

## INTRODUCTION

Luisa has a problem—several, really. She and her partner—“We’re not married, but we’ve been together for 14 years”—are embedded in deep conflict that has recently gotten worse. They hurt each other often, and they are bitter toward each other. Their 13-year-old son (Jamie) and 10-year-old daughter (Maria) are being affected, and the 13-year-old is demanding more independence and playing off Luisa against her partner, Carlos. Jamie was recently suspended from middle school for looking at pornography on the school computer and, as subsequent school investigation showed, exchanging naked pictures of himself with several young women in his class. Below is an exchange between Luisa and her psychotherapist.

*Luisa:* Carlos is in denial. He just goes to work and leaves it to me to deal with Jamie and Maria. He flat-out refused to get family therapy or come to see you. We have huge fights over what to do about Jamie, and they end

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*Forgiveness and Spirituality in Psychotherapy: A Relational Approach*, by E. L. Worthington, Jr.  
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with Carlos throwing up his hands and storming out. We are like John Gottman's "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse." (Yeah, I saw that on a television program about troubled marriages one night.) We have gone beyond criticism and defensiveness and contempt. We are now in a battle, and he stonewalls me. It's no wonder I'm depressed and anxious all the time.

*Psychotherapist:* You are certainly dealing with many problems that seem impossible to solve. I sense your hopelessness. I also feel your anxiety about what might happen in your son's life, your family, your own relationship with Carlos, and your own emotional life.

*Luisa:* I don't know what to do. I've tried everything.

*Psychotherapist:* What have you tried?

*Luisa:* I've been on the Internet. I've talked with my priest. I've talked with my mother and sister for hours. Mama really understands. My dad abandoned all of us when I was 5, and she had responsibility of raising the six of us for most of my life. We needed Dad, but he wasn't there. But Mama had the courage and strength to get through her own problems. She didn't have much insight on my problems other than, "Hang in there." I keep thinking that if I just find the right person to help and get the right information, I'll be able to turn everything around.

*Psychotherapist:* But so far?

*Luisa:* So far, nothing I've learned, nothing I've tried, has done any good. In fact, Carlos gets upset when I bring up suggestions. If I mention God, he goes crazy. He doesn't believe the church can be trusted. He seems to have given up on his faith. He's right in some ways—Father Ramirez couldn't help. He's overwhelmed that the youth group has come unglued. There was the nude-picture scandal at school, and the parents are upset with him for not being keeping their kids from such disgusting things as sending naked pictures to each other.

*Psychotherapist:* So, the kids in the youth group were involved in Jamie's problems at school?

*Luisa:* Yes, the problems apparently *started* within the youth group! The kids just got busted at school. How can that happen? In church?! I knew Jamie was drifting

from God, but I didn't think the youth group would add to the problem.

*Psychotherapist:* So, you are really most upset that Jamie could get into this kind of behavior through church.

*Luisa:* Well, I don't know if I'm the most upset over that. But I'm really, really upset. I'm disappointed. I'm disillusioned. I'm hurt. I feel betrayed. And Father Ramirez not only couldn't help me, he seems unwilling to do anything. The church should be solving these problems. But instead it's causing problems and then denying responsibility.

*Psychotherapist:* And Carlos isn't engaged in trying to help?

*Luisa:* He's doing the same thing. He has caused a lot of problems by not being the family man we need. He's neglected his faith. And now that problems have come up, he denies responsibility: "Luisa, you solve it. Luisa, take care of your son." As if Jamie wasn't his son, too.

*Psychotherapist:* You resent it.

*Luisa:* Big time! And rage. And I feel powerless to do anything about it all. Basically, I'm stuck. And the sources of strength in my life have become the sources of my destruction. God has always been a help in my trials. Now I feel like God—if he even exists—is not around. I have prayed for help but nothing. *That's* despair.

