

Forgiveness, Reconciliation and Hope in Trauma Healing

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Abstract

In this talk, I argue that trauma healing is complex and individual. The internal experience of forgiveness can help heal traumas that have been experienced both individually and within a society because it (1) signals some perception of trustworthiness; (2) creates a desire to reconcile (though the person might not act on the desire), and (3) is perceived. Forgiveness can therefore lead to a change in one's own and the other person's behavior. Reconciliation is even harder than forgiveness. Forgiveness involves one person making a decision to forgive and experiencing emotional forgiveness. Reconciliation involves a society in which individuals on each conflicting side differ both within and between the groups. Trustworthiness and perceptions by the other side that both sides are trustworthy are difficult to reach. But reconciliation is possible and it is aided by individuals forgiving others. Trustworthiness can be manifested by balancing justice and mercy, and trust can grow from perceptions of mutual trustworthiness. Trust can grow into hope, which can keep people seeking reconciliation even when it seems unlikely that it will occur.

Keywords: forgiveness, hope, justice, trauma, trust.

Resumen

En esta charla argumento que la curación del trauma es compleja e individual. La experiencia interna del perdón puede ayudar a sanar traumas individualmente y dentro de una sociedad porque (1) señala cierta percepción de confianza, (2) crea un deseo de reconciliación (aunque la persona puede no actuar según dicho deseo), y (3) se percibe. El perdón, por lo tanto, puede conducir al cambio de la conducta propia y de la otra persona. La reconciliación es aún más difícil que el perdón. El perdón implica que una persona tome la decisión de perdonar y experimente el perdón emocional. La reconciliación surge de una sociedad en la que los individuos de cada lado en conflicto difieren tanto dentro de su grupo como con los individuos del otro grupo. La confianza y la percepción de ambas partes de que la otra parte es fiable es difícil de alcanzar. Pero la reconciliación es posible y es posibilitada por individuos que perdonan a otros. La confianza puede manifestarse al equilibrar la justicia y la misericordia, y puede crecer a partir de percepciones de confiabilidad mutua. La confianza puede convertirse en esperanza, lo que puede hacer que las personas intenten reconciliarse incluso cuando parezca poco probable que la reconciliación ocurra.

Palabras clave: confianza, esperanza, justicia, perdón, trauma.

Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Hope in Trauma Healing

In this talk, I'll cover five main topics. What is trauma healing? The roles of forgiveness in trauma healing. How can we forgive better? What is reconciliation? Finally, we put these points together and ask: How are forgiveness, reconciliation, trustworthiness, trust, and hope related to peace?

What is trauma healing?

What is trauma?

Trauma results from exposure to an incident or series of events that are emotionally disturbing or life-threatening and that have lasting adverse effects (e.g., flashbacks, unpredictable emotions, hyper-arousal, intrusive symptoms, negative alterations in mood, or constricted affect, nightmares, intense reactions to stimuli associated with the experience, effortful avoidance of event stimuli, persistent blame of self or others, strained relationships, physical symptoms) on an individual's functioning and well-being. Trauma can be directly acute, chronic, or complex, or secondary/vicarious. Importantly,

these types of traumas are based on individual experience, not on an event itself.

Events are not traumas. Events are “*potentially traumatic events*”. Not everyone experiences trauma after bearing witness to horrible events. George Bonanno (2005) has studied trauma for his entire career and has aggregated numerous studies.¹ He identifies four classes of response to potentially traumatic events. Clearly, some events are more likely to result in trauma than others.

- Chronic disturbance (severe and persistent) [10%-30%, depending on study and sample]
- Delayed reaction (mild to moderate disturbance for a year, and then worsening) [5%-10%]
- Recovery (moderate to severe disturbance for a while, then return to mild disturbance or “normal” within a year) [15%-35%]
- Resilience (mild disturbance initially, return to “normal” soon) [35%-55%]

A potentially traumatic event \neq trauma. Whether a person experiences a “trauma” or not is highly individual. It depends on the individual’s genetics, personality, personal history, experience during the event, and (importantly) culture. In many cultures, people are so inured to violence and threats to death or injury that much fewer people than we might expect experience chronic disturbance, delayed reaction or even delayed recovery.

