

A Christian Depth Psychology Of Forgiveness Leading to *the Resurrection Effect**

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Forgiveness may be the key to healing deep psychological wounds. This article develops a Christian depth psychology of forgiveness, employing psychological theory as an exegetical tool for developing the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth in Matthew 5:22-26 into a theory of how *Core Wounds* become imprisoned within the psyche. This article offers a psychotherapeutic prayer protocol for healing wounded core areas of the psyche based on that same scripture. This article places the forgiveness intervention in the context of social science, orthodox Christian theology, and addresses the Holy Spirit's presence in the treatment situation. Clinical examples of what the author calls *the Resurrection Effect*, a natural outcome of effective forgiveness, are provided in case studies.

When Jesus of Nazareth answered St. Peter's question, "Lord, how often must I forgive my brother if he wrongs me? Seven times?", Peter was undoubtedly astonished to hear his Master's reply, "Not seven, I tell you, but seventy seven times" (Matt. 18:21-22, NJB). Like us, Peter lived in an age of retribution. Why did the Son of Man insist on this departure from conventional wisdom? Why advise such radical forgiveness? In part, the answer lies in Jesus' advanced knowledge of human nature. Knowing both the mind of God and the mind of man, Jesus understood that human nature resembles divine nature. Jesus commanded forgiveness, because he knew that unforgiveness imprisons us in a *Will to Punish* that locks us into our woundedness. He knew that the *Will to Forgive* culminates in a mental posture that frees us from the prison of the woundedness that others originally inflict upon us. The *Will to Forgive* opens the way to our healing.

As a Christian clinical psychologist, trained in Cognitive Therapy and versed in depth psychology, I am impressed by Our Lord's teachings about forgiveness. Today, as in the first century, Jesus' position was, and remains, counter-intuitive. Given the current state of human nature, the *Will to Punish* remains the most native of our responses to those who wrong us. And the *Will to Punish* feels most authentic to us. But depth analysis of Jesus' teaching shows that what appears right and feels right is actually wrong. From a psychological point of view, the *Will to Punish* harms us. What I hope to demonstrate is that Jesus' teachings on forgiveness provide a template for healing psychological woundedness, that His teachings make scientific, theological, and clinical sense for those seeking to restore the Image of God in themselves and mankind. Most importantly, I hope to demonstrate the clinical usefulness of praying according to the healing protocol implicit in Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:23-24 and Mark 11:25. I believe Jesus' teachings on forgiveness contain depth psychological insight about how we might pray to successfully heal even profound psychological woundedness. The health efficacy of Christ's forgiveness message, in particular, and the Christian revelation, in general, is scientifically supported.

What is Forgiveness?

In theorizing and researching the phenomenon, forgiveness experts have developed various definitions of forgiveness. Aponte's and Enright's are among them. Aponte (1998) proposes that:

... forgiveness at its core is a freely made intention to let go of the bitter debt to which we hold another. It is a desire to let go that grows out of a commitment to free oneself and the other person from the bondage of debt and hurt, however grievous (p. 41).

Freedman and Enright (1996) propose that interpersonal forgiveness is defined as:

... an unjustly hurt person's act of deliberately giving up resentment toward an offender while fostering the undeserved qualities of beneficence and compassion toward the offender. Forgiveness is in the context of deep injustice in contrast to every day annoyance. There is a decidedly paradoxical quality to forgiveness as the forgiver gives up the resentment to which he has a right and gives the gift of compassion to which the offender has no right (p. 983).

The definition of forgiveness that I use clinically to guide my treatment interventions with Christian patients is:

the intentional replacement of the *Will to Punish* those who harm with the *Will to Forgive*. Forgiveness is an exercise of free will, conducted before the face of God, with the formal intention to abandon the pursuit of equal harm to the harmer. Forgiveness is grounded fully in the ego of the forgiver and results in healing psychological complexes outside the ego's control through the power of the Holy Spirit in the name of Jesus Christ.

While all three definitions of forgiveness are adequate, high-lighting the relinquishment of a retributive stance toward an offender for the purpose of psychological healing, my definition puts God in the object-relations mix, landing the definition within the emerging theistic therapeutic paradigm (Zeiders and Schaller, 1998) and the Judeo-Christian tradition. To my mind, God must be included in the definition of forgiveness, because the Holy Spirit responds in a mind-restoring way to the *Will to Forgive*. I will develop this idea after a quick look at some scientific research into forgiveness.

Scientific Research on Forgiveness

Scientific evidence exists that forgiveness, both within and without a theistic context, correlates with psychological healing. One study of special value was conducted by Freedman and Enright (1996). Although small in sample size, their outcome results on the effects of forgiveness upon female incest survivors were provocative. The study involved 12 female incest survivors randomly divided into a forgiveness treatment group and a wait-list control group. The treatment group attended weekly individual psychotherapy sessions over the course of a year, during which time they received a standardized 17 point forgiveness protocol. At the conclusion of treatment, the forgiveness group had gained more than the control group in forgiving their victimizers and they experienced increased hope. Moreover, their depression and anxiety scores fell below that of the no treatment control group, raising the possibility that there is a relationship between forgiveness and peace and happiness. When the control group participated in the forgiveness intervention, it made similar gains as the original treatment group. Examination of individual cases showed that forgivers were able to emotionally heal as they relinquished resentment of their perpetrators. Some participants were even able to reconcile with them. Importantly, the forgiveness intervention correlates to what appears to be a healing of both emotional states and healthy object-relations ability.

Other scientific research on forgiveness shows similar hopeful findings:

1. Al-Mabuk, Enright, Cardis (1995), in a study among adolescent children who felt inadequately loved by their parents, demonstrated that the children experienced decreased anxiety and depression and increased self-esteem following forgiveness interventions. They were taught how to forgive—and after they forgave their parents, they felt better about themselves.
2. Coyle and Enright, (1997) showed that men hurt by their female partner's decision to have an abortion experienced decreased anger, anxiety, and grief following a forgiveness intervention targeted to foster forgiveness for the person they blamed most for the abortion.
3. Hebl and Enright, (1993) found that among 24 elderly Christian females who struggled with a forgiveness issue, those in the treatment group who scored higher on forgiveness demonstrated increased self-esteem and lower anxiety and depression levels than those in the non-forgiveness group.
4. A cross sectional study of over 1,000 adults during a 1988 poll statistically established that negative life satisfaction relates to resentment of offenders and positive life satisfaction relates to praying for people who hurt us. So, in this Gallup poll, forgivers appear more satisfied with their lives than resentful non-forgivers (Poloma and Gallop, 1988) .
5. Among outcomes measured in a study by Dr. Robert Enright ¹ validating the Enright Forgiveness Inventory—a 60 item forgiveness scale that assesses positive and negative aspects of behavior, cognition, and affect toward an offending person—anxiety levels decreased as forgiveness scores increased (Subkoviak, Enright, Wu, Gassin, Freedman, Olson, and Sarinopoulos, 1995).
6. van Oyen Witvliet, C., Ludwig, T., and Vander Laan, K. (2001) in a fascinating study attempted to measure the physiological responses of forgiveness. In their study, 36 men and 35 women, who were connected to biofeedback equipment, were asked to think of someone who hurt them and to think about all the things that they would like to do to punish those people. The biofeedback equipment

registered dramatic physiological changes—from increased muscle tension to heart rate. As the participants thought about hurting the people who trespassed against them, their own bodies were ravaged. When they were told to think of forgiving the people who had hurt them, something different happened: their bodies quieted into normal ranges. The conclusion of these researchers was that forgiving people is probably good, not only for your emotional health, but also physical health. The researchers believe that further research is likely to show that forgivers will have fewer coronary problems.

Forgiveness Myths

Before I further define true forgiveness, I would like to explore what forgiveness is not. I have drawn these ideas from Caine and Kaufman (1999, p. 285) and developed them.

