

The Effects of a Prayer Intervention on the Process of Forgiveness

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Abstract

Throughout the psychological literature there has been a vast amount of research examining forgiveness as well as prayer within the context of the discipline of psychology; however these 2 constructs have rarely been examined together. This study examined the relationship between 2 important religious and spiritual constructs: forgiveness and prayer. Recent studies suggest Christians who forgive often use prayer. This intervention study looked to see more specifically what benefit there is to those who specifically use prayer as they seek to forgive an interpersonal offense. Participants consisted of 411 undergraduate students from private Christian colleges across the United States. They were randomly assigned to a prayer group, a devotional attention group or a control group, consisting of a sixteen day intervention. Those who were in the prayer and devotional attention groups were found to have significant changes in state forgiveness. In addition, those in the prayer intervention group showed significant changes in empathy toward their offender. Implications include the importance of exploring forgiveness as a spiritual construct, as well as help clinicians integrate their clients'

journey towards forgiveness with their clients' spiritual practices. In addition, these findings can help clinicians educate their clients on the relational benefits of spending daily time with God.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

An old adage reminds us that to err is human, and to forgive divine. Apparently the realm of forgiveness has moved beyond the sacred and into the psychological, as forgiveness has been given much attention by psychological researchers and clinicians over the last 20 years. An abundance of empirical studies have examined the benefits of forgiveness on physical health and emotional well-being (Harris & Thorensen, 2005; Lawler et al., 2005; McCullough, 2000; McCullough & Witvliet, 2002; Thorensen, Luskin, & Harris, 1998, 2000; Witvliet, 2001; Worthington & Scherer, 2004). In addition, a wide variety of forgiveness definitions have been formulated within the psychological community and from these definitions has come the development of many forgiveness models, both religious and secular (Augsberger, 1988; Brandsma, 1982; Cunningham, 1985; Enright & The Human Development Study Group, 1991; Fitzgibbons, 1986; Hargrave & Sells, 1997; Menninger, 1996; Pettitt, 1987; Pingleton, 1997; Smedes, 1996; Worthington, 1998). Moreover, numerous empirical forgiveness intervention studies have been reported, including those with college students (Lampton, Oliver, Worthington & Berry, 2005; Luskin, 2001; Luskin, Ginzberg & Thorensen, 2005; McCullough & Worthington, 1995; Rye & Pargament, 2002), postabortion men (Coyle & Enright, 1997), female incest survivors (Freedman & Enright, 1996), adolescents (Freedman & Knupp, 2003), substance abusers (Lin, Mack, Enright, Krahn & Baskin, 2004), married couples (DiBlasio & Benda, 2002;

Ripley & Worthington, 2002), elderly adults (Hebl & Enright, 1993; Ingersoll-Dayton, Campbell & Ha, 2009), and divorced adults (Rye et al., 2005). These studies show various benefits for those who experience a forgiveness intervention including a decrease in anxiety, depression and anger as well as an increase in forgiveness, hope, self-esteem, and spiritual wellbeing.

The Religiosity of Forgiveness

This assortment of research has led to a greater psychological understanding of forgiveness as an intrapersonal construct. Internal negative thoughts, behaviors and feelings have been found to decrease, while positive thoughts, behaviors and feelings increase as one forgives another (Lawler-Row, Scott, Raines, Edlis-Matityahou & Moore, 2006). Yet, several have pointed out that while in the process of researching the psychological aspects of forgiveness, the religious foundations of the forgiveness construct have been neglected (McCullough & Worthington 1999; McMinn, Fervida, Louwse, Pop, Thompson, et al., 2008). Forgiveness has been a construct that for centuries has had deep roots in major world religions including Christianity, Judaism, Islam and Hinduism. Some would argue forgiveness, at its very core, is a pervasively spiritual concept (Frise & McMinn, 2010; Meek & McMinn, 1997). For many religiously-committed individuals, forgiveness is tied tightly with their own spiritual context; it is a moral value that many of those of devout faith attempt to internalize and carry out in their lives and relationships (Rye, Paragament, Ali, Beck, Dorff, et.al., 2000). Even though there has been a plethora of psychological research surrounding forgiveness, it is not simply a psychological construct.

In a Gallup poll (2002) of a nationally represented sample, 84% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed, “because of my faith, I have forgiven people who have hurt me deeply” (p. 5). Multiple studies have examined the relationship between forgiveness and

religiosity (Edwards et al., 2002; Enright, Santos & Al-Mabuk, 1989; Gorsuch & Hao, 1993). Religious individuals who felt they should forgive, placed a greater value on forgiveness and were more forgiving in general. However, as McCullough and Worthington (1999) explain, as might be hypothesized, the relationship between forgiveness and religiosity is neither clear nor easily reduced to simple categories. Forgiveness as a construct can be measured in two ways, as a general personality disposition or as a more specific situational response. Forgiveness as a disposition describes “people's attitudes, values and beliefs” (McCullough & Worthington, 1999, p. 1146) about forgiveness. Forgiveness as a situational response measures specific, isolated forgiveness responses. Though religiosity was measured in various ways throughout the studies, it was found consistently that those who were more religious rated higher on dispositional forgiveness traits, and not necessarily higher on situational forgiveness. Hui, Watkins, Wong and Sun (2006) suggest that due to the relationship between forgiveness and religiosity, there becomes a deeper moral obligation and internalization of forgiveness by those who are religious.

McCullough and Worthington (1999) conclude that though religious individuals value forgiveness and feel compelled to forgive, there is little difference between religious and nonreligious individuals and their actual act of forgiving. Tsang, McCullough and Hoyt (2005) describe this void in difference as a religious-forgiveness discrepancy. Explanations given for this discrepancy include psychometric weaknesses, abstract religious systems that leave room for “moral rationalization” (Tsang et al., 2005, p. 799), including rationales for both forgiving and unforgiving behaviors, social desirability and recall biases (McCullough & Worthington, 1999; Tsang et al., 2005).

