

Thank you for your interest in this topic. If you have any questions about this, or any issue, please contact our office at 214-642-8737

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Newsletter of Stonebriar Counseling Associates

▣ Forgiveness-The Road Less Taken

For many people forgiveness is one of the hardest steps of all in their progress toward love and acceptance. Yet it is essential. For as long as we are unable to forgive, we keep ourselves chained to an unforgiving spirit. We give them rent-free space in our minds, emotional shackles on our hearts, and the right to torment us in the small hours of the night. In order to clearly understand the process of forgiveness it is important to articulate a clear definition. First

What forgiveness is not:

1. *Forgetting/Denial*

Time passing or ignoring the effects of the wrongdoing so that permission is granted for the memory to be dislodged from any and all recollection.

2. *Excusing*

Believing that nothing bad happened. "It was only this one time. It won't happen again. The person did this because...it wasn't really their responsibility." Once blame is attributed to one's culture, genetics, family upbringing, etc., extenuating circumstances become the modus operandi leaving little or no room for personal responsibility of their choice.

3. *Seeking Justice or Compensation*

"She/he **deserves** to know they have wronged me."

"Forgiving" becomes a sense of moral superiority. Forgiveness is not a quid pro quo deal--it doesn't demand compensation first.

4. *Forgiving For Your Own Sake* In her book *Forgiveness: A Bold Choice for a Peaceful Heart*.

Robin Casarjian, a secular psychotherapist, advocates forgiveness as a means of helping people let go of old anger and resentment. The idea sounds

good. But how is she defining forgiveness? In an interview she stated, "So often when people think about forgiveness they think about what it's going to do for someone else. . . What they don't realize is that forgiveness is really an act of self-interest. We're doing ourselves a favor because we become free to have a more peaceful life--we free ourselves from being emotional victims of others" (*New Age Journal*, Sept/Oct 1993, p.78).

There are many who long for peace by adopting this unconditional approach to forgiveness. Forgiving for your own sake does relieve feelings of rage and bitterness. It does allow us to release ourselves from the bitter emotions of revenge. It does allow us to treat those who have harmed us in a manner that *seems* Christ-like. But on closer inspection it is a Trojan horse that threatens to undermine the loving forgiveness taught in the Bible. The danger is that it changes forgiveness from an expression of love to a self-centered act of self-protection.

What forgiveness is:

Throughout the Bible, forgiveness carries the idea of "release," "sending away," or "letting go." The Greek word often translated "forgiveness" was used to indicate release from an office, marriage, obligation, debt, or punishment. The idea of a debt or something owed is inherent to the concept of forgiveness. In biblical terms, therefore, forgiveness is *the loving, voluntary cancellation of a debt*. Morally, it is a response

to an injustice (a moral wrong). It is a merciful restraint from pursuing resentment or revenge. So that paradoxically, it is the foregoing of resentment or revenge when the wrongdoer's actions deserve it and giving the gifts of mercy, generosity and love when the wrongdoer does not deserve them.

▣ An Unforgiving Heart

The process of forgiveness can only occur when an individual realizes that he/she has the choice to forgive or not to forgive and that no one can force them to do either. This ability to forgive is a reflection of the personal control we have over our lives. In other words, one must recognize how the hurtful words and/or actions of another has resulted in personal pain. Does the other person make you burn with anger? Do you feel the knot in your stomach or experience the cycling and recycling of your thoughts as you re-experience the events in your mind? Do they stay awake as you rehearse in your mind what you would like to say or do to 'punish' them? Indeed, the pain is all yours. Therefore, the personal pain that we feel can only be directed at forgiving the people who hurt us. We cannot deny the pain we *feel* as we move forward to forgive the person who opened the wound. Author Lewis B. Smedes¹ offers a few examples of unfair hurts that can become deep enough to bring us into a crisis of forgiving: 1) Unfair pain-wrongfully wounded when we don't deserve it, or when it's not necessary. Whether people hurt us

¹ Forgive and Forget, Lewis B. Smedes, HarperCollins Publishers Inc., New York, 1984, pp.7-19.