1. Forgiveness is not sanctioning and condoning abusive behavior. True forgiveness recognizes that something wrong occurred.
2. Forgiveness is not conditional. We do not say: “I’ll forgive you if you change.” Forgiveness is predicated on an act of the will. We say: “I forgive the person who trespasses against me regardless of whether or not they repent.”
3. Forgiveness is not reconciliation. It is a separate construct from reconciliation. Many people who forgive should create huge boundaries between themselves and the people who have trespassed against them.
4. Forgiveness is not denial. If someone is too quick to forgive, and their anger is not available to their ego, they are probably in denial. My recommendation is to not pursue forgiveness until the person doing the forgiving is in touch with their anger.
5. Forgiveness is not forgetting. We do not want to forget legitimate learning about fallen human nature. If somebody hurts you, and you forgive them, maintain a wide boundary between yourself and them. Do not assume that your forgiveness has changed the person who hurt you. Forgiveness is the forgiver’s project, not the trespasser’s. One’s forgiveness does not necessarily heal or influence the other person. Human nature is fallen, and people are capable of sadism, abuse, and grotesque behaviors that will again hurt us. Jesus knows this truth. In Matthew 10:17 Jesus warns, “Be on your guard against men.” Our Lord’s words are important for the forgiveness enterprise. We forgive, but we do not pretend that the people we have forgiven have been touched by God or that reconciliation is possible. Even though we forgive in this life, we might have to wait for the next life to enjoy full community with those who have harmed us.

What is True Forgiveness? How Does Psychological Healing Work?

1. Forgiveness is acknowledging that a person has wounded you by trespassing against you.
2. Forgiveness is acknowledging a *Will to Punish* the offending person. The client becomes aware of an intention to hurt their offender in a manner that will balance the damage the offender inflicted on them. The client, for example, may calculate, “This person inflicted six units of pain on me; I will inflict six units of pain on them.” That is the *Will to Punish*.
3. Through an act of *Will* before God in prayer, the forgiver asserts a *Will to Forgive* the trespasser over and above their *Will to Punish* the trespasser.
4. Forgiveness is a change of mind—not a change of heart. In this forgiveness intervention, forgiveness is an ego event. It is not an emotional event. It is a psychological deed conducted with intention. The forgiver *Willfully* insists, “I no longer require you to suffer the way you made me suffer.”
5. Following forgiveness, healing is sought. This is because the wound remains. After the person forgives, the therapist must remember to minister to their hurt soul and pray that the anger, shame, rejection, etc. that the person sustained from being trespassed against finds healing through God’s grace. This is important.

The Resurrection Effect

Research studies support the notion that forgiveness can contribute powerfully to psychological healing and well-being. Science may well establish that forgiveness consistently produces a healing, restorative effect on a variety of outcome measures. I observe this to be the case clinically. I believe that the restoration of mental health that forgiveness almost inevitably produces is an effect of forgiveness. Because

forgiveness so powerfully lifts souls to the experience of new psychological life, I call this effect *The Resurrection Effect*.

An example of *The Resurrection Effect* exists in the experience of Joseph Cardinal Bernardin (1997). Bernardin was falsely accused of sexually abusing a former seminarian. Before the world, he was maligned in the media. Due to the plethora of sexual scandals among clergy, many doubted when the Cardinal denied the charges. Bernardin knew this, and he saw himself being ruined and maligned, all unjustly, by this false accusation. Bernardin experienced a great trespass. But, finally, the man who accused him admitted that he had lied. Cardinal Bernardin met with this young man and forgave him for accusing him falsely. Cardinal Bernardin did not file libel charges against him. Nor did he tongue-lash him. He did not demand anything. He formally substituted a *Will to Forgive* him over the *Will to Punish* him. He forgave him, and then he celebrated Mass for him. He gave him Our Lord. Listen to what the late Cardinal wrote in his autobiography:

Never in my entire priesthood have I witnessed a more powerful reconciliation. The words I am using to tell you this story cannot describe the power of God's grace at work that afternoon. It was a manifestation of God's love, forgiveness, and healing that I will never forget As [I] flew back to Chicago that evening, I felt the lightness of spirit that ... grace brings to one's life (p. 39-40).

This is a wonderful example of the *Resurrection Effect*: a psychological healing complemented by lightness of spirit. What happened to Bernardin can happen for all of us.

Social science has just begun to understand that forgiving our trespassers is imperative to psychological health—an imperative that Jesus of Nazareth understood two thousand years ago—an imperative that culminates in the psychological healing and the ebullience characteristic of *The Resurrection Effect*.

The Imperative to Forgive: What Jesus Taught

There can be no doubt that Jesus taught radical forgiveness. The Gospels disclose his unambiguous teachings about the matter. Jesus tells Peter to forgive the brother who wrongs him seventy-seven times (Mt. 18:21-22, “70 times 7 times” in some translations), essentially commanding forgiveness for every offense. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches us to forgive the sins, while praying to the Father, of “those who are in debt to us” (Mt. 6:12) from their wrong treatment of us. Also, Jesus tells us to “forgive others their failings” (Mt. 6:14) and to “forgive whatever you have against anybody” (Mk 11:25). His position is unmistakable. Forgive. Forgive. Forgive. Jesus commands us to forgive.

A Psychological Exegesis of Jesus' Command To Forgive: Suffering Hurt, The Damaged Psyche and The Will to Punish Imprisoning Us in Complexes

Why does Jesus teach us to forgive so unequivocally? What did Jesus of Nazareth know about mental and spiritual health that makes forgiveness so imperative? What about his teaching frees us to experience *The Resurrection Effect*?

The teachings of Jesus of Nazareth inform the psychology of healing *Core Wounds* and related problems. In this regard, Our Lord's teachings from Mt. 5:21-26 are immeasurably helpful.

When someone is sinned against, they sustain a psychic wound. The wound is a crack in the wholeness and dynamic functioning that is the Divine *Imago* within them. The psychic wound sustained by the trespass obscures the inner harmony that is one's birthright as a child of God, while giving rise to intellectual, emotional, behavioral, somatic, and spiritual dysfunction. The pain of having the *Imago* obscured next gives rise to highly charged affects, like anger and resentment. These affects formulate, consciously or unconsciously within the psyche, into a *Will to Punish* which is directed at the offender. Now the trouble begins. Jesus teaches that the *Will to Punish* the offender locks one into one's woundedness. The very desire to punish the offender, punishes the punisher by locking their psychic woundedness into an internal prison. Once in this prison, the woundedness configured in the *Core Wound* is unavailable to the healing properties of either natural or supernatural grace. The *Will to Punish* walls out the mind's native tendency to heal as well as God's healing movement toward the wound. If someone experiences betrayal, for example a child abused and neglected by a parent, and develops a *Will to Punish* the betrayer, the *Core Wound* caused by the betrayal will operate virtually imprisoned within the psyche. The *Will to Punish* is analogous to a jailhouse wall that locks in the *Core Wound* and locks out God's healing.

Jesus explains it this way,

Anyone who is angry with a brother will answer for it before the court; and anyone who calls a brother “Fool” will answer for it before the Sanhedrin; and anyone who calls him “Traitor” will answer for it in hellfire (Mt. 5:22-23).

In this section of the gospel, Jesus maps out a scenario wherein the plaintiff experiences anger at another for suffering an offense that has distinguished the offender in the mind of the plaintiff as a “Fool” and a “Traitor.” When the plaintiff, however, seeks from the court a just punishment for the person who wronged him, the plaintiff himself oddly experiences punishment.

One explanation for the plaintiff/accuser suffering punishment rather than receiving satisfaction by seeing the Fool/Traitor punished is that the plaintiff is unconscious of having criminally sinned against the one he accuses. Unaware that his offense is greater than the Fool/Traitor’s offense against him, he remains unconscious of impending court judgment against him. While this interpretation appears valid in and of itself, it does not help us to understand the teaching in light of Jesus’ other statements, telling us to forgive over and over, even when as is the case in Peter’s question, the question of forgiveness is not qualified by the plaintiff’s having participated in wrong doing.

Others make us angry, Jesus teaches, because they treat us in a sinful way. Yet, when we develop a *Will to Punish* our offenders, we imprison ourselves in our unforgiveness. When we want to punish others for the sins they commit against us, it is as though our own *Will to Punish* becomes a prison that locks out God’s healing grace from the hurt within our soul, while imprisoning the wound itself in the core of our psyche.

