgiveness, Forgiveness Likelihood, and Spiritual Well-Being Posttest**

		<b>F4</b>	<b>FL4</b>	<b>SWB4</b>
<b>F4</b>	Pearson Correlation	1.000	.612	.690
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.	.001**	.000**
	N	28	24	25
<b>FL4</b>	Pearson Correlation	.612	1.000	.522
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.001**	.	.006**
	N	24	25	22
<b>SWB4</b>	Pearson Correlation	.690	.522	1.000
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000**	.006**	.
	N	25	22	25

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

**Effects of Spiritual Disciplines on Spiritual Well-Being, Forgiveness, and Likelihood of Forgiveness**

On the pretest, correlations between the disciplines of devotions, meditation, and prayer, and participants’ spiritual well-being were significant at the 0.05 levels. No significant correlations existed among the disciplines and forgiveness and likelihood of forgiveness (see Table 4.22).

**Table 4.22. Correlation of Prayer and Devotions with Forgiveness, Forgiveness Likelihood, and Spiritual Well-Being Pretest**

		<b>F1</b>	<b>FL1</b>	<b>SWB1</b>
<b>How regular are your devotions 1?</b>	Correlation Coefficient	.280	.097	.387
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.063	.326	.021*
	N	31	24	28
<b>What form of meditation do you take 2?</b>	Correlation Coefficient	-.118	-.039	.441
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.271	.427	.012*
	N	29	24	26
<b>How frequently do you pray every day 1?</b>	Correlation Coefficient	-.065	.206	.320
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.365	.167	.048*
	N	31	24	28

\* Correlation is significant at the .05 level (1-tailed).

At one month, correlation between regularity of devotions, and forgiveness and spiritual well-being was significant at the 0.01 levels (see Table 4.23). Correlation between regularity of devotions and willingness to forgive was less significant at 0.084.

**Table 4.23. Correlation of Prayer and Devotions with Forgiveness, Forgiveness Likelihood, and Spiritual Well-Being Month One**

		<b>F2</b>	<b>FL2</b>	<b>SWB2</b>
<b>How regular are your devotions 2?</b>	Correlation Coefficient	.512	.273	.519
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.002**	.084	.002**
	N	29	27	28
<b>What form of meditation do you take 2?</b>	Correlation Coefficient	-.046	-.140	.174
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.408	.248	.193
	N	28	26	27
<b>How frequently do you pray every day 2?</b>	Correlation Coefficient	.171	.219	.174
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.188	.137	.188
	N	29	27	28

\* Correlation is significant at the .05 level (1-tailed).  
 \*\* Correlation is significant at the .01 level (1-tailed).

At month two, correlations among regularity of devotions and forgiveness and spiritual well-being were significant at the 0.05 and 0.01 levels respectively. Meditation and frequency of prayer were significantly correlated with spiritual well-being at the 0.05 levels (see Table 4.24).



**Table 4.24. Correlation of Prayer and Devotions with Forgiveness, Forgiveness Likelihood, and Spiritual Well-Being Month Two**

		<b>F3</b>	<b>FL3</b>	<b>SWB3</b>
<b>How regular are your devotions 3?</b>		.420	.338	.537
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.016*	.053	.003**
	N	26	24	25
<b>What form of meditation do you take 3?</b>		.161	.026	.366
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.220	.453	.039*
	N	25	23	24
<b>How frequently do you pray every day 3?</b>		.302	.261	.398
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.067	.109	.025*
	N	26	24	25

\*\* Correlation is significant at the .01 level (1-tailed).

\* Correlation is significant at the .05 level (1-tailed).

At posttest, regularity of devotions and frequency of prayer were significantly correlated with spiritual well-being at the 0.01 levels (see Table 4.25).

**Table 4.25. Correlation of Prayer and Devotions with Forgiveness, Forgiveness Likelihood, and Spiritual Well-Being Posttest**

		<b>F4</b>	<b>FL4</b>	<b>SWB4</b>
<b>How regular are your devotions 4?</b>	Correlation Coefficient	.199	.247	.581
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.155	.117	.001**
	N	28	25	25
<b>What form of meditation do you take 4?</b>	Correlation Coefficient	.288	.283	.188
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.072	.090	.189
	N	27	24	24
<b>How frequently do you pray every day 4?</b>	Correlation Coefficient	.394	.246	.461
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.019*	.118	.010**
	N	28	25	25

\*\* Correlation is significant at the .01 level (1-tailed).

No significant correlation existed among the disciplines of journaling and attendance at small groups, and forgiveness, willingness to forgive, and spiritual well-being from pretest through posttest.

### **Summary Findings of Journal Entries**

The journal entries of four participants whose forgiveness test scores showed positive change of more than one point on the Likert scale were evaluated and summarized. The themes observed in these four journals were either more pronounced in these journals than in others or were found exclusively in these journals.

### **Common Themes in Journal Entries of Participants with High Positive Change towards Forgiveness**

A passionate yearning for the subjective experience of the presence of God was evident in each of the four journals. Participants echoed cries of ecstasy in, or of longing for, the presence of God. One participant recorded having wept uncontrollably as the “presence of the Lord came over me.” Another participant recorded that “there were

times when I would ask for nothing except to be in your presence.” One other participant prayed to be taken beyond serving God to “be where your presence resides.”

Loving and being loved by God was another theme recorded in the journals of the participants who were most able to forgive their offenders. One participant journaled his longing: “O that I may experience His love in all its fullness!” Another prayed that God would grant him a “greater appreciation of your love.” Drawing close to God was important to two participants, as closeness to God would prevent them from substituting material things for their love for God.

A corollary to being in God’s presence and loving God was the longing for God to be revealed so that the participants could obey him. The journals revealed the participants longing to “follow Christ,” to “turn our eyes upon Jesus,” and to have God “as our constant guide.” The desired knowledge of God was not merely cognitive. One participant prayed that his “head-knowledge would head down south to his heart.” Others desired an affective knowledge of God, to “see people and things and situations through Jesus’ eyes” and to “love as Jesus loved.” I observed the participants’ yearning for the presence of God brought about the willingness to obey at great personal cost.