If we (mistakenly) treat everyone who has experienced a horrible event as having “experienced a trauma”, we will find a high incidence of “trauma” and healing of “traumas”. It is important to remember that trauma is defined by an individual’s reaction, not the event they went through.

Trauma healing

The efficacy and effectiveness of programmes aimed at healing trauma are difficult to interpret. Estimates of the healing of traumas from programmes with this purpose might be over-inflated, as many of the participants who went through potentially traumatic events did not actually have trauma reactions.

There are successful treatments for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Probably the two with the most evidence are prolonged exposure and

¹ George A. Bonanno, “Resilience in the face of loss and potential trauma”, in *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 14 (3), 2005, pp. 135–138.

cognitive processing therapy, but other treatments also exist, such as CBT, cognitive therapy, EMDR (eye-movement desensitisation and reprocessing), and narrative exposure therapy. Others, with less randomised control trial evidence supporting them however, can also be very effective for certain groups.

American Bible Society Trauma Healing Institute

The American Bible Society has opened a Trauma Healing Institute, which offers a programme around the world for Christians, many of whom (in countries other than the USA or in Western Europe) are suspicious of Western psychotherapies. Its intent is to reduce the trauma symptoms of Christians seeking treatment, often from places in the world that experience a high number of potentially traumatic events. A scale has been created to assess three subscales—trauma healing, coping and religious engagement—as three indexes of the return to normalcy following a self-assessed trauma (Worthington et al., 2022).² Here are a few of the findings. First, the scores on subscales were mildly related to each other. Trauma healing was related to coping ($r = .67$) but not as strongly to religious engagement ($r = .44$). Second, the subscales of trauma healing, coping and religious engagement are related to validity criteria. Trauma healing was related negatively to trauma symptoms ($r = -.39$ to $r = -.66$). Thus, higher scores on the trauma healing index were related to fewer reported trauma symptoms. Third, trauma healing was related positively to dispositional forgiveness ($r = .35$). Fourth, trauma healing was not related to social desirability ($r = .07$). Fifth, in a study involving 27 samples of adult Christians participating in trauma healing workshops from around the world ($N = 2,694$), we found wide differences by continent, country, and even sample within the same country on the mean scores for trauma healing. Thus, that which constitutes self-assessed trauma and the symptoms alleviated as people in different environments heal from trauma, vary substantially.

Roles of forgiveness in healing traumas

Most potentially traumatic events (excluding natural disasters and accidents) occur at the hands of others. Forgiveness can thus play an important role in trauma healing.

² Everett L. Worthington, Jr. and others, Assessing traumas among Christians: *The development of the Trauma Healing Institute-Impact Survey*, Virginia Commonwealth University, Unpublished manuscript.

What is forgiveness?

There are two types of forgiveness. *Decisional forgiveness* is a decision to treat the offender as a valuable and valued person. It is possible to carry out the decision faithfully for years and still feel emotional unforgiveness, resentment and even hate. That suggests there is a second type of forgiveness. *Emotional forgiveness* is the emotional replacement of negative, unforgiving emotions (e.g., resentment, hate) with more positive (or less negative) other-oriented emotions like empathy, compassion or love towards the offender (called person-to-person forgiveness) or group of people (called intergroup forgiveness). These emotions often change slowly, irregularly, and (sometimes) unconsciously.

Forgiveness is *not* the same thing as saying, “I forgive you”. Both decisional forgiveness and emotional forgiveness—whether person-to-person or intergroup forgiveness—are internal processes. They both produce a *desire* for interpersonal reconciliation, which may or may not be acted upon.

Societal forgiveness is different. It includes official societal or governmental proclamations that an act or debt is forgiven.