In the case, for example, of a child who suffers the parental treason of neglect or abuse, a *Will to Punish* the offending parent will harm the child’s ability to heal from the parent’s sin. The *Will to Punish* the offending parent *locks in* the wound of painful lovelessness and the painful anger at the injustice. At the same time, the *Will to Punish* will also *lock out* God’s healing grace that would restore love to the child’s core and thus heal the wound.

Jesus of Nazareth—an expert in restoring the *Imago* to the human psyche—tells psychological captives how to gain freedom. Jesus knew that the extent to which one maintains the *Will to Punish*, one maintains the woundedness in the *Core Wound* sustained by the wrong suffered. Hence Jesus taught:

“And when you stand in prayer, forgive whatever you have against anybody, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your failings too” (Mk. 11:25).

If we think of “failings” as anything outside of the Image of God, like our wounds and complexes sustained from other’s sins against us, we see that Jesus offers us a way to heal these “failings.” By forgiving others, we abandon the *Will to Punish* which imprisons us in our woundedness. Based on our ego’s response to Jesus’ teaching, we willingly and willfully assert a *Will to Forgive*. Forgiveness begins as an act of will. It is an intention, a resolution based firmly within the ego’s freedom to respond to Jesus’ command to forgive enemies. The *Will to Forgive* is an intention based squarely upon the ego’s resolve to follow Christ, despite the contrary retributive stance of the wounded psyche. It removes the prison wall. Once accomplished, no barrier exists to impede healing grace. *Core Wounds* can heal, because the *Will to Punish* no longer locks out the God of healing. The *Imago* can be restored.

The Clinical Process: The Road to *The Resurrection Effect*

The road to *The Resurrection Effect* through forgiveness takes place in three clinical stages:

1. problem definition
2. psycho-spiritual education
3. healing prayer.

Stage one involves defining the problem. When in the course of therapy, clients discover that they have been hurt by others, the difficult work begins. In this stage, the therapeutic goal consists in establishing who hurt them (e.g. parent, friend, authority figure), how they were hurt (e.g. neglect, abuse, omission, commission), and how the hurt took up residence in the psyche as dynamics of dysfunction arising from the *Core Wound* (e.g. clinical syndrome, characterological flaws). This stage of treatment establishes that someone sinned against the client, that the sin caused lasting harm, and that the *Will to Punish* the offender exists. Stage one concludes with anger available to the client’s ego.

Stage two is terribly important. It pivots the client from a state of unawareness about how to heal from other-inflicted wounds to an awareness of deep psychological healing opportunities inherent in Jesus' teaching about forgiveness. It personalizes *The Resurrection Effect*. During this stage the therapist and the client discuss relevant principles from Matthew chapter 5 and other germane scripture. Further discussed is how the *Will to Punish* imprisons the client's woundedness and the emergent dysfunction within the client's psychic system. A crucial therapeutic task involves validating the reasonableness of the client's *Will to Punish*, establishing that—given the present state of human nature—the *Will to Punish* trespassers intuitively feels like the psyche's most right response. Psychospiritual education establishes that the retributive stance feels most natural but is not in the client's best interests, when considered in the light of the Son of Man's higher understanding of human nature. During this stage, two-fold goals include:

- developing an intellectual understanding of how the retributive stance locks in woundedness and
- that a *Will to Forgive* can replace the *Will to Punish* and remove barriers to natural and supernatural healing grace.

Stage two concludes with the client ready to commit spiritual deeds based on Jesus' teachings: to forgive, and to experience *The Resurrection Effect*.

Stage three involves the actual business of forgiving and healing. At this stage, prayer represents the principal therapeutic intervention. This stage of therapy brings to mind Jesus' words in Matthew 5:23-24,

... if you are bringing your offering to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, go and be reconciled with your brother first, and then come back and present your offering.

Jesus says that prayer will become efficacious to the extent that reconciliation—but for our purposes *forgiveness*, a component of reconciliation—occurs. Forgive the person who hurt you before you pray for the hurt that was caused. Then the prayer for healing will be efficacious. This dynamic guides the healing prayer.

The prayer itself has several components. My client and I picture ourselves going to the client's inner altar to pray for healing of a psychic wound, a *Core Wound*. Then we recall that the prayer for inner healing may not be effective, because forgiveness of the trespasser has not yet occurred. We leave our prayer intention for inner healing at the inner altar and go to the place in the client's psyche where the *Will to Punish* exists. Then, still in prayer, the client willingly and willfully asserts before God that his or her intentions toward the persecutor have changed. They revise their *Will* and assert that the person in debt to them no longer owes them a debt of equal woundedness. When the client asserts the *Will to Forgive* over the *Will to Punish* before God, the barrier of unforgiveness drops away. God's healing grace is no longer locked out, and the woundedness is no longer locked in. This prayer springs the *Core Wound* from its inner prison. Next, the prayer involves the client returning to the inner altar and making an offering of prayer, praying that God's healing grace will act upon the inner wound inflicted by the one now forgiven. This involves inviting the Holy Spirit in Jesus' name to restore the Image dwelling in the Father's divine imagination for the wounded part of the client. This prayer involves acknowledging that God has something special in mind for that portion of psyche which has been sinned against and wounded. This prayer involves inviting the Trinity to operate upon the wounded area so that the image of that area will conform to God's Image of how that psychological place should thrive.

The following prayer may serve as a sample forgiveness prayer:

Father, I pray in Jesus' name and according to his teachings. I have a wound inside my soul. I intend to offer a prayer for healing of that wound. But Jesus tells me to make peace with those who inflicted this wound upon me before I offer this prayer. When I freely offer forgiveness to those who have hurt me, when I replace my *Will to Punish* them with my *Will to Forgive* them, then I free this wound from the prison of unforgiveness. I am confident that I will experience your healing grace, because no barrier will exist within me to lock out your restorative power.

Thus, Father, in Jesus' name, I will ask you to heal the wound that they inflicted upon me. But, first I leave my prayer intention like an offering on your altar. I proceed to the place within my soul where I see those who harmed me through the following act of Treason and/or Foolishness: _____. Even though they wronged me, I follow the teachings of your son, Jesus

Christ. Using my free *Will*, I excuse them of any obligation to me. I no longer require they experience a punish-ment like the one inflicted upon me. I replace my *Will to Punish* them with a *Will to Forgive* them.

Now that I have made peace with those who hurt me, God, I return to my prayer intention—like a person returning to your altar after making peace with his brother. Lord God, I continue to pray in Jesus' name that you will heal the wound inflicted on me by those I just forgave. I have forgiven them their failings.

Please heal me now of the way their failings have injured me. Please take away the absence-of-love, the anger, the anxiety, the shame, the pain, the deep hurt. Please heal painful ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving that spring from this wound. Please heal me in mind, body, and spirit. Please restore the Image of God to that part of my soul. Thank you for sending the Holy Spirit with your healing grace. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Forgiving our trespassers frees us to receive healing of the wounds they inflicted upon us. Forgiveness leads to freedom. Forgiveness leads to *The Resurrection Effect*.

Case Illustrations

So far I have developed a somewhat abstracted version of *Christian Holism* and its Practical Theology of Forgiveness. In this section, I describe some published stories and clinical case experiences that generated my development of this psychology and theology of forgiveness. These illustrations ground the principals of forgiveness in clinical reality, and depict the road to *The Resurrection Effect* in terms of process. Reporting the case examples with permission from my clients, I have changed some information to preserve confidentiality without compromising the relevant clinical events.

A Captive No Longer

The first case is that of Sgt. Jacob deShazer. A U.S. soldier stationed in the Pacific theater during World War II, deShazer was captured by the Japanese and interred in a concentration camp. Because of his soldierly spirit and his captors' brutality, deShazer developed a hatred for his enemies and cultivated fantasies of slaughtering them.

