

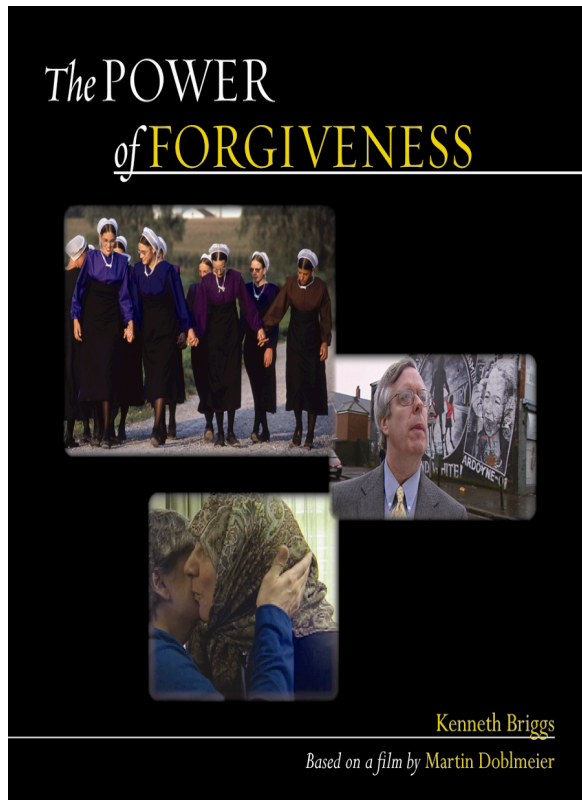
The Power of Forgiveness

Based on a film by Martin Doblmeier

FORTRESS PRESS
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Kenneth Briggs

A frank and compelling look at the neglected power of forgiveness



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A companion to the Journey Films documentary by film-maker, Martin Doblmeier, this volume examines the mysteries of forgiveness and focuses on personal struggles with betrayal, loss, grief, and confusion that give rise to the need for mercy and pardon. Forgiveness is portrayed as a healing force that occupies a central place in religious traditions and whose benefits are being noted by social-scientific research.

Illuminating and wise, Kenneth Briggs's work probes deeply how we can engage freshly the elusive quality of forgiveness. It shows how forgiveness and reconciliation can transform the personal, social, political, and cultural scripts that plague us.

Also included are compelling interviews with forgiveness researchers and with such luminaries as Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel, Sr. Helen Prejean, Pastor James A. Forbes Jr., Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh, and acclaimed spiritual writer Thomas Moore.

"The spirit of forgiveness could change our world for the better. Everyone should read this book."

—Thomas Moore, author of *Care of the Soul*

"Forgiveness may be the best hope for our rage-filled world. In a lively style, Kenneth Briggs deftly explores the tough questions and illuminates the transforming power of forgiveness."

—Donald B. Kraybill, coauthor of *Amish Grace*

Kenneth Briggs joined the staff of *Newsday* in 1970, becoming its first religion writer. He moved to *The New York Times* in 1974 as the religion editor and remained there until 1985. Since then, he has freelanced and taught, as well as written two important works on Roman Catholicism in America: *Holy Siege: The Year That Shook Catholic America* (1992, HarperSanFrancisco) and *Double-Crossed: Uncovering the Catholic Church's Betrayal of American Nuns* (2006, Doubleday). He is an ordained elder in the United Methodist Church and a regular columnist for beliefnet.com.

Martin Doblmeier, President and founder of Journey Films, combines a lifelong interest in religion with a passion for journalism. Over the past twenty years, he has traveled on location to over forty countries to profile numerous religious leaders, religious communities, heads of state, and Nobel Laureates. His documentaries, among them *Catholics in America*, *American Byzantine*, *Bernardin*, and the widely acclaimed *Bonhoeffer*, have aired on PBS, NBC, ABC, the History Channel, and other cable networks. His latest film, *The Power of Forgiveness*, was recently previewed in 25 cities across the U.S. and at the United Nations Headquarters in New York City. The film will begin broadcast nationwide on public television in March 2008.