Mechanisms for forgiveness

Forgiveness is rooted in an internal perception of an “injustice gap”, which is a subjective perception of the degree of injustice or offense one experiences. It is adjusted after subsequent actions within the interpersonal dynamic. Thus, if an offender takes ownership of the harm, expresses remorse, apologises or seeks to make amends, the victim often narrows the injustice gap, making it easier to deal with the injustice. There are many ways to narrow injustice gaps. These include seeing justice carried out, turning the matter over to God, minimising the perception of harm, tolerating the offense, forbearing negative responses, and accepting and moving on. In relationships, victims can also reduce the size of the injustice gap by empathising with the offender to understand the injustice or forgive. On the other hand, victims might also keep grudges “green” by ruminating and refusing to empathise—both of which can increase the size of the injustice gap.

In communities and societies, forgiveness might be promoted by encouraging passive attitudes towards past offenses, in other words, letting their importance die out. Leaders can also promote societal forgiveness by actively encouraging it.

Societal desires for retaliation and revenge can be nurtured within honour cultures, vengeance-oriented cultures, communities engaging in the general dehumanisation of one group by another and communities that nurse historic offenses.

How can forgiveness heal wounds and prevent new wounds from forming?

Forgiveness promotes trauma healing in several ways. First, it can affect people's attitudes towards previous enemies or people at the hands of whom one has experienced a perceived injustice, leading to personal forgiveness and relational reconciliation. It does this in three ways: it (1) signals some perception of trustworthiness; (2) creates a desire to reconcile (though the person might not act on the desire), and (3) is perceived. Second, it can affect communities (and perhaps even whole societies) by stimulating greater awareness of forgiveness. Third, it can drive people toward time-intensive ways of experiencing greater personal forgiveness of others—such as working through self-help materials, attending groups, reading books, etc. Fourth, both community awareness and personal efforts to forgive affect public health (improved individual health thanks to public efforts to promote forgiveness) and peace and communal/societal/political healing. Fifth, in countries where religion is highly valued, the roots of forgiveness in religious practices make it acceptable to many people who might not seek other types of treatment.

Understanding the benefits of forgiveness as measurable effects

In four studies, simply understanding the benefits of forgiveness produced $ES = 0.4$ (at the end of the intervention), and $ES = \sim 0.2$ upon follow-up, regardless of the duration of the intervention, which lasted between 10 minutes and 8 hours. Given the fact that informing people of the benefits of forgiveness can take effect quickly, forgiveness interventions should probably spend at least ten minutes covering them.

Benefits of forgiveness

Relationship benefits. Forgiveness directly changes how people perceive the offender and victim, therefore it changes how they behave toward them. This is primarily due to changes caused by decisional forgiveness, though some changes are effected with emotional forgiveness. Indirectly, forgiveness changes both mental health and physical health (and spirituality), which in turn affect relationships.

Mental health benefits. Forgiveness directly changes the way we think and therefore impacts depression, anxiety and anger disorders. It can affect PTSD, obsessive-compulsive disorders and psychophysical disorders. Forgiveness impacts subjective well-being and indirectly changes physical health and relationships (and spirituality), which can also affect mental health indirectly.

Physical health benefits. Forgiveness directly changes activation in the HPA-axis (hypothalamus-pituitary-adrenal-axis), heart-rate variability (HRV), and neurohormones cortisol and oxytocin. Therefore, it directly impacts stress reactivity (freeze, flee, fight), stress-related disorders, positive emotions (broaden and build), coping (emotion-, problem- and meaning-focused coping) and tend-and-befriend coping. Indirectly, forgiveness changes relationships and mental health (and spirituality), which influence physical health. While people might feel some immediate changes to their mood following forgiveness, the effects on physical health usually take years to culminate in disorders or healing from disorders.

Spiritual health benefits. Spirituality for some is effected through forgiveness, especially for devout individuals or those devoted to their spiritual life.

Where might forgiveness be a protective factor for mental health problems and also increase a sense of well-being in the population?