## WHERE DID LUISA'S PROBLEM SEEM TO WORSEN?

Luisa unfolded her problems to a psychotherapist whom a friend had recommended. She presented multiple problems, ending in her self-diagnosis that she was depressed and anxious. Her narrative emphasized that she had too much to cope with and did not have adequate resources to deal with all of the threats to survival—to her, her son, and her and Carlos's relationship.

Furthermore, Luisa's problems involve God, the church, and the sacred. She described how Carlos "goes crazy" when she mentions God; she expected Father Ramirez to solve the problems but he could not; and the problems started in the church, where she believed the solutions to lie, and yet that added to the problems.

The introduction of spiritual dimensions seemed to make the problems more serious and disillusioning. As the psychotherapist continued to direct Luisa to talk about the problem, she revealed a parallelism between

her perceived failure of the church and her perceived failure of Carlos. Luisa ended by voicing a profound thought—that a God on whom she had relied for spiritual strength, courage, and perhaps care and comfort was at best not around, and at worst, nonexistent. A bedrock foundation of her existence was eroding or being undermined, and it seemed to be tumbling into the abyss. One senses that, like her mother, she might have been able to cope and have courage and strength, but that the undermining of her faith has damaged her coping ability.

In the months to come, Luisa would revisit many of the themes she introduced in those first few minutes with her psychotherapist. They would work on her coping repertoire and the relationship of different coping attempts to her feelings of strength, competence, and relational comfort. They would deal at length with her unforgiving feelings toward both Carlos and the Roman Catholic Church and their relationship to each other. They would explore the connections between her mother, who was courageous and strong; the father, who abandoned the family in a time of need; and her conception of God (and of the church) as doing the same thing—abandoning her in a time of need. And they would consider ways Luisa could encourage parenting collaboration with Carlos even though they were in different places spiritually. Finally, she started to reflect for the first time on her own implicit assumptions about the relationship between sexuality and spirituality and ways this was affecting her stance toward her son's emerging sexual development.

It is not surprising that Luisa brought her own relational expectations and conflicts into her relationship with her psychotherapist. Establishing and then later maintaining a therapeutic relationship with her male psychotherapist was even a challenging issue, especially during a rough patch when she was not feeling like any progress was being made in psychotherapy. As with Father Ramirez, Carlos, her father, and God (whom she perceived in male terms), she started to become disappointed in another male. However, this time she experienced her psychotherapist showing empathy for her disappointments and struggles. He did not rescue her, but he also did not counter-attack nor abandon her. According to dynamic psychological theories, some of those old *attachment templates*—working mental models that had presumably been established through Luisa's interactions as a child with her father or other significant male and were used as patterns for current relationships with males today—were being reshaped. The psychotherapist stayed with her in the heat of the psychotherapeutic desert, in the wilderness of wandering and seeking a new way of understanding her spiritual past, present, and future. That stability of her psychotherapist invited Luisa into an authentic relational process that could hold her tension and frustration and provide space for honest dialogue. Psychotherapy was mostly about relationships and

the way they played into religion and spirituality, stress and coping, and justice and forgiveness.

What's more, Luisa did not leave psychotherapy in complete psychological control with her problems "fixed." In fact, psychotherapy helped her profoundly reorient her direction in life and set the stage for a period of over a year of spiritual wrestling and searching. She did not enjoy that year. Yet, when she emerged from that process, she had renewed her attachment and commitment with God. However, her experience of God had become less anxious and more secure, and this affected her relationship with Carlos, her relationship with her children, and her engagement in her church and community. The psychotherapy relationship became, as several therapists have described it, a *crucible* (Napier & Whitaker, 1978; Schnarch, 1991, 1997, 2009; Wallin, 2007).

An effective crucible is a resilient yet incredibly strong container that can hold intense heat and pressure without reacting to the materials being contained in the crucible. As it holds the pressure, a catalyst (i.e., the psychotherapeutic interactions) provides the equivalent of the chemical reaction sites at which the materials of Luisa's internal and external life can react, give off heat and light, and eventually produce a transformation of the old materials into a material with new properties. The crucible of the therapeutic relationship provided a balance of support and challenge that eventually formed a secure attachment between Luisa and her psychotherapist (Schnarch, 1991; Wallin, 2007). This provided a corrective relational experience for Luisa that shifted her relational templates about conflict and forgiveness and offered a holding environment (Winnicott, 1986) for her own relational healing and development.