Trust and surrender were also common themes. One participant defined surrender to God as “when you rely on God to work things out instead of trying to manipulate others, force your agenda, and control the situation. You do not edge others out, demand your rights, and you are not self-serving.” Each participant acknowledged his or her struggles with completely trusting God and surrendering to him. Nevertheless, they prayed to trust God more. One participant testified that God had always proven faithful yet knew that as he grew older, each succeeding challenge would get more difficult.

Another testified how his fears about how life would turn out if he surrendered to God were fading away.

Each of the participants who had forgiven much was also very conscious of his or her sin and weaknesses. Rather than focusing on the faults of their offenders, the participants were more concerned with being transformed by God. Peppered throughout their journals were acknowledgements of their sinfulness and pleas for God to cleanse, purify, and transform them. One participant who had earlier in his journal expressed anger and contempt towards Christians who misbehaved, journaled later, "I need look no further than myself to realize that we all live in a fallen world."

### **Summary of Significant Findings**

1. Significant, positive change was observed on the Forgiveness scale over the period of the experiment.
2. Significant, positive change was observed in the Willingness to Forgive scale over the period of the experiment.
3. Significant, positive change was observed in the Spiritual Well-Being scale over the period of the experiment.
4. Highly significant and positive correlation existed among spiritual well-being, forgiveness, and willingness to forgive. A participant whose spiritual well-being was high was more likely to be more forgiving and willing to forgive than one whose spiritual well-being was lower.
5. Regularity of devotions and frequency of prayer were significantly and positively correlated with spiritual well-being.

6. Those who experienced a greater ability to forgive had the following common traits:
  - a. They longed for and enjoyed the experience of being in God's presence,
  - b. They desired to love God and be loved by him,
  - c. In their love for God, they wanted God to guide them constantly and to reveal himself to them. Implicit in their desire was the willingness to obey regardless of the cost,
  - d. Each was learning to trust God and to surrender to him; and,
  - e. Each participant was more conscious of his or her sin than of those of others.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION**

I started this project because I realized how unforgiveness in one relationship could adversely affect other relationships. My experience with my father showed me that unforgiveness on my part had pervaded all other relationships I had my relationships with my wife and child, my relationship with my mother and brother, and my relationships with those in authority. As a chaplain in prison, I observed many prisoners attributed their lives of violence, crime, and substance abuse to their broken relationships with their parents. I realized that unforgiveness had the power to destroy the lives of persons who were unable to forgive.

I wanted to find out if ways existed to help persons forgive. In the fields of psychology and counseling, several intervention models were available. Notwithstanding, I wanted to find a way to help persons forgive without requiring them to undergo intensive and expensive counseling. I searched for ways to help the average person in the church pews or the average person behind bars and their spouses and children find the ability to forgive. I wanted to know how God was involved in the process of forgiveness.

I knew theoretically that spiritual disciplines would draw a person closer to God and that intimacy with God would bring about the constructs of forgiveness such as humility, a sense of security and a diminution of anxiety, and empathy. I wanted to know if the practice of spiritual disciplines could indeed help persons come to offer forgiveness to those who had offended them. The purpose of the project was to determine the correlation between the practice of the spiritual disciplines of meditation, prayer,

journaling, and participation in small groups and a person's ability and tendency to forgive.

### **Major Findings**

The data from the research indicated the following findings.

#### **Results for Research Question #1**

Fear and anxiety are at the center of unforgiveness and estranged relationships (Sandage 30): fear of trusting persons who may prove to be unworthy of trust, fear of being robbed of life's limited resources, and fear of being overcome by another, thus losing one's own significance.

Participants were asked to mention a person who had wronged them and to describe the offense. The most common offense cited by participants is betrayal by friends. None of the participants cited offenses committed by strangers, as offenses that caused much pain. Instead the relationships that caused pain were relationships of trust, that of friends. Unless the offense was life threatening, offenses by strangers did not inflict enduring pain. Rather, the relationship conflicts that caused much emotional agony were those involving persons whom participants trusted. The findings reveal that an offense that undermines trust, in a relationship of trust, brings about much suffering. Each person is created with the need for trustworthy and faithful communion with others. If someone breaks faith, forgiveness is difficult when victims do not know if the offender will break faith again (Shults 173-75).

Betrayal and backstabbing in the work environment was the next most common relational conflict cited. The work place is where persons obtain the goods they deem important. Goods such as material possessions, promotions, and adulation are much

sought after and fiercely competed for. When one loses out on the goods because of competition from a colleague, the pain of loss may be agonizing. The experience is threatening and brings about fears that one may once again be deprived of one's significant goods. The fear that someone else will acquire these goods at another's expense leads to ethical anxiety (Shults 189).

The third and deepest fear is ontological anxiety. Within each person is a longing for transcendence, a desire to be in a future reality where that person belongs in harmonious relationships with others. Residing in the same person, however, is a corresponding fear that he or she will be annihilated, violently destroyed, or absorbed so that the individual loses the particularity of existence. Being human, the individual lacks the "metaphysical weight to establish himself in the systems of the lived world" (Shults 206). On the other hand, one cannot suppress one's longing to belong to a glorious future. Persons are faced with a dilemma: a longing for future glory and a dread of future annihilation. Abuse is the act of one person attempting to devalue another. Abuse brings about ontological anxiety, the fear that one may ultimately lose one's dignity and personhood in the hands of the abuser. The findings reveal that abuse by parents, bosses, and colleagues was the third most common relational conflict in which participants had difficulty forgiving.

The findings related to research question one are consistent with the theory that anxiety is at the center of unforgiveness.

## **Results for Research Question #2**

Most of the participants were already practicing the spiritual disciplines of meditating on Scripture and prayer prior to the experiment. No significant changes were



observed after the experiment commenced. Notwithstanding, the journals reveal that a great deal of cognitive and affective changes took place in the course of the experiment. The changes in cognition and affect are discussed further in the section dealing with research question 3.

Journaling was new to many of the participants. Even those who journaled prior to the experiment generally kept journal entries of expenses rather than of experiences and thoughts.

### **Results for Research Question #3**

Significant correlation was observed between participants' ability to forgive their offenders and their spiritual well-being. The findings show that persons who had grown in their ability to forgive had also grown in their spiritual well-being. As people grow secure in the love of God in Christ Jesus, healing of past hurts and the assuaging of anxieties take place. Epistemic anxiety occurs because humans value themselves according to their relations with others. Persons need to know and be known by others in faithful relationships. Epistemic anxiety arises when humans are not assured their relations with others will not end in betrayal and the diminution of their selves. Only when persons find their identity in relation to God can they be at peace (Shults 179). As Christians grow in the Christian faith, they learn not to depend on their own epistemic power to secure their identity. By finding their identity in the Father of Jesus Christ, Christians are enabled to become vulnerable and to forgive. They no longer need to withhold forgiveness as a way of protecting themselves (178).