Forgiveness might help entire societies or communities. It might lower worldwide conflict and ultimately prevent war, death, injury and trauma. It might improve individual mental health by (a) reducing conflict and increasing social support, thus improving civic relationships, making group

relationships more harmonious (e.g., work, religious organisations, community relationships) and enhancing couple and family relationships; (b) better stress management which could lower rumination (thus lowering depression, anxiety, anger, O-C disorders, psychosomatic disorders) and contributing to a better (more virtuous) character, which could increase individual well-being (by increasing character development and promoting happiness).

How can we get better at forgiveness?

Ways to promote forgiveness

At this point (in 2020), there are over 100 randomised controlled trials studying forgiveness interventions.³ They tell us several things:

1. Interventions work.
2. Established programmes have about the same efficacy per hour of treatment.
3. Two programmes have the most support—Worthington’s REACH Forgiveness model and Enright’s Process Model of Forgiveness.⁴ Each has over 30 randomised controlled trials.
4. Forgiveness depends directly on the time spent trying to forgive and there is a straight-line dose-response relationship. $\text{Forgiveness (d against no-treatment)} = 0.124 + 0.046 * \text{Time}$.⁵
5. As people forgive, most spontaneously experience increased hope, less depression and less anxiety.

REACH Forgiveness

Let me describe the REACH Forgiveness model (Worthington, 2020).⁶ It has typically been used for psychoeducation and in do-it-yourself workbook treatments on all types of offenses. It also has been used with couples, in group therapy, in individual therapy, and with some very difficult-to-forgive trauma (i.e., with borderline personality disorders). It is particularly useful when used in conjunction with psychotherapy.

³ Some of these forgiveness interventions have been published in the following articles: Michael E. McCullough & Everett L. Worthington, Jr., “Promoting forgiveness: A comparison of two psychoeducational group interventions with a waiting-list control”, in *Counseling and Values*, 40, 1995, pp. 55-68; Michael E. McCullough, Everett L. Worthington, Jr. & Kenneth C. Rachal, “Interpersonal forgiving in close relationships”, in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 73, 1997, pp. 321-336; Steven J. Sandage & Everett L. Worthington, Jr., “Comparison of two group interventions to promote forgiveness: Empathy as a mediator of change”, in *Journal of Mental Health Counseling*, 32 (1), 2010, pp. 35-57.

⁴ Robert D. Enright & Richard P. Fitzgibbons, *Forgiveness therapy: An empirical guide for resolving anger and restoring hope*, American Psychological Association: Washington DC, 2015.

⁵ Everett L. Worthington, Jr. and others, “Forgiving usually takes time: A lesson learned by studying interventions to promote forgiveness”, in *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 28, 2000, pp. 3–20.

⁶ Everett L. Worthington, Jr., «An update of the REACH Forgiveness model to promote forgiveness», in Everett L. Worthington, Jr. & Nathaniel G. Wade (Eds.), *Handbook of forgiveness*, 2nd ed., Routledge: New York, 2020, pp. 277-287.

Generally, the following steps are used. First, individuals are asked to recall the most difficult thing they have ever successfully forgiven. Second, they are asked to assess their own forgiveness of a particular hurtful act (i.e., target transgression). Before working on it, they are asked to think more about forgiveness in general. Third, they contemplate inspirational quotes. Fourth, they define decisional and emotional forgiveness. Fifth, they identify the relational, psychological, physical and spiritual benefits of forgiving. Sixth, they work on forgiving the target transgression by first working through the five steps to REACH emotional forgiveness.

R = Recall the hurt

E = Empathise with (Sympathise, feel compassion for, love) the transgressor

A = Altruistic gift of forgiveness

C = Commit to the emotional forgiveness one experienced

H = Hold onto forgiveness when doubts arise

The emphasis is emotional and motivational forgiveness, not cognitive. After the five REACH steps, the person will be invited to decide to forgive the offender. Seventh, they will work through twelve steps that help the person apply REACH to other transgressions in order to become a more forgiving person. Eighth, they use the same self-assessment process with the target transgression as they completed in the second step to see the degree to which they have forgiven. Protocols for groups and workbooks are freely available at: www.EvWorthington-forgiveness.com.

