

A Series of Reflections on Forgiveness

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A sculpture of two people embracing with the title "Reconciliation."

What could you forgive? Try to imagine the worst possible incident and imagine if you could find a way to forgive.

Take for instance this excerpt from an essay titled "Forgiveness saves your bacon" in "*Searching for SanViejo: Notes to my Younger Self*," a book of essays and observations by Larry Moffitt.



Flowers starting to bloom in the springtime such as now – a symbol of renewal.

"A man steals \$10,000 from the loose change basket on his father's dresser. He flees his home and spends most of it on blackjack, vodka shooters, and fast women.

The rest he squanders.

Too ashamed to go home, he becomes a drifter. After sinking to the depths of degradation, and weary of his job tuning the piano in a whorehouse, he returns to his family home, and to his father, with a remorseful heart. He hands his father everything he has left, which is two \$5 poker chips.

The father tearfully embraces the son, and orders that the fatted calf be killed for a feast. This your basic repentance and forgiveness. Forgiveness is something that was invented, simply because it had to be.”

The concept of forgiveness wasn't invented by Jesus, but he certainly stressed the concept of forgiving others, even your enemy, with his final words on the cross, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34).

Forgiveness might seem like a religious concept, a task that only the most pious undertake, because it is a practice and teaching of many religious traditions. But in reality everyone stands to benefit from forgiveness, especially if you are the one doing the forgiving.

In this discussion around forgiveness in honor of the Easter holiday, we'll introduce an aspect of forgiveness from which CARP students especially can benefit. By looking at the process of forgiveness not only from an individual level but from a group perspective, students and others can begin to embody part of CARP's vision to become *global citizens*.

Benefits of Forgiveness

To forgive is *to stop feeling angry or resentful towards (someone) for an offence, flaw, or mistake* according to the Oxford Dictionary.

This process of changing one's emotion and attitude towards an offender is actually an intentional and voluntary act that does not even require the offender to say “I'm sorry” (though it couldn't hurt).

Here are just a few benefits of *forgiveness*:

- Empowers you to keep moving forward
- Improves your mental and physical health
- Creates hope in your life and in the greater community

A couple of CARP students illustrate a time they have forgiven and its effect on them.



An image of “forgiving.”

“I failed a college course many years ago and it ended up snowballing enough to lose my desired degree. I felt like a failure and spent years barely getting by. Thanks to my supportive parents and doing multiple reading conditions with them, I took the first steps to forgiving myself and attempting to do more. It has taken years of recovery to get to where I am now, but I am proud of where I am and look forward to what the future brings.” – Kenei, CARP student