Ethical anxiety is largely due to persons not being able to secure all they deem to be good for them. They act in ways so as to secure things that can provide them with the

“good life.” Because the goods that they seek are finite, they struggle with their neighbors and become anxious when they perceive that their chances of attaining all that they desire are slipping away.

Christians who have given up control of their lives receive from God a life that is infinitely secure in divine love. Christians become confident in the knowledge that God gives to them without limit. They gradually cease to compete with others for finite goods and are enabled to be vulnerable to their neighbors (Shults 189-97).

Ontological anxiety is the human fear that if individuals were to absorb the sins of others, their lives would be destroyed in the process (Shults 209). Coming into God’s presence dissolves persons’ ontological anxiety. In the New Testament, salvation is described as sharing in divine glory. The New Testament promises a life of glory where nothing, not even death, can separate from divine love.

When Christians have the assurance of their present and future with God, they no longer fear the destruction of their personhood by others. They are thus freed to absorb in their own beings the consequences of other persons’ sin without passing those consequences on to others. They are freed to forgive, to create space and time for the other to move towards wholeness and salvation (Shults 206-11).

As one moves towards God, one becomes increasingly assured of God’s protection and providence. Epistemic, ethical, and ontological anxieties are assuaged, and forgiveness becomes possible. As one’s spiritual well-being improves, one is better able to forgive.

The findings also reveal that participants who grew in forgiving specific persons who had offended them also grew in forgivingness, the general disposition to forgive.

Fundamentally, Christian forgiveness does not aim simply at absolving individual guilt but at the restoration of broken communion with God and with one another (Jones, Embodying Forgiveness xii). Forgiveness is not confined to specific isolated acts but becomes an embodied way of life (218). It is a way of life that grows into an ever-deepening friendship with God and others (xii). Within the embrace of God, persons learn to live without anxiety, freely risking themselves in living in joyful relations with God and neighbor (172). The findings in this project confirm the theory that Christian forgiveness goes beyond specific acts to becoming a way of life for the Christian.

The journal entries of four participants whose forgiveness test scores showed positive change of more than 1 point on the Likert scale were evaluated and are summarized below.

### **Common Themes in Journal Entries of Participants with High Positive Change towards Forgiveness**

Each of the four participants expressed an insatiable desire for intimacy with God. Their journal entries chronicled deep yearnings for God that eclipsed other needs and desires.

Loving and being loved by God was important to participants as closeness to God would prevent them from substituting material things for their love for God. Crysdale suggests that a deepening love and yearning for God is part of the transformation from unforgiveness to forgiveness. The Holy Spirit helps victims forgive by shifting their appetites. A taste of this deep desire stirs up power, courage, deeper yearnings, and the pursuit of this desire for communion with God: hunger overtakes fear. This shifting of appetites, in turn, opens persons up to insights they had previously avoided, and the new

insights shift the bases of their feelings and decisions (Crysdale 132-35). Deep yearnings for God replace fear with spiritual desire. Having had their fears assuaged and substituted with a longing to please God, victims are enabled to face their offenders compassionately.

As the four participants' yearning for God increased, so did their desire to obey God. The journals revealed the participants' willingness to follow Christ at great personal cost. This willingness to obey extended to the willingness to forgive even when to do so would be painful.

According to Enright, Gassin, and Wu's model of forgiveness, where the victim offers to forgive out of pressure to conform to the norms or requirements of moral and religious institutions, such forgiveness is incomplete as persons falling into these categories continue to hold on to feelings of hurt and anger.

Enright, Gassin, and Wu's model asserts that the influence of religion is below that of one's personal desire to forgive. Nevertheless, research shows that even though persons may feel compelled by their faith to forgive, they may still think that the beliefs of their religious community have a greater influence on their ability and willingness to forgive (McCullough, Sandage, and Worthington 71). Further, other researchers suggest that the construct of forgiveness cannot be formulated without placing great importance on religious and spiritual realities (Pargament and Rye 69, 72). The present research findings support the hypothesis that a victim is enabled willingly to obey spiritual authority to forgive when he or she views such obedience as spiritual reality.

Nevertheless, mere cognition does not enable victims to forgive. People do not have the resources to forgive others on their own. Divine forgiveness opens the

opportunity for them to share in God's grace, which provides infinite resources for human forgiveness (Shults 169). Beyond merely knowing that it was right to forgive, participants in this study prayed for a transformation of their perspectives and feelings, a change in cognition and affection.

Trust and surrender were also common themes. Each participant acknowledged his or her struggles with completely trusting God and surrendering to him. Nevertheless, they prayed to trust God more.

Each of the participants who had forgiven much was also very conscious of his or her sin and weaknesses. Rather than focusing on the faults of their offenders, the participants were more concerned with being transformed by God. Peppered throughout their journals were acknowledgements of their sinfulness and pleas for God to cleanse, purify, and transform them.

According to Worthington, empathy and the guilt and gratitude of humility create an aroused motivational state in people, enabling them to identify with the offenders and see the needs of the offenders (Worthington, "Pyramid Model" 125).

Humility involves three states: guilt, gratitude, and gift. Guilt is the realization that one is capable of both inflicting as well as desiring to inflict harm on others, including the offending person. When persons realize that they, too, are capable of inflicting similar or other harm, humility and empathic identification toward the offenders are enhanced. Gratitude is experienced when persons recall the times when they were forgiven and what that felt like. When the sense of gratitude is vividly recalled and elaborated, people's emotional state changes to one of joy, love, and positive emotions.

They attempt to project the good feelings to other persons (Worthington, “Pyramid Model” 125).

Those who experienced the greatest ability to forgive had the following common traits:

1. They longed for and enjoyed the experience of being in God’s presence.
2. They desired to love God and be loved by him.
3. In their love for God, they wanted God to guide them constantly and to reveal himself to them. Implicit in their desire was the willingness to obey regardless of the cost.
4. Each was learning to trust God and to surrender to him.
5. Each participant was more conscious of his or her sin than of those of others.