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For review copies or to interview the author
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Q & A with author Kenneth Briggs

Q: Is this a self-help book on how to forgive people?

A: It can be seen that way but that's not its direct purpose. It's a book of reflections on the difficulties of forgiving amid the realities of everyday life and the various ways traditions treated these dilemmas. In that sense, the book is a collection of resources – philosophical, religious, and practical – for finding a remedy among the many discussed without endorsing a single view. I would hope people would find remedies but it's much more an appraisal of forgiveness itself than an instruction manual.

Q: What's good about forgiveness?

A: The alternative is storing up anger, resentment and hatred. The great South African leader, Nelson Mandela, said that refusing to forgive is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die. But it's not usually easy to do so.

Q: What's the toughest type of forgiving?

A: Overall the most stubborn form is self-forgiveness. We tend to be very hard on ourselves. Pride and poor self image present barriers – actually they are opposite side of the same coin. Our idealism makes us punish ourselves for shortcomings, which it turn produces self-hatred and that lead us hold ourselves captive.

Q: We've been hearing that forgiveness is being touted as a boost to a person's health. Is that true?

A: During the past 15 years or so, social scientists have been studying the effects of forgiveness on the human metabolism. They're finding that people who forgive often gain both physical and psychological benefits. Blood pressure tends to decline and depression eases, among other things.

Q: Does every major religion prescribe forgiveness?

A: Yes, but the conditions under which it's granted vary considerably. Differences also appear among branches of the same religion. A generally shared view among the three Abrahamic faiths – Jews, Christians and Muslims – is that offering forgiveness is a means of worship God whose nature is to forgive. But how and when that offer should be made, what the penitent must do to gain it and how flexible the forgiver should be varies considerably.

Q: What aspect of forgiving most often gets overlooked?

A: It's what I call "two way street" forgiveness. Many people find it fairly easy to see themselves as victims who have been wronged by someone. But in some many daily situations it's more likely that both people have both been harmed and done harm. That requires a more mutual set of responses whereby each person is both supplicant and benefactor. The "one way street" variety like those involving murder of innocent people tend to capture most of the attention.

Q: It's become common for people to say they'll forgive but not forget. Is that possible?

A: Not in any pure sense. The "not forgetting" part is understandable as a way of saying you're not naïve or willing to give up every last vestige of memory of the wrong someone has done because to erase the memory might seem to give the offender an advantage. In the end, however, I think the vow to never forget usually does mean a refusal to totally forgive.

Q: Are there times when you can't be expected to forgive?

A: Yes, I think there are human limitations. Many Jews, for example, cannot in good conscience forgive the Nazis for the Holocaust.

Q: South Africa and other nations that have been torn apart by conflict have used the concept of “truth and reconciliation” to bring about forgiveness. Could that process be widely used?

A: I think so but it requires lots of work. People on all sides have to agree generally that forgiveness is necessary and must create clear steps to achieve it. Consistency and fairness in applying the steps are essential.

Q: Where might forgiveness enter into the judicial process?

A: There is an alternative to the strictly adversarial procedure whereby the accused is confronted, charged and tried as a hostile subject. It is called “restorative justice” and involves an attempt by the accusers and accused to attain a degree of communication that will allow a reduction in anger and revenge and perhaps even a lessening of the penalties imposed on the guilty.

Broadcasts Begin in March 2008

Journey Films announces the national public television broadcast of a one-hour version of ***The Power of Forgiveness*** film beginning in late March 2008.

Over the last 20 years the topic of forgiveness has come into its own as an area of academic study. Researchers are now examining the psychological and physical effects of forgiveness on individuals and within relationships under an amazingly wide variety of conditions, ranging from petty insults to sexual assault. Clinicians have developed interventions that help guide people through a structured process that allows them to forgive transgressions and get on with their lives.

The Power of Forgiveness film documentary explores this important work and translates it into a popular, accessible venue for public television. The broadcast is only one part of a national outreach effort that includes a community conversation campaign, a dedicated website www.thepowerofforgiveness.com, a national screening tour and the companion book with the same title from Fortress Press.