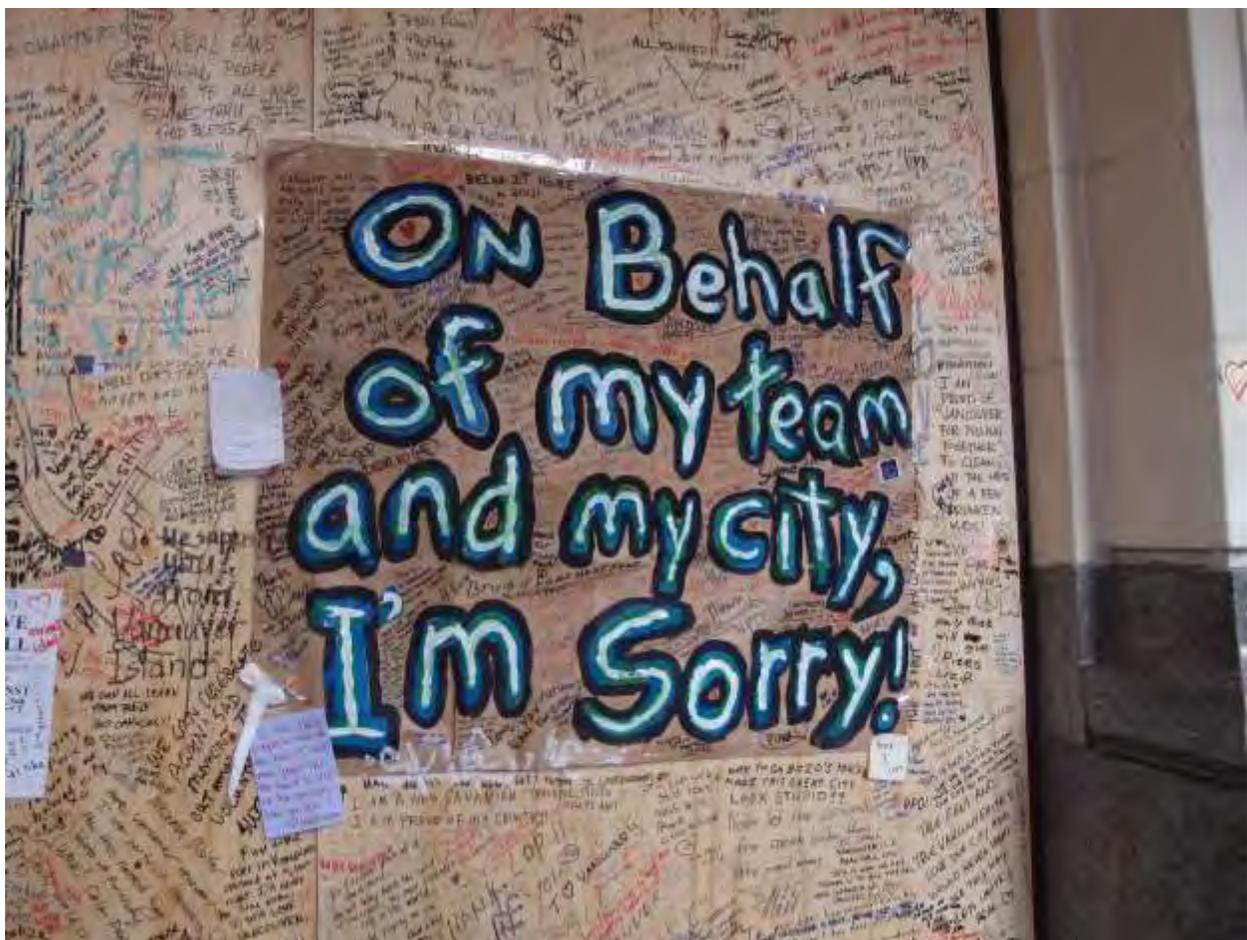
“The last time I forgave someone else was today, when I held the door open for this girl behind me, and she just walked right through without any acknowledgment whatsoever. In my head I was like, “Girl, please! You don’t even say thank you, or even give a simple head nod? Sheesh.” Smh (shaking my head). But then I told the story to a friend, and they said, “Maybe she was just really caught up in her own thoughts to realize you were intentionally doing something nice for her.” And then I realized the importance of not judging too quickly, considering other possible realities beyond my own, and acting with care without the expectation of receiving anything in return. So, I forgave that girl. And I forgave myself for the mistake I made of judging her.” – Kristin, CARP student

Forgiving as an Individual

It isn’t easy to forgive. Mahatma Gandhi said “the weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is an attribute of the strong.”

Just like we can train our muscles to become stronger, we can train our hearts and minds to develop a forgiving attitude. Don’t wait for someone else to say “I’m sorry.”

The process of forgiving someone else or even yourself *can* start with you and it’s a smart decision to develop a forgiving attitude since the benefits seriously outweigh the costs.



“Wall of Forgiveness” at HBC building after the 2011 Stanley Cup Riot in Vancouver, CA.

START training your heart and mind to regularly forgive and let go of your annoyance, anger, or resentment. Here are a few steps to try out, but an even stronger result will come from you putting in the effort to develop your own strategy for forgiving.

- **Relax your mind and heart.** This might seem an impossible task when someone or even yourself has just hurt you, but you will make wiser decisions when you are calm.
- **Examine the situation deeply.** Instead of ignoring the wrong that was done to you, look deeper and try to understand the situation and accept that it happened.
- **Accept your feelings.** It’s crucial to not condemn yourself or even reward yourself for the

feelings that follow an offense – analyze your feelings about a situation and accept them, but don't necessarily act on them.

- **Say “I forgive you.”** Try not to brush off a situation and instead communicate your feelings towards the someone that hurt you in some way. An “I forgive you” as opposed to an “It's okay” has a much more powerful effect on both parties, too.

Forgiving as Part of a Group

On an individual level, the forgiveness process isn't easy but it's very achievable and even somewhat commonplace since people understand the benefits of forgiveness to some extent.

Now imagine specific groups forgiving one another – a community forgiving a company that destroyed their livelihood, one race forgiving another race for the racist behavior, one nation forgiving another nation for atrocities committed.

It's not so easy to imagine, is it?

Yet, large-scale forgiveness processes have occurred and continue to be researched. You can check out this brochure on forgiveness research findings put out by the United Nations (UN) and the American Psychological Association (APA) in 2006.

As part of CARP's mission to *inspire and empower students to become global citizens*, we encourage you to think globally when considering when, where, and how to forgive.

Considering the state of the world today – terrorist activity across the globe, ideological conflicts within our countries, racial conflicts within our communities – an attitude of forgiveness could be the healing power we need.

The benefits to forgiveness as part of group are the same to those on an individual level. As a global citizen, think of areas in which you need to change a negative attitude into a positive one towards another group and try to rectify that through the process of forgiveness.

A habit of forgiving is a tool not only for personal peace, but also for world peace.