Testing the REACH Forgiveness two-hour workbooks worldwider

One in-progress study involves six sites in five countries—Hong Kong, Indonesia, Ukraine (two sites), Colombia, South Africa—and has some 3,600 people completing workbooks. Once the study has been published, we will post all translations of the workbooks (downloadable without cost). Thus, about 75% of the world can complete a workbook free of charge in their native language (English, Spanish, Mandarin, Russian, Ukrainian or Indonesian). The project also has a second part—a public awareness-raising campaign—at each site

to promote forgiveness in communities. Such campaigns have previously been done on a smaller scale (Griffin et al., 2019).⁷

What is reconciliation?

Reconciliation

Definition. Reconciliation is the restoration of trust between people or groups after trust has been damaged by transgressions. The prerequisite to reconciliation is that both parties are perceived as trustworthy—at least to a limited degree. Reconciliation involves several factors, as they signal some degree of trustworthiness and trust.

- Communication of forgiveness,
- Holding perpetrators accountable (at different levels of perpetration),
- Consideration of reparations,
- In-group versus out-group forgiveness,
- Public statements by leaders urging forgiveness or public apologies,
- Communication of apologies between individuals,
- Responses to apologies,
- Forgiveness of oneself (including dealing with one's moral injury),
- Forgiveness of offending entities.

Reconciliation is difficult.

Reconciliation between romantic partners who are at a loggerhead is much more complex than forgiveness. Forgiveness, both decisional forgiveness and emotional forgiveness, happen inside the skin of a single individual. The injustice gap perceived by that person is certainly affected by what the other person does, but still, forgiveness is the act of a single individual. Reconciliation, however, involves more than one person, and the complexity increases because two people's forgiveness, plus the perceptions of each person, guessing the other person's intentions regarding their trustworthiness and the opinions of both individuals' social networks, all affect whether reconciliation occurs.

In this regard, societal reconciliation is much more complicated. Even if there are (only) two conflicting sides, each side is made up of many people. Each side has individuals who have more or less authority to speak for their side, and each person has a different perception about if, when and how to

⁷ Brandon J. Griffin and others, "Evaluating the effectiveness of a community-based forgiveness campaign", in *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 14 (3), 2019, pp. 354-361.

reconcile. Also, each side has extremists who are often more vocal and demonstrative than their numbers might suggest. Extremists can not only take extreme positions, but they can also perpetrate violence and make public spectacles. Because they are so visible, they can be seen by the opposite side as reflecting the will of the entire group, when in fact they are a weak minority. So, different people represent different positions within each group. The groups might have had very different experiences and thus the average person in each group might differ dramatically.

I recall the American Civil War of 1861-1865. This war resulted in more deaths than almost the sum of all other conflicts the United States has ever been involved in. Almost all of the fighting took place in the American South. The South lost proportionately more people, both combatants and non-combatants, than the North. It suffered vastly more property loss and social upheaval because the fighting took place there and not in the North, which only hosted three brief campaigns, all of which were easily defeated. After the war ended in the South's defeat, the Northern army occupied the South for years.

When it came to reconciliation, many in the North found it much easier to consider reconciliation than people in the South. Yet there was still a lot of division within the North. Some wanted to reconcile quickly. Some wanted to reconcile, but only after the South was severely punished for the rebellion. Others were against reconciliation due to the evils of slavery, one of the two most salient issues of the American Civil War (the other being the preservation of the union).

The South experienced a very different distribution of views on reconciliation. In the presence of Northern occupying troops, Southerners struggled to see how reconciliation could ever be just. The South had also suffered enormous damage to property and loss of life, so proposals to punish the South harshly fell on the ears of people who already felt that the North had inflicted a far greater punishment than it had suffered. In short, there were still a range of opinions regarding reconciliation. Some (but only a few) favoured quick reconciliation in the belief that it would allow them to recover the population and restore pre-conflict numbers. But most just wanted Northern troops to leave the South and not force a perceived inequitable reconciliation upon them.