In this book, we describe how to create a therapeutic relationship that facilitates spiritual transformation to help clients forgive—a relationship that will heal and also permit the effective use of evidence-based treatments. Our approach can be applied to brief or long-term psychotherapy, as well as therapy with various client configurations (individuals, couples, families, and groups). In addition, we hope this to be broadly applicable by integrating conceptual ideas into other therapeutic approaches and by informing other approaches to forgiveness and spirituality or religious issues.

Because spirituality and religion can either facilitate or impede forgiveness, our work identifies not only spiritual and religious factors that are positively associated with forgiveness but also those that are negatively associated with forgiveness. (Examples of the latter include perceived desecration, spiritual grandiosity, and anger at God.)

We use a relational approach to religion and spirituality that we have called *relational spirituality*. This term, which might seem unusual to some readers, reflects the way that religion and spirituality are embedded in relationships,

including perceived relationships—relationships between an offender and victim, relationships between victim and the sacred, the victim's perception of the relationship between the offender and the sacred (and whether it is similar to or different than the victim's perception of this relationship), and even the relationship between the offense and the sacred. It is the nature of those relationships that governs whether people can forgive.

Although neither of us trained personally with Schnarch or Wallin and do not presume to be experts in the therapies they teach, we draw from their ideas. Notably, we draw from a Bowen-informed approach to long-term psychotherapy and from their writing about the nature of a psychotherapeutic crucible for instigating change. Those ideas are congruent with our own experiences.

In short, we want to help psychotherapists effectively use relational dynamics and constructive coping strategies in helping clients deal with the inevitable interpersonal conflicts in life. We especially seek to help you treat the very hot and energetic reactions that involve (a) deep interpersonal wounds that might (depending on the psychotherapy and the person's reactions to it) either form chronic knots of resentment and bitterness or might be forgiven and (b) deep spiritual disruptions that might result in defensive retreat or transformation. We hope to help by facilitating your understanding of the complex natures of these problems. We want you to see how transgressions trigger a stress-and-coping process that draws out interpersonal templates like one's attachment schemas and also often activates religious and spiritual templates that seek to provide meaning. These all fit together. With that understanding, we offer practical suggestions about how to apply that understanding in the lives of your clients. Reviews of much research have clearly shown that if clients can forgive with authenticity, there are benefits to the clients' physical health (Worthington, Witvliet, Pietrini, & Miller, 2007), mental health (Griffin, Worthington, Wade, Hoyt, & Davis, *in press*), relationships (Riek, & Mania, 2012; Waldron & Kelley, 2008), and spirituality (D. E. Davis, Worthington, Hook, & Hill, 2013).

In the remainder of this chapter, we elaborate on how you can benefit from this book, present background information about why forgiveness matters and common misconceptions about forgiveness, and provide an overview of the book's major themes and a road map of how we navigate those themes.

## HOW YOU CAN BENEFIT FROM THIS BOOK

Most psychological problems are strongly influenced by interpersonal issues, and most people in the United States consider themselves religious or spiritual or recovering from spirituality or religion "gone awry." Thus, numbers alone suggest that this could be a very pertinent book for you and your clients.

Psychotherapy tends to deal with problems that occur in interpersonal contexts. Often, people hurt or offend others. Think about your own week and how many times people have hurt or offended you—intentionally or not. When people stop and look, they see offenses everywhere—the colleague who makes a snide remark, the spouse who is critical, the friend who fails to show for the long-planned appointment. When people are well functioning, many of those transgressions roll off. But clients are not usually functioning that well. Stresses leak into and magnify the daily hassles, often rendering the clients depressed, anxious, angry, or even traumatized.