because they believe we deserve it in a vengeful manner or we get caught in the crossfire as an innocent bystander around someone else's personal conflict. 2) Deep pains-such as disloyalty when promises broken at a place where there was once trust and support (i.e. infidelity); or betrayal from those whose promises are sold out for someone or something else (i.e. incest); or brutality when you are personally violated by a stranger (i.e. rape, violent crime). The interesting thing is that people are prone to attach their pain to the moment they were hurt and endow it with a sense of immortality. I commonly refer to this as an "emotional file folder" that contains the pain of anger, resentment, and bitterness. In turn, the emotional pain assaults the mind every time the memory is brought to the surface of one's thought process. It will attach itself in every area of daily living until its parasitic tentacles suck the joy and hope right out of us. There is an emotional cost of refusing to forgive. If the perpetrator is someone the injured party must continue to see, each contact with the offender will cause the victim to feel upset again and again. Continuing to feel angry toward distant or dead perpetrators, over transgressions that cannot be changed, does nothing but make the injured party miserable. Forgiveness would release the victim, and would be a welcome relief. Such pain can be healed. And, by forgiving someone for hurting you, one might experience beneficial health effects that derive from the capacity for blocking negative effects of stress. Health professionals tell us that the body manufactures "high voltage" chemicals like adrenaline and cortisone when you don't forgive. Too many of these chemicals can result in tension-related ills such as headaches and abdominal pains. Left unchecked, this can result in more serious problems such as ulcers, gastritis or irritable bowel

syndrome. Increased health through reduced stress may derive from the brain's release of beneficial neurohormones and neuropeptides.

▣ Steps of Forgiveness

One of the first steps in helping people extend forgiveness is to show them that they can forgive others when they realize that their well-being is not in the hands of those who have harmed them. Not that we loose the wrongdoer from the hurt but that we release the person within our memory of the wrong. ***Forgiving within the mind and heart is the means by which one does not have to understand why the person hurt us. Understanding may come later, in fragments, an insight here and a glimpse there, after forgiving.*** We should not make forgetting a **test** of our forgiving. The test of forgiving lies with healing the lingering pain of the past, not with forgetting that the past ever happened. Secondly, one must separate the hurtful person's action from the person him/herself. Otherwise, the action or words and the hurtful person become one reality. Once we separate the person from the act that has hurt us we can begin to forgive the person, not the act. Thirdly, choose to forgive. C.S. Lewis said, "Real forgiveness means looking steadily at the sin, the sin that is left over without any excuse, after all allowances have been made, and seeing it in all its horror, dirt, meanness and malice, and nevertheless being wholly reconciled to the man who has done it."² God's concept of love is so radically different from our own. We tend to love what we like. He loves what is in our best interest. We are inclined to forgive when we think it is in our best interest to do so. He wants us to forgive when it is in the best interest of someone else

to do so. We are inclined to embrace what is comfortable and to avoid what brings pain. He tells us, "Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good" (Rom. 12:9). Loving others requires that we be willing to forgive.

Forgiving others requires that we be willing to love. Both require an ever-deepening relationship with God to make us a reflection of His good heart to those with whom we have relationships. For then, and only then, is love "made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like Him" (1 Jn. 4:17 NIV). Fourth, Commit to forgive. When you forgive, you can eventually doubt that you have forgiven. When people remember a previous injury or offense, they often interpret it as evidence that they must not have forgiven. If you make your forgiveness tangible, you are less likely to doubt it later. Tell a friend, partner, or counselor that you have forgiven the person who hurt you. Write a "certificate of forgiveness," stating that you have, as of today, forgiven.

The steps of forgiveness involve commitment and personal dedication toward the person who hurt us. And for those we counsel who are either living with recent memories or those covered by the sands of time-not only is commitment important but so is the extension of God's love through them no matter how mean, cruel, or terribly unfair someone was to them. Remember, limited forgiveness is like conditional love-it's a poor substitute for the genuine thing!

