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Practicing forgiveness: spirituality and psychothera

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Practicing Forgiveness: Spirituality and Psychotherapy

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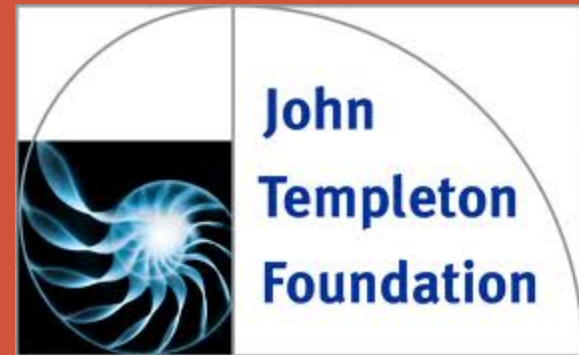


Presentation for Wartburg Theological Seminary, November 2019

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Gratitude

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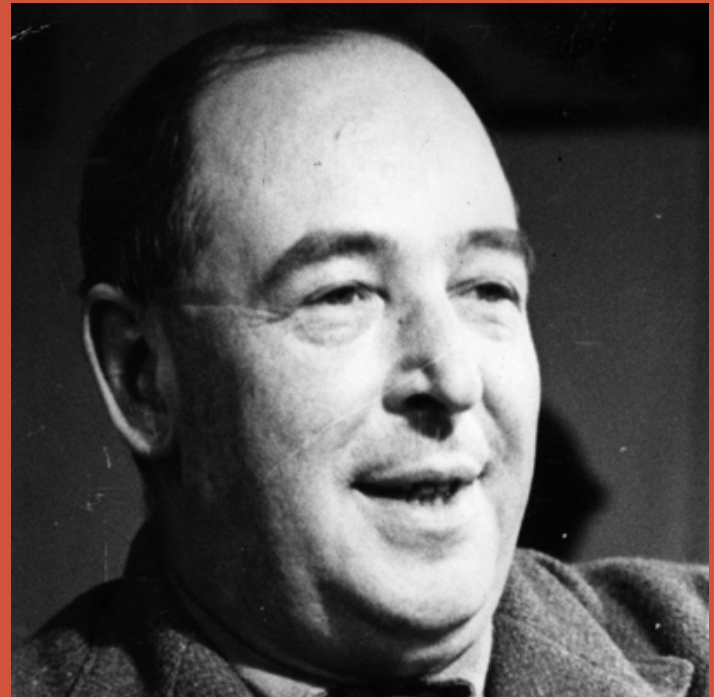
Psychological Research on Forgiveness

- **Forgiving Others***
- **Seeking Forgiveness**
- **Self-Forgiveness**
- **Receiving Forgiveness**
- **Inter-Group Forgiveness**



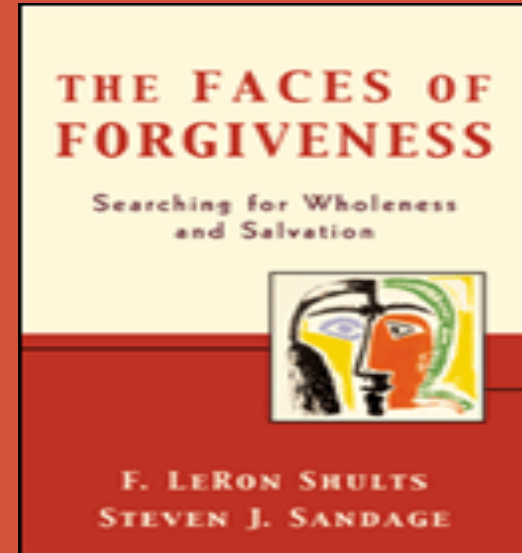
**“Everyone says
forgiveness is a lovely
idea, until they have
something to forgive.”**

**C.S. Lewis,
*Mere Christianity***



Defining Forgiveness

Forgiveness: a process of soothing one's demand for revenge and internal avoidance and moving toward an attitude of goodwill toward one's offender (McCullough et al., 2007; Sandage, 2005; Shults & Sandage, 2003).