Thus, this book will help you spend time thinking about some very prevalent human problems and dilemmas. It will help you sort out religious and spiritual issues and practical issues. It will help you guide your patients to make better decisions about their lives.

Despite findings that few graduate programs train psychotherapists to discuss religious and spiritual issues in counseling (Delaney, Miller, & Bisonó, 2007; Sauerheber, Holeman, Dean, & Haynes, 2014), it has been our experience that most psychotherapists are quite good at dealing with these issues. If they were not, there would, we believe, be a public outcry demanding more competence. But the more pertinent question is this: Might *you* want to improve your ability to sensitively discuss these topics in ways that can help religious and spiritual clients?

Most clients endorse some type of religion or spirituality (The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2008). In addition, most say that they would like to discuss matters of their faith with their physician or psychotherapist (Richards & Bergin, 2014). Yet, surveys show psychotherapists are often less religious than the general public (Aten & Leach, 2009). Even psychotherapists who are themselves religious or spiritual might lack knowledge and confidence in dealing with clients who hold different religious or spiritual beliefs and practices. Many psychotherapists—whether religious or not—must treat clients who are either explicitly religious or who consider themselves spiritual but not religious. Some clients have also experienced negative or abusive experiences with religious or spiritual communities, and their painful experiences of relational spirituality can also inform their dynamics related to forgiveness. Psychotherapists—whether they treat individuals, couples, families, or groups—must treat people for whom religion or spirituality is important and usually differs to some extent from the practitioner's religion or spirituality or even others in the same therapy. Even when the religion or spirituality of a client is similar to the practitioner's, the practitioner may not necessarily know how to use religion and spirituality effectively in his or her practice. In this book, we seek to provide such help for mental health practitioners.

There is a lot of interest in this topic. Although religion and spirituality might not be personally important to all psychotherapists, their dedication

to their professional competence has led to increasing interest in seeking more training than they already have. Webinars, conference presentations and workshops, articles, chapters, and professional books that deal with religious and spiritual psychotherapy have arisen to meet this interest (e.g., Aten & Leach, 2009; Aten, McMinn, & Worthington, 2011; Aten, O'Grady, & Worthington, 2012; Miller, 1999; Pargament, 1997, 2007, 2013a, 2013b; Richards & Bergin, 1997, 2000, 2004, 2005, 2014; Shafranske, 1996; Sperry & Shafranske, 2004; Worthington, Johnson, Hook, & Aten, 2013).

We are not advocating that the psychotherapist force-feed overconcern for forgiveness or religion to clients. Yet, we wish to show how you can open that doorway and let people discuss the things that they might not ordinarily bring into psychotherapy because they are afraid that religion, spirituality, and forgiveness might not be “proper” to discuss in psychotherapy. Religion and spirituality are not roadblocks for clients’ progress, nor are they a panacea. They can be an opportunity to enter the client’s personal existential world so that he or she can undergo a transformation that would not have been possible had the psychotherapist given religion and spirituality short shrift.

In short, through this book, you will have, we hope, a more nuanced understanding of religion and spirituality and their roles in interpersonal problems. In particular, this book will help you deal better with aiding religious and spiritual people consider forgiveness sensitively.

## WHY FORGIVENESS MATTERS IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

Interpersonal conflict is inevitable (McCullough, 2008), and in national probability samples, most people admit to holding some unforgiveness (Toussaint, Williams, Musick, & Everson, 2001). People wrong and are wronged. Boundaries need to be maintained and defended—and people continually step into others’ private psychological space. Subjective perspectives on various issues collide as people get to know each other. When people do wrong during conflicts, almost everyone wants to be forgiven for their transgressions. Many people want to forgive those who have hurt or offended them, particularly if they care about the relationship. Sometimes they do not believe they can or should forgive. When they are unable to be forgiven or to forgive, people are usually stressed (Worthington, 2006). They become emotionally distraught, experience a release of stress hormones, might have physical symptoms of such stress, experience relationship upheaval (which adds another layer of complications), mobilize numbing defenses against painful affect, and may feel disconnected from God or their sense of the sacred. Unforgiveness has a way of becoming contagious. Resentment leaks



into tense interactions with someone else who may further pass along this chain of estrangement.