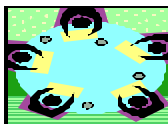
² Quoted in Guelzo, Allen C. (February 8, 1993). Fear of forgiving. *Christianity today*: 37, 2, 42-45. (p. 44)



Newsletter of Stonebriar Counseling Associates

From the desk of....

Bob Good



**Sexual Addiction Group Meeting
Tuesday Nights at 7:00 pm
Location: SCA office**



Dear Educator and Ministry Leader:

At San Diego's Wild Life Animal Park, the following sign is posted at the entrance:

**PLEASE DO NOT!!!
annoy, torment, pester, plague, badger,
harass, persecute, bother, tease, tantalize, or ruffle
THE ANIMALS!**

Now, if we would dare to change the last two words to "other people," the sign could probably be placed almost anywhere: billboards, offices, churches, even in homes across America! Because we are all so very different sometimes those differences can cause us to build walls rather than drawbridges to people who have hurt us. Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote: "Man is a bundle of relations, a knot of roots..." And, every so often we feel like a knot of roots...twisted, torn, pulled, stretched and snagged from the mixture of relationships we have with people. But Emerson finished his quote by saying, "Man is a bundle of relations, a knot of roots whose flower and fruitage is the world." In other words, even though we are all distinctively different the relationships we have with people can indeed bring sweetness and refreshment. And, with companionship and communication comes love and understanding. The problem is that we sometimes find ourselves going into the construction business of building walls rather than bridges-far more concerned about what divides us rather than what connects us.

Within some OF US there is a slow boiling mixture of resentment, bitterness, and anger. Unfortunately, if allowed to fester its toxic fumes will foam to a boil within the steamroom of the soul and then it's only a matter of time when the damage is done-with ugly caustic words; a domestic disharmony, a broken friendship, or, a ruined Christian testimony. Attitudes of vengeance, hate, resentment, and bitterness all are crucial elements to the hunger of unforgiveness.

For most of us, forgiveness is a difficult matter to handle whether we wronged someone or someone wronged us. In our attempts to be forgiving our consciences are eased if we pretend, forget, or even act like we are forgiving someone in our life. How can we help others become forgiving people without harboring hidden feelings of hurt covered up by a spirit of unforgiveness? The longer one delays in forgiving those who have injured them the greater the pressure mounts to a maddening magnitude of a strained/broken relationship.

This month's article is part three of a four part series on human emotions that we have been focusing on: part one- dealing with three different manifestations of guilt; part two-false guilt; and part three-four steps toward a forgiving heart. I invite you this month to join me as we learn how to take positive steps in repairing broken relationships.

Sincerely,
Bob

Bob is available this summer to
Note: speak at church camps or
Sunday Evening church services.



- 1. Understand that forgiving does not mean giving permission for the behavior to be repeated. It does not mean saying that what was done was acceptable. Forgiveness is needed for behaviors that were not acceptable and that you should not allow to be repeated.**
- 2. Recognize who is being hurt by your non-forgiveness. Does the other person burn with your anger, feel the knot in your stomach, experience the cycling and recycling of your thoughts as you re-experience the events in your mind? Do they stay awake as you rehearse in your mind what you would like to say or do to 'punish' them? No, the pain is all yours.**
- 3. Do not require to know 'why' as a prerequisite to forgiveness. Knowing why the behavior happened is unlikely to lessen the pain, because the pain came at a time when you did not know why. Occasionally there are times when knowing why makes forgiveness unnecessary, but they are rare. Don't count on it and don't count on even the perpetrator knowing why.**
- 4. Make a list of what you need to forgive. What was actually done that caused your pain? Not what you felt, what was done.**
- 5. Acknowledge your part. Were you honest about your hurt or did you hide the fact that the behavior hurt you? Did you seek peace by reassuring the perpetrator that it was all right? Did you stay when you could or should have left? If so, then you, too, have some responsibility. (Here you start to move away from being a victim.)**
- 6. Make a list of what you gained from the relationship, whatever form of relationship it was. Looking back you may be focusing on the negatives, the hurts. Yet if they were repeated, you must have stayed to allow the repetition. You did not remove yourself. Why? There must have been some positives if you chose to stay around. What were they?**
- 7. Write a letter to the person (no need to mail it). Acknowledge what you gained from the relationship, and express forgiveness for the hurts. Allow yourself to express all your feelings fully. Do not focus only on the hurts.**
- 8. Create a ceremony in which you get rid of your lists and the letter, so symbolizing the ending of the link between you. You may choose to visualize placing them on a raft and watching it drift gently away down a river. You may prefer to burn them and scatter the ashes. You may invent some other form of ritualized separation.**
- 9. Visualize the person you are forgiving being blessed by your forgiveness and, as a result, being freed from continuing the behavior that hurt you.**
- 10. Now that you have freed yourself from the painful links and released the pain, feel yourself growing lighter and more joyous. Now you are free to move on with your life without that burden of bitterness. Do not look back in anger.**