Due to forgiveness's close tie with a religious and spiritual context, when a religious context is taken away, there is the danger that important and deep aspects of forgiveness and its effects on people are lost. At its most extreme, divorcing forgiveness from its religious context might even change the nature of forgiveness (McMinn et al., 2008, McCullough & Worthington, 1999). McCullough and Worthington (1999) suggest that refocusing on the religious roots of forgiveness will lead to a greater and refreshed understanding of the forgiveness construct.

Prayer

In addition to the focus that has been given to forgiveness, prayer has also received attention from psychologists. The psychological community has recognized the influence and use of prayer as people process their emotions (Ai, Bolling, & Peterson, 2000) and deal with their physical health (Harris et al., 1999; McCaffrey, Eisenberg, Legedza, Davis, & Phillips, 2004). However one of the best controlled studies on the therapeutic effects of prayer found prayer did not influence the occurrence of complications in cardiac bypass patients. Those patients who were certain they would receive intercessory prayer experienced greater complications than those who were uncertain of whether they would receive prayer (Bensen et al., 2006).

Like forgiveness, prayer has always been an important religious concept. It has been an integral part of experiencing God and having relationship with God. Ameling (2000) writes that prayer is “the simple act of turning our mind and our heart to the sacred” (p. 42). The history and world of prayer is complexly vast. Prayer has been divided into a number of categories: petition, adoration, sacrifice, confession, intercession, contemplation, thanksgiving and so on, thus showing that prayer has multiple forms and aims (Zaleski & Zaleski, 2005). Prayer is at the root of all the believer does; it is the way in which people engage with the divine (Murray, 1981). Through prayer there is an experience of strength and peace with God. Prayer is directly related

to many religious constructs, as it is the channel of communication used to experience connection with God. Zaleski and Zaliski (2005) write, “The story of prayer is the story of the impossible: of how we creatures of flesh and blood lay siege to heaven, speak to the Maker of all things, and await, with confidence or hopeful skepticism, a response” (p. 3).

Theological Relationship Between Forgiveness and Prayer

The psychological community has seen substantial research surrounding both forgiveness and prayer independently. Yet surprisingly so, it has not been until the last five years that the relationship between prayer and forgiveness has been researched, and the recent studies have been limited both in scope and methodological rigor (Batson & Marks, 2008; McMinn et al., 2008).

From a Christian theological perspective, prayer and forgiveness are closely related. Danaher (2006) writes, “our capacity to forgive does increase with prayer” (p. 15). Prayer, as communication with God, is a constant facilitator as forgiveness is a process that is engaged in throughout the day and weeks with the help of God. One of the clearest examples of the connection between prayer and forgiveness within Christian scriptures is seen in the Lord's prayer, as found in the New Testament (Matthew 6:5-15, Today's New International Version, italics added).

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.
*And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.*

And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.

In this prayer Jesus addresses the offenses that his disciples had committed against others, including offenses against Jesus, as well as offenses that had been done to the disciples.

Investigating the Relationship Between Forgiveness and Prayer

Though there appears to be an inherent theological connection between forgiveness and prayer, to what extent do people's ability to forgive correlate with their prayer practices?

Wuthnow (2000) reported that praying within a group setting helped facilitate the participants' ability to forgive others and heal their relationships. Those who were involved in small, religiously focused groups found group activity involving prayer and the reading of the Bible strongly assisted in their process of forgiving. In a qualitative study Batson and Marks (2008) found a relationship between prayer and forgiveness where prayer facilitated a couple's process of forgiving one another.

Neither of the above studies looked at forgiveness and prayer in a controlled, scientific manner. The current study is part of a series of studies that has been undertaken to look for a connection between prayer and the process of forgiveness. The first study took an exploratory approach to understand prayer and forgiveness (McMinn et al., 2008). Using a narrative-based inquiry, it was found just over half the participants spontaneously mentioned prayer in their forgiving process. The themes that were prevalent in the narratives were consistent with Worthington's five-step forgiveness model. Prayer was related to participants' personal change. This is consistent with the suggestion from Lawler-Row et al. (2006) that the psychological research is finding that intrapersonal gains come for those who forgive others. This first study

found a connection between prayer and the process of forgiveness, but more was needed to understand the connection.

A second study (McMinn, Vasiliauskas, Dickey & Honeycutt, 2009) was conducted to assess how prayer is specifically used in forgiveness among Christian young adults. Eighty-three prayer related statements were generated based on the narratives from the first study and were given to a group of Christian undergraduate students. A factor analysis was conducted to discern which themes were endorsed as Christians use prayer in the process of forgiveness. Nine themes emerged from factor analysis, ranging from petitionary pleas toward God for help, to intimate relational prayers to God expressing emotions about an offense. More specifically, there were four themes that were most commonly identified in the study. These were as follows: prayer for guidance, asking God for help in forgiving, revealing pain to God, and letting go of the burden. Based on the clusters that were found most salient in this study, the current intervention study examines the effects of a prayer intervention in the form of devotional readings and compares pretest and posttest results of forgiveness against a control group. The goal was to fold four these themes throughout the interventions, each theme highlighted in four devotionals, equaling a total of sixteen devotions forming the intervention. Apparent in these themes is the participant's seeking of God with the goal of receiving help in the task of forgiveness. Also apparent in these themes is the relational component of prayer that remains central, guiding the participant to expressing emotions about the offense to God in an expressive, relational manner.

The current research is an intervention study looking specifically at the benefits of a prayer intervention on the process of forgiveness. Several questions guide this study. Prayer has been found to be a part of the forgiveness process, but how will the forgiveness process be

facilitated when participants undertake a prayer focused intervention. How will a person's empathy for the offender be influenced? And what is the impact of a consistent time of directed prayer on forgiving a significant interpersonal offense? In this study it is hypothesized that those who participate in a time-limited prayer intervention will demonstrate a higher score in state forgiveness than those in the devotional group and control group.