Repairing conflicts is also often just as inevitable (McCullough, 2008). When transgressions occur, human communities often use socially evolved methods to reduce the volatility of unforgiveness and to restore violators to the group. If that were not the case, group members would be cast adrift and would not survive for long. Human societies simply cannot hold together if massive unforgiveness is the norm.

Is there hope that people can get over grudges by themselves or with the help of a friend? Of course. Counseling and psychotherapy have been around only a little over 100 years, but people forgave for centuries before psychotherapy became common. But many people do not get over grudges. One might suspect that the rate at which grudges are maintained might be worsened by the chronic stress of dealing with a psychological disorder or chaos in one's life. Some people are bitter and develop stress disorders. Some are passive-aggressive and experience relational discord. A few take up weapons and act out in the violence of a righteous jealous lover or religious or antireligious terrorist.

DiBlasio and Proctor (1993) surveyed a variety of types of psychotherapists and concluded that forgiveness is often addressed in psychotherapy. Almost one half of the cases were reported to be forgiveness-relevant. It is important to note that DiBlasio and Proctor's study was done in 1992, before psychologists were attuned to the importance of forgiveness. For example, research and writing on forgiveness within psychology only began in 1984. But after puttering on with only a few devotees, it took a huge step jump upward in 1998 when the John Templeton Foundation funded a competitive request for proposals to study forgiveness. Now, the number of empirical articles published in 2014 exceeded (by far) the total number of publications on forgiveness in the 15 years between 1984 and 1998. One survey 10 years after the DiBlasio and Proctor work found that a majority of mental health professionals agree not only that unresolved and unforgiven harms arise often in psychotherapy but also that forgiveness can be therapeutic for some clients (Konstam, Marx, Schurer, Lombardo, & Harrington, 2002).

How good are psychotherapists at dealing with forgiveness? The answer is, we do not really know. We do know that psychotherapists deal with it a lot. They meet the challenge of the client, but they might not feel confident that they are really giving good help to the client on forgiving. This book will help.

Professionally, vast resources are available to help psychotherapists become better at helping clients forgive. Books are too numerous to list, although many are cited in our references; here are a few from the leading writers for practitioners: Enright (2012), Enright and Fitzgibbons (2000,

2014), and Worthington (2006). One cannot typically attend a large conference without some presentations on forgiveness. Experts in forgiveness (e.g., Abrams, DiBlasio, Enright, Hargrave, Luskin, and Worthington are a few) provide workshops for clinicians. Websites provide resources (e.g., <http://www.EvWorthington-forgiveness.com>, <http://www.forgiveself.com>, <http://www.internationalforgiveness.com>). In the present book, we provide another resource to help you more competently deal with forgiveness issues.

## MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT FORGIVENESS

Despite the easy availability of the abovementioned resources, many misconceptions about forgiveness exist. Some psychotherapists hold views about forgiveness that might not be helpful to clients. In fact, some psychotherapists hold views that do not agree with the scientific understanding of forgiveness. They might have the following beliefs:

- Forgiveness is a purely religious rather than psychological topic.
- Forgiveness is not complete as long as the forgiver does not have emotional peace.
- Forgiveness requires telling your offenders you forgive them.
- Forgiveness means that one must reconcile with the offender.
- One must forgive to heal.
- Forgiveness is always beneficial to the forgiver.
- A forgiven person is more likely to reoffend than an unforgiven person.
- Forgiveness means that you return the offender to the pre-offense state and essentially reboot the relationship.
- If one remembers the offense, and especially if one remembers or feels any negative emotions toward the offender, forgiveness is not complete.
- Apology and repentance by the offender is always necessary if one is to forgive.
- If the offender does not make restitution, forgiveness will encourage repeat offenses.
- If an offender asks for forgiveness three times, one is duty-bound to forgive.