Michael
McCullough

Differentiating Forgiveness

Authentic Forgiveness is *not*:

- 1. Forgetting or dissociation**
- 2. Exoneration or condoning an offense**
- 3. Reaction formation**
- 4. A means for taking a one-up position**
- 5. Reconciliation**

New Testament Words for Forgiveness

(see Shults & Sandage, 2003)

- *Aphiemi* – “to send (or set) away”

“Let it be known to you ... that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.” Rom 4:7

- *Charizomai* – “to manifest grace”

“And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.”

Eph 4:32

Forgiveness is an Integrative Process

“The forgiving character is only achieved after a hard fought battle.”

Joanna North,
*Exploring
Forgiveness*



Balancing Forgiveness & Justice Dialectics

“Forgiveness and justice are related in this way. To claim forgiveness while perpetuating injustice is to live a fiction; to fight for justice without also being prepared to offer forgiveness is to render your struggle null and void.”

Kenneth Kaunda



Sharon Lamb, *Before Forgiving*

“Concerning women, and particularly women who have been abused, the idea of offering forgiveness toward unrepentant perpetrators in an effort to help a woman free herself from anger is dangerous and plays into deep stereotypes of women’s ‘essential’ nature.”



Kristina Coop Gordon’s research with women at domestic violence shelters shows “forgiveness” tended to be associated with quicker returns to perpetrators.

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Forgiveness in Cultural Context

(Sandage, Crabtree, & Bell, in press)

Importance of cultural and contextual differences in practices of forgiveness. For example, individualism versus collectivism.

Sandage, S.J., Crabtree, S.A., & Bell, C.A. (in press). Forgiveness and culture: Conceptual issues. In E. L. Worthington, Jr. & N. Wade, (Eds.). *Handbook of forgiveness* (2nd ed). New York: Brunner-Routledge.



Hmong Filial Piety & Forgiveness

(Sandage, Hill, & Vang, 2003)

“We have always said, ‘After a family argues, they still sleep in the same bed. For brothers, even after an argument, it is them who prepare your funeral and you who prepares theirs.’”

Male (age 47)



Science of Forgiveness

Forgiveness & Health

Forgiving Personality has been associated with *reduced* (Worthington et al., 2007):

- Depression
- Muscle Tension
- Systolic and Diastolic Blood Pressure
- Mean Arterial Pressure & Lower Cardiovascular Reactivity
- Self-Reported Illness
- Sensory Pain among those with Chronic Back Pain

Relational Spirituality

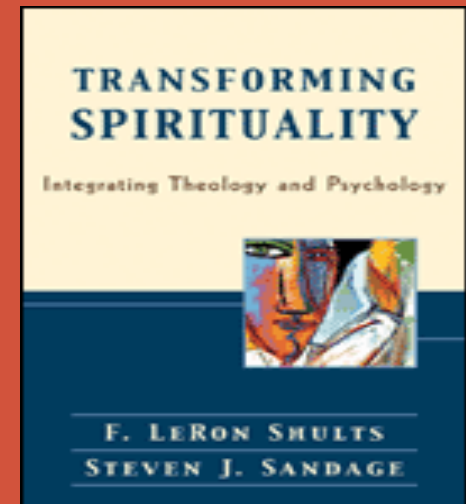
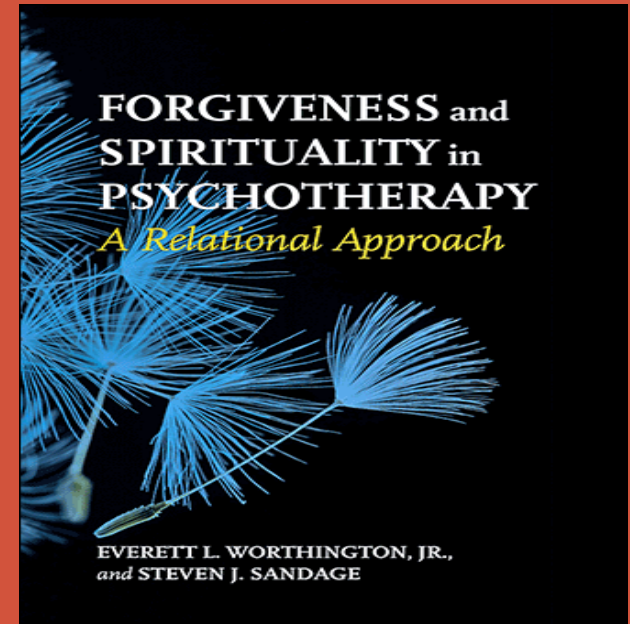
Relational Spirituality (Shults & Sandage, 2006; Worthington & Sandage, 2015):