The Japanese forbade the Americans to practice their religion. So, deShazer, who was not religious, delighted when a Bible was smuggled into the camp. This gave him an opportunity to break the rules and defy his captors by reading it. However, when he read the Gospel where the crucified Christ cries, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," deShazer had a change of heart. Jesus of Nazareth's exemplification of forgiveness "transformed deShazer's thinking It reorganized his experience of who he was and who he could be" (McCullough, Sandage, & Worthington, 1997, p. 108). Convinced that Christ's forgiving path exceeded his retributive one, deShazer forgave his captors.

Shortly after his conversion experience—and the forgiveness that characterized his conversion—one of the prison guards intentionally slammed an iron door on deShazer's foot. Suffering physical pain from this cruel act, deShazer witnessed his emotional response with shock. He neither hated the guard nor desired revenge. Even though he was still a prisoner of war held by guards and razor wire, deShazer was no longer confined to a psychological and spiritual prison. Through forgiveness, God freed him from psychospiritual captivity.

The "Touch" of Forgiveness

In her memoir, *Tramp for the Lord* (ten Boom & Buckingham, 1974), Corrie ten Boom credited the love of Jesus Christ with helping her survive a Nazi concentration camp during World War II. After the war, Corrie visited churches and talked about her faith. Following one such talk, a man approached her. Immediately she recognized him as one of the former prison guards, known for his cruelty. To her horror, he extended his hand and asked for her forgiveness.

Corrie was stunned. How could she forgive such a loathsome person—one who had worked in service to the Holocaust—one who had participated in the senseless torture and death of so many people? Because she was preaching the Gospel of Christ and the Gospel of forgiveness, ten Boom decided to make the attempt. Following a quick prayer and acting in faith, she took his hand and forgave him. Corrie then felt God's spiritual power ignite in her heart and radiate to the former Nazi. To her surprise, Corrie found that she suddenly loved the man. Implicit in her description of this forgiveness episode is a comprehensive level of healing both for herself and the transgressor.

Zeb

Zeb was a strapping Christian young man of 27. Recently discharged from a responsible position in the Army, he looked forward to finishing his schooling, assuming a well-paying civilian job, and seeking a wife. Several months out of the service, however, things started to go awry. He noticed that without the highly structured life of a military serviceman, he had trouble making decisions. He postponed applying for school, decided to work for a while instead, then thought the better of it after missing the deadline for applications. With more time on his hands, he accomplished less and less. Living off his savings, he spent his days sitting in his apartment, indecisive about his plans, neglecting to make even simple decisions about daily life. He found himself unable to commit to a course in life.

During this time, Zeb noticed that his thoughts became problematic. When socializing with friends, he found that odd thoughts intruded into his consciousness. Often these thoughts involved harming the person to whom he spoke. During conversation, Zeb found that violent images suddenly sprang to his mind. What would begin as an enjoyable conversation would conclude with Zeb trying desperately to suppress images of striking or spitting on his companions. While he hid his upset, these violent thoughts and images stormed through his mind and significantly impaired his ability to relate to others. Since contact with others seemed to trigger these violent thoughts, Zeb tried to defend himself against the aggressive thoughts by isolating himself. To his dismay, however, a new set of disturbing thoughts intruded into his consciousness. A committed Christian, he was disturbed by blasphemous cognitions and sacrilegious images that seemed to take on a life of their own within his psyche. Zeb recognized his obsessions as unreasonable, but he could not stop thinking these intrusive, tormenting thoughts.

By the time we began our therapeutic relationship, he was under psychiatric care for Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder. While his psychiatrist's prescriptions provided relief of some of the intensity of his troubling thoughts, his obsessions continued to intrude into his consciousness and derail his efforts to put his life on track. Working in conjunction with Zeb's psychiatrist, I offered a variety of cognitive-behavioral techniques, including thought stopping, exposure with response prevention, and Rational Emotive Therapy. Similar to his response to medication, Zeb found that these psychotherapeutic techniques enabled him to cope but did not solve his problem. The intrusive thoughts continued to disturb him.

Several months into treatment, Zeb learned that I was a practicing Episcopalian and that I believed in healing prayer. Excitedly, Zeb confided that he, too, was an Episcopalian and would like me to include healing prayer as part of the treatment. I agreed, and we designated the next several sessions for healing prayer. Both of us entertained high hopes for the prayer interventions, but following several sessions of soaking prayer and intercession no real progress occurred. Although neither of us had lost faith in God's power to heal, we realized that we were probably missing some important piece of information. Acting upon a mutually shared intuition, we agreed to explore Zeb's early life to see if the key to his healing might lie there.

At first, Zeb's recollections of growing up were utterly normal. He recollected a happy home life, plenty of love, and feelings of safety. When we dug deeper, however, we discovered painful memories regarding his father. Zeb's earliest recollection went to the age of four. He recalled his father, tired and ill-tempered after work, sitting in a chair and criticizing his little boy for the way he walked across the living room. Apparently, Zeb's father thought that his son walked incorrectly. Zeb next recalled being a little older and seeking his father's approval for a model airplane he had worked hard to complete. Rather than compliment the achievement, his father roundly criticized Zeb for a number of flaws in the model's execution. Zeb was crushed. Another memory involved an early sports experience. Proud of having been chosen to start in his first organized football game, Zeb played an instrumental role in several touchdowns, but after the game his father only spoke to him about the few mistakes he had made. By exploring these memories and others like it, it became clear that his father never recognized Zeb for his talents or achievements. Zeb acknowledged that while his father's abuses lacked an atrocious quality, they nevertheless malignantly impacted his sensitive psyche.

Based on the above, Zeb and I developed the following case conceptualization: Because Zeb's father had never mentored him, Zeb had never learned to be his own man. When he was in the military, daily life was highly structured and nicely compensated for the indecisiveness that results from the absence of a reliable male role model. Upon discharge, however, the externally imposed military structure left, and Zeb's life stalled, because his father never taught him to activate himself to advance his interests. Additionally, we conceptualized that the violent, intrusive thoughts over which he obsessed and experienced so much distress, stemmed from a deep reservoir of anger, originally directed toward his father, but generalized to any person with whom he became close. It was as if a part of his psyche, despite

Zeb's conscious desires, sought to protect him from impending humiliations and rejections he had come to expect through the formative relationship with his father. We further conceptualized that the blasphemous cognitions and sacrilegious images that tormented Zeb, were a transference of the anger Zeb felt toward his humiliating, rejecting earthly father to his heavenly Father. The sacrilegious thoughts that invaded Zeb's mind birthed from the part of Zeb's psyche that believed that God the Father should suffer equal and opposite humiliation that Zeb experienced from his father on earth.

Arriving at these insights inaugurated a heady time in therapy. Zeb and I had worked hard to uncover the secret source of his stalled life and violent, intrusive thoughts. We were certain that when we prayed again for inner healing, we would pray rightly, and therefore effectively. We decided to pray for healing of the humiliation and under-mentoring that represented the *Core Wound* (A *Core Wound* can be thought of as a wound that is central to our very being and manifests as an empty, shattered place in the soul.) of the Father Complex/Schema. Our rationale was that, if the humiliation from his father's constant criticism and rejection healed, then the anger and the reflexively defensive role of the aggressive thoughts and images would have no psychic purpose, causing the *Core Wound* to collapse on itself. Then we would pray for a reconfiguration of the former core of the Father Complex, that God would change the image of the rejected, humiliated son into an image consistent with the Image of God—an image of a beloved son.

After agreeing on issues that our healing prayer needed to address, we spent part of the next therapy session in prayerful intercession. We expected a lot. But nothing happened. Our headiness turned to deflation and discouragement. Zeb struggled with the idea that perhaps God the Father really was as rejecting as his earthly father, and I began to question whether I had made a technical error by incorporating Christian faith into psychotherapy.

