pain. It is a freedom to reconstruct one's life from a richer tapestry of experience."

When All Three Perspectives Occur in a Relationship

Don grew up in a blended family with children from several marriages by both of his parents. To manage the blend, his father became a tyrant, eventually throwing Don out of the house at age fifteen.

To achieve forgiveness, Don first had to deal with psychological issues, such as anger toward his father and guilt for not being the son his father wanted. Eventually, his inner struggle and disappointment shifted to focus on the relationship. As an adult, he was unsure how to relate to his father after years of abuse. His forgiveness involved seeing past the harsh way he had been treated, and trying to be pleasant when he saw his father.

By the end of his father's life, Don's forgiveness gained a spiritual dimension. After many years of bitterness, he decided it was time to give his father's behavior and his own resentment over to God. A few years before his father's death, Don reconciled with his father and experienced a deep level of healing.

As illustrated in Don's story, we have identified all three of the primary perspectives from which people approach forgiveness: psychological, relational, and spiritual. In some cases, we might experience all three at the same time; in others, we may begin in one domain and end in another, as Don did over the course of fifty years.

We experience the need to forgive or be forgiven in many different ways. For some, forgiveness may appear as a spiritual yearning for peace. For others, psychological self-doubt, anger, and, at times, even resentment may precede the drive to offer or accept forgiveness. And some experience deteriorating communication in an important relationship. If you are trying to get past a harm you have done or one that has been done to you, you need to focus on the perspective that matches your need. For spiritual issues—when you are searching for meaning in life experiences and inner peace—you need to work on resolving forgiveness issues with the Sacred. If the issue is psychological, you have to explore your inner sources of worry and anger. This may include considering the issue of self-forgiveness. And for those who have damage in relationships, the path may call for initiating a discussion with a friend or family member to resolve old wounds. For each of the perspectives, we must do different kinds of work for forgiveness is to be achieved.

As far as the East is from the West, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

—PSALM 103:12

In the chapters that follow, we explore ways to find peace through forgiveness in each of the different perspectives. We provide tactics for self-healing as well as the healing of broken relationships. And because we live in community, we conclude this journey with direction on how you can help those around you experience freedom through forgiveness. Let's begin the journey on this healing path together.

Questions

1. How do you typically respond to situations requiring forgiveness: with grace, by working through your emotions, by encouraging dialogue, or by setting down conditions?
2. List some examples of the psychological, relational, and spiritual perspectives of forgiveness in your life?
3. What helps you get over harm that's been done to you?

CHAPTER 2

WAYS WE EXPERIENCE FORGIVENESS

Three Perspectives on Harm Within and Between Us

To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you.

—Lewis Smedes

People express their forgiveness or others in many ways. How a person who has been harmed chooses to respond depends on many factors, including who committed the harm, the seriousness of the harm, and the type of relationship she has with the transgressor. Among the more common types of responses, we find the following:

Grace. This response involves unconditional compassion and mercy because the wounded person has great resilience, patience, and capacity for self-repair, he is able to dismiss the harm and continue the relationship without anger or resentment.

Working through emotions. In this response, the person forgives as her negative emotions subside. This allows her to let go of the harm done without placing demands on the transgressor.

Dialogue. In this response, the person invites the offender into a dialogue through which he hear what hurt him. He then wants to learn why he acted as he did and how to prevent this from happening again. Through conversation, healing begins and the relationship is restored.

Conditional. In this response, the person seeks to have the transgressor see what he has done and make a promise not to do it again. Depending on the specified conditions, the person may gain some or all of what she wanted in the relationship.

Forgiveness also occurs across different dimensions. You may need to forgive someone, you might need to be forgiven by someone, or you need to forgive yourself. Or, you may experience forgiveness in one of the dimensions and not another. For example, you could have forgiven your father for his abuse when you were a little girl, but you still feel angry and bitter today for your mother, who you