Families & Forgiveness

Healing Wounds in the Intergenerational Family

Terry D. Hargrave, Ph.D.
Families and Forgiveness

Healing Wounds in the Intergenerational Family
Also by Terry D. Hargrave

*Finishing Well: Aging and Reparation in the Intergenerational Family*
(coauthored with William T. Anderson)
Families and Forgiveness

Healing Wounds in the Intergenerational Family

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To My Loving and Trustworthy Parents,
Charley and Janice
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Families, no matter how damaging they are and appear, also have resources and strengths. I unapologetically carry this belief as one of my fundamental tenets in therapeutic practice. I have seen it in many ways in many different people. A young mother who came from a family where she was raped by her father and then thrown out by her mother seeks to nurture her new husband and baby with responsible tenderness. A husband who was physically abused as a child seeks help whenever he feels himself losing control of his temper to the point where he might become abusive with his own family. A poor and uneducated woman in an abusive relationship works two jobs so her daughter can attend a special private school to get a better education. These are just a few of the many stories that I see every day where people overcome tremendous obstacles with seemingly little going for them.

In reality, however, these people tap into a powerful energy that seems common to humankind: the ability to love and to be trustworthy. Certainly not all people tap the resource. I also see many families and people who are irresponsible and use hate as a daily method of retaliation as they pass destructive tendencies from one generation to the next. Even in these situations, however, I believe the resource and the energy—however meager—are somewhere in the individuals and families.

Nowhere do I see this fundamental belief about family strength more evident than in the work of forgiveness. The very family situations that produced violations of love and trust are turned around to restore and nurture the very heart of what was damaged in the family members. It is in the salvage and restoration effort in the family that I think the resources and the strengths of the group are most evident. I have come to this belief in family
strengths not only through what I see in the therapy room; I have seen the resources tapped in my own family. At times when I thought my own family was a lost cause and would fly apart at the seams, it not only survived but came together in a stronger way than I thought possible. It was these powerful changes in therapy and in my own family that started my thinking on the therapeutic value of forgiveness.

Forgiveness is achieved in a variety of situations by many people in many different ways. As I began my work in this area, I found a wealth of religious material and some theories about stages of forgiveness. I also found some therapeutic information that spoke of forgiveness but gave no specifics to people or therapists on the mechanics of the phenomena. So I began to conceptualize a component framework of how forgiveness can occur for individuals and families. It is important to realize that this book is only one conceptualization of the forgiveness process. I do not maintain or expect that it should be the only way people can or should think about the issue. It is simply one method of examining a very complex and heavy therapeutic process that I, and many of my clients and colleagues, have found helpful in the healing, salvage, and restoration of the family after severe violations of love and trust have occurred in the intergenerational family.

I conceptualize the work of forgiveness as four stations: two of exonerating and two of forgiving. In Section One: "The Four Stations of Forgiveness," I outline each station. This section contains the framework of forgiveness, and I believe it is appropriate reading for the therapist and nontherapist alike. Since my thinking about forgiveness has been so heavily influenced by my experience in my own family, I include some of my family story as well as an overview of the work of forgiveness in Chapter One, "Love, Trust, and Family." Chapter Two, "Station One: Insight," includes a discussion of the origins of family pain and the ways that insight can be used to make initial inroads to trustworthiness by
stopping and blocking the perpetuation of unjustified actions that cause harm.

Any person who has experienced a severe violation of justice in the family knows the pain caused from guilt and shame. In Chapter Three, "Station Two: Understanding," the origins of guilt and shame are discussed, along with how the second station of understanding can rework perspective on the violation to eventually reduce pain. The tough and risky work of forgiveness is covered in Chapter Four, "Station Three: Giving the Opportunity for Compensation." In this chapter, forgiving is discussed as a process by which the victim gives the victimizer the opportunity to demonstrate love and trust in the present context to rework and rethink the family past. Finally, in Chapter Five, "Station Four: The Overt Act of Forgiveness," a step-by-step process is covered on how an overt confrontation between a victim and relational culprit can result in the restoration of love and trust.