The focus is on the emergent understanding of contemporary clinical and academic research that shows forgiveness is validated as having real potential for personal and spiritual transformation. At the same time the film points to the centrality of forgiveness as a virtue in many of the world's great religions and the struggle that people of all faiths have in honoring it.

The film combines character-driven stories of dramatic transgressions with those of more commonplace annoyances, examining the role that forgiveness can play in alleviating the resulting anger and grief and the physical, mental and spiritual benefits that come with forgiveness. These stories assure us that there is hope if we are open to seeking it and accepting it.

The film includes stories and interviews with people from many faith traditions: Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh; Nobel Peace Laureate Elie Wiesel on forgiveness in the Jewish faith; Azim Khamisa on forgiveness and Islam; Rev. James Forbes, pastor emeritus of Riverside Church in New York, on forgiveness from a Christian perspective; and best-selling author Thomas Moore (*Care of the Soul*) speaks on forgiveness from a spiritual dimension.

There are stories on forgiveness research, The Garden of Forgiveness in Beirut, Lebanon, building a Garden of Forgiveness at Ground Zero and the Amish teaching on forgiveness. The film also features doctors, psychologists and psychotherapists who present the measurable benefits of forgiveness and the hidden costs of un-forgiveness.

Filming locations include New York, Pennsylvania, California, Virginia, North Carolina and Tennessee, as well as France, Lebanon and Northern Ireland. Archival footage comes from Germany, Israel and Vietnam.

The film is a presentation of South Carolina ETV. Major funding for ***The Power of Forgiveness*** was provided by Fetzer Institute as part of its Campaign for Love and Forgiveness and by The John Templeton Foundation, Funding Science and Investing in the Big Questions.

www.thepowerofforgiveness.com will provide local dates and times of broadcasts as they are confirmed.

About Journey Films

Journey Films was founded in 1983 by award-winning documentary filmmaker, Martin Doblmeier, as a television and film production company specializing in spirituality, history and social issues. Journey's documentaries have won numerous awards and have aired on PBS, ABC, NBC, the BBC, The History Channel and other networks in the United States and abroad. Journey's first theatrical release, *Bonhoeffer*, opened in cities across the US and internationally to wide critical acclaim.

Martin Doblmeier

President and Founder

Martin Doblmeier is president and founder of Journey Films in Alexandria, Virginia. Since 1983 he has produced and directed more than 25 award-winning films on subjects of faith and spirituality, including *The Heart Has Its Reasons*: the story of the L'Arche communities for men and women with mental handicaps, *Taize: That Little Springtime*: a profile of the ecumenical monastic community in France, *Bernardin*: the story of Chicago's Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, *Final Blessing*: a film about the spiritual issues of the terminally ill, and *Bonhoeffer*: the critically acclaimed, theatrically released documentary about the famed pastor and Nazi resister.

Martin combines a lifelong interest in religion with a passion for journalism. Over the years he has traveled on location to more than forty countries to profile numerous religious leaders, religious communities, heads of state and Nobel Laureates. His films examine how belief can lead individuals to extraordinary actions, how spirituality creates and sustains communities and how faith is lived out in the most challenging times.

In the last few years Martin has been a featured speaker or presented films and led discussions in some 100 churches, synagogues and theaters across America, and has been a guest on numerous national and international programs.

For further information about Journey Films visit www.journeyfilms.com.

Q & A with filmmaker Martin Doblemeier

Q. How did you come to make this film?

A. Well, this film really had its origins a few years ago. Dan Juday and I went down to a conference in Atlanta, Georgia, where researchers, mostly scientists, were presenting the results of the research they were doing in the world of forgiveness. You had psychologists, you had health care physicians, and what you really saw for the first time was the confluence of two worlds coming together around the topic of forgiveness. You have the tradition of the faith communities - all the great faiths talk about the value of forgiveness; they have for centuries - but now you had the scientists and the healthcare world talking about the *virtue* of forgiveness.