ways of relating to God and the sacred.

Images of God and the sacred are shaped by neurobiological relational templates.

Spiritual health & pathology

Sandage (2019)



Research on Spirituality/Religious Factors & Interpersonal Forgiveness

Negative Factors	Positive Factors
Anger at God	Gratitude
Spiritual Disappointment	Spiritual Well-Being
Spiritual Instability	Secure Attachment w/ God
Perceived Desecration	Intrinsic Religiosity
Spiritual Grandiosity	Meditative Prayer

Practicing Forgiveness

Can People Be Helped to Forgive?

- Wade, N. G., Hoyt, W. T., Kidwell, J. E. M., & Worthington, E. L., Jr. (2014). Efficacy of psychotherapeutic interventions to promote forgiveness: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 82*(1), 154-170.
- 54 studies (N=2,323)
- Avg effect size $\Delta+$.56 cf. no tx;
 $\Delta+$.45 cf. alternative tx
- Efficacy is proportional to time in treatment.



Forgiveness in psychoeducational groups: Hour for hour, all forgiveness treatments that have been investigated have been found to be equal.

Some Pathways to Forgiveness

- **Empathy**
- **Differentiation of Self**
- **Emotion Regulation**
- **Humility**
- **Grieving/Mourning**
- **Mindfulness or Meditative Prayer**

Forgiveness & Empathy

Comparison of Two Group Interventions to Promote Forgiveness: Empathy as a Mediator of Change

Steven J. Sandage

Everett L. Worthington, Jr.

Journal of Mental Health Counseling (2010)

vol 32, pp. 35-57

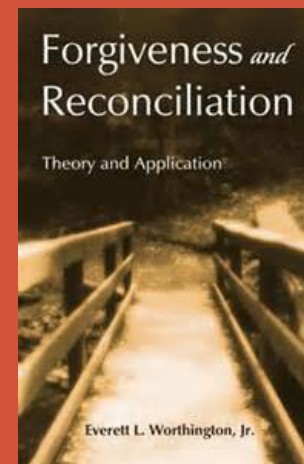
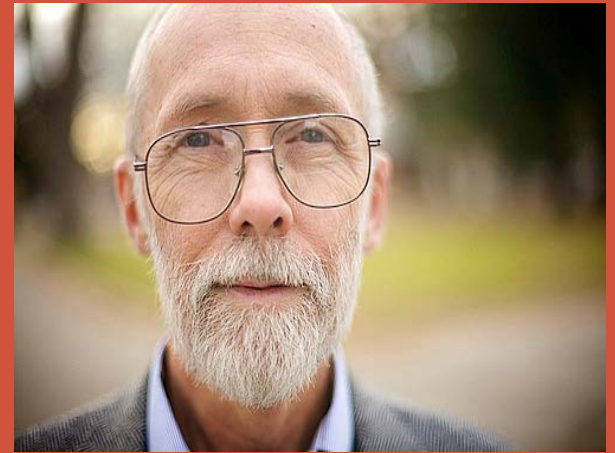
bell hooks on Forgiveness & Compassion

“For me, forgiveness and compassion are always linked: how do we hold people accountable for wrongdoing and yet at the same time remain in touch with their humanity enough to believe in their capacity to be transformed?”