During this time of clinical discouragement, I reread The Gospel According to Saint Matthew. After reading the fifth chapter, a cascade of ideas developed that resulted in the rudiments of the theory enumerated above. Applying the theory to Zeb, I began to wonder if our prayer for his inner healing failed because we had not applied Jesus' teachings on forgiveness to the clinical situation. Certainly something blocked the operation of natural and supernatural grace on Zeb's Father Complex and the Obsessive-Compulsive syndrome that arose from it. Some barrier existed that kept God's healing power from the core of Zeb's wounded area. I shared with Zeb my hunch that his Father Complex and his Obsessive-Compulsive syndrome were imprisoned within the *Will to Punish*. In our earlier attempt at healing prayer we had gone to the altar to pray for healing, but we had neglected to leave our healing prayer request at the altar while first making peace with Zeb's father. Making peace with Zeb's father would have meant asserting the *Will to Forgive* over the *Will to Punish*, essentially forgiving just as Jesus commands throughout the gospels. By following Jesus teaching, by forgiving, we would remove the barrier of unforgiveness that kept the wound within Zeb alienated from God's healing grace, and imprisoned the *Core Wound* within him.

Intrigued by the above interpretation, Zeb agreed to formally forgive his father before again praying for inner healing. We used Mt. 5:23-24 as our prayer template. In the clinical setting, we began to pray together. Using the imagery of scripture, we imagined Zeb going to the altar to ask God to heal the rejection and humiliation that was the core of his Father Complex. But, remembering that Zeb held something against his father, we left this prayer intention at the altar and went to the place in Zeb's psyche where he held his father image. There, verbally, out loud, in the presence of God, Zeb acknowledged that, because his father had sinned against him, he had suffered a deep inner wound of humiliation and under-mentoring that gave rise to the symptoms described. Zeb acknowledged that what his father had done was wrong, and it was precisely because it was wrong that Zeb needed to forgive him. In prayer, following the commandments of Christ, Zeb renounced his right and his willingness to have his father suffer in a way equivalent to the suffering he inflicted upon Zeb. In prayer with Zeb, I affirmed that Zeb had just executed Jesus' teaching to forgive. Then, still following the template of Mt. 5:23-24, we returned to the altar to pray for Zeb's inner healing. Taking turns, Zeb and I prayed in Jesus' name to God the Father that God would send the Holy Spirit to heal the different aspects of Zeb's Father Complex, especially the rejection, humiliation and the violent intrusive thoughts that defensively arouse from it, as well as the violent, blasphemous thoughts which represented a defensive position toward the wounding father. We acknowledged in prayer before God that it was Zeb's willing intention that Zeb would forgive his father his failings, just as we hoped that God would forgive Zeb his failings and restore him to the original design inherent in the Image of God. Following this eventful therapy session, we were both somewhat drained. We postponed further processing until the following week.

When Zeb and I next met, he looked like himself, only better. He looked relaxed, happy, and healthy. To an extent, he even glowed. Responding to my question as to what accounted for his looking so well, he unhesitatingly responded, "It's the Holy Spirit. I haven't had a violent or intrusive thought all week. I am in a state of grace. The forgiveness prayer worked." Zeb experienced *The Resurrection Effect*.

We worked together for another three months. During that time, Zeb resumed executing the plans for his life that he had put on hold after he got out of the service. He got a job and resumed a normal social life. Things went well and he experienced a total remission of violent intrusive thoughts for a year. Following a period of stress, he returned to therapy due to a flare-up of intrusive thoughts. In two sessions, these were easily resolved using simple behavioral techniques. Periodically, I hear from him. He continues to live a normal life, to work, to socialize, and to seek love, without the symptoms that brought him into therapy. He believes that forgiving his father in accordance with the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth changed his life and helped him to reclaim his portion of the Image of God within his psyche. He is thankful for *The Resurrection Effect*.

The Forgiveness "Fish"

Another example of the healing power of forgiveness comes from the following case. Importantly, this case involves a brief therapeutic encounter consisting of a one hour contact, followed up by a phone consultation one week later. The fact that the client experienced benefit after brief therapeutic contact suggests that forgiveness may be a treatment of unusual efficacy.

A 35-year-old man sought consultation with me. At the outset of contact, it was clear that he was a high functioning, effective individual. The head of an important non-profit organization, he contributed much to his community and excelled at his philanthropic work. He enjoyed an unusually happy marriage to a pretty, talented wife. Together with her, he was raising two boys, ages 7 and 4. For the weeks prior to consultation, he found himself growing increasingly uneasy. Usually patient with his children, he observed that he responded to their needs and naive mistakes with irritability, down-putting overreaction, and an inappropriate drive to control them. He knew neither the source of this behavior toward his children, nor how to stop acting it out towards them. These episodes culminated in a dream which so disquieted him that the next day he sought my services via phone.

The dream he disclosed to me is as follows: he found himself in the house in which he grew up. The house had fallen into a dilapidated state. He felt that he should abandon it for a newer, more comfortable dwelling. For some reason, however, he was indentured to the house and to his father who strode about the halls of the run-down dwelling. His father ordered him about and demanded that he commence with unreasonably ambitious construction projects. He protested to his father that the shabby dwelling did not warrant such effort, but the father insisted that the son "owed" him the work. His father insisted that the son had an almost legal obligation to pursue the ill-conceived building projects at the father's bidding. When his father ordered him to install expensive fish tanks in the walls of the house, the son went to work, executing the odd request with the hope that this final task would discharge further obligation to his tyrannical dad. Completing this unrewarding task, he approached his father to say his farewell and strike out on his own. To his dismay, however, his father sternly informed him that he would not let him leave until he fulfilled a last duty. The father pointed to the largest fish tank and told his son that he could only be acquitted of his indentured status if he sailed to sea and caught a rare fish and deposited it in the father's tank. Only this would conclude their business and allow the son to leave his tyrannical father and his dilapidated house. Upon hearing this, the son had a violent physical reaction. His left shoulder hurt, and he found a circular bruise around a red open wound. The pain was excruciating. At the same time he experienced a wave of physical nausea as he anticipated going out to sea in search of the fish and suffering debilitating sea-sickness. The idea of securing the fish for his father was wildly distasteful.

We dove into dream interpretation. During his youth, just as in the dream, this man had experienced his father as denigrating and tyrannical. His dad had wounded his soul. The dream revealed this wound as the unhealed area of his left shoulder. The dilapidated dream house represented the *Core Wound*—the subjective space within which the hurtful experiences with his dad continued to operate and determine his thinking, emotion, and behavior. In his recent adult life, this psychological wound operated in the projection of his hurt childhood self onto his children, with the man acting out the role of his mean dad. In other words, the wounding father/son dynamic operated both within the subjective space of his dream house and within the objective space of his real house. He lamented that he had begun to repeat the painful dynamics of his childhood. He wanted to save his sons from the tyranny he himself had so painfully experienced. His verbalized sentiment that this father/son dynamic was "getting old" consciously expressed

the symbolism of the dilapidated house in the dream. The house was old, no longer useful, and not worth even fixing up. He desired to leave his old frame of reference for father/son relationships. The dream, however, showed that something kept pulling him back into the relational dynamics depicted by the dream dad's insistence that the son remained obligated to him. The dream father would not let his son leave the dysfunctional subjective frame of reference, the frame of reference that dictated the man's own troubling responses to his little sons.

At this point, we committed ourselves to exploring if the dream offered a way to freedom. We explored the symbols of his dream in earnest. What kept him in the house with his dad? What would free him? The following insights rewarded our efforts: symbolically, the dream did point the way to a new frame of reference, of getting free from the dilapidated father/son dynamic. Freedom appeared in the form of a fish, given to the dream father. For Christians, dream fish are often emblems of Christ (Lewis, 1995). I believe that the Holy Spirit brought Jesus' teaching in the form of the dream fish to show this man the way to healing and freedom. Jesus taught that the way to spring free from our prisons, to get free from the obligation that imprisons us, is to pay something. "In truth I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny" (Mt. 5:26). The fish represented a shocking means of healing and freedom to this man that was utterly consistent with his Christianity. To heal, he had to let his father "off the hook." He had to surrender his *Will to Punish* his father. He had to forgive his dad for inflicting the psychological wound symbolized in the festering shoulder. The man's desire to take from his father in punishment for what the father had taken from him via a tyrannical upbringing had to be surrendered back to the offensive father. By forgiving his father's debt to him, he pays out to his father the punishment that his father owes him. In short, the fish represents the forgiveness that Jesus of Nazareth taught us to give to those who trespass against us. Carrying out Christ's teaching, however, is hard to the point of being sickening. The *Will to Punish* is intuitive and native to human psychological impulses, while the *Will to Forgive* is not. Note that when the dream father asserted that he would discharge his son from him and the subjective space associated with him, if the son would give back what he intended to take from the dream father, the son became nauseous. The man saw that the prospect of fishing the *Will to Forgive* out of his soul sickened him.