We had about a hundred story ideas that we were looking at to come up with the stories for the film. We wanted to make sure that we had stories that spoke both to the faith tradition and to the new work that was being done in science. We also wanted to do one other thing, which was to say that forgiveness works really on a couple of different dimensions. It's about one person being hurt and forgiving one other person. But sometimes too the idea forgiveness works for groups, communities, and nations. And it was a balance of that personal and collective sense of forgiveness that I thought would make for an interesting film.

Q. What was the most memorable part of the process?

A. Forgiveness is really one of the hardest things we're asked to do, in terms of our relationships with other people. The word itself opens up the deepest chambers in our heart and soul. One of the aspects of forgiveness that I had not really thought about until I started doing the film was the aspect of self forgiveness. Even the best people have a hard time getting to forgiveness, being able to forgive themselves for what they've done or what they've failed to do. As we began to see the stories unfold, this aspect of self forgiveness seemed as though it was playing a role in each one of the stories again and again. For me it's become one of the most critical learning moments in the making of the film.

Q. What's the relationship between forgiving and forgetting?

A. Somewhere along the line the words forgive and forget got joined at the hip, and I'm not sure why. People would say to us, "I can't forget what happened, so how can I even begin to forgive?" But what we're hearing from people was not about forgetting what happened. It was about *how* you remember, and *what you do* with that memory, *how* you incorporate the memory of that pain and suffering and how you get over that pain, how it affects your relationships going forward. In some ways it is redeeming to feel as though you aren't being asked to forget what happened, only to come to a new awareness of how you're going to carry forward a memory that you can't get rid of anyway most important lessons in making the film.

Q. What's the relationship between forgiveness and justice?

A. I think in the 21st century we're living in a justice-focused culture. Justice is about righting the past. But that's always done by human beings who are as imperfect as we are. So you don't always get the justice that you hope for. Sometimes you don't get justice at all. You don't have control over it. But you do have some control over how you want to see your relationships unfolding, and that's where forgiveness can really play a big role. You have control over what you want to forgive someone for, outside of the justice program. Justice, in terms of forgiveness, is not about opening up the prisons and letting the prisoners go. You have an obligation to protect yourself and to protect your loved ones. People do terrible things, evil things. But how do you exact that justice? Is it done in a spirit of anger and revenge, or is it done with some level of balance and compassion? Sometimes getting to the world that we want to get to means not exacting a pound of flesh. Sometimes compassion and mercy actually can get us to the place we all want to get to.

Taking Action to Love and Forgive

The Fetzer Institute's Campaign for Love and Forgiveness

If you're finding all this "talk" about love and forgiveness intriguing, join the conversation! Whether you'd prefer meeting others face-to-face or in a virtual community, The Fetzer Institute's Campaign for Love and Forgiveness offers wonderful online resources that invite you to join a growing community of people interested in discovering the power of love and forgiveness.

If you would like to organize, sponsor, or facilitate a conversation in your community their website, www.loveandforgive.org, provides downloadable materials to get you started!

Their Facilitator Guides provide campaign background, guidelines for facilitating conversations, essays on love and forgiveness, discussion questions, and activities.

The Participant Handbooks include essays on love and forgiveness and suggested home practices to extend conversations and encourage reflection and action.

These resources, designed to work with *The Power of Forgiveness* book and film, make it easy to inspire local organizations discussion groups, or special venues in your community such as conversation cafés, civic groups, or classes to collaborate in building a conversation on love and forgiveness.

Online Resources from Journey Films

At www.journeyfilms.com, the producers of the film have provided online materials designed to encourage individuals, families and communities of all kinds to use *The POWER of FORGIVENESS* film as a focus for reflection and discussion. Included are simple tips for conversation leaders, links to specially commissioned articles with discussion questions to help promote fuller engagement with the issues raised in the film, and a PDF-formatted mini-poster to build awareness of the broadcast and to promote your conversations

A Downloadable Study Guide from Fortress Press

At www.fortresspress.com/forgiveness individuals and groups reading *The Power of Forgiveness* book by Kenneth Briggs will find a study guide with discussion questions and topics for reflection that will assist the reader in understanding forgiveness and allowing it into their everyday lives.