In Section Two, "The Work of Forgiveness in Therapy," I try to demonstrate how the four stations play out in a therapeutic situation. Each chapter is a case from my own practice in which I discuss the details of how the client achieved some element of salvage or restoration in the family. In Chapter Six, "Helping Family Members Forgive One Another," I try to give an overview of the therapeutic issues facing the therapist who is helping an individual or family work through tough violations. The goals, pace, and assessment of forgiveness are covered in this chapter, as well as the role the therapist should play in each particular station.

Chapter Seven, "Clinical Application of Insight," discusses the details of a case in which a woman who had been sexually abused in childhood learns through insight to salvage herself and stop the perpetuation of her pain to her children.

In Chapter Eight, "Clinical Application of Understanding," I team up with my colleague William T. Anderson to write about a

* - All cases have been disguised so that the people involved cannot be identified.
family who deals with the pain of an alcoholic past that continues to be felt in the present. I worked as the therapist in the first part of this case, with Bill as my supervisor. The family re-presented themselves to therapy about two years later, and Bill took on the job of therapist while I had the opportunity to view several sessions from behind a one-way mirror.

Forgiveness is not an issue just in intergenerational families. There are many violations that are experienced in horizontal relationships, such as between spouses. Chapter Nine, “Clinical Application of Giving the Opportunity for Compensation,” discusses a distressed relationship between a couple where the wife had been betrayed by her husband after she had been faithful to him all their married life. Finally, in Chapter Ten, “Clinical Application of the Overt Act of Forgiving,” a woman who had remembered her father sexually abusing her learns how to constructively confront her father with the issue and make their relationship less painful and more constructive.

In Section Three, “Issues and Questions in the Work of Forgiveness,” I try to include some answers on common questions that I am asked about the process of forgiveness. I conclude the final chapter with some thoughts about the promise of forgiveness and the potential hope that it offers for humanity as a whole.

If there has been anything that I have learned through working with families dealing with forgiveness, it is that it is difficult work that is hammered out in a process. Although I am sure there are exceptions, most family members do not experience forgiveness as a once-and-for-all event that happens at a place and time, with all issues being resolved completely. Most of us forgive and then go about the process of working out forgiveness as we experience love and trust where we once experienced violation. The four stations of forgiveness are not stages or prescriptions; they are places along the road where most of us wander in our quest to make ourselves and our past whole.

No work such as this is ever accomplished without significant contribution from many people. I want to express my special thanks to the many individuals and families that have demonstrated
true commitment and caring in dealing with past pain. They have inspired me by their courage. Also, to my wife, Sharon, I extend my gratitude for her patience and encouragement in moving these ideas out of my personal experience into a therapeutic approach. Finally, I wish to express my love and gratitude to my parents, Charley and Janice. They have been loving teachers on how to restore and redeem brokenness and access the resources that I hardly realized existed in my family. When I rock, cuddle, and love my children in a trustworthy manner, I am thankful for the heritage they have passed along that enables me to give in such a way.
Families and Forgiveness

Healing Wounds in the Intergenerational Family
Section One

The Four Stations of Forgiveness
Chapter One

LOVE, TRUST, AND FAMILY

As a species, human beings are enormously blessed with the ability to heal physically. But even as tenacious as human life is, we are remarkably vulnerable to injury, disease, and death. Emotionally and relationally, we also have amazing resilience. It is our families that build this resource of resilience by assuring us that they indeed love us and that they can be trusted. Relationships and emotional damage can be held in check if there is a resource of love and trust. No matter how irresponsible the act, how harsh the anger, how hideous the ramifications in the family, relationships survive when people are loved and trusted. On the other hand, in families where the resource of love and trust is depleted, relational and emotional energy drain is almost a foregone conclusion; it does not matter how insignificant the act, how innocent the remark, or how minor the damage.