At this point in the consultation, he became agitated and complained that his muscles had tensed to a painful level of constriction. The idea of replacing the *Will to Punish* with the *Will to Forgive* was obviously painful. But, being a man of faith and courage, he resolved to pray a prayer of forgiveness for his father and let him off the hook. Then, our consultation period concluded, and we set up a phone meeting for the following week.

During the interim, I reflected that our brief consult had fruitfully passed through the first two stages of the forgiveness model. One, this man's intelligence and sensitivity to his psychological life, aided by an innate gift for understanding his dreams, led to a level of problem definition and psychological understanding that was unusually thorough, despite the complexity of the psychodynamics and the brevity of our consultation. Second, he quickly grasped the importance of forgiveness as the key to freeing him from the unfortunate relations he had with his sons, and he concluded the session resolving to follow Jesus' teaching in the matter, rather than to allow his natural revulsion to forgiveness compromise his hope for freedom in father/son relations. He resolved to forgive his father, not only to heal himself, but to save his little sons from a similar fate.

When he contacted me a week later, he informed that he had prayed according to the Matthew prayer protocol and that his revulsion about forgiving his father rapidly receded into a sense of relief. Further, he noticed that interacting with his own sons had become far less problematic than before he forgave his father. Now, he informed me, he found that he could easily stop denigrating or tyrannical behavior toward his sons. Had this man been available for more treatment, we would have devoted more therapy and prayer to aggressively reversing the damage of his childhood. But his renewed emotional equilibrium, behavioral control, and intellectual awareness demonstrate that this man enjoyed some of beneficial outcomes often associated with *The Resurrection Effect*. Had he had time for more forgiveness work, I believe that he would have healed even more.

Sylvia

This next case is of interest to anyone interested to learn how forgiveness work can effectively treat clinical syndromes and the deep psychological wounds that underlie them.

A 33-year-old physician, Sylvia, sought consultation, concerned that she had "not been herself" for a year. A year previously, she had diagnosed a 14 year old girl with a serious illness. While treating her

young patient, she had become restless, keyed up, physically tense, and unable to sleep well. Try as Sylvia might, she could not calm herself and regain her former happiness. Due to her medical training, she was savvy regarding psychiatric matters. She diagnosed herself with Generalized Anxiety Disorder and, deciding against pharmaceutical intervention, sought psychotherapy.

After speedily building rapport, we began an aggressive regimen of cognitive and behavioral interventions. Cognitively, we pursued the notion that Generalized Anxiety stems from the tendency to over-interpret life's events in terms of a personal threat. We worked at disputing irrational, anxiety provoking thoughts as they automatically popped into Sylvia's mind and replaced these with reality-based, safety-oriented thoughts. Behaviorally, we pursued stress reduction techniques geared to short-circuit the fight/flight response with the relaxation response. While Sylvia performed these exercises and was formally good at them, she gained little real relief.

Experiencing frustration, we decided to look into her early life to see if we could find the historical root of her anxiety. As Sylvia told her story, my heart went out to her. She was the younger of two sisters. Shortly after Sylvia's birth, her father died, leaving Sylvia's grief-stricken mother to succumb to alcoholism before Sylvia had reached the age of 5. Early on, Sylvia demonstrated exceptional intelligence, and it fell to her to meet her sister's psychological and maternal needs, and it also fell to her to clean up after her mother's drinking.

When Sylvia reached the age of 10, a local minister helped her mother find sobriety. No longer drinking, Sylvia's mother threw herself into nurturing her daughters. For a time, Sylvia thrived on her mother's attention. The unhappy years of her stolen childhood, she hoped, would be restored in a puberty and adolescence complete with her mom's loving nurturing. Such relief. Such happiness. But the relief and happiness were short lived.

One day after school, scampering home to bake cookies with her mom, Sylvia found her mother crying at the kitchen table. The family doctor, Sylvia's mother wept, had just diagnosed Sylvia's sister with a serious disease. But Sylvia's mom was determined to keep her eldest daughter alive. When Sylvia saw her mother devote herself to her ill sister's complicated care, she feared that her mother might resume drinking. She did not. Rather, she cared for Sylvia's sister admirably. In fact, to Sylvia's horror, her mother devoted so much energy to Sylvia's sick sister, that she had nothing left for Sylvia. The poor girl was bitterly hurt. To her, the situation was crazily unjust. Not only had Sylvia surrendered her childhood to her mother's alcoholism, but now, just when she had begun to recover her longed-for mother's love, her sister robbed it from Sylvia, monopolizing her mother's love by illness. At the core, Sylvia was stunned with hurt. Her mother hurt her by abandoning her a second time. Her sister hurt her by stealing the love she so badly needed to flourish. Anger and resentment built up around her hurt core.

On some level, she wished her mother to hurt as she hurt. On another level she wished that her sister would die, both to punish her for robbing away mother's love, and as a wish-fulfillment-means of removing her sister as an obstruction to her mother's attention. Because Sylvia was "supposed" to be the helpful kid without needs, no one ever processed Sylvia's hurt or anger with her at the early age. Sylvia herself, did not feel entitled to her hurt or anger, so her pain and her *Will to Punish* went underground. She threw herself into her role as the helpful one, a role that dominated her life and culminated in becoming a physician. But in the previous year, when she diagnosed and began treatment of the sick 14 year old girl, the events were too similar to the trauma of her sister's illness. Her *Core Wound* activated. She felt chronic global anxiety, because the destructive emotions connected to her *Will to Punish* dangerously threatened her entrenched self-image of helper and healer.

A Christian, Sylvia was intrigued by the model of forgiveness that I presented. Before immediately praying the forgiveness prayer, however, we spent several sessions gathering Sylvia's anger at her mother and sister. Neither of us were interested in compromising the therapy by praying a prayer of forgiveness before Sylvia's anger was fully available to her ego. In itself, this part of the therapy contributed to causing her anxiety to collapse, because making her anger conscious negated the need to defend against its emergence with physiological arousal and emotional dread. With the *Will to Punish* out of the unconscious, her forgiveness of her mother and sister would be meaningful and real. Most importantly, forgiveness would clear away the psychological barriers to the Holy Spirit's desire to heal the deep wound of early neglect.

Finally, we prayed in the usual way. We prayed to God in the name of Jesus Christ that our intention was to have the deep hurt caused by her mother and sister healed, but we left this prayer request at the altar of Sylvia's healing intention, and went to that place in her psyche where she maintained the *Will to Punish* her mother and sister. During this part of the prayer, she formally renounced the *Will to Punish* them and

asserted the *Will to Forgive* them. As soon as Sylvia prayed this part of the prayer, an intense feeling of being in the presence of an incredibly powerful Spirit of Love came over us both. It seemed to fill my entire office. Both of us were overwhelmed in the presence of the Holy Spirit. We had difficulty speaking, because the Holy Spirit's love and beauty moved us to tears. We struggled to finish the prayer by simply reiterating our original prayer intention, that the painful absence of love at her core would be replaced by God's restorative, healing love. Done praying, we sat in the midst of the awesome presence. It was so beautiful and powerful and loving, I had the impression that the walls of my office would strain by the force of God's passionate love and explode.

For Sylvia, the outcome was excellent. For two weeks, she had wonderful dreams and a feeling of deep goodness and energy at her core. When she came down from her "high", she experienced full remission of the anxiety that brought her to treatment. Even more wonderfully, she reported that the hurt connected with her *Core Wound* had simply been healed by the love of God. Her experience is consistent with *The Resurrection Effect*.

