

All Souls Church Unitarian

Covenant Group Guide

May 2016

“Forgiveness”

Forgiveness is giving up all hope of a better past.

Jack Kornfield

Forgiveness does not change the past, but it does enlarge the future.

Paul Boose

When you hold resentment toward another, you are bound to that person or condition by an emotional link that is stronger than steel. Forgiveness is the only way to dissolve that link and get free.

Catherine Ponder

To forgive is among the most challenging things for you human beings to do. It requires that you let go of your stories.

Deborah L. Johnson, *Your Deepest Intent*

The primary teaching of Jesus is forgiveness—for everything, for everyone, in all circumstances and deeds.

Megan McKenna, *On Your Mark*

If all the forgiveness the heavens have known could be offered from one face, would you accept that divine pardon? In his sublime sanity—every moment God offers that to us: anything that might comfort.

St. Francis of Assisi

Lessons from Great Acts of Forgiveness

So when people forgive appalling acts of cruelty, it is not the offence they forgive but humanity itself for failing. They empathize not because they tolerate the wrongdoing but because they have compassion for people with twisted minds hell-bent on cruelty, what Shakespeare describes as 'ruined pieces of nature'. And somehow they are able to stand in these dirty shoes and imagine something of what it is like to be born with such aberrant compulsions.

Marina Cantacuzino, *The Forgiveness Project: Stories for a Vengeful Age*.
(Cantacuzino launched The Forgiveness Project in 2004 in response to the invasion of Iraq and as a way of countering the rhetoric of retaliation so prominent at that time. She set out to collect stories from victims and perpetrators who had chosen to resolve conflict through dialogue and restorative means.)

On Responding to Injury—Advice to a Child

When [my goddaughter] was about nine years old, she started sending me emails through her mother. She'd dictate and her mother would write the email. This was the first e-mail:

"I have been thinking about things and I wonder if you can help me out. Where did the universe come from? Where does love come from? Where does space come from? And do love and space have anything to do with one another? Please tell me everything you know."

I thought, Oh my God. Is this what being a godmother is like?

Fortunately, there is a quote from the Buddha that says:

"Develop a mind so filled with love it resembles space which cannot be painted, marred or ruined."

So if someone were standing in this room throwing paint, there would be nowhere that could be ruined because it is so unconfined. I wrote some version of this in nine-year-old-appropriate language:

“Something happens. Someone hurts your feelings, and it hurts. But maybe your mind can be like the sky. And all these things you’ve heard and felt, those things can be more like clouds. Or, you could be like a sponge and suck it all in, and let it FILL you. All that toxic energy can enter you and become soggy like a sponge.”

I didn’t hear from my goddaughter again for a while, but a month later her mother wrote to me saying that my goddaughter had gotten into an argument with her younger sister, and that it was upsetting for both of them. In the aftermath of the fight, my goddaughter was apparently going around the apartment saying, “I am like the sky. I am not a sponge.” That’s a variant on love — self-love and compassion — right there.

Sharon Salzberg, from her post written for *On Being, Getting Over Guilt*

Forgiveness Is Central to the Course in Miracles. . .

Forgiveness is the healing of the perception of separation.

Forgiveness leads to the only thing of value--the knowledge that you are one with God.

Forgiveness is a selective remembering, based on the selection of the Holy Spirit.

Katherine T. Owen, *A Course in Miracles* (a self-study system of spiritual psychology)

On Forgiving Ourselves

Help us to forgive ourselves, acknowledging that we are no better than we are; and then help us to believe we can be better.

We commune too much, O God, with what defeats us. We brood over failures until failure takes possession of our hearts. Help us to see the good that we have done and to be encouraged by it. Help us to see the good we might have done and be drawn towards it. Help us to try once more to do the best we can, and keep us hopeful even when we are discontented with it.

A. Powell Davies, *The Language of the Heart, A Book of Prayers*. 1956

For Reflection and Discussion

1. Is forgiveness an important issue in your life? Upon further reflection, does it become more important or less important?
2. What is your own working definition of forgiveness? Has your understanding of forgiveness changed over time?
3. Have there been great acts of forgiveness in your life?
4. How does your experience of All Souls relate to your spiritual practice of forgiveness?

Prepared for All Souls Covenant Groups by Mary Beth Hatem