These beliefs are not held by everyone. Certain spiritual or religious traditions might teach some of the perspectives above, and clinicians certainly need to be sensitive to their clients' traditions and values. However, the scientific study of forgiveness has shown that none of these is believed by most forgiveness researchers today nor are they always descriptively true

(Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000, 2014; Worthington, 2006). Worse, they usually are not helpful for a forgiver. If you found yourself agreeing with some of the assumptions above, it might be valuable to reflect on (a) the sources of influence on your own moral, spiritual, or religious perspectives on forgiveness and (b) the empirical counterevidence we present in the chapters that follow. That evidence paints a different portrait of interpersonal forgiveness. Injustices are stressful, and forgiveness is one of many possible coping responses to transgressions and unforgiveness but differs from reconciliation.

## IDENTIFYING OUR THEMES: ESSENTIAL TENSIONS

Throughout the book, we emphasize six tensions that occur when religion, spirituality, and forgiveness collide. One might think of these as poles between which people oscillate. One might see them as conflicts that show up countless times in individual adjustment and in societal interaction. One might see them as dialectics that people do not resolve but hold in dynamic tension. Each is like two elephants balancing on a teeter-totter. One cannot get off without wrecking the other and disrupting the playground. These tensions within forgiveness and relational spirituality will be elaborated throughout the book, but let us mention them now.

First, there is the tension between conflict, which tears relationships apart, and restoring relationships. This has to do with defending (psychological, physical, and social) boundaries against assault and violating others' boundaries. Forgiveness is at the center of this tension. Many clients come to therapy depressed, anxious, angry, guilty, and ashamed. Most emotional struggles are embedded in interpersonal conflicts. Those often involve unforgiveness or self-condemnation over acts done to others.

Second, there is tension between attachment and differentiation of self. In the same way that societies must hold together in tight bonds and yet provide freedom for members to expand outside the boundaries, individuals must experience appropriate stable and secure attachments and yet be able to act as a differentiated individual within the context of relationships.

Third, there is tension between emotion regulation and emotion processing. People are emotional creatures—much more, we believe, than they are rational (Kahneman, 2011). They experience emotion and must regulate its expression without overcontrolling it. But just keeping emotions tamped down does not let them understand their meaning. They can best benefit if emotions are revealed and people process their experiences to gain understanding and reconstruct meaning.

Fourth, there is tension between hope and humility. When people are troubled, they may hope that someone can rescue them. But reality has taught most people that life happens, and they must also have the humility to endure and live through troubles and not just hope they will go away. Mature hope involves the desire to move forward, and humility helps people learn from conflicts rather than remain trapped in toxic cycles of shame.

Fifth, there is the tension between spiritual dwelling in a safe or familiar place in regard to the sacred and spiritual seeking. All people at times become unmoored and drift away from their spot of existential security. Other times, they may intentionally seek new meaning or spiritual experience. They need to be able to negotiate those destabilizing, stretching times of spiritual seeking, grow from them, and come into another place of spiritual dwelling. That stands in contrast to becoming lost in spiritual seeking, becoming like Ahab obsessed by the white whale, wandering the seas in search of it, and yet knowing that it is likely to eventually be one's undoing.

And sixth, there is tension between justice (which may require things beyond our control, such as the offender's willingness to atone) and the emotional and physical benefits of releasing resentment. Should I demand restitution? Should I forgive? How can justice be served if I forgive and mercy be served if I demand unrelenting justice?

Forgiveness often ends up at the center of these tensions. Forgiveness helps people negotiate between defending boundaries and restoring relationships, know when to hold closely to attachments and when to differentiate, sense when emotional processing is possible and when emotional regulation is prudent, experience hope when they feel disempowered and humility when they seek to reconcile justice and mercy, live in the moment but with a sense of deep inspiration, and experience the pain of unmoored spiritual seeking without giving in to perpetual spiritual wandering.