This book is about forgiveness and how the work of forgiving can reach into the family—any family—and heal the damaged past to the point where a resource of love, justice, and trust can be built. Forgiveness, because it has ramifications for the past and the future of relationships, is a long road of tough work with many potential risks. But accomplishing the work of forgiveness is
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perhaps one of the supreme manifestations of relationship because it has to involve the work of at least two people willing to trust and rebuild their relationship, even after severe damage.

Perhaps because forgiveness happens in so many different ways and because it is so difficult, there is almost global confusion among families and therapists alike concerning its accomplishment. Many believe forgiveness carries too many indictments of guilt and religious decrees to be useful in therapy. I have found the therapeutic work of forgiveness to be effective not only as an intervention but as powerful vortex where the family past and future can be changed simultaneously.

Like most of the therapy that I use with clients, these ideas of forgiveness have been test driven in my own family. The description of the stations of forgiveness—insight, understanding, giving the opportunity for compensation, and the overt act of forgiveness—includes stories not only of the therapeutic journeys of clients but also of my own journey with my family.

LOVE AND TRUST IN MY FAMILY

In 1948, in the vast coldness of space and a little past the orbit of the planet Neptune, an almost imperceptible turn of the great comet Halley changed its direction from extension outward from the solar system inward toward its 1985–86 apparition. It was this gentle turn inward that guaranteed that comet Halley would continue to fulfill its promise and tradition to humanity. The turn of this stale dirty snowball only a few miles in diameter directed Halley to its regular fruition when its brilliant coma would be one of the brighter objects in the night sky and its tail would stretch for millions of miles across the solar system. Its fiery torch, which has appeared approximately every 75 years for centuries, has marked the time to generations as they bask in its beauty, remember its history, and even fear its omens.

A little less than a year later, a barely witnessed generational turn took place on the stark plains of New Mexico. This
generational turn in my family appeared to be minimal, but it put my intergenerational group on a course where a new apparition of love and trust would appear. In 1949, my parents eloped and married.

Charley Bevard, my father, was the tenth of 12 children. He had grown up in a Depression family that clung to existence after his father lost his arm in a railroad accident. They moved to homestead in New Mexico on some parched land they tried to farm and continued the struggle as the children left home one by one to try to improve their lot in life. Lola Janice, my mother, was the oldest of five children. Her family also homesteaded in New Mexico, but chose ranching as their primary occupation. Like her mother and her grandmother before her, she fought and argued constantly with her mother as she tried to break free of oppressive expectations and find her own place and personality. In an almost flippant manner, she decided to take my father up on his marriage proposal (even though they had had only a few dates) because she could not face telling her father that she had got in trouble at school and had been sent home early. My father, perhaps because he was older, having spent time in the service, or perhaps because he was stricken in love, heartily agreed to the marriage. The same day, they loaded up in a car with a couple of friends to witness the affair and started their lives together. With this very quick and unplanned turn of events, the generational torch was passed along and my parents were set on their family course together.

Along this new course, my parents would have four children in 6½ years. I was the youngest of these four. As one might expect, they struggled hard to maintain existence while they grew up together. When I was four, my mother made the courageous decision to take her high school equivalency exam and start college to become a teacher. My father took two jobs and tenaciously worked my mother through college until she had secured a public teaching position. In turn, my mother worked my father through his degree as a science teacher.

Although my family struggled, we never were hungry and seldom went without things we wanted or needed. But there was
something that was desperate in my family that was very difficult for me to describe as a child. My sister fought and argued with my mother in much the same way that my mother struggled with hers; at age 18, my sister eloped to marry a man with whom she had had only a few dates. My oldest brother became alienated from the family, and after several years of tension and threats drifted into the service and marriage. My next brother struggled to fit in and be recognized for his own uniqueness. I experienced tasks as overwhelming and felt incompetent, but it felt safer to keep these feelings to myself. Like much of my family, I labored in loneliness. I grew up—and I suspect that my brothers and sister did also—with the feeling that we were on our own. Family members, siblings included, were not quite to be trusted. Love was scarcely mentioned. The intent of family, as far as I could tell, was to enable you to survive until you were out on your own. There was a family pain that everyone in my household felt, but no one could quite articulate. Something was desperately wrong.