For this study, I will be using McCullough and Worthington's (1999) definition of forgiveness. Forgiveness is the understanding that some kind of harmful action was done producing some kind of relational deterioration and negative emotional response from the offended. A forgiving response by the offended reduces the negative emotion and prepares for a restoration of relationship. In addition, I will be using Zaleski and Zaleski's (2005) definition of prayer, prayer being any direct communication with God.

Chapter 2

Methods

Participants

Participants consisted of 411 undergraduate students from private Christian colleges across the United States (Appendix A). Participants were both male and female; the average age of students was 21.0 (SD = 4.32). Ethnicity of the participants included African American (4.4%), European American (81%), Asian American (3.6%), Latino or Hispanic (6.3%), Native American (2.2%), International (3.2%) and Other (5.1%). They were enrolled in an undergraduate class in psychology. Additionally, the students were able to identify a significant interpersonal offense they wanted to forgive. They were given the opportunity to sign up through an announcement in class from their professor and those who participate were entered into a drawing to win an iPod or an iPod Touch.

Instruments

The following inventories were administered (Appendix B).

Structure of Prayer Scales. Prayer behavior was measured using the Structure of Prayer Scales (Luckow, Ladd, Spilka, McIntosh, Parks, et al., 1997). The Structure of Prayer Scales is a 28-item scale that measures six types of prayer: confession, petition, ritual, meditation-improvement, habitual, and compassionate petition. The following Cronbach's alpha ranges were found for each of the six subscales: Confession, .58 - .89, Petition, .44 - .81, Ritual .68 - 80,

Meditate-improvement, .19 - .86, Habitual, .67 - .88, and Compassionate petition, .81 - .95. Items contain face validity but further validity has not been investigated (Luckow et al., 1997).

Religious Commitment Inventory. Religious commitment was measured using the Religious Commitment Inventory (Worthington et al., 2003). The Religious Commitment Inventory (RCI-10) is a 10-item measure of how much a person is committed to his or her religious beliefs, values, and practices and how they are used in everyday life. Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the overall sample is .95. Worthington et al. (2003) reported the correlation between the RCI-10 and the frequency of other religious activities to be .57.

Trait Forgiveness Scale. The Trait Forgiveness Scale (Berry, Worthington, O'Connor, Parrott, & Wade, 2005) measures dispositional forgiveness using a 10-item scale. Each item is rated from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. For instance, "I can usually forgive and forget an insult." There were five studies that found adequate construct and predictive validity as well as estimated reliabilities (Berry et al., 2005).

Transgression Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory. The Transgression Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory (TRIM; McCullough et al., 1998) measures a person's willingness and motivation to forgive an offender. There are two subscales, revenge and avoidance with internal consistency of .85 to .93.

Batson Empathy Adjectives. The Batson Empathy Adjectives (BEA; Batson, 1986; Coke, Batson, & McDavis, 1978) measures a person's emotional empathy towards the offender. Items are rated on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 = not at all to 5 = extremely. Cronbach's alphas for scores range from .79 to .95 (Coke et al., 1978).

Relational Engagement of the Sacred for a Transgression Scale. Relational

Engagement for the Sacred for a Transgression Scale (REST; Davis et al., 2010) measures the extent to which a person's personal relationship with the Sacred is engaged in when dealing with a specific transgression. This 4-item scale was rated on a 6-point Likert-type scale from 1 = completely disagree to 6 = completely agree. Cronbach's alpha has been found to be .90 (Davis et al., 2010).

Procedures

Psychology professors from Christian liberal Arts colleges were contacted through email asking them to announce to their students the opportunity to be part of a study. Those professors who agreed were emailed sign-up sheets including informed consent to distribute in one or more of their undergraduate classes. After the participants signed up they were emailed a pretest in the form of an online survey. The survey included asking the participants to rate, on a seven-point scale, the perceived significance of a personal offense they wanted to forgive. All participants were invited to continue with the study but only those participants' who rated their offense as a five or higher were analyzed in the results. The survey included the Trait Forgiveness Scale (Berry, et al., 2005), the TRIM (McCullough et al., 1998), the Structure of Prayer Scales (Luckow et al., 1997), the Religious Commitment Inventory (Worthington, et al., 2003), the Batson Empathy Adjectives (BEA; Batson, 1986; Coke et al., 1978) and the Relational Engagement for the Sacred for a Transgression Scale (Davis et al., 2010). After taking this survey they were randomly assigned to one of three groups: an attention intervention group, a prayer intervention group, and a no-contact control group. This was done using a random number assignment feature on Microsoft Excel.

The attention intervention group and prayer intervention group were given directions that informed them that over the next sixteen days they would be emailed sixteen brief devotionals to complete (Appendix C). The attention intervention consisted of randomly selected daily meditations taken from Oswald Chamber's (1992) book, *My Utmost for His Highest*. The prayer intervention involved daily prayer directions highlighting the top four ways people used prayer as seen in McMinn et al. (2009). These prayer interventions were written by the author in collaboration with a professional writer. Also included in the intervention was a request to spend 10 minutes in prayer each day. The no-contact control group completed the pre-test and post-test without additional contact. The post-test included a re-administration of the pre-test.

Chapter 3

Results

Data analysis included the 241 participants who rated the significance of their personal offense at a five or higher on a seven point scale. This exclusionary criteria was used with the hope of identifying those who were experiencing significant subjective pain. I presumed that these participants would have a subjective experience of a substantial offense to forgive, thus increasing the impact of the intervention as well as reducing the natural impact of time as healing.

I computed a series of oneway analyses of variance (ANOVA), using an alpha level of .05, comparing change scores of participants who were randomly assigned to one of the three different groups (control group and two intervention groups). Change scores were computed by subtracting pre-intervention scores from post-intervention scores, and were justified by the finding that no pre-intervention scores showed differences among the three groups.