### **Unexpected Findings**

In the original project plan, ten persons who were participating in small groups or support groups were to be selected. The *prima facie* assumption was that participation in small groups or support groups would foster healing and hence bring about a greater tendency and ability to forgive. A miscommunication with the project manager in Singapore resulted in the selection of twenty-eight out of thirty-one participants being already in small groups. Data revealed no significant correlation among participation in small groups and the project participants’ spiritual well-being, tendency to forgive, or their ability to forgive.

The finding surfaces a possible problem with small groups. Of the twenty-eight participants who belonged in small groups, only eight shared with others their difficulties forgiving in the small groups. Even more alarming was the finding that only three shared and prayed with fellow members of their small groups over their issues with forgiveness.

Of the two participants who did not belong to small groups, both shared and prayed with others. While the sample size of two is too small to draw any conclusions, the findings suggest that participation in small groups does not foster transparency in its members. The tendency of small group dynamics to stifle transparency may explain the lack of significant correlation between participation in small groups and growth in forgiveness.

### **Weaknesses of the Study**

The study required participants to disclose a relational conflict they had recently encountered. I observed some participants had disclosed “presenting problem conflicts” that may not have been real conflicts. For example, one participant listed his conflict as one with a neighbor, yet in his journal he wrote extensively about his fear of his boss and the emotional turmoil he experienced whenever he had to deal with his boss. Mention of any conflict with his neighbor or a struggle with forgiving his neighbor occurred only once throughout the journal. Another participant, while stating her conflict to be with a friend, hinted in several journal entries that the real cause of pain was in her relationship with her father. Her conflict with her father appeared to be of far greater distress to her than her conflict with her friend. I surmised that the participant’s conflict with her father was too painful for her to use as a basis for evaluating changes in her willingness and ability to forgive. One weakness of this study was that the real conflict being experienced had not been identified by some of the participants.

Another observed weakness was that some of the conflicts disclosed might not have been of such a serious nature as to endure the duration of the experiment. Certain conflicts simply became of little or no significance with the passage of time; hence, I was unable to ascertain whether the participants’ improved ability and willingness to forgive

was due to his or her transformation or to a fading of memory and dulling of pain over time.

One design weakness was that the instructions to participants and the researcher-designed questionnaire had not been pretested prior to being sent to the participants. While the Spiritual Well-Being, Forgiveness, and Likelihood of Forgiveness surveys were standard instruments, the instructions and researcher-designed questionnaire were not and should have been pretested.

### **Contribution to Research Methodology**

The use of journals in the experiment allowed me to understand the participants' journey into forgiveness and forgivingness. The pretest-posttest research model gave me a snapshot of the participants' ability and willingness to forgive at a specific point in time. A participant could, at the moment when he or she is answering the survey, be subjected to various intervening variables such as moods, social and physical environment, the events preceding the answering of the survey, or anticipated events. The journal, on the other hand, chronicled the participants' daily thoughts and emotions and gave insights into the factors fostering participants' transformation. As an example, a participant might be growing into forgiveness, but a chance unpleasant encounter with his or her offender a day before answering the survey may swing the answers towards unforgiveness. The journal revealed the context in which the survey was answered and provided reasons for the anomalous survey answers. The use of journaling in the study of transformation provided a fuller picture of the transformative process that was taking place in the participants' lives.

### **Further Studies**



The present study was based on devotions on prescribed texts, with researcher-designed guide questions and comments. Many of the meditation pieces directed the participants' thoughts to the constructs of forgiveness. One area for further study would be to examine the impact on forgiveness and forgivingness that various forms of meditation and types of devotional material have. Ascertaining if certain forms of meditation and genre of devotional material are more effective in fostering forgiveness and forgivingness than others would be useful.

Another area for further research would be to examine the characteristics of small groups that have a significant impact on forgiveness and forgivingness. The present study showed that participants' attendance at small group meetings had no significant impact on their ability and willingness to forgive. The data ostensibly contradicts the theory that the work of healing and reconciliation takes place within a community of believers (Jones, Embodying Forgiveness 163). From my observations as a pastor, many small groups, in fact, hinder healing, as members tend to present a false persona within the groups. The present data confirms the observations. Of twenty-eight participants who belong in small groups, only three shared about or requested prayer for their struggles with forgiveness. One further study could look into the factors in small group meetings that foster and those that hinder the development of forgivingness in persons.

### **Conclusion**

Reading the participants' journals was a sacred privilege as participants invited me into their inner sanctum and allowed me to gain insights into their emotions, thoughts, victories, and struggles. Through reading the journals, I discovered that many persons, while struggling with sin and unforgiveness, long to be intimate with God. The longing

for intimacy with God draws them deeper into surrendering to God and doing things they would not normally be inclined to do, such as forgiving persons who had offended them. I am convinced that as persons are drawn closer to God through the practice of spiritual disciplines, they will discover that intimacy with God removes their fears and opens the way for them to forgive and gain freedom for themselves as well as their offenders.

## APPENDIX A

### Letter to Participants in Set A

Dear

Thank you for participating in this study. This commitment on your part requires some sacrifice of time and effort and transparency. I hope that by participating in this study, you will benefit from the exercises and spiritual disciplines. Allow me to explain a little of what this study is intended to achieve.

#### Purpose of Study

This study is part of the dissertation that I am doing for the Doctor of Ministry programme. In this dissertation, I am trying to find out if, and in what ways, practicing certain spiritual disciplines will affect our tendency and ability to forgive. Jesus calls us to forgive our enemies. But those of us who have tried to be obedient know how difficult it is to forgive another person. In this study, I hope to find out a little more about how God helps us to do so. This information is important because when we know more about how God works in helping us forgive, we can be more intentional about allowing Him to work in our lives.

#### Procedure

In this study, I will ask you several questions concerning persons who have mistreated or offended you. I need you to answer honestly.

I will also ask you questions about how you do devotions, how you pray and read the Bible. Again, I will need you to answer as honestly as possible.

Then you will begin the experiment. You have been given a list of passages to read everyday. You have also been given a journal that you will have to fill daily.

Each week, or fortnight, you will also meet in your groups to share and pray over some of the thoughts that you have recorded in your journals. You will then record your feelings after your sharing in your journals.

Finally, at the end of one month, two months, and three and a half months, you will answer several more questions about your experiences.