Many of the centrifugal and centripetal tensions—forces that sling people outward or seek to implode them inward, respectively—are powered by religious beliefs and religious communities and by the closeness or distance people experience with things they treat as sacred. Where religion and spirituality come together with justice and forgiveness, deep cultural and evolutionary pressures are at work. They form a knot. The nature of a knot is that it has at its nip—its center—a point of friction and pressure. Without the friction and pressure, the knot will not, in fact it cannot, hold. Thus, we should expect to feel the heat of friction and the push and pull of pressure when counseling people in which forgiveness and justice and religion and spirituality are coming together. We want to help you tie a strong, healthy knot that will bear the clients' weight of healthy living.

## THE REACH FORGIVENESS MODEL

In addition to addressing the aforementioned tensions, this book emphasizes a treatment model that both of us use in psychoeducational and therapy groups, in individual counseling, and in couple counseling to help people forgive others. We also use an adapted version of this model to help clients forgive themselves. Over the course of the book, you will see it placed into use both as a formal model and as the source of long-term psychotherapy or group therapy. Let us describe the model now.

In the REACH forgiveness model, spelled out below, each letter of REACH cues one step to reach emotional forgiveness of others.

- R: *Recalling* the hurt differently than as a source of rage or woundedness. Some degree of emotional maturity, of differentiation of self, is needed to disentangle one's emotions from the hurtful event.
- E: *Emotional* reprocessing. We often call "E" *empathy*, though empathy is only one of four emotions that can be used to replace unforgiveness (i.e., resentment, bitterness, hostility, hatred, anger, and fear). The others are sympathy, compassion, and love.
- A: Giving an *altruistic* gift of forgiveness—one that is predicated on blessing the offender who is a needy person.
- C: *Commitment* to the emotional forgiveness experienced.
- H: *Hold* onto the forgiveness when doubts occur.

Although REACH has primarily been applied to help clients forgive others, we have also adapted it to help clients forgive themselves. When we deal with self-forgiveness, we find that the five steps of the REACH forgiveness model recur as a subpart of the self-forgiveness process. Self-forgiveness is one response to self-condemnation that one feels because one has either done something he or she considers to be wrong or feels that he or she is failing to live up to his or her standards. Thus, in the Afterword, we present six steps to responsible self-forgiveness. We briefly name them here.

1. Restore a right relationship with humanity, nature, or God.
2. Repair relationships.
3. Rework one's unrealistic standards and reduce rumination (obsessing self-condemning thoughts and feelings).
4. Use the REACH forgiveness steps toward forgiving the self (see above).
5. Seek to accept oneself as being less perfect than one had previously felt.
6. Seek not to fail in the same way again.

## OVERVIEW OF THIS BOOK

In Part I of the book, we explain why and when forgiveness and spiritual transformation might be appropriate therapeutic goals. To do this, we introduce four interlocking models that guide our understanding of forgiveness and relational spirituality and we summarize the research evidence supporting the models. These models are described below.

1. *How forgiveness helps people cope with stress.* Making a decision to forgive and experiencing an emotional transformation from bitter grudge-holding to more peaceful acceptance are healthy targets that many patients aim for. Chapter 1 presents this first model.
2. *How spiritual transformation occurs.* People tend to seek a stable sense of dwelling comfortably with their religious and spiritual beliefs and practices, which we call *spiritual dwelling* (after Wuthnow, 1998, 2000). Yet, life kicks them out of those dwelling places into often chaotic *spiritual seeking*. That pattern can lead to either (a) finding a new dwelling place, (b) returning (albeit changed) to the previous dwelling place, or (c) getting stuck in seeking. Spiritual transformations can lead to reexamination of prior hurtful relationships and surface forgiveness issues. Or current difficulties in forgiving—often a life-changing event like in a divorce or traumatic loss—can lead to spiritual struggles and crises. Chapter 2 presents this second model.
3. *How people's relations with significant attachment figures affect their relations with the sacred.* We see spirituality as being embedded in relationships, so we tackle attachments in current and past relationships. We introduce the idea of a *relational template*, the way or ways people learned to relate emotionally in early emotion-charged relationships that serve as unconscious models for current emotion-charged relationships. Chapter 3 presents this third model.
4. *Why spiritual transformation may be needed before people can forgive their perceived transgressor if (a) they perceive that someone else has transgressed against them and (b) our current relations with the sacred prohibit them from forgiving.* Chapter 3 also presents this fourth, and cumulative, model, which links stress and coping with spiritual dwelling and seeking.