Worthington's REACH Model

- **Recall the Hurt (in helpful ways)**
- **Empathize**
- **Altruistic Gift**
- **Commit**
- **Hold onto Forgiveness**
- www.people.vcu.edu/~eworthh/



Empathy and Forgiveness

- Empathy has been found to mediate change toward forgiveness in intervention studies (eg Sandage & Worthington, 2010)
- Humanizing the offender and reducing psychological distance.
- Reflecting on their story

Differentiation of Self

Differentiation of Self (DoS) represents the capacity to balance: (a) cognitive and emotional functioning, and (b) intimacy and autonomy in relationships (Skowron & Schmitt, 2003).



Solid, flexible self (Schnarch, 2009).

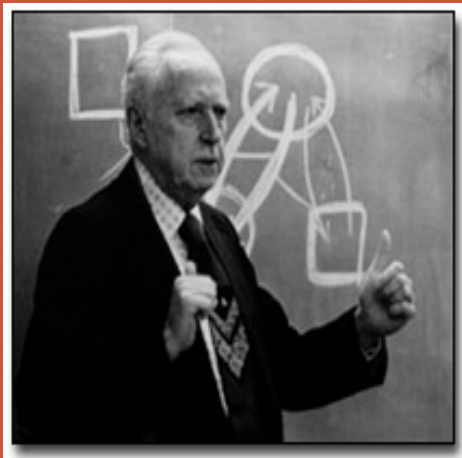
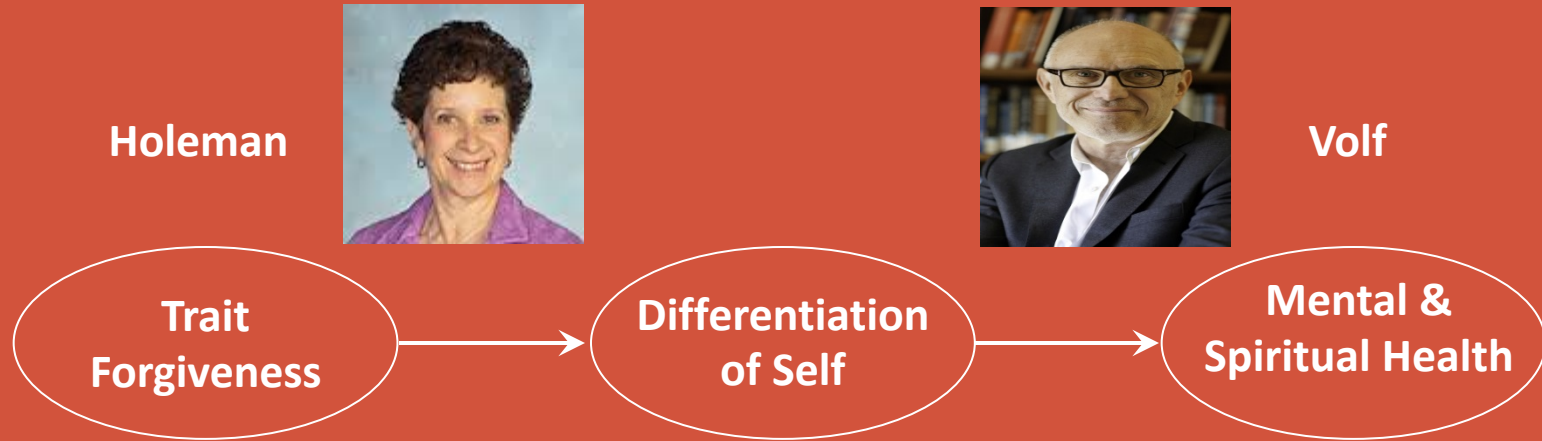
Limited need for interpersonal fusion or cutoff.

Skills in self-regulation or self-soothing.