Significant differences were found between the three groups on state forgiveness, $F(2, 238) = 4.78, p < .01$. A post hoc Scheffe test was used to determine the nature of the state forgiveness differences between the intervention groups. This analysis revealed that both those participants who received the prayer intervention ($m = -.33, sd = .60$) as well as the devotional attention intervention ($m = -.34, sd = .63$) had significantly changed state forgiveness scores compared with the control group ($m = -.06, sd = .65$). The pre-post Cohen's d effect size for the prayer intervention group was .39. Changes in the devotional attention group produced an effect

size of .38. Thus, both groups demonstrated a small to medium effect size in the change observed. As was hypothesized, there were no significant changes found within any of the groups on trait forgiveness change scores. See Table 1.

Table 1

Means (and Standard Deviations) for Pre- and Post-Intervention Scores

Measure	Pre-Intervention			Post-Intervention		
	Prayer (N = 78)	Attention (N = 91)	Control (N = 72)	Prayer (N = 78)	Attention (N = 91)	Control (N = 72)
TRIM	2.68(.84)	2.76(.91)	2.50(.90)	2.35(.86)	2.43(.81)	2.44(.92)
RCI	3.68(.77)	3.58(.75)	3.48(.80)	3.74(.77)	3.56(.72)	3.52(.84)
TFS	3.68(.64)	3.60(.68)	3.69(.78)	3.68(.62)	3.62(.70)	3.73(.72)
REST	3.60(1.05)	3.78(.90)	3.54(1.01)	3.87(.96)	3.79(.75)	3.67(.84)
BEA	2.64(.96)	2.59(.97)	2.72(.98)	3.21(.89)	2.95(.92)	2.89(1.0)

In addition, those in the prayer intervention group showed greater change on empathy towards their abuser than those in other groups, with a Cohen's d effect size of .61. Significant differences were found between the three groups, $F(2, 237) = 4.58, p < .05$. Scheffe' post hoc test was used to determine the nature of the differences between the groups. This analysis revealed that those participants who received the prayer intervention changed more in empathy toward their offender ($m = .56, sd = .88$) than those in the control group ($m = .16, sd = .60$).

Students in the attention intervention group ($m = .36, sd = .88$) were not significantly different from either of the other two groups.

I also computed oneway ANOVAS to look for group differences in REST and RCI change scores. No significant differences were observed.

Chapter 4

Discussion

The results of this intervention study support the hypothesis that those who received a prayer intervention would rate higher on a state forgiveness scale at post test than those in a control group. It was somewhat surprising that those in the attention group also rated higher in state forgiveness compared to the control group, with no significant differences between the attention and prayer groups. It may be that time spent with God—whether specifically prayer and forgiveness focused or simply devotional time with on God—provides an environment that guides people towards forgiveness of an offense. Time with God perhaps reminds the Christian believer of the call to forgive as God has forgiven. A forgiving heart is a Christian moral call; time with God, whether forgiveness focused or not reminds and potentially convicts the believer of the need to forgive.

In addition, people's capacity and propensity for mending their relationships and pursuing healthy relational qualities may tend to increase when they are spending time with God. Belief in God, whether the Christian God, the Jewish God, Buddha or Allah, is a belief in a higher good, pushing believers to strive to attain part of that good. Time spent with God (e.g., prayer, forgiveness, celebration, confession, worship, and so on) leads the believer towards general goodness and health which in turn influences the believer's relationships. This could help explain the change in state forgiveness. Further intervention studies with other religious groups

are needed to explore how time spent with God from other religions impacts state and perhaps even trait forgiveness.

In addition, the increase in state forgiveness following both the attention and prayer interventions may be an example of the participant's movement towards healthy relational attunement to the other, particularly mentalization and reflective capacities (Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist, & Target, 2002). Time with God, an experience of seeing self in relation to God, pulls the believer to an other-focused perspective which may, in turn, draw the believer to sense that there is another reality, another perspective on life, essentially God's perspective. This is a decentering experience, moving from a personal perspective and inward thinking (Stark, 1999), to an increased ability to reflect on the offender, and the offender's humanity as well as on the believer's own humanity.

Relatedly, there appears to be a relationship between prayer and a significant increase in empathy towards the offender. Those within the prayer group rated a significant change in empathy towards their offender compared to the attention and control groups. This change in empathy is not particularly a surprise. Empathy is often seen as a predictor of forgiveness and included alongside forgiveness in the research (McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997; Welton, Hill & Seybold, 2008). In particular, Worthington's (2003) REACH model includes empathizing with the offender as one of its core steps towards forgiveness. Theoretically, changes in empathy accompany changes in state forgiveness. However there was only a significant change in empathy for those in the prayer intervention. The nature of the prayer interventions may have influenced the significant empathy changes more than what was accomplished through devotional reflection. The prayer interventions particularly focused on

four themes including: praying for guidance, asking God for help, revealing pain and letting go of burden.

The nature of these prayer devotional themes led the participant at times towards thinking about the offender, thus increasing the participant's perspective taking ability in his/her process of forgiving. In addition to the decentering provided in the devotion group, the forgiveness group seems to be providing a specific form of other-centeredness that promotes empathy. Welton et al. (2008) write, "The common thread between empathy and forgiveness is the other-centered focus rather than the self-centered focus" (p. 169). Perhaps due to the nature of the prayer intervention, those in the prayer intervention had a greater empathic identification with the offender. However this greater empathic change did not produce a greater change in state forgiveness between the prayer and attention groups. This may be the result of relatively low power in the intervention.

There also may be something unique about prayer and prayer's direct communication with God that leads participants to have greater empathy for their offender. Perhaps becoming aware of one's own fallenness and wrongdoings in relation to God reminds the believer of the shared humanity with the offender. This perspective leads to renewed compassion, understanding and ultimately empathy for the offender.