#### Confidentiality and Anonymity

I recognize that for you to be absolutely honest in your answers and journaling, you will want to be assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Let me assure you that I will not be given any of your names, and the persons collecting your journals and answers will not be allowed to read your entries. Further, none of the details I read in the journals and answers will be disclosed, whether verbally or in writing. I will only use generalized data from your responses for my dissertation, and your journals and responses will be returned to you once my dissertation is complete.

For purposes of the experiment, I would be very happy to have an interview with you after the conclusion of this research. This will allow you to talk about your experiences and allow me to understand better the changes that were taking place during the experiment. If you wish to be interviewed, please indicate at the top of the journal that

you have been supplied with.

I thank you once again for participating in this study and pray that your experience in this will be enriching to you.

Yours in Christ,

Chiu Ming Li

## APPENDIX B

### Letter to Participants in Set B

Dear

Thank you for participating in this study. This commitment on your part requires some sacrifice of time and effort and transparency. I hope that by participating in this study, you will benefit from the exercises and spiritual disciplines. Allow me to explain a little of what this study is intended to achieve.

#### Purpose of Study

This study is part of the dissertation that I am doing for the Doctor of Ministry programme. In this dissertation, I am trying to find out if, and in what ways, practicing certain spiritual disciplines will affect our tendency and ability to forgive. Jesus calls us to forgive our enemies. But those of us who have tried to be obedient know how difficult it is to forgive another person. In this study, I hope to find out a little more about how God helps us to do so. This information is important because when we know more about how God works in helping us forgive, we can be more intentional about allowing Him to work in our lives.

#### Procedure

In this study, I will ask you several questions concerning persons who have mistreated or offended you. I need you to answer honestly.

I will also ask you questions about how you do devotions, how you pray and read the Bible. Again, I will need you to answer as honestly as possible.

Then you will begin the experiment. You have been given a list of passages to read everyday. You have also been given a journal that you will have to fill daily.

Finally, at the end of one month, two months, and three and a half months, you will answer several more questions about your experiences.

#### Confidentiality and Anonymity

I recognize that for you to be absolutely honest in your answers and journaling, you will want to be assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Let me assure you that I will not be given any of your names, and the persons collecting your journals and answers will not be allowed to read your entries. Further, none of the details I read in the journals and answers will be disclosed, whether verbally or in writing. I will only use generalized data from your responses for my dissertation, and your journals and responses will be returned to you once my dissertation is complete.

For purposes of the experiment, I would be very happy to have an interview with you after the conclusion of this research. This will allow you to talk about your experiences and allow me to understand better the changes that were taking place during the experiment. If you wish to be interviewed, please indicate at the top of the journal that you have been supplied with.

I thank you once again for participating in this study and pray that your experience in this will be enriching to you.

Yours in Christ,

Chiu Ming Li

## APPENDIX C

### Letter to Participants in Set C

Dear

Thank you for participating in this study. This commitment on your part requires some sacrifice of time and effort and transparency. Allow me to explain a little of what this study is intended to achieve.

#### Purpose of Study

This study is part of the dissertation that I am doing for the Doctor of Ministry programme. In this dissertation, I am trying to find out if, and in what ways, practicing certain spiritual disciplines will affect our tendency and ability to forgive. Jesus calls us to forgive our enemies. But those of us who have tried to be obedient know how difficult it is to forgive another person. In this study, I hope to find out a little more about how God helps us to do so. This information is important because when we know more about how God works in helping us forgive, we can be more intentional about allowing Him to work in our lives.

#### Procedure

In this study, I will ask you several questions concerning persons who have mistreated or offended you. I need you to answer honestly.

I will also ask you questions about how you do devotions, how you pray and read the Bible. Again, I will need you to answer as honestly as possible.

Since you are in the control group, you will not be participating in the “Spiritual Disciplines” portion of the research at this time. However I shall need you to answer the surveys again after one month, two months, and three and a half months.

When I have completed the study, I will share the information and results with you. I will also be available to help you develop strong devotional habits, if you wish.

#### Confidentiality and Anonymity

I recognize that for you to be absolutely honest in your answers, you will want to be assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Let me assure you that I will not be given any of your names, and the persons collecting your answers will not be allowed to read them. Further, none of the details I read in the answers will be disclosed, whether verbally or in writing. I will only use generalized data from your responses for my dissertation, and your responses will be returned to you once my dissertation is complete.

I thank you once again for participating in this study.

Yours in Christ,

Chiu Ming Li

## **APPENDIX D**

### **Instructions**

Thank you once again for participating in this research project. You have been given the following surveys in the package:

1. Devotional Habits Questionnaire,
2. Forgiveness Scale,
3. Forgiveness Likelihood Scale,
4. Spiritual Well-Being Scale,
5. Journal with Bible Passages.

Before you begin practicing the Spiritual Disciplines, please answer the questions in the first four surveys (Devotional Habits Questionnaire, Forgiveness Scale, Forgiveness Likelihood Scale, and Spiritual Well-Being Scale), place them in the attached self-addressed, stamped envelope, and return to April Khoo at Barker Road Methodist Church.

I shall be sending you the surveys again after one month, two months, and three and a half months. This is to monitor changes in your responses to the survey questions.

The journal comes with instructions on reading and prayer, as well as how and what to record in your journals. At the end of the two-month period, please seal the journal with tape and return it in the self-addressed, stamped envelope provided.

I hope that you will be enriched through this exercise.



**APPENDIX E****Devotional Habits Questionnaire**

Code:

1. How regularly do you read the Bible?
  - a. Daily
  - b. Between two to five times a week
  - c. Once a week
  - d. Less than once a week
  - e. Hardly ever
2. Describe in not more than four lines what you do with the passage you have read (e.g., think about it throughout the day, spend a few minutes thinking and praying about the passage, forget about it right away, etc.).
3. Do you pray
  - a. Throughout the day
  - b. At specific times (e.g., start or end of the day)
  - c. Specific times, several times in a day
  - d. When in need
  - e. Occasionally
  - f. Hardly ever
4. Have you kept a journal in the past six months?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
5. What do you record in your journals (facts, income and expenditure, feelings, experiences)?

## APPENDIX F

### The Forgiveness Scale

Code:

Think of someone who has wronged you in the past. Describe how you were wronged by that person (if you need additional space, please write at the back of this questionnaire, or insert a separate sheet. If you prefer to type your answer, please insert the typewritten answer).