In Chapter 4, we examine a large amount of research evidence supporting the models. We seek to give you a good sense of the scope, depth, and power of the research supporting the various models we use in the book. Yet we also seek to make this a user-friendly account of the research, not a full-on dry and boring review of massive study after study.

Although Part I is about theory and evidence that ground our clinical applications, Part II is about applications. It is filled with cases, psychotherapist–patient dialogues, techniques, and references back to the theoretical grounding. By the end of the book, we think you will know what to do in psychotherapy, how to do it, and why to do it.

In Chapter 5, we describe generally how one can help someone change his or her personality. This is the basis for subsequent chapters on applying the theory and these general thoughts in brief and long-term individual, couple, family, and group psychotherapies.

We next describe (Chapter 6) and illustrate (Chapter 7) how people can be helped with forgiveness issues regarding religion and spirituality in a brief psychotherapy format. We recognize the practical constraints of having to practice in agencies that set time limits on psychotherapy, with managed care and employee assistance programs, and with patient personal preferences that require psychotherapists to use brief, hopefully evidence-based, practices. In these two chapters, we describe how to accomplish the maximum possible short-term change and long-term personality transformation within a brief format.

In the next two chapters, we describe (Chapter 8) and illustrate (Chapter 9) how people can be helped with forgiveness issues regarding religion and spirituality in a long-term, systems-theory-informed psychotherapy format. This long-term format can be a luxury for some patients and psychotherapists in today's fast-paced world. However, it might also be highly desirable by or explicitly requested by patients.

In Chapter 10, we consider the presence of multiple people in the psychotherapy room—in couples and family therapies. Although the principles are the same as those we applied throughout Chapters 5 to 9, the methods can differ.

In Chapter 11, we examine applying the theory and methods described in the book to groups. We apply the ideas in both psychoeducational and therapy groups. These groups include methods we have developed and adaptations and additions to treatments like mindfulness-based training and dialectical behavior therapy.

In the Afterword, we wrap up our journey through the book. We consider how clients renarrate their lives with the help of the treatments we have described. We conclude by considering your noble role as a guide for clients through a sacred reconsideration of their lives.

## CONCLUSION

We believe you will find this book enlightening and helpful in conducting your psychotherapy. It is not a detailed step-by-step instruction manual. Rather, it offers general principles that can be adapted to your specific cases.

Similar to being on the battlefield, the psychotherapist is like a general, helping an emotionally involved and emotionally distraught client battle for a fulfilling way of life in the battlefield of the psyche. The battle for the psyche requires all of the preparations that an actual battle requires—planning, knowing your opponent (the problems) and your own officers (the client), mapping a winning strategy, making bold decisions, and knowing yourself—and your tendencies to act well and to yield to pressures that take you in unproductive directions. It also requires flexibility. Do not lock yourself into a treatment plan or treatment approach from which you cannot escape. Adaptation is always necessary. Change is necessary. What worked with the previous client might not work with the present one: “Thus, one’s victories in battle cannot be repeated—they take their form in response to inexhaustibly changing circumstances” (Sun-Tzu, *The Art of War*, 4th century BC).

There will be tensions, which are, as we said, essential. They are part of a relational dialogue you can have with each client about the stresses he or she confronts and the ways he or she can cope with those stresses—within the context of religion and spirituality and of forgiveness and justice.