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This volume on forgiveness is the first in a projected series of collected symposia presentations on research into the scientific foundations of effective living—how positive mindsets and virtues enhance the lives of individuals and, ultimately, the well-being of society. Future volumes in this Laws of Life Symposia Series will focus on optimism and hope, wisdom, and other life-changing positive states as viewed from various research perspectives.

This series of investigations begins with an exploration of the profound value of the multiple dimensions of forgiveness in our lives. In October, 1997, the John Templeton Foundation invited more than forty scholars to participate in a conference on the scientific study of forgiveness, entitled “A Journey to Hope: A Research Workshop to Launch the John Templeton Foundation’s Program to Encourage the Scientific Study of Forgiveness,” held at Hope College in Holland, Michigan.

Following the conference, more than one hundred researchers submitted proposals in response to a Request for Proposals. Sixty proposals were approved for funding, and twenty-nine have been guaranteed funding through the Campaign for Forgiveness Research. The Templeton Foundation’s grant program is expected to initiate forgiveness research by both established and developing scholars, as well as to assist those researchers who are already embarked on such projects in expanding their investigations.

The speakers were asked to reflect on the present and future status of research into forgiveness from the perspectives of their particular interests. The individual articles were drafted from the presentations and
circulated among all of the contributing authors, who then revised their work based on the feedback they received. This provided a rigorous peer review of each chapter.

All authors gratefully acknowledge the work of their colleagues, who have contributed to our collective thinking about this topic; however, all authors remain solely responsible for what they have written.

I commend this volume to those investigating forgiveness, not only to provide scholars with a sound research foundation, but also to provide the general knowledge and tools that can touch the lives and spirits of us all—at our foundation.

As Dryden said in the epigraph that begins this book, to forgive is our “prerogative.” Indeed, it is one of the most life-affirming choices we can make.

*Everett L. Worthington, Jr.*
DIMENSIONS OF FORGIVENESS

Psychological Research & Theological Perspectives
For thousands of years, people have practiced and studied forgiveness, both within religious and philosophical systems and as part of their personal lives. However, the scientific study of forgiveness began only recently: Before 1985, only five studies investigating forgiveness had been identified. In the thirteen years since then, more than fifty-five scientific studies have been conducted to study forgiveness and to help people learn how to forgive,* as shown in the graph:

*For a summary of many of these studies, see McCullough, Exline, and Baumeister (Chapter 8).

What stimulus triggered this surging scientific interest in forgiveness? Reflection on this subject might have been stimulated by the fall of communism, which could have prompted people to reflect on how to
forgive long-time enemies. It might have been spurred by the need to
deal with increased racial tensions in communities and violent conflicts
within nations—South Africa, Northern Ireland, Rwanda, the United
States, and elsewhere. It might have been ignited by the budding com-
munitarianism movement signaled by published works (e.g., Bellah,
Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Etzioni, 1983, 1984), as well
as a growing postmodern philosophy (Gergen, 1992).

While these and other factors have contributed to a zeitgeist that
permits reflection on forgiveness, a simpler impetus may have been at
work. *Forgive and Forget: Healing the Hurts We Don’t Deserve*, published in
1984 by Lewis Smedes (who contributed Chapter 10 to this volume),
has sold well in the United States and may have stimulated both the gen-
eral public and practitioners of the helping professions to initiate pro-
grams to help us learn the value of forgiveness, as well as how to forgive.

The study of forgiveness has followed the example of many clinical
research models. Beginning largely in the therapeutic realm, it spread to
researchers who created and studied clinical protocols and then branched
out into the basic scientific realm. Two notable exceptions to this pattern
have been basic research by Enright (who contributed Chapter 6 to this
book) on the development of reasoning about forgiveness, which he has
shown to be similar across several cultures, and some of the social psy-
chological research on topics related to forgiveness. For example, from
the 1960s and early 1970s, research programs by numerous social psychol-
ogists have investigated revenge, blame, apologies, confession, and accounts
of transgressions. Thus, the foundation for an integrated basic–applied
scientific research effort—albeit one that is still emerging—has been laid.

Besides the growth in research, there is evidence that forgiveness is
an especially meaningful topic today—both within the scientific com-
munity and in the larger world community:

✦ *The Journal of Family Therapy* recently published a special issue on for-
giveness in family therapy (Vol. 20 [1998], No. 1).