Implications

These findings support the importance of integrative work within the field of psychology. Exploring how faith and religious and spiritual constructs interplay with psychological constructs introduce depth not only to the field of research but also to the field of practice. It is fascinating to see how many research articles from the past two decades pertain to forgiveness, and how few consider spiritual interventions in the forgiveness process. This study brings forgiveness together

with one of its close spiritual siblings (prayer) and illustrates that there is much to be gained in exploring forgiveness as a spiritual construct. That time with God in prayer and devotion increases a person's reported state of forgiveness introduces the possibility of a spiritual understanding for what helps promote the state of forgiveness.

In regards to professional practice, it is reasonable to consider possible benefits of a prayer and/or a devotional time on a person's state of forgiveness. For example, a psychotherapist may work with Christian clients whose desire to forgive an offender becomes part of the therapeutic process. Devotional time and forgiveness-focused prayer would likely benefit those clients who have a relationship with God and have a desire to forgive. Therapists may also use these findings to educate their clients on the relational benefits of spending daily time with God as well as even suggesting a client spend time with God as a form of therapeutic homework.

In addition, this research supports the importance of a Christian's relationship with God and the connection and benefit that relationship can have on the personal journey toward health. It seems reasonable to suggest that the psychological state of Christian clients' unforgiveness and forgiveness is entwined in their spiritual life and relationship with God. When we dichotomize these states we ignore the complexity of forgiveness and its roots as both a spiritual and psychological construct.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. The first limitation is the college population that was used. A younger Christian population may not fully represent deep, lasting wounds in need of forgiveness. I tried to control for this by analyzing the data from only those who

perceived their offense as significant, however, an older population would possibly yield different results. Also, not only rating the magnitude of the offense but also categorizing the type of offenses participants wanted to forgive as well as the relationship of the offender to the participant would provide a clearer idea of the characteristics of the sample and the complexity of the offenses. Both these additions would give a better perspective on the scope, depth and relational quality of offenses that were being forgiven.

These results can only be generalized to a Christian population. Not only was there little religious diversity, but there was little ethnic diversity as well. Surveying a more diverse population would be a helpful follow-up to this study.

In addition, the length of the intervention itself could be a limitation insofar as it may have reduces power in this study. The intervention lasted for sixteen days. Perhaps a longer intervention, lasting four or five weeks would more accurately reflect real life devotional practices and perhaps yield greater differences between the attention and prayer groups.

Also, there was no way to control for each person's own decisions to spend time in prayer and devotional material. Though each group was different in terms of what was asked of them through the study, each participant's personal practices may have also influenced the changes or lack of changes seen in the scales. Adding some questions to survey the participants' current prayer and devotional practices would help give a conceptual idea of how much prayer and devotional time each participant was spending in addition to the prayer and devotional requests of the intervention study.

As is relevant in all survey research, there may be the presence of response bias. That is, those participants who chose to participate in the study may differ in systematic ways from those who chose not to participate.

There is also the potential problem of demand characteristics. Participants may have responded to questions in ways they thought I wanted them to answer rather than according to their true feelings and behaviors. Participants were students who were receiving extra credit for their participation and though they were informed that their results would be confidential and de-identified, they were collected within an academic setting for academic credit. Demand characteristics may be reduced if participation were not tied to academic performance.

In addition, this study relied on the participants' self-report in regards to how they viewed their own feelings and behaviors, particularly their state of forgiveness. This is a potential limitation as it reflects the participants' perspective on how they are feeling but does not reflect the actual behavior or even attitude of the participants. Behavioral measures are difficult to come by in forgiveness research, but it would be ideal to supplement self-report data with some sort of behavioral observation. Results should be taken in the light of this self-report methodology.

Further Research

This current study looking at the relationship between prayer and forgiveness contributes to a small part of examining again forgiveness within a spiritual context. Further research is needed. Specifically within a Christian population, having an intervention study examining participants' change after a longer intervention, perhaps several months long would highlight the influence of a consistent prayer and devotion practice on the process of forgiveness. In addition, this study specifically examined the effects of a prayer intervention on state forgiveness,

including a devotional attention group. However, the attention group itself was a form of intimacy with God. Parsing out the influence of different ways of spending time with God, such as prayer, structured devotional, music, meditation and silence could help identify the nuances of the influences of these devotional times, not only on forgiveness but also on other relational qualities, such as empathy, anger, patience, and intimacy. It might also be useful to include a group that is given an intervention but not asked to forgive an offender, thus seeing if changes in other relational qualities only exist when there are changes in state forgiveness or if they change also when the focus on forgiveness is not present.

As stated previously, further research is needed to explore the relationship between prayer and forgiveness in other religions. This study was specifically examining Christian participants, but undergoing an intervention study with Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist and Islamic participants could help further identify the nature of connection between time with God and changes in state forgiveness. Forgiveness has close roots to the Christian faith, but also has connections to other faiths as well. Examining these connections would help clarify the extent of the generalizability of these findings and assist clinicians working with clients from religiously diverse backgrounds.

An intervention study, examining forgiveness, which includes a follow-up after a period of time is needed. A follow-up study six months after the intervention could further clarify the stability of attitude and behavior change. Additionally, if clinicians were to suggest clients spend daily time with God as a means of forgiveness, examining clients' openness to this suggestion and beliefs about its effectiveness would be beneficial.

Conclusion

The psychological community has produced a plethora of research surrounding forgiveness, both in efforts to understand the nature of the construct as well as the nature of its impact of people. Though there have been many forgiveness intervention studies, few have looked at the connection between forgiveness and other spiritual constructs, particularly prayer. This forgiveness and prayer study leaves many questions unanswered, particularly whether there is something unique about prayer that facilitates forgiveness or if it is simply time with God that leads towards forgiveness. My hope is that this will spark interest in examining the complexity of forgiveness within its spiritual context. As the acknowledgement of spiritual and religious issues in therapy becomes more prevalent in professional psychology, integrating our clients' journeys toward forgiveness with their spiritual practices becomes starkly relevant.