Upcoming Free Workshop

Please RSVP



Spousal Abuse-Signs To look for/When To Refer—AUG 21, '03

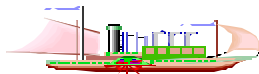
(Free Coffee and Donuts) Time: 6:30 PM

Location: 3550 Parkwood Blvd., Suite 301, Bldg. C, Frisco, Texas

Call SCA office at 214-642-8737 to register

Note:

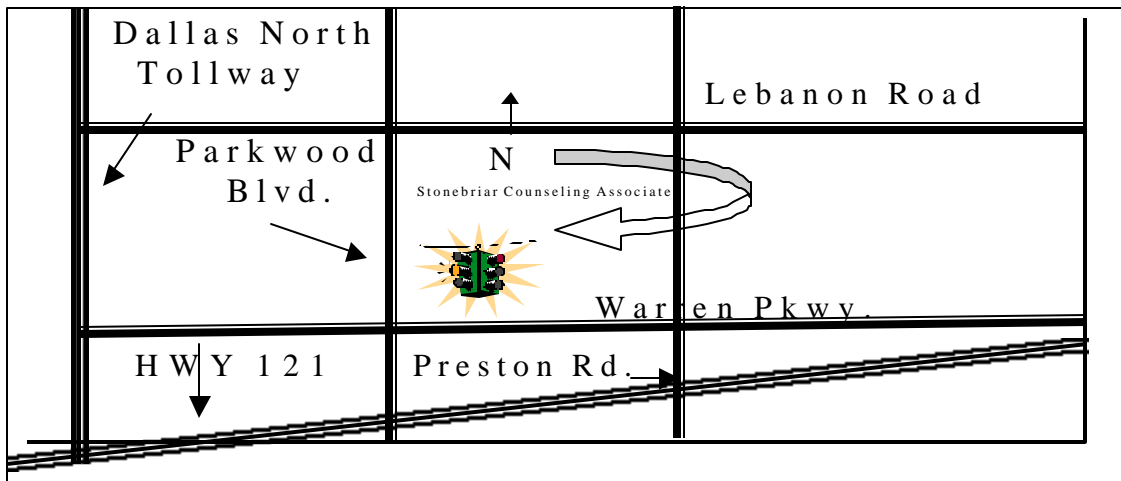
This summer Bob Good is available to speak at camps



New Location!!



or evening church services



Mission Statement

Stonebriar Counseling Associates (SCA) is purposefully passionate in providing quality psychotherapy from a Christian perspective that influences the treatment of psychological, emotional, and mental health issues.

To this end, SCA is committed to glorify God by:

- Believing that each person has the innate ability for personal growth and wholeness.
- Seeking a variety of approaches to help you learn new skills and find more choices so as to manage life's changes with a broader range of solutions for recognizing your strengths.
- Accepting all people with respect and love regardless of age, sex, race, religion, ethnicity or socio-economic status.
- Thoughtfully affirming and carefully following the morals of the Christian faith and the ethics of the professional governing boards.
- Providing research and development for new and innovative programs, seminars, and workshops in order to further the well-being and self-sufficiency of each client.