As I articulate it now, I realize my parents were immature, manipulative, relationally unstable, and—regrettably—emotionally and physically abusive. It was not that my parents did everything wrong. Much of their parenting was right on target. But the times that were damaging were such that they left me with the overall impression that I was not loved and my family could not be trusted. Facing these facts and specific incidents was enormously painful for me. They are extremely painful even today.

The abuse for me personally, although there were many times that things were out of control, came to a watershed one evening when I was 8 years old. Looking back, I suppose I was somewhat depressed. I seemed to be unable to have significant contact with anyone in my family, performed poorly in school, and was clearly regarded as incompetent in my neighborhood. I also knew that my parents were struggling to stay above water and not drift into hopelessness. Financially, they were struggling while they were trying to get through college. Physically, they were struggling to keep up with the horrendous work schedule they had set for
themselves, manage a household, and take care of four children. Emotionally, they struggled with each other in a relationship that had already had one lengthy separation and intense fights. My home was not a happy place when I was 8.

Feeling the pain of my own incompetence and carrying the pain of my family's lack of nurture, I made my decision to "end it all." I went into the bathroom and selected one of my father's razor blades and carefully sliced into my forearms. Of course, I knew to avoid cutting my wrists or I would be in serious trouble and might really die! But the slicing of several wounds into both of my forearms was enough to cause quite a mess. The reaction of my family to this attempt was cold, threatening, and uncaring. After discovering what I had done, they left me in the bathroom with no more than threat ringing in my ears. I was left alone. My heart pounded in fear as I felt I had narrowly escaped. A toxic shame coursed through my entire being. Unable to put words to it then, I have come to recognize this awful watershed event as the day I decided for sure that my family did not love me. I felt I had the overt proof they believed they would be better off without me. When I tried to manipulate a declaration of love from them by purposely botching suicide, I received the heinous statement that not only was I not loved, I was not wanted.

This is the root of shame in the family: People who should love you the most and whom you trust with your very life damage you with what appears to be total disregard. For the rest of my years at home, I laid low and never ventured into any activity that would force another family declaration. But the shame and the loneliness remained intact for many years to come.

COMETS AND FAMILIES

Halley and other comets are members of the solar system, but are very different from anything else that orbits the sun. At one end of its orbit, Halley's comet is small, slow, dead, unwitnessed, and undramatic. But on the other end, the comet is flung to an
explosive turn dangerously close to the sun, which animates the woefully small object to dramatic proportions that burn in our memories for a lifetime. So different are the attributes of the comet at opposite ends of its orbit that it was just a little over two centuries ago that Edmund Halley finally recognized that the periodic appearances of the comet were actually the "returns" of the same object.

This inward and outward journey is what makes us like Halley's comet. We are bound to our families much in the same way a celestial object is maintained in orbit. Imperceptible pushes and pulls from family members nudge us toward familiar and repetitious patterns that have been played out for generations in our lineage. Even when we are the most removed from our family—when we appear alone, dormant, and unanimated—we actually are still on a course that will eventually bring us back into relation with other family members.

As with Halley's comet, it is the journey inward that is uncontrolled, dramatic, and dangerous. In its tight orbit closest to the sun, the comet struggles against the intense gravitational pull of the gigantic object to maintain its celestial integrity. What we see as the comet's tail is actually comet "stuff" that has been strewn across space as a witness to the cost of the comet's membership in the solar system. When we are close to our families, we have a dual potential to experience a beautiful fruition of intimacy or damage from manipulation or abuse. The journey outward from the family also carries a dual potential. Away from our families, we are either secure and confident in our delineation of selves as we set out to discover our own limits or on an outward-bound retreat to loneliness.