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Appendix A

Demographics Questionnaire

Age: _____

Sex: _____

Class Standing:

Freshman

Sophomore

Junior

Senior

Graduate Student

Ethnicity:

African-American

European-American

Hispanic/Latino

Asian

Native American

Multi-Racial

Other _____

Religious Affiliation:

Protestant

Catholic

Christian Orthodox

Other _____

In the past year how frequently have you attended a religious activity?

Not at all

Once or twice a year

Between 3 and 11 times a year

Between one and three times a month

Weekly

More than once a week

How important are your religious beliefs and practices?

No importance;
have no religion

Neutral

Extremely important; religious
faith is the center of my life

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

Measure your degree of completion of the sixteen interventions.

I did not read
any of the
Interventions

I read and completed
about half of the
interventions.

I read and completed
all the interventions.

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

Appendix B

Instruments

Structure of Prayer Scales

Prayer or meditation is approached in a wide variety of fashions. For the purpose of this study, please think of “prayer” and “meditate” as the same sort of practice. We would like you to indicate for each of the following statements the position that most accurately reflects your personal practices. Please use the below code for your answers:

1 = strongly disagree, 2 = moderately disagree, 3 = slightly disagree, 4 = slightly agree, 5 = moderately agree, 6 = strongly agree

- 1. When I pray alone, I have a ritual that I adhere to strictly.
- 2. Through deep pray I am able to know God better.
- 3. It is important to me to tell God about my sins or faults.
- 4. When I pray, I want to share my life with God.
- 5. I usually pray for God to make me a better person.
- 6. I pray to give thanks for all God has done for me.
- 7. When I feel guilty about something, it helps to tell God about it.
- 8. When God has answered my prayers, I usually give thanks.
- 9. My prayers are like rituals; they have a regular, orderly sequence.
- 10. I usually say a prayer before each meal.
- 11. I like to say prayers for people about whom I care very much.
- 12. I always pray before I go to sleep.
- 13. I must admit that I usually prayer to get something.
- 14. Confession is important to me because it helps me lead a more respectable life.
- 15. When I pray, I ask God for special favors.
- 16. Prayer helps me keep my life balanced and happy.
- 17. When I pray, I confess to God the things I should not have done.
- 18. Usually when I feel unable to help my loved ones, I ask God for help.
- 19. I ask God to help others when I am unable to.
- 20. When I pray, I have certain words of phrases that I repeat a number of times.
- 21. In my prayers I like to express my recognition for what God grants me.
- 22. Most of my prayers are for God to solve problems.
- 23. When I finish praying, I feel like a better person.
- 24. I pray for other people.
- 25. A morning prayer helps me cope with the world during the day.
- 26. Prayer is a way for me to connect with my inner spirit.
- 27. When I pray, I feel secure.
- 28. I pray daily.

Religious Commitment Inventory

1 = not at all true of me, 2 = somewhat true of me, 3 = moderately true of me, 4 = mostly true of me, 5 = totally true of me

- 1. I often read books and magazines about my faith.
- 2. I make financial contributions to my religious organization.
- 3. I spend time trying to grow in understanding of my faith.
- 4. Religion is especially important to me because it answers many questions about the meaning of life.
- 5. My religious beliefs lie behind my whole approach to life.
- 6. I enjoy spending time with others of my religious affiliation.
- 7. Religious beliefs influence all my dealings in life.
- 8. It is important to me to spend periods of time in private religious thought and reflection.
- 9. I enjoy working in the activities of my religious organization.
- 10. I keep well informed about my local religious group and have some influence in its decisions.

Trait Forgiveness Scale

Directions: Indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement below by using the following scale.

1 = strongly disagree, 2 = mildly disagree, 3 = agree and disagree equally, 4 = mildly agree, 5 = strongly agree

- 1. People close to me probably think I hold a grudge too long.
- 2. I can forgive a friend for almost anything.
- 3. If someone treats me badly, I treat him or her the same.
- 4. I try to forgive others even when they don't feel guilty for what they did.
- 5. I can usually forgive and forget an insult.
- 6. I feel bitter about many of my relationships.
- 7. Even after I forgive someone, things often come back to me that I resent.
- 8. There are some things for which I could never forgive even a loved one.
- 9. I have always forgiven those who have hurt me.
- 10. I am a forgiving person.

The Transgression Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory: TRIM

For the questions below, please indicate your current thoughts and feelings about the person who recently hurt you. Use the following scale to indicate your agreement with each of the questions.

1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree

- 1. I'll make him/her pay.
- 2. I wish that something bad would happen to him/her.
- 3. I want him/her to get what he/she deserves.
- 4. I'm going to get even.

- 5. I want to see him/her hurt and miserable.
- 6. I keep as much distance between us as possible.
- 7. I live as if he/she doesn't exist, isn't around.
- 8. I don't trust him/her.
- 9. I find it difficult to act warmly toward him/her.
- 10. I avoid him/her.
- 11. I cut off the relationship with him/her.
- 12. I withdraw from him/her.

Relational Engagement of the Sacred for a Transgression: REST

Use the following scale to rate your agreement with each of the questions.
0 = completely disagree, 3 = neither agree or disagree, 6 = completely agree

- 1. I tried to view him/her as a child of God.
- 2. I asked God to help me see his/her good points.
- 3. I tried to pray for him/her.
- 4. I believe God wants us to mend our relationships.

Batson Empathy Adjectives: BEA

Use the following scale to indicate the current degree to which you feel the following affects for the person who you want to forgive.
0 = Not at all to 5 = Extremely

- 1. Sympathetic
- 2. Moved
- 3. Compassionate
- 4. Warm
- 5. Soft-hearted
- 6. Tender
- 7. Empathetic
- 8. Concerned

Appendix C
Interventions

Intervention 1

One of the key elements of the Christian life is realizing that God is far more capable than we are. The Creator possesses all power, all ability and all knowledge. As the image bearers of God, we can possess limited amounts of power, ability and knowledge. And because we are limited, we often find ourselves wanting in power, ability and knowledge. We will never obtain such ability that we will be able to overcome every obstacle, that comes across the path of our lives. Surely you can remember an instance (or several) in which you could only say, “I am not capable of handling this.” We come up short. Such can be the case with forgiveness. We often are not capable of forgiving on our own.