Think of how you have responded or are responding to the person who has wronged or mistreated you. Indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements by circling **SA** for Strongly Agree

**A** for Agree

**N** for Neutral

**D** for Disagree

**SD** for Strongly Disagree

1. I can't stop thinking about how I was wronged by this person.

SA    A    N    D    SD

2. I wish for good things to happen to the person who wronged me.

SA    A    N    D    SD

3. I spend time thinking about ways to get back at the person who wronged me.

SA    A    N    D    SD

4. I feel resentful toward the person who wronged me.  
SA    A    N    D    SD
5. I avoid certain people and/or places because they remind me of the person who wronged me.  
SA    A    N    D    SD
6. I pray for the person who wronged me.  
SA    A    N    D    SD
7. If I encountered the person who wronged me I would feel at peace.  
SA    A    N    D    SD
8. This person's wrongful actions have kept me from enjoying life.  
SA    A    N    D    SD
9. I have been able to let go of my anger toward the person who wronged me.  
SA    A    N    D    SD
10. I become depressed when I think of how I was mistreated by this person.  
SA    A    N    D    SD
11. I think that many of the emotional wounds related to this person's wrongful actions have healed.  
SA    A    N    D    SD
12. I feel hatred whenever I think about the person who wronged me.  
SA    A    N    D    SD
13. I have compassion for the person who wronged me.  
SA    A    N    D    SD

14. I think my life is ruined because of this person's wrongful action.

SA    A    N    D    SD

15. I hope the person who wronged me is treated fairly by others in the future.

SA    A    N    D    SD

**APPENDIX G****Forgiveness Likelihood Scale**

Code:

Imagine the scenarios below happened to you. Based on the information provided, consider the likelihood that you would choose to forgive the person. Then, circle the response that is most true for you. The responses are coded as follows:

**EL** for Extremely Likely**FL** for Fairly Likely**SWL** for Somewhat Likely**SL** for Slightly Likely**NL** for Not at all Likely

1. You share something embarrassing about yourself to a friend who promises to keep the information confidential. However, the friend breaks his/her promise and proceeds to tell several people. What is the likelihood that you would choose to forgive your friend?

EL   FL   SWL   SL   NL

2. One of your friends starts a nasty rumor about you that is not true. As a result, people begin treating you worse than they have in the past. What is the likelihood that you would choose to forgive your friend?

EL   FL   SWL   SL   NL

3. Your significant other has just broken up with you, leaving you hurt and confused. You learn that the reason for the break up is that your significant other started dating a good friend of yours. What is the likelihood that you would choose to forgive your significant other?

EL FL SWL SL NL

4. A family member humiliates you in front of others by sharing a story about you that you did not want anyone to know. What is the likelihood that you would choose to forgive the family member?

EL FL SWL SL NL

5. Your significant other has a “one night stand” and becomes sexually involved with someone else. What is the likelihood that you would choose to forgive your significant other?

EL FL SWL SL NL

6. Your friend has been talking about you behind your back. When you confront this person, he/she denies it, even though you know that he/she is lying. What is the likelihood that you would choose to forgive your friend?

EL FL SWL SL NL

7. A friend borrows your most valued possession and then loses it. The friend refuses to replace it. What is the likelihood that you would choose to forgive your friend?

EL FL SWL SL NL

8. You tell an acquaintance about a job that you hope to be hired for. Without telling you, the acquaintance applies and gets the job for him/herself. What is the likelihood that you would choose to forgive your acquaintance?

EL FL SWL SL NL

9. A stranger breaks into your house and steals a substantial sum of money from you. What is the likelihood that you would choose to forgive the stranger?

EL FL SWL SL NL

10. You accept someone's invitation to attend a formal dance. However, this person breaks his/her commitment to take you and goes to the event with someone whom he/she finds more attractive. What is the likelihood that you would forgive this person?

EL FL SWL SL NL

## APPENDIX H

### Spiritual Well-Being Scale

Code:

For each of the following statements *circle* the choice that best indicates the extent of your agreement or disagreement as it describes your personal experience:

SA = Strongly Agree

MA = Moderately Agree

A = Agree

D = Disagree

MD = Moderately Disagree

SD = Strongly Disagree

1. I don't find much satisfaction in private prayer with God.  
SA    MA    A    D    MD    SD
2. I don't know who I am, where I came from, or where I am going.  
SA    MA    A    D    MD    SD
3. I believe that God loves me and cares about me.  
SA    MA    A    D    MD    SD
4. I feel that life is a positive experience.  
SA    MA    A    D    MD    SD
5. I believe that God is impersonal and not interested in my daily situations.  
SA    MA    A    D    MD    SD



6. I feel unsettled about my future.  
SA MA A D MD SD
7. I have a personally meaningful relationship with God.  
SA MA A D MD SD
8. I feel very fulfilled and satisfied with life.  
SA MA A D MD SD
9. I don't get much personal strength and support from my God.  
SA MA A D MD SD
10. I feel a sense of well-being about the direction my life is headed in.  
SA MA A D MD SD
11. I believe that God is concerned about my problems.  
SA MA A D MD SD
12. I don't enjoy much about life.  
SA MA A D MD SD
13. I don't have a personally satisfying relationship with God.  
SA MA A D MD SD
14. I feel good about my future.  
SA MA A D MD SD
15. My relationship with God helps me not to feel lonely.  
SA MA A D MD SD
16. I feel that life is full of conflict and unhappiness.  
SA MA A D MD SD

17. I feel most fulfilled when I am in close communion with God.

SA MA A D MD SD

18. Life doesn't have much meaning.

SA MA A D MD SD

19. My relationship with God contributes to my sense of well-being.

SA MA A D MD SD

20. I believe there is some real purpose for my life.

SA MA A D MD SD

## APPENDIX I

### Journal

Code \_\_\_\_\_

I waive my right to remain anonymous  
and would be happy to speak to you about  
my experiences. \_\_\_\_\_

(Please sign on the line if this is so)

Each passage is to be read for 2 days. Record your thoughts, emotions, experiences, and memories in the journal. You must have at least one entry for each passage, though you may have more.