Bereavement and Constipation

A client came to me who initially asked for psychotherapy for what appeared to be complicated bereavement. She simply could not get over the death of her husband. In life, her husband had been in the 1st Gulf War and, as the result of his combat experience, had tremendous Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). To medicate this, he used drugs and alcohol for years. Finally, he got treatment, received healing and became a counselor himself, in fact, a very good one. He met this much younger woman at an Episcopal church and they married. She was very happy in the marriage. When he died, she was devastated. In therapy, we kept praying that this complicated bereavement would heal, but it just did not happen. No matter what intervention we tried—spiritual or psychological—nothing seemed to help.

Eventually, it became clear that she was angry at him for taking such poor care of his body after the war. She was thinking: "How dare you send yourself to an early grave and leave me here. You ruined yourself on drugs. I was happy with you. Your post-war drug use led to your death." Even though she loved him, she was furious at him and had an unconscious *Will to Punish* him. Then we prayed that she would forgive him for taking such poor care of himself, and she asserted the *Will to Forgive*, saying "I will no longer ask you to suffer the way you made me suffer. I forgive you for the drug abuse and for dying because of it." We then went back and prayed to God to heal from her complicated bereavement, and God healed it.

After that healing took place, a whole new level of woundedness came forward. She had a father wound. When she was a child, her father—a high level business man who worked his way up from poverty—did many cruel things to her. In fact, whenever she was around her father, even as an adult, she felt physically small and afraid of him. She was always trying to get him to bless her so that there would be some love placed in her rejected heart, but her father would not love her in the way she needed. It did not surprise me, because, as she grew up, this tremendously selfish father would do outrageous things that would psychologically injure his children. For example, he complained that when his daughter would use the toilet, her flushing made too much noise, was hard on the plumbing and would disturb his rest. Eventually, it got so bad that this poor young girl started going to the bathroom on newspaper like the family dog.

We worked on forgiveness again. As we did, the anger at her Dad for being so tremendously selfish and rejecting became available to her ego. We decided to pray for healing of her wounds in this situation. First, however, during prayer, she forgave her dad for the litany of trespasses he committed against her. Then she prayed for healing of the wounds he inflicted by those trespasses.

Several things happened as a result of this prayer. The most striking result was that the next time she visited her father, even though he berated her as usual, she felt like an adult, and she looked at him and saw a little child—a mean little child. She even found her dad to be sort of comical. The abandonment depression was healed, and she was better able to relate to men.

However, to me the most interesting aspect of this case was psychosomatic. Recall her childhood bathroom trauma. A week after the forgiveness intervention, she came dancing into my office, and the first thing she said to me was: "Dr. Zeiders, I can go to the bathroom!" She had been chronically constipated throughout her adult life and that was now healed.

Loretta

We (my wonderful colleague Julie Wegryn and I) began co-therapy with Loretta. We met one time per week for six months. Some cognitive-behavioral interventions were offered, but we also engaged in psycho-dynamic-style uncovering. Once her story was told, we brainstormed as to how the forgiveness

prayer might help her. Eventually, treatment culminated in the forgiveness prayer. We offered prayers throughout therapy and conducted all interventions in the name of Jesus Christ. (Because Loretta's case is so illustrative, I have decided to treat it with special attention.)

1. Client History: Familial and Psychological Dynamics

Family-of-origin issues formed the *Core Wound* that set forth so much unhappiness in her life. Her father was a highly placed official in a religious denomination. In early memories, Loretta recollects him admonishing that God's will for her life was to serve the nuclear family. God expected her, he told her, to put herself last and to take care of her mother and her two younger brothers. Fearing her father's and God's punishment if she dis-obeyed, she became *good* as good had been inflicted upon her. Instead of loving her in a way that would invigorate the core of her psyche with energy, her father abandoned that part of her to emptiness and indoctrinated her to a life of slavish service to her family.

Her mother played a similar role. Physically frail, lazy, and hypochondriacal, Loretta's mother never expended herself to praise Loretta. Rather, she sought to draw love, nurturing, and reassurance from Loretta, using her alleged sicknesses as the excuse for demanding that Loretta *mother* her. At one point, she told Loretta that unless Loretta fully obeyed, her mother might become so upset that she would die. Hence, Loretta associated any demands she might make on her mother—whether through disobedience or asking for nurturing—as threats to her mother's life.

Both parents insisted that Loretta take parental-like responsibility for her younger brothers. This role as pseudo-parent set forth an ongoing childhood nightmare for Loretta. The younger brothers intuitively understood that although Loretta had responsibility for them, she had no authority over them. Their sadism caused them to delight in setting her up to fail.

On Sundays, Loretta had to prepare her little brothers for church. Her father made it clear that this chore was one of her Christian duties. Not to fulfill it would let God down and open her to verbal abuse and *guilt-tripping* by her religious father. Her mother made it clear that she herself was too frail to dress the boys. Loretta had to dress them to prevent her mother from ex-haustion. Under such pressure, Loretta would try to dress her little brothers. She would lay out their clothes and ask them to get dressed for church. Invariably, they would refuse to dress, throwing their clothes out windows and screaming when Loretta tried to correct them. They would run to the parents and accuse Loretta of wild injustice toward them. Loretta's father would blame and shame her for her failure to carry out God's work with her little brothers. Her mother would swoon, look troubled and frail, declaring that Loretta would be the death of her.

This family dynamic repeated itself throughout Loretta's childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. She recalled times that her brothers made poor investments. It then fell to her to give them money. They asked for loans as though they were entitled to them, but never repaid Loretta. At other times, when they asked for and acted on her advice, they never thanked her for good outcomes. When they thought that her advice was poor they denigrated her relentlessly.

When Loretta was a young mother involved in caring for her little children, she received a call from her youngest brother. He demanded that Loretta drop everything and immediately fly to the city where his wife was giving birth to their first child. Loretta was the only one, he exclaimed, who knew how to take care of children. At great personal sacrifice, Loretta honored her brother's request. She bundled up her infant children. She bought plane tickets. And, because her husband had to work, she flew alone to her brother and sister-in-law's to help them with their new infant. When she arrived, she found them extremely stressed from the new responsibility of parenthood. Despite her kindness, they scapegoated her for not arriving even sooner to help them. They also established humiliating house rules to which they told Loretta she would have to abide. Even in the face of their meanness, Loretta helped her nervous brother and sister-in-law. She helped them tremendously and selflessly, but they never thanked her. Even after their children were grown, they would allude to Loretta's visit as though she had done something slightly wrong to them.

Fortunately, Loretta married a kind, supportive man. He sought the best for his wife. He encouraged her to make friends outside of her family. He hoped that the establishment of a positive peer group would help Loretta find happier relationships. Unfortunately, this was not the case. Loretta found herself in relational dynamics very similar to the dynamics she experienced in her family-of-origin. For example, she reached out to a group of ladies in her church. At first, she got along well with them. So well, in fact, that they elected her to become the head of the growth committee. Then similar dynamics unfolded that reiterated the dynamics of her excruciating childhood Sunday mornings trying to dress her brothers. The church growth committee loaded Loretta with great responsibility but they provided her with little authority. When Loretta tried to make necessary changes, her *friends* on the committee rebelled and went to the pastor,

complaining that Loretta was unreasonable. In turn, the pastor *guilt-tripped* Loretta and told her that she would be the death of the church. The dysfunctional dynamics of childhood haunted her adult relationships.

Listening to Loretta tell the story of these experiences, we learned of the emotional toll that was taken on her. For long periods throughout her life, she experienced a depressive emptiness at the core of her being. Also, much of the time she felt shame, as though there was something intrinsically wrong with her. She also had a vague awareness that her relations with her brothers were not right, but she could not help herself from getting into the same humiliating relations with them over and over. Lastly, despite her good marriage, she felt very lonely for a friend. All this emotional and relational pain was exacerbated by progressively debilitating leg pain that doctors attributed to arthritis.

Loretta told these things to us in treatment and our hearts went out to her. We conducted treatment and prayed. We developed a passion to understand the deep structure of her woundedness and to look to God for help in healing Loretta.