This foregoing example stems from the complexity of reconciliation. It involves multiple people with multiple leaders who have multiple opinions that differ both within and between the two sides. Reconciliation requires trust to

be rebuilt through perceived mutual trustworthiness. Both are difficult because the social differences exceed the intrapersonal differences involved in forgiveness.

Forgiveness in restorative and retributive justice

Retributive justice has various motivations. The most accepted motive at present is probably punishing wrongdoers for their crimes. There have been other motives over the years. These have included incarceration (or even capital punishment) to prevent future crimes or seeking to provide an environment in which to rehabilitate wrongdoers. The role of forgiveness in retributive justice is largely informal. Some criminal justice systems allow victim impact statements prior to a sentencing decision. This allows victims to state that they forgive the offender and influence judicial decision-making. Generally, however, forgiveness is something that victims and survivors, or victims' family members, might experience individually. They might even talk with members of their communities about their experiences of forgiving the offender. However, any good that comes from forgiveness is a result of an intrapersonal transformation within the forgiver, whether by means of decisional forgiveness, emotional forgiveness, or both.

Decisions taken by the justice system can influence the degree of emotional forgiveness, the likelihood of a decision to forgive and the process by which decisional forgiveness and emotional forgiveness interact with and influence each other. For example, when an alleged offender is apprehended, jailed, trialled, convicted, sentenced, and incarcerated (or adjudicated to pay restitution), each decision within the justice system can reduce (or increase, if the victim believes the decision is unfair) the size of the injustice gap, making it more or less easy to forgive.

Restorative justice does not aim to somehow get back at the offender or inflict harsh punishment to ally the victim's feelings of resentment, bitterness, anger, fear, or even hate. Restorative justice is a process aimed at engaging the offender in responsible behaviour that will eventually return the offender to full participation within society. It primarily aims to benefit the community in which the offender is located, where the engaged members decide on acts that will demonstrate the offender's accountability, sincerity, regret, acceptance of responsibility, desire to return to the community, wi-

llingness to do whatever is needed for trust to be restored, and other acts to demonstrate trustworthiness.

Restorative justice is a type of justice. It is not forgiveness. It is justice that allows the offender to perform acts that will reduce the size of the injustice gaps perceived by the community members. However, depending on the extent to which the offender succeeds in reducing these injustice gaps and in complying with the agreed-upon conditions for restoration within the community, forgiveness might be experienced by community members and the offender might then be welcomed back into the community.

Restorative justice for an offender's wrongdoing within a community will affect community members differently. Kiefer et al. (2020) studied restorative justice in a role play simulation.⁸ Sixteen quartets (two women and two men) of participants (N = 64) were assigned the role of either the offender or the victim (men were randomly assigned) and of the offender's mother or the victim's mother (women were randomly assigned). The participants, in their assigned roles, then discussed restoring the offender to the community during a one-hour, family-circle restorative-justice meeting mediated by a trained mediator. The person playing the offender was given one of two instructions. They had to either act as the offender, but under no circumstances offer an apology or make an offer of restitution, or act as the offender and offer a sincere apology and some kind of restitution. Multiple questionnaires were completed in order to assess participants' feelings, behaviour, and attitudes prior to and after the restorative justice meeting. In addition, the meeting was videotaped and the participants' behavioural responses were coded. The main findings were—using questionnaires and coded behaviour—that (1) victims were quite forgiving and acted consonantly with their stated forgiveness; (2) victims' mothers were forgiving, but less so than the victim; and (3) the least forgiving participant was the mother of the offender.

To complement this study, Witvliet et al. (2020) investigated physiological responses as well as reports of empathy and forgiveness.⁹ They found that the degree of offenders' manipulated accountability (e.g., the presence or absence of an apology and offer of restitution) influenced both victims' empathy for and forgiveness of the offender, and sympathetic nervous system arousal mirrored self-reports and were consonant with Kiefer et al.'s role play simulation, which assessed self-reports and observer-coded behaviour.