As you read, place yourself in the story or as a by-stander. Explore how you **feel** as you witness the incident or listen to Jesus' teaching. It is especially important to ask, "How do I feel as I read this passage?" Then ask yourself why you feel that way. Sometimes you may not even feel anything as you read. That is important, too; record it and ask yourself why you are emotionless about the passage.

After you have read the passage, try to picture the scene in your mind. For example, if you are reading the story of the officer and his dying son in John 4: 43-53, picture yourself as the anxious parent. Try to relate with how the officer in the story might have felt. Read the passage again the following day, adding more detail to your mind picture.

Replay the pictures in your mind several times throughout the day. You may wish to set aside certain times in the day to do so. For example, you may wish to do this as you travel to and from work and before you sleep.

As you go through the day, think of what the passage means to you in each area of your life. For example, in the passage mentioned above, think of what it means to take God at his Word in your work, or when you are taking care of your children, or when relating to colleagues or family. Then ask yourself again how you feel as you do so.

Record your thoughts in your journal. When you write in your journal, write in the form of a prayer: try starting each journal entry with, "Dear God." Your journal is no longer just a record of your thoughts, but also a prayer to God.

Record in your journal your thoughts and feelings about any conflict you encounter during the day. Express yourself, your anger, joy, sadness, guilt, shame, hope, and despair in the form of a prayer.

Each week as you meet with your small group, share some of your entries with the other members of the group and pray together over them. After the meeting, record your thoughts and feelings about the meeting.

I have attached some comments and questions for each passage. These are intended merely as a guide for reflection, and you are free to use them or to ignore them.

Days 1 & 2

John 1:16-18

Verse 16 says that we have received blessings after blessings from the fullness of God's grace. Do you feel that you have been very blessed by God? Talk to God about this in your journal.

Days 3 & 4

John 1:35-51

Jesus did not come to save the world in an impersonal way. He called people to follow Him so that He could show them the way. Do you remember when and how Jesus called you to follow Him?

Days 5 & 6

John 2:1-11

This was an "unnecessary miracle." There was no life-threatening situation that Jesus was dealing with. He simply did this to bring celebration to a situation that was potentially dampening. Can you recall some occasions when God simply blessed you when you could have faced a miserable situation?

Days 7 & 8

John 2:12-22

Jesus' one passion is to remove all obstacles so that people can truly know God as He is. He wants to do the same for us, too. Ask Jesus to remove the obstacles in your life that stand in the way of truly knowing God.

Days 9 & 10

John 3:1-15

Jesus tells Nicodemus, "You won't be able to see that God is King unless you lose the baggage you have accumulated over the years" (paraphrased).

Do you believe that Jesus can remove your baggage of prejudice, fear, resentment, defensiveness, rage, etc.? He can make you into a new person, a person who has been born again.

Days 11 & 12

John 3:16-21

God gave His precious Son to a world that chose darkness over light. How do you think God felt when He gave His most precious to people who were neither worthy of His gift, nor appreciated it? He gave with just the hope that some would receive His gift and be grateful. Have you ever considered doing good to someone who does not deserve it and may not even appreciate it? And you do it with just a hope that they may someday be thankful for your gift?

Days 13 & 14

John 4:1-14

Jesus gave an incredible offer to someone who, in the eyes of society, did not deserve a second glance. Have you ever felt that God would leave you out from His blessings and from the gift of His Holy Spirit? Have you felt that some people ought to be left out of God's blessing and love? Do you think that God would leave you out? Or them?

Days 15 & 16

John 4:43-53

Jesus told the official to "go" with the assurance that his dying son would be healed. The official "took Jesus at His word." Do you think it was easy for the official to take Jesus at His word? Why? Is it difficult for you to trust Jesus with matters most important to you? Talk to Jesus about your answer.

Days 17 & 18

John 5:1-9

For 38 years, this invalid was a loser. For 38 years, this man lost to the competition in the matter that meant the most to him—his healing. Jesus showed that the "losers" in this world are important to Him. The man who had lost to the competition for 38 years discovered God who watches over him. What is your response to the fact that God keeps a look out for "losers"?

Days 19 & 20

John 5:9-18

A miracle had taken place right in front of the Pharisees, but they did not see it. They only saw that the law had been broken. Have you noticed lately the miracles that God has performed in your life and the lives of those around you? Or have you, like the Pharisees, been blinded by your faults and the faults of others?

Days 21 & 22

John 5:19-23

God the Father loves the Son and demonstrates His love by showing the Son all that He is doing. The Son, in return, imitates the Father. Modeling and imitation are what characterizes the deep love between God the Father and God the Son. Jesus also sets for us a model of how to live, and calls us to imitate Him. A disciple is one who commits himself or herself to imitate Christ. Will you commit yourself to live life as Jesus lived?

Days 23 & 24

John 6:1-15

As we follow Jesus, He places us in situations that seem impossible—like feeding 5000 people with two loaves and five fishes. But He is waiting to show us a miracle. Are you facing a seemingly insurmountable problem? Have you talked to God about it? Perhaps it is a miracle waiting for your attention.

Days 25 & 26

John 6:35-40

We all fight and compete for things that “promise” to satisfy us: money, power, position, property. Perhaps you are presently fighting with someone over some of these things. Jesus promises that if we believe in Him, we will have the one thing that will completely satisfy us. Our craving for other things will fade away. Thomas Merton says, “Why should I fear anything that cannot rob me of God, and why should I desire anything that cannot give me possession of Him?”

Days 27 & 28

**John 7:37-39**

Jesus publicly offers the gift of the Holy Spirit, whose presence is like “streams of living water flowing from within” those who are dry and thirsty. It is a gift offered to all without exception. Those who take Jesus at His Word and ask for the Holy

Spirit will receive.

Days 29 & 30

John 7:45-52

The guards and the common people sensed that there was something special about Jesus because of the way He spoke. The Pharisees and chief priests missed the opportunity to realize this truth because they were proud and despised the common people. They silenced the guards and told them they were not qualified to know the truth.

Have you allowed yourself to be prevented from knowing Jesus intimately because you are not a pastor or do not have a theological education and think you are not qualified to know Him?

Days 31 & 32

John 8:3-11

In this story, Jesus demonstrated that a person who has done something bad is not condemned. More than that, He affirmed that she could change and leave her life of sin. Do you feel that you are condemned because of certain sins and habits like rage, lust, alcohol or drug addiction, or jealousy? Jesus shows that no one is ever condemned to remain in a life of sin. On the other hand, have you considered some people as incapable of change and written them off? Perhaps you would like to pray for these persons and see God work a miracle in their lives.