As Loretta's story unfolded, we found the following structure within her woundedness: From the beginning her parents rejected her. Obsessed with making Loretta do the *right* and *Christian* thing, Loretta's father had neglected to love his daughter. Similarly, Loretta's mother, neurotically striving to avoid her maternal responsibilities, used her hypochondriacal defenses to shirk her role as a nurturer. She forced Loretta to raise herself and her little brothers. She forced Loretta's compliance by telling Loretta that non-compliance with the situation would kill her. Instead of loving Loretta, both parents abandoned her. When children are abandoned, they often grow into adults who experience emptiness at the core. This was Loretta's case. She also felt anger for being trespassed against by her parents, but she had to bring the anger back upon herself, because she had been indoctrinated that anger at her parents—and the *Will to Punish* that naturally arises from it—made her *bad* to her father and *murderous* to her mother. By turning such vitality—the vitality of anger—back upon herself she developed depression within her emptiness.

Next, the relationship her parents forced her to have with her brothers was especially damaging. Loretta was told that she had to meet the needs of her unappreciative brothers. In this way, she could be good in her father's eyes and keep her mother alive. Because her father's approval and her mother's life were contingent upon Loretta serving her sadistic, immature brothers, this relationship style became the only way that Loretta learned to relate to others. It followed her throughout her life. Each time Loretta repeated this relational dynamic, she experienced another wound that exacerbated the pain in her core. This repetition compulsion determined her relationship with the church growth committee and her pastor. She was compelled to repeat the relational dynamics of her childhood. In all these experiences, the lovelessness of the relational dynamics kept her core empty, and the anger she turned back upon herself kept her in a state of depression. (Loretta agreed with these interpretations. They modeled reality as she understood it. All of us agreed, however, that only God sees the entire picture, and that none of us really understood the moral or spiritual nature of those who had hurt Loretta in an ultimate sense. God, not ourselves, is the final authority.)

2. Specific Healing Interventions

Loretta wanted to be free from wounded, painful relationships. To meet her need, we discussed Jesus' teaching regarding how unforgiveness locks in our woundedness and how forgiveness frees us for healing. We further proposed that we had gathered enough information about Loretta's past to move to the next decisive stage of healing: the forgiveness prayer. Anxious to heal, Loretta readily agreed.

We opened the prayer in Jesus' name. Then we approached God with the prayer intention that God would heal Loretta from the emptiness and depression she felt and that he would free her from the abusive relational dynamics that plagued her. Recalling, however, that Loretta had outstanding business with those who had trespassed against her, we left these prayer intentions for healing and went to the place within her where she maintained the *Will to Punish* her father. She replaced her *Will to Punish* him for indoctrinating her to be the family slave with the *Will to Forgive* him for this sin against her. She did the same thing with her mother for not nurturing her and for forcing her to take over the role of mother to her brothers. She then forgave her brothers for the way they wounded her by abusing her nurturing and for their sadism and lack of appreciation. She then began to replace the *Will to Punish* with the *Will to Forgive* regarding other people in her life with whom she had experienced similar hurtful dynamics—including the ladies from the church growth committee and her pastor. Still in prayer, we returned to the original prayer intention. Having forgiven those who trespassed against her, Loretta had, by using her *Will to Forgive*, freed herself from the unforgiveness that blocked out the healing power of the Holy Spirit from the wounds that others

had inflicted upon her. We acknowledged that Loretta had for-given others their failings, just as Jesus had taught. We asked God to now heal Loretta of the way those failings had harmed her soul.

When we concluded this prayer, it was obvious that the clinical situation had entered into a state of unusual grace. The feeling of joy and energy that accompanies the special presence of the Holy Spirit permeated our office. Loretta left feeling encouraged. And she continued the forgiveness prayer. On her drive home, she reported, she had the impression that the Holy Spirit was bringing different people to mind who had injured her psyche. In prayer, she replaced her *Will to Punish* these people with the *Will to Forgive* them. Then she asked the Father in Jesus' name to send the Holy Spirit to heal the part of her soul that had sustained damage from those who had sinned against her.

3. Therapeutic Process

By this time, Loretta had been in therapy for six months. Within four months, she had finished the bulk of stage one, the stage of problem defini-tion. In less than a month, she finished stage two, the stage of developing an intellectual understanding of how forgiving her trespassers could lead to healing. The rest of her sessions were spent praying the forgiveness prayer and discussing outcomes. The outcomes themselves were staggering. Within a very short period of time, Loretta experienced a radical decrease in her experience of inner emptiness and depression. Within five weeks of practicing the forgiveness prayer, Loretta noticed that she had not experienced her repetition compulsion. She found that in none of her relationships had she fallen into the care-take-until-abuse dynamic that plagued and hurt her throughout her life. Following her forgiveness work, she developed a sponta-neous ability to avoid the old dynamic and to draw boundaries. She delight-ed in suddenly finding herself appropriately assertive. Further, just follow-ing her forgiveness work, she began a friendship with a woman in her church. Loretta found the experience of friendship delightful. Rather than giving to another while waiting to be abused, Loretta had the first intimate relationship with another person (outside her marriage) that was character-ized by respect and reciprocity. Finally, the pain Loretta had in her leg—originally attributed to arthritis—diminished by 85%, according to Loretta's self-report. All these breakthroughs occurred following the initial forgive-ness prayer and Loretta's ongoing discipline of practicing it.

Because Loretta experienced such profound relief and experienced a wel-come elevation to an energized sense of well being, she was a beneficiary of the *Resurrection Effect*.

Conclusion

Jesus Christ teaches us to forgive. Contained within his teaching is a depth psychology that organizes spiritual and psychological dynamics in such a way that God's grace heals our deepest wounds. By replacing the *Will to Punish* with the *Will to Forgive*, we use our free will to destroy the psychological barriers that prevent God's healing grace from healing our *Core Wounds*. When we forgive those who hurt us, we then can pray effectively for the wounds that have been inflicted upon us. God heals us. He enters the wound and restores to it the Image of God. I call this is *The Resurrection Effect*.

Reference Note

1. Dr. Enright, an important forgiveness researcher, has an interesting personal story. He began researching forgiveness as an agnostic, looking for a way to gain grant money and pursue interesting science. He was not particularly religious or spiritual. However, once he began doing this research, he had a conversion experience. He is now a practicing Christian, attends church weekly and is fully ensconced in the Christian faith. He is also an amazingly generous, engaging man. By scientifically studying the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, he entered Christendom! What a wonderful way to embrace Christianity! We do not have to be scared of the scientific method. It can lead us to the Beautiful Mystery.

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* This article is an editorial reworking of the author's three articles on forgiveness. #1. "A Christian Depth Psychology of Forgiveness Leading to the Resurrection Effect," *The Journal of Christian Healing*, Volume 21, #2, Summer, 1999, pp. 3-23; #2. "Forgiveness, Christian Holism and the Resurrection Effect," *The Journal of Christian Healing*, Volume 22, #3&4, Fall/Winter, 2001, pp 42-57 and #3. "Forgiveness and Healing the Repetition Compulsion," Charles Zeiders, Psy.D. & Julie Wegryn, M.A., *A Primer for Christian Healthcare Practice*, (2001), The Association of Christian Therapists: McLean, VA, pp. 155-164.

Offertory Prayer

We offer to you the persons who have done things to us that have hurt us.

We offer to you those who have oppressed us, slandered us, rejected us, ignored us, misunderstood us, harmed us, attacked us, and done things which we cannot say.

By their real or imagined offenses, we have become wounded. Our thinking has become disordered, our feelings painful, our bodies sick, our experience of life a disappointment.

Father, in the hate and rage we feel toward these people, we avail ourselves of the great dignity we possess as creatures made in the Image of God.

Despite our hurt feelings, thoughts, and bodies, despite the cruel results in us of others' unkindness towards us, we freely abandon our will to punish those have trespassed against us, and we freely employ our will to forgive them.

Let no one suffer as they have made us to suffer. And in so pardoning, O Christ, according to your teaching and example, we commit a revolutionary act against the world principles of retaliation and madness.

*We become free from the prison of the Will to Punish,
and implore the joyfully approving Father and Son*

to send the Holy Spirit

*to restore to us all health,
to remove the afflictions inflicted upon us,
and with the graceful medicine that is God's very self,
to restore in us the human health which is the Image of God.*

Charles L. Zeiders, Psy.D.