It is along this journey toward and away from family that we find the basic elements that keep humanity in orbit and in the family. These elements, stated most simply, are love and trust. Every question of our existence in the family centers on these two most basic elements. These are the universal laws that make the family universe work. If my family does not love me and revel in my being with unconditional positive regard, or if they cannot be trusted and choose to use, abuse, and manipulate me for their
own destructive ends, I cannot survive. I will fly off of my orbit and eventually wither and die from neglect and harm. It is in the confines of a family that takes joy in me and that I can trust to seek my best good that I grow and mature. So in the most elemental form, there are two questions we ask of family: Does my family love me? Is my family trustworthy?

Most of us answer the question with a qualified yes—qualified because none of our families are perfect. I do not know of one human being who could ever love another in a totally unconditional manner; neither have I known one who never had an impure motive. We all have a tendency to look out for our own consideration before we look out for the other guy. But we extend ourselves to family perhaps more than to others. Parents consistently put the wishes of their children above their own. Many spouses dedicate and commit themselves to each other and go about the endless work of humility and compromise to discover the joy of intimacy with another human who is no blood relation. Most children maintain an intense loyalty to their families, clinging to those relationships as a fruit clings to a life-giving vine. So despite the imperfections in families, most people experience them as places of safety, security, and love that can be counted on when the chips are down.

In families such as these, persons are relatively free to move on the inward and outward journeys in which their orbits take them. Even intense and close inward journeys that produce disagreement or difference are colored with the security that members love and trust one another and will not tear each other apart. Even when individuals are outward-bound on their own and have almost no contact with their families, they go with the confidence of best wishes for success and security and knowledge of a safe haven if things go awry. Relational or emotional hurts between members of these families are like the cuts, bruises, and scrapes that we experienced as children. They hurt—sometimes intensely—and then they heal, leaving no pain and little or no scar.

But some of us will answer the question, Does my family love me and is my family trustworthy? with an unqualified no. This conclusion makes normal family functioning almost impossible.
Sacrifice is sparingly made by spent parents who resent the fact that they receive little or no recognition or compensation for their effort. Spouses move to extremes of either enmeshed relations where one is not allowed to function without the other or boundaries that are so rigid that the two are like alienated roommates. Children are still loyal, but their resilience and resources become drained as they receive the confusing message of love and hate. In these families, looking out for oneself is a necessity for survival. Each inward journey into the family means risk of losing one's emotional self and perhaps experiencing physical harm. Outward journeys often mean cutoffs that offer neither the alleviation of pain nor the confidence of eventual safety. Relational and emotional hurts in these families are quite severe. They leave scars and pain that remain for years. Some injuries may fester and swell for the entire life course and may never heal. Other damage is so profound that relational or even physical life may be in question.

The damage may come in many forms. As S.L. Smith (1991) has outlined, family pain may result from physical mistreatment, emotional mistreatment, neglect, long-standing addictions, or sexual abuse. But the reality that makes this pain of a damaging family so severe is my underlying understanding that my family does not love me and is not trustworthy. The pain of that reality is inescapable. If I try to continue the relationship and move inward, I am usually hurt worse and damaged again. If I move outward or keep my distance, I keep the pain to myself and find it almost impossible to find a safe haven. I am damned if I do and damned if I don't. Without fundamental change in the relationship, the hopeless course seems to be set. These are the situations where the therapeutic intervention of forgiveness is perhaps most powerful.

THE THERAPEUTIC WORK OF FORGIVENESS

I fancy myself somewhat of a backyard astronomer. I am one of the strange birds that loves to search the stars for faint smudges
of light in a telescope eyepiece when most of the world is asleep. The thing that really hooked my interest in astronomy, however, was when I learned as a boy of the future, 1985–86, apparition of Halley's comet.

When the first sighting of Halley was made in deep space in the early 1980s by a huge telescope, my plans were already taking shape to make the most of my once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to view the comet. Because of the distance between Halley and the earth and the alignment that would make the comet be most prominent in the extreme southern sky, it would be the poorest visual apparition of the comet in two millennia. But that did not matter. This was my opportunity and I was going to make the most of it. I constantly read about viewing techniques, photography methods, