

Guided Private Reflection on Forgiveness and *Agape* Love

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**Presented at the International Educational Conference
on *Agape* Love and Forgiveness
Madison, Wisconsin**

July 19, 2022

OBJECTIVES

- ✓ How do we go about forgiving others?
- ✓ How *agape* is part of this process
- ✓ Incorporating this into your own life and relationships

So often a person will come to me and say, “I want to forgive, but I do not know how to do it.”

✓I will be introducing you to the Guided Private Reflection, for those of you who would like to go on this journey with me.

✓This is based on our Process Model of Forgiveness, used in many scientific studies of forgiveness.

✓Does it work? Is it shown to be scientifically successful?

Examples of Experimental Studies (with Randomized Experimental and Control Groups) in which People Learn to Forgive

- **Incest survivors.** After over 12 months, positive changes in forgiveness, depression, anxiety, hope, and self-esteem. (N=12) (Freedman & Enright, 1996).
- **Emotionally-abused women.** Results are similar to the above in terms of forgiving and emotional health (decreased anxiety, depression, PTSD symptoms, increased self-esteem; N=20) (Reed & Enright, 2006).
- **Cardiac patients.** Again, the experimental (forgiveness) group became emotionally healthier than the control group. At a 4-month follow-up, the experimental group had more efficiently functioning hearts than the control group (all males; N=9 in the experimental group; N=8 in the control group) (Waltman et al., 2009).
- **Terminally-ill, elderly cancer patients.** After a 4-week intervention, the forgiveness group showed greater improvement in psychological health (less anger, more hopefulness toward the future) than the control group. Physical indicators of both groups showed declines (Hansen & Enright, 2009).

CROSS CULTURAL EVIDENCE: 1 OF 2

- A study in **South Korea** with at-risk **adolescent females**: Those in the experimental group (N=16), compared with those in the 2 control groups (N=16 each) showed **significant decreases in anger, hostile attribution, aggression, and delinquency at posttest and the 8-week follow-up**

Park, J.H., Enright, R.D., Essex, M.J., Zahn-Waxler, C., & Klatt, J.S. (2013). Forgiveness intervention for female South Korean adolescent aggressive victims. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 20*, 393-402.

CROSS-CULTURAL EVIDENCE: 2 OF 2

- Emotionally and sexually abused adolescent females in **Pakistan**: The experimental group (N=4) compared to the control group (N=4) at the **1-year follow-up** were statistically-significantly:
 - **better in forgiveness and hope**
 - **lower in anger**

Rahman, A., Iftikhar, R., Kim, J., & Enright, R.D. (2018). Pilot study: Evaluating the effectiveness of forgiveness therapy with abused early adolescent females in Pakistan. *Spirituality in Clinical Practice*, 5, 75-87.

The Guided Private Reflection with *Agape* and Forgiveness



Reflecting on Receiving Agape Love from Another Person

Please think of one time in your life in which someone loved you unconditionally when you were suffering, perhaps injured or confused.

Who is this person?

What did the person do to comfort you?

How did you feel when this happened?

This now is a very *real experience in your life*. It is part of you. Bring this on the forgiveness journey with you.

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Reflecting on Giving Agape Love to Another Person

Please think of one time in your life in which someone was suffering and you loved this person unconditionally. Perhaps the person was injured or confused.

Who is this person?

What did you do to comfort this person?

How did you feel when this happened?

This now is a *very real experience in your life*. It is part of you. Bring this on the forgiveness journey with you.

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THE PROCESS MODEL OF FORGIVING

PRELIMINARIES

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

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THE PROCESS MODEL OF FORGIVING

PHASE 1 – UNCOVERING YOUR ANGER

- **How have you avoided dealing with anger?**
- **Have you faced your anger?**
- **Are you afraid to expose your shame or guilt?**
- **Has your anger affected your health?**

CONTINUED

THE PROCESS MODEL OF FORGIVING

PHASE 1 – UNCOVERING YOUR ANGER (CONTINUED)

- **Have you been obsessed about the injury or the one who offended you?**
- **Do you compare your situation with that of the one who offended you?**
- **Has the injury caused a permanent change in your life?**
- **Has the injury changed your worldview?**

THE PROCESS MODEL OF FORGIVING

PHASE 2 – DECIDING TO FORGIVE

- **Decide that what you have been doing hasn't worked.**
- **Be willing to begin the forgiveness process.**
- **Decide to forgive. Start by committing to *do no harm* to the one who hurt you (refrain from the negative).**

THE PROCESS MODEL OF FORGIVING

PHASE 3 – WORKING ON FORGIVENESS

- **Work toward understanding.**
(personal, global, and cosmic perspectives)
- **Work toward compassion.**
- **Accept the pain. Recall receiving and giving *agape* in the very different contexts than this. Agape is part of your life.**
- **Give the offender a gift. Why? This manifests forgiving as a moral virtue (offering the positives).**
- **In considering giving this gift, reflect for a moment on the time you gave *agape* to a suffering person. You are a gift giver.**

THE PROCESS MODEL OF FORGIVING

PHASE 4 – DISCOVERY AND RELEASE FROM EMOTIONAL PRISON

- **Discover the meaning of suffering.**
- **Discover your need for forgiveness.**
- **Discover that you are not alone.**
- **Discover the purpose (perhaps the *new* purpose) of your life.**
- **Discover the freedom of forgiveness.**

- **Note:** The **Process Model** just reviewed is **NOT the ***necessary*** pathway** to forgiving. By the term necessary, I mean this: To forgive one must go through all 20 units of the Process Model to end up with a forgiving response.
- Instead, I just described in the **Process Model a ***sufficient*** pathway** to forgiving. By the term sufficient, I mean this: If one goes through this Process Model, then one is likely to end up with a forgiving response, but one could end up with a forgiving response by another pathway or even only part of the pathway described by the Process Model.
- **No existing forgiveness model is so precise as to be the ***necessary*** way to produce a forgiving response.**

There are two paradoxes to this pathway to forgiving (a paradox is an apparent contradiction that actually is not a contradiction):

1. The forgiver, who was hurt by the other person, gives a gift to that person rather than punishes that person who was unfair.

2. As the forgiver reaches out in mercy to the one who acted unfairly, it is the forgiver who experiences emotional healing.

YOUR FORGIVENESS LEGACY



What will you leave behind on this earth when you die?
Will you leave more anger or more love?