✦ *MARRIAGE AND FAMILY: A Christian Journal* has collected articles
for two special issues on forgiveness in the family (Vol. 2 [1999], Nos.
2 and 3).
INTRODUCTION

✦ McCullough, Pargament, and Thoresen (who contributed to Chapters 8, 3, and 7, respectively, to this book) are collecting chapters for an edited book on forgiveness written by psychologists for Guilford Press (New York); it is expected to be published in August, 1999.

✦ Enright founded the International Forgiveness Institute (IFI), which has created a network of scientists, healing practitioners, and people within the general population who can share current information about forgiveness.

✦ Prime-time television—the newsmagazine 20/20—featured appearances by DiBlasio, Enright, and Hargrave in a twenty-minute segment on forgiveness that originally aired on January 3, 1997.

✦ The Chronicle of Higher Education has also featured forgiveness (1998, July 17).

✦ Forgiveness has been relevant within countries plagued by strife. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa has provided a focus for world attention on righting the wrongs of the apartheid era. Numerous stories of brutality and harm have been confessed in public hearings, and many have been forgiven by the victims’ families, as well as by the victims themselves. And, even as the “Troubles” continue in Northern Ireland, the restoration of peace has brought about examples of forgiveness.

Although forgiveness is receiving attention within scientific journals and the media, the need for further investigation in this area seems to be outpacing the research being done. Throughout the world, hostility among people and perpetration of evil continues, and the need for forgiveness for political abuses is high. In the United States, violence seems to continue to rise as well. And in our homes, the conflict and hurtfulness between partners that often occur before the dissolution of a marriage—at current rates, almost half of the couples who marry can expect to divorce—argue for increased knowledge about how to repair such personal damage, for ourselves and for the most vulnerable victims, our children.

With interest and effort burgeoning, it is timely to examine the scientific research into forgiveness that can both inform and invite further
scholarly dialog on the topic. The articles in this volume derived from the symposium presentations provide views on the role of forgiveness from different perspectives: religion (Marty considers Christianity in Chapter 1; Dorff reflects on Judaism in Chapter 2); basic social processes (Pargament and Rye examine the psychology of religion in Chapter 3; Baumeister, Exline, and Sommer investigate a social psychological point of view in Chapter 4); and interventions (Worthington explores his Pyramid Model in Chapter 5; Enright and Coyle explain Enright’s process model in Chapter 6; Thoresen, Luskin, and Harris set forth general guidelines for conducting interventions in Chapter 7). In addition to reviewing some of the directions in which research on forgiveness is heading, it is appropriate to consider the published research, and McCullough, Exline, and Baumeister provide an indexed collection of annotated research articles in Chapter 8. An earlier version of this annotated bibliography, less up to date and less focused specifically on forgiveness, was available on the John Templeton Foundation website (http://www.templeton.org, Grant Opportunities, Forgiveness RFP [1997]) to inform researchers in the field of extant empirical studies. The annotated bibliography in this volume includes several research studies that were not contained in the web version.

The symposium presentations on current topics, a review of the literature, and an analysis of future research provide a foundation for investigators who wish to study forgiveness scientifically. To round out the book, I provide a discussion in Chapter 9 that suggests an ambitious matrix of studies needed to create a vital science of forgiveness. We need to determine the psychological, social, and even physical mechanisms of forgiveness; study different levels (event, relationship, and personality) of forgiveness predictors; discern the social processes that occur in forgiveness within ongoing relationships; investigate the correlates and sequelae of divine forgiveness; and determine the best methods of intervening to promote forgiveness in the lives of individuals, dyads, families, communities, racial and ethnic groups, and countries.

The book closes with the stirring account in Chapter 10 by Smedes, who sets forgiveness into the larger context of reconciliation and hope. He not only describes the “stations” along the “journey” to hope (estrangement, forgiveness, reconciliation, hope), but also poignantly
discusses the limitations of and quandaries in forgiving that continue to haunt us as individuals and societies. This chapter will, I hope, motivate researchers to carry out their studies with clear thinking and energy fueled by zeal, passion, and compassion.

REFERENCES