Yet, hope is not lost. For as we are incapable, God is capable. Indeed, one of the goals of prayer is that we engage in it that we may draw closer to God and glean capability from the Sustainer of all things. As we draw near to God, so do we draw near to the awesome power God provides. Imagine it as a lone campfire on a cold night. As you wander through the woods, your internal body temperature is incapable of maintaining itself. Yet, as you draw nearer to the flames warmth washes over you. The reason prayer is important is because the longer you stay near the fire the warmer you stay.

If you can’t find the words to begin this process, feel free to use the following prayer to assist you. If you begin this prayer and new words begin to come to your mind, feel free to deviate in the way the Spirit leads.

Lord, you are unimaginably strong and I am not.
 In my weakness, I desire your strength so that I can do your will.
 When I feel the cold of my limited humanity,
 fill me with the fire of your divine strength.

Intervention 2

There are times in life when we feel life and the tasks ahead are overwhelming difficult. Forgiving someone who has hurt us is a hard journey to take. Sometimes it feels as if we need an extra breath just to get through. It is a worn out feeling. The deep within us needs another breath. It is almost like we are a kite, fluttering low to the ground. We see the kite and long for the wind to lift it to the sky. Often we will run along the beach or field for hours just to coax the kite to soar. The kite is fine flying low, or even laying on the ground, and yet there is so much more hope for it. Sometimes we need a breathe like a fluttering kite needs the wind.

Forgiveness is by no means an easy task. The difficulty in forgiving is what makes it so transformative and important. The process of forgiving will require much of your emotional and physical energy. As you walk through this process, you may feel completely overwhelmed. But

take heart, for as your strength fails, God's strength will be a breathe for you. When you feel your will to move forward growing cold, move closer to his wind. Draw on the unending strength and power of God to pull you through. Admitting to God that you need help is integral to spiritual growth. "Power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9, NRSV).

As you set out to pray today, focus on your weaknesses and how God has the ability to bolster you through the process of forgiveness. As you focus on your weaknesses, don't be discouraged, but rather encouraged by God's faithfulness in supporting you.

As I think about the journey of forgiveness ahead of me,
I am overwhelmed with the task.
I know this journey is not easy.
I need your assistance.
Each moment I need your breathe in me.

Intervention 3

An important part of working through forgiveness is seeking a direction forward. We often know that forgiveness needs to take place but possess few ideas on how to move in the right direction. As a result, we turn to God and ask, "How can I begin to forgive this person, Lord?" In doing this, we recognize that God possesses infinite wisdom and that we need this wisdom as we seek to forgive.

However, the error we often make is that there is only one path, the "right" path towards forgiveness. We come to God asking that he show us the way to move forward without considering that there might be several ways or paths. In Psalm 25, the psalmist requests, "Let me know Your paths, O Lord; teach me Your ways" (Ps. 25:4, JPS). Here is a recognition that the "path" or "way" of God is not singular, but multiple. This is a tremendous relief! Instead of seeking the one way, we are to seek a range of possible ways in which to move forward. We can rest assured that God's is continually revealing to us a way forward.

Seek God's guidance in moving toward forgiveness; meditate on the possible paths before you. Instead of focusing in on one possible future, imagine several courses of action and how they might ultimately turn out for you and the person you are forgiving. Ask God to provide wisdom on what words or actions you might use. Seek multiple visions of what God might have for you.

If you can't find the words to begin this process, feel free to use the following prayer to assist you. If you begin this prayer and new words begin to come to your mind, feel free to deviate in the way the Spirit leads.

Lord, I've come to you because I don't know how to begin forgiving.
Yet, you are the creator and sustainer of wisdom.

I ask you to show me your paths and ways in my situation.
Help me to visualize what forgiveness will look like and feel like.
Continue to guide me in those paths and give me the strength to pursue them.

Amen

Appendix D
Curriculum Vita

Sarah Lorraine Vasiliauskas
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EDUCATION

- 8.2007 to Present **Student of Doctor of Psychology, Clinical Psychology**
 George Fox University, Newberg, Oregon
 Graduate Department of Clinical Psychology: *APA Accredited*
Doctor of Psychology, Clinical Psychology (Expected August of 2011)
- 8.2007 to 5.2009 **Masters of Arts, Clinical Psychology**
 George Fox University, Newberg, Oregon
 Graduate Department of Clinical Psychology: *APA Accredited*
- 8.2004 to 5.2007 **Bachelor of Arts, Psychology, Family Studies**
 Houghton College, Houghton, New York
 Magna cum laude
-

SUPERVISED CLINICAL EXPERIENCE

- 9.2010 to present **Practicum III-** (18 hours a week)
 Oregon State Hospital, Salem, Oregon
Populations Served: Persistently, severely mentally ill forensic patients
Duties: Comprehensive assessment, individual therapy, group therapy, interdisciplinary consultation.
Supervisor: Matthew Sturgeon, Psy.D.
- 9.2009 to 6.2010 **Practicum II-** (18 hours a week)
 Sundstrom Clinical Services, Clackamas, Oregon
Populations Served: Children, adults and families.
Duties: Performed Cognitive Behavioral therapy in both independent and co-therapy modalities. Provided child focused diagnostic assessments (e.g. learning and ADHD). Responsibilities included report writing, weekly chart notes, case presentations, and consultation. Received two hours individual and two hours group supervision weekly.
Supervisors: Kristin Valerius, Ph.D., Kameron Dill, Psy.D.
- 9.2008 to Present **Practicum I-** (18 hours a week)
 George Fox University Health and Counseling Center

Newberg, Oregon

Populations Served: College students.