Days 33 & 34

John 8:12-20

Although Jesus knew that very soon He would be betrayed and would die a shameful and painful death, He was not afraid because He knew where He came from and where He was going. Jesus promises all who follow Him that they, too, will see clearly. One reason why we are so easily threatened by situations and by others is that we are afraid that situations and people will rob us of our dreams and ambitions. But if we have the assurance that no matter who or what comes our way, we will inevitably end gloriously, our anxieties will fade. Talk to God about the people by whom you feel threatened or hurt, and ask for His assurance that you will nevertheless end your life gloriously.

Days 35 & 36

John 8:31-38

Jesus says we are slaves to sin. When we sin, we often find ourselves saying, "I

couldn't help it. I just had to do it," or, "I lost control." Our lives are actually governed by sin. When we follow Jesus, He will show us the truth—about God, about ourselves, and about others. Then we will be set free to live the good life, no longer tormented by sin.

Days 37 & 38

John 10:11-15

We probably have had bad experiences with people telling us that they are making sacrifices for us, only to discover that they had ulterior motives. We may have done this to others, too. Jesus, on the other hand, serves us **to His detriment**. He dies a cruel death so that we may have life. Are you tired of trusting people, having been betrayed and "played out" too often? Would you entrust your life to Christ, who would rather die than see us harmed? Would you also learn to love as Christ loved, sacrificing yourself for others, **with no strings attached**?

Days 39 & 40

John 12:1-8

Mary was extravagant in an almost reckless way. The perfume, which she "wastefully" poured on Jesus' feet, was worth one year's wages. She was not rich, yet she squandered lavishly on Jesus. Contemporary psychologists say that her conduct was evidence of psychological and spiritual health. She was a person set free to love. When was the last time you were madly extravagant with God? Or are you calculative with Him and with others?

Days 41 & 42

John 12:20-29

Jesus knows that shortly He will fall into the hands of evil men who will seek to destroy Him and all that He has done. Rather than feeling threatened, He sees glory beyond this. More than anything else, most of us fear that all the good that we have done and accumulated over the years may be destroyed by the sins and evil of others. The thought that someone with bad intentions may undo all the good that we have ever done terrifies us. Will you let God assure you that nothing can destroy you or take you out of God's loving care?

Days 43 & 44

John 13:1-17

In a gathering of disciples where no one wanted to serve each other, Jesus became the servant. What is it to you, to know that your king comes to you as your



servant? How would you respond to His call to do the lowliest work for those around you, some of whom may be your rivals?

Days 45 & 46

John 13:34 & 35

The mark of the followers of Christ is their love for each other. Do you want to bear the mark of a follower of Christ?

Days 47 & 48

John 15:5-8

Christ tells His disciples to “remain in me, because outside of me, you can do nothing.” What does it mean to “remain in Christ”? Perhaps to “stay with Him,” “to rely on Him,” “to be present with Him in all your activities and situations”? Would your life be very different if Christ is present in all your relationships, activities, and encounters? What would it be like?

Days 49 & 50

John 15:18-21

Jesus warns His followers to expect the world to hate them. Facing rejection should come as no surprise to followers of Christ. Would you feel less offended by persons who reject you if you know beforehand that this is to be expected and that Jesus, nevertheless, loves them?

Days 51 & 52

John 18:15-18, 25-27

Jesus’ most loved disciple disappoints Him by denying any association with Him. Have you ever been disappointed by someone you trusted, loved, or respected? Describe one incident and how you felt. Have you ever disappointed someone who trusted you? Describe the incident.

Days 53 & 54

John 18:19-22; 37-19: 3

Jesus is bullied: by religious leaders, political leaders, and common soldiers. Jesus is bullied, exploited, and shown neither mercy nor justice. Have you ever been bullied by people in authority and still feel the sting of the offense? Describe the incident and record how you felt then and how you feel now. Compare your story

with Jesus'. Have you also bullied someone under your authority? Describe the incident. What is the Holy Spirit telling you about this?

Days 55 & 56

John 19:28-30

Jesus' mission is now complete, and He "gave up His Spirit." Jesus' mission was to bring peace to the world by reconciling men and women with God and with each other. This mission could only be accomplished by His being betrayed and deserted by His friends, rejected by those He had helped, and bullied by those in authority. What is God's mission for your life? What can you expect to experience as you accomplish this mission?

Days 57 & 58

John 21:1-13

Each of Jesus' disciples had failed Him and none of them was worthy to be His disciples. Even though Jesus had been raised to life and was victorious. The disciples could no longer hope to be allowed to follow Him. So they returned to their former jobs. But Jesus not only came back for them, He blessed the work they were doing by giving them a large catch of fish. More than that, He did something very tender: He prepared breakfast for them. Do you sometimes feel you are useless to God because you have failed Him? Can you believe that He now comes to call you, to bless you, and to serve you? Will you do the same for someone who has failed you?

Days 59 & 60

John 21:15-19

Peter is now called to demonstrate his love for Jesus by loving others. Three times, Jesus linked caring for others (tend to my sheep) to loving Him. The love that Peter was called to have for Jesus' sheep would lead him to a painful death. Peter was told that there would be no limit for his love for Christ, and, consequently, his love for others. His love for them would be unto death. Jesus then repeats His first call to Peter: "Follow me!" The call to follow Jesus is a call to love others as Jesus loved, and unto death. Does this truth change the way you relate to others?

Code \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX J**  
**SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS**

Dear participant,

Having read your responses, I realize that I had omitted some important questions that will be of help to my research. I will appreciate your answers to them.

I am grateful for your earlier frank responses and pray that the exercise has helped you in some way, as it has helped me in my research.

1. What is your Age?

2. What is your gender?      Male                  Female

3. What is your marital status?      Single                  Married                  Divorced

Widowed

4. From the time you started the experiment/survey to the end of it, did you:

a. share with person/s in your small group, some of your struggles concerning forgiveness,      Yes                  No

If your answer is “yes,” about how many times?

b. pray with someone concerning the person(s) you had difficulty forgiving.

Yes                  No

If your answer is “yes,” about how often?

c. discuss insights that you had from your journal or the devotions.

Yes                  No

If your answer is “yes,” how frequently?

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