



## The Healing Power of Forgiveness

From disagreements with others, to news headlines, or situations that happen to you, it can feel like there are reasons to be angry. Holding onto feelings of anger may make you feel in control in the moment, but they are actually doing far more damage physically and emotionally. Science shows that to heal yourself, physically and emotionally, the practice of forgiveness is the best solution.

According to MaryBeth Goodman, a Licensed Professional Counselor with [Alaska Behavioral Health](#), science shows that holding onto feelings of resentment does not allow your brain to function as it should. Goodman notes that when you are angry, you:

- Stay in a state of perceived danger
- Are unable to think rationally or regulate your feelings
- Are constantly monitoring and looking out for more conflict

Goodman goes on to elaborate further, noting that when your brain is functioning like this, you are in a constant state of “fight or flight” mode. This constant state can increase your heart rate, increase the release of cortisone, and has been linked to worsening symptoms for diabetes, heart disease, and chronic pain. Shifting into a state of forgiveness alleviates this. [Harvard Health](#) notes that forgiveness is associated with lower feelings of depression, anxiety, and reduced substance abuse. They also note that people who practiced forgiveness had a better outlook on life.

Depending on circumstances, forgiveness can feel difficult to achieve. According to Dr. Tyler VanderWeele, with Harvard Health, it can be a multistep process. VanderWeele notes that there are two types of forgiveness - decisional and emotional. He notes that decisional forgiveness is making the conscious choice to be angry at someone or wish them ill will, and this type of forgiveness is easier to accomplish.

The second type of forgiveness is emotional forgiveness, where you choose to shift your focus away from the painful event and onto more positive feelings. VanderWeele notes that this stage can take a bit longer as it can be difficult to overcome the memories of the event, or potential triggers.

One way to work on forgiving others, notes the experts at Harvard Health, is through the **REACH Method**. These steps include:

**Recall:** Recalling the wrongdoing in an objective way will help you have a new perspective on both the wrong and the person who committed the wrong. VanderWeele notes not to suppress or ignore any feelings that come up during this stage.

**Empathize:** Taking an empathetic approach to someone who wronged you, without minimizing what they have done, allows you to potentially understand their perspective at the time of the incident, thus allowing you to see them as a person.

**Altruistic Gift:** Now that you can see the other party as a person, during this phase, you are called to remember a time you were the wrongdoer and were forgiven. This stage, according to VanderWeele, allows you to see forgiveness as a gift you have received and can extend to others.

**Commit:** This stage requires you to commit to forgiveness; this is the decisional forgiveness stage, where you actively choose to no longer wish the other party harm or ill will.

**Hold:** The most difficult stage, VanderWeele notes, is the final one, which requires you to hold onto your forgiveness. This stage helps shape how you react to the memory, thus alleviating the anger and the symptoms that go along with it.

Forgiveness can be tricky, but it's good for your mental, emotional, and physical health. Remember that forgiveness is not about denying a wrong you have experienced but simply changing your response to the event. Forgiveness is a healing process that allows you to better love yourself and the world around you.

In the song "Forgiveness" by Christian singer, Matthew West, the lyrics say:

*"It'll clear the bitterness away  
It can even set a prisoner free  
There is no end to what it's power can do  
So, let it go and be amazed  
By what you see through eyes of grace  
**The prisoner that it really frees is you**  
Forgiveness"*

To listen to the song and hear additional comments from Matthew West about Forgiveness, [click here](#).