⁸ Rebecca P. Kiefer and others, "Apology and restitution in a role play restorative justice experiment: Multiple perspectives, multiple measures", in *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 48 (2), 2020, pp. 105-117.

⁹ Charlotte V. O. Witvliet and others, "Apology and restitution increase forgiveness with emotional and physiological change: Offender accountability responses influence victim empathy and forgiveness", *Frontiers in Psychology*, Vol.11, March 2020.

How is hope involved with forgiveness, reconciliation, and peace?

What is hope?

There are two types of hope. One is goal-oriented and the other is motivational when desired outcomes do not seem likely. Snyder et al.'s (1991) goal-oriented hope has two parts.¹⁰ One is agency, which is understood as having the willpower to change or one's ability to reach a desired outcome. The other is pathways to change, which is understood as having the willpower to change or knowing how to reach a desired outcome. Rueger et al. (2022) developed the concept to measure persevering hope (see Appendix).¹¹ They defined persevering hope as the motivation to persevere when a desired outcome seems unlikely or impossible. Although both types of hope are important, often when suffering and offenses are multiple, deep and inflicted over a long period—such as in societies that have experienced armed conflict or war—persevering hope is most important. We developed a four-item assessment scale. We collected four samples involving 1,428 adults from the United States. We then developed the scale with undergraduate students at a traditional university; replicated our findings with community-based adults; extended them with students at a faith-based university, and tested them on chronically ill community-based adults.

How does hope benefit individuals?

To determine how hope benefits people, Long et al. (2020) used a database of 12,998 nurses from the Health and Retirement Study (mean age=66).¹² They found that hope NOW predicts (a) improved physical health and health behaviour (fewer chronic conditions, lower risk of cancer, fewer sleep problems, better reduced all-cause mortality); (b) less psychological distress (depression, anxiety); (c) higher psychological well-being (positive effect, life satisfaction, purpose in life); and (d) better social well-being.

Hope helps people forgive and forgiveness helps people hope

Hope helps people forgive. Hope provides a basis to keep pursuing a better relationship. It does not keep people locked into punishment and revenge. It allows people to see that restored relationships are possible. Take two cases, reconstruction following the American Civil War and the World War I Treaty of Versailles. In both examples, after the cessation of hostilities, the victors' desire was to punish the losing side harshly, which they did. The punis-

¹⁰ Charles R. Snyder and others, "The will and the ways: Development and validation of an individual differences measure of hope", in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 60 (4), 1991, pp. 570-585.

¹¹ Sandra Y. Rueger and others, "Development and initial validation of the Persevering Hope Scale: Measuring Wait-power in four independent samples", in *Journal of Personality Assessment*, March 2022, pp. 1-57.

¹² Katelyn N. G. Long and others, "The role of hope in subsequent health and well-being for older adults: An outcome-wide longitudinal approach", in *Global Epidemiology*, Vol. 2, November 2020.

hed side responded with anger, feelings that injustices had been perpetrated on them when they were helpless, and a desire to retaliate. Contrast that with Mandela's reconciliation attempts after the Nationalist Party was defeated and Apartheid was dismantled.

Forgiveness helps people hope. When wrongs have been perpetrated, the willingness of one side (usually the victor, but it could occur regardless of which side held power) to forgive the other gives people hope of reconciliation. Forgiveness is not opposed to justice. If one forgives, which is something internal, one might still pursue justice in societal dealings with the other side. When one side is harshly punitive, it is a social signal that punishment is likely to continue. The punished side quickly believes that the victors are not trustworthy and trust is rarely established. Thus reconciliation can only be imagined in the distant and not the near future.

How does hope help heal traumas?

Hope can help heal traumas. Hope can help people heal from traumas suffered in potentially traumatic events by several mechanisms. First, hope can motivate people to seek, adhere to and benefit from treatment. Second, hope can inspire people to seek a healing community because they sense that supportive relationships can help the healing process. Third, hope can help people deal with PTSD symptoms—like flashbacks or other intrusive memories, avoidance of events or situations that remind them of their trauma, responsiveness to trigger stimuli, negative changes to thoughts and mood, and volatile physical and emotional reactions. Fourth, hope can help people achieve post-traumatic growth (PTG). There are five parts to PTG Inventory: perceiving new possibilities, relating to others, developing or becoming aware of new personal strength, changing spiritually in a positive manner, and appreciating life more. Hope is needed for each of these five areas of change.