Forgiveness and Differentiation: Mediator model

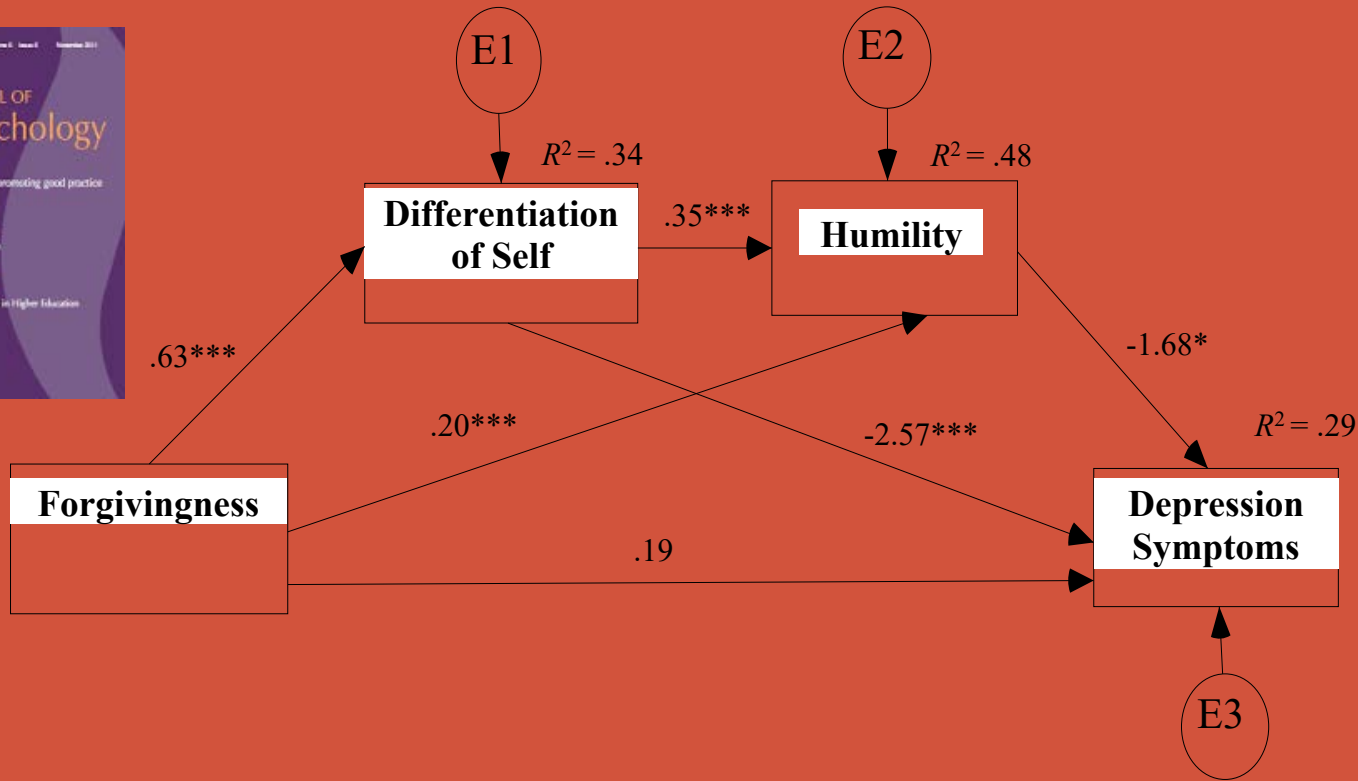
(Sandage & Jankowski, 2010; N=213)