Duties: Solution-focused short and long term therapy. Weekly chart notes. Including one hour individual supervision and two hours group supervision.

Supervisors: William Buhrow, PsyD, Kristina Kays, PsyD

1.2008 to 5.2008

Pre-Practicum- (5 hours a week)

George Fox University, Graduate Department of Clinical Psychology
Newberg, Oregon

Populations Served: College students.

Duties: Therapist for two female college students.

Supervisors: Mary Peterson, PhD, Jory Smith, MA

8.2006 to 5.2007

Intern- (16 hours a week)

Allegheny Rehabilitation Association Adult Day Treatment Center
Wellsville, New York

Populations Served: Chronically mentally ill clients.

Duties: Leading groups, in particular social skills and emotion regulation.

Supervisor: Jennifer Sheesley, LMHC

SUPPLEMENTAL SUPERVISED CLINICAL EXPERIENCE

10.2008 to Present

Long-Term Clients

George Fox University Health and Counseling Center, Newberg, Oregon

Populations Served: Two Adult females.

Duties: Long-term dynamic therapy, clients seen twice a week, with additional bi-weekly psychodynamic consultation.

Supervisor: William Buhrow, PsyD

Consultant: Jenny Huwe, PsyD

2.2009 to 5.2011

International Student Mental Health Support- (5 hours a week)

George Fox University, Newberg, Oregon

Populations Served: International students, emphasis on Asian students.

Duties: Program founder; program development, co-facilitator of weekly acculturation process group, freshman orientation classes, consultation with ESL and International student faculty.

Supervisor: Winston Seegobin, PhD

9.2009 to 5.2010

Supplemental Practicum- (10 hours a week)

George Fox University Health and Counseling Center, Newberg, Oregon

Populations Served: College students.

Presenters: Richard Summers, MD and Jaques Barber, PhD.

- 5.2010 **Attachment, Neuroscience and Early Brain Development**
Portland, Oregon, Artz Center, Interdisciplinary Study Group.
Presenter: Allan Schore, PhD
- 11.2009 **Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavior Therapy (TF-CBT)**
Clackamas, Oregon, Sundstrom Clinical Services.
Web-based training.
Facilitator: Kristin Valerius, PhD
- 10.2009 **Time-Limited Dynamic Psychotherapy**
Eugene, Oregon
Make Every Session Count: An Attachment-Based, Emotionally-Focused,
Interpersonal Approach.
Presenter: Hanna Levenson, PhD
- 9.2009 **Multi-Cultural Counseling: An Alternative Conceptualization**
George Fox University, Newberg, Oregon
An interactive training workshop.
Presenter: Carlos Taloyo, PhD
- 8.2009 **Bipolar Disorder in Children and Adolescents**
Toronto, Canada
APA National Conference day-long training workshop.
Presenter: Eric Youngstrom, PhD
- 8.2003 to 5.2004 **Organization Campus Leader**
University of Southern Maine, Portland, Maine
Duties: Began and led a university campus organization

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

- 2010 to present **Oregon Psychoanalytic Center, OPC, Member**
- 2010 to present **International Association for Relational Psychoanalysis and
Psychotherapy, IARPP, Student Member**
- 2009 to present **Division of Psychoanalysis, APA, Division 39**
- 2007 to present **American Psychological Association, Student Affiliate**
- 8.2006 to 2007 **The National Honor's Society in Psychology, Member**

PROFESSIONAL CONFERENCES

- 8.2010 **American Psychological Association National Conference**
San Diego, California, *Poster presentation*
- 8.2009 **American Psychological Association National Conference**
Toronto, Canada, *Poster presentation*
- 3.2009 **The Therapeutic Action of Psychodynamic Psychotherapy**
Boston, Massachusetts
Current Concepts of Cure
- 4.2006/2007 **Christian Psychological Conference, National Conference**
King of Prussia, Pennsylvania and Cincinnati, Ohio
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RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

- 9.2010 to present **Clinical Psychology Doctoral Students' Experiences of Forced Termination: Attachment Styles and Theoretical Orientation**
George Fox University, Newberg, Oregon
- 9.2008 to present **Research Vertical Team Member**
Dissertation: The Effects of a Prayer Intervention on the Process of Forgiveness
Defense Scheduled: October 28, 2010
George Fox University, Newberg, Oregon
Supervisor: Mark McMinn, PhD
- 5.2007 **Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy's Contextual Therapy: Enhancing a Secular Family Systems Theory with a Christian Theological Understanding of God's Character and Resource of Forgiveness**
Honors Thesis at Houghton College, Houghton, New York
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RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS

- 8.2009 McMinn, M., Vasiliauskas, S., Dickey, R., Honeycutt, R. (2009, August). *Themes of Prayer and the Process of Forgiveness*. Poster session presented at the American Psychological Association National Conference, Toronto, ON.
- 8.2010 Vasiliauskas, S. (2010, August) The Effects of a Prayer Intervention on

the Process of Forgiveness. Poster session presented at the American Psychological Association National Conference, San Diego, CA.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

- 9.2010 to present **Teacher's Assistant:** Course: Clinical Foundations
Supervised 1st year PsyD students in pre-practicum experience. Weekly supervision group and review of videos.
George Fox University, Newberg, Oregon
- 2.2010 **How to be a Good Supervisee**
Practicum training for 1st year PsyD students.
George Fox University, Newberg, Oregon
- 2.2010 **Intercultural Eating Disorder Forum**
Educational forum and discussion for Asian college students.
George Fox University, Newberg, Oregon
- 9.2009 **Intercultural Communication Workshop**
ESL and Freshman Orientation, Teaching communication and social skills to Asian students, Interpretation of International Conflict Style Inventory.
George Fox University, Newberg Oregon
- 8.2006 to 5.2007 **Teacher's Assistant:** Courses: Introduction to Psychology, Psychology of Personality, History and Systems of Psychology.
Houghton College Psychology Department, Houghton, New York
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REFERENCES

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