How does hope benefit reconciliation?

Hopeful people are more inclined to keep pursuing reconciliation when they do not see progress or its perceived future. Persevering hope is needed when reconciliation is seen as unlikely or impossible. Reconciliation is the development of mutual trust and it requires mutually trustworthy behaviour. But when trust has been broken, people are cognitively primed to look for further violations of trustworthiness and to engage in the cognitive fallacy

of self-confirming bias. They look for the others' failures. They then use these failures as evidence that their perception of the others was initially correct. Hope disrupts the self-confirming bias—at least to some small degree—and allows the person to recognise others' positive actions. It is not easy to re-establish trust (i.e., reconciliation), but it is easier to re-establish than when a self-confirming bias is at work.

Take-home messages: What leads to peace and reconciliation?

Hope is a fundamentally disruptive process that interrupts cognitive biases by (1) focusing cognition on one's agency for obtaining desired outcomes and on pathways to achieve them. (2) Hope also is disruptive when desired outcomes seem impossible or unlikely because it is a motivational willingness to persevere, thus it interrupts the inertia toward behavioural paralysis.

Forgiveness is founded on hope for a different type of relationship than one that is based on a past offense or pattern of offenses. Generally, forgiveness seems impossible in light of traumas. But if a person can experience some success at forgiveness, even the slightest degree of hope can propel them toward more forgiveness. Two brief exercises have been found to create an initial burst of hope. One is to publicly recall and describe the hardest thing one has ever successfully forgiven. The other is to list the potential benefits of forgiveness for the forgiver.

In public awareness-raising campaigns, limited but significant goals have been found to be successful in communities. First, define and differentiate two types of forgiveness—a decision to treat the offender as a valuable and valued human and to replace negative, unforgiving emotions, wholly or partially, by more positive, other-oriented emotions like empathy or compassion for the offender. Second, make the benefits of forgiveness plain. Third, convey hope by describing effective interventions (like REACH Forgiveness) and telling people how to access them easily.

Turning people's hearts and minds towards forgiveness does several things: it (1) creates a desire for reconciliation; (2) reduces anger, depression and anxiety, and increases hope—all of which make people want to keep seeking reconciliation; (3) triggers a desire to move forward with limited bids for trust-building; (4) signals safety, which contributes to the birth or building of trust; and (5) builds persevering hope, which is motivation to persevere in their quest for trust and trustworthiness.

The internal experience of forgiveness can help heal traumas individually and within a society because it (1) signals a perception of trustworthiness; (2) creates a desire to reconcile (though the person might not act on the desire), and (3) is perceived. Forgiveness can therefore lead to a change in one's own and the other person's behaviour. Trust can grow into hope, which can keep people seeking reconciliation even when it seems unlikely that it will occur. Hope can grow into forgiveness, forgiveness can grow into reconciliation, and reconciliation, into peace.

Appendix - Persevering Hope Scale (PHS)

How descriptive of you is each of the following items?

- 1=*not at all*
- 2=*a little*
- 3=*somewhat*
- 4=*mostly*
- 5=*very*

When an outcome I desire seems unlikely or even impossible, I...

		Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Mostly	Very
1	Am determined to see things through to the end	1	2	3	4	5
2	Will keep trying	1	2	3	4	5
3	Won't give up	1	2	3	4	5
4	Am motivated to wait for a successful outcome	1	2	3	4	5

Scoring: Items are averaged to create a total score that can range from 1 to 5, with higher scores reflecting higher levels of persevering hope (the dispositional motivation to endure when a desired goal seems unattainable, unlikely, or even impossible).

Norms: Range = 4-20; Mean = 16; SD = 2.5 (67% score 14 to 18; 95% score between 11 and 20)