Bowen



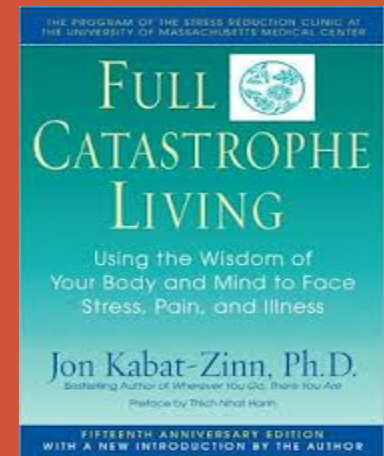
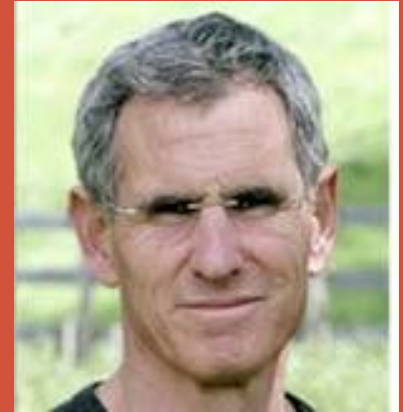
Friedman



(Jankowski, Sandage, & Hill, 2013; N=213): Multiple mediation model predicting depression symptoms. *Note:* Unstandardized coefficients are presented. Overall model: $F(3, 209) = 27.90$, $p = .00$, $R^2 = .29$. Specific indirect effect between forgivingness and depression symptoms through DoS: $B = -1.62$, $SE = .34$, BC 95% CI (-2.34, -1.03). Specific indirect effect between forgivingness and depression symptoms through humility: $B = -.33$, $SE = .19$, BC 95% CI (-.80, -.04). Specific indirect effect through DoS and then through humility: $B = -.37$, $SE = .21$, BC 95% CI (-.89, -.02). $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$.

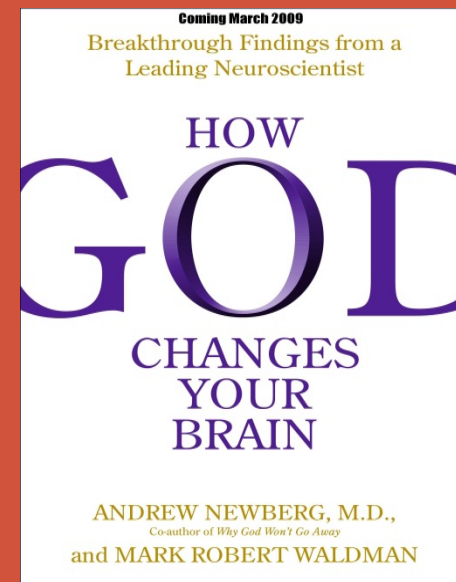
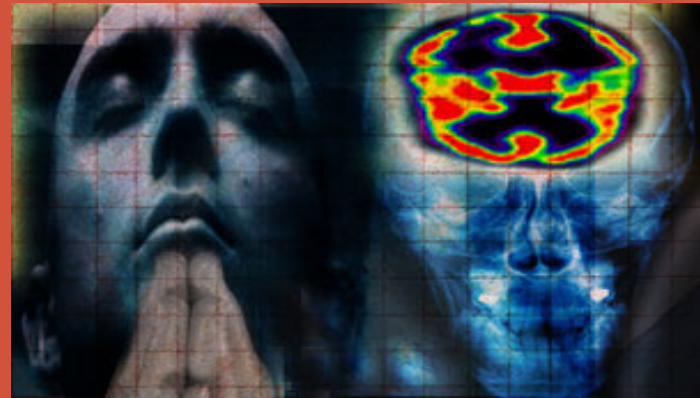
Jon Kabat-Zinn on Forgiveness Meditation: Joy & Sorrow

“We do a lovingkindness meditation ... to give people a taste of the power a concentrated and calm mind can generate when evoking feelings of kindness, generosity, goodwill, love, and forgiveness. The response is invariably moving; a great many tears are shed, both in joy and in sorrow.”



Andrew Newberg – Forgiveness Meditation

Meditative
Practice/Prayer
+
Imaging Offender
=
Forgiveness



Sandage (2019)

Implications for Church Applications

- Recognize forgiveness is sensitive and complicated topic
- Study complicating impact of trauma
- Integrate theology and psychology; beliefs, emotions, behaviors, relational patterns
- Introduce diversity
- Be ready with referrals for therapy
- Construct a multi-week and multi-level engagement (eg sermons, adult education, discussion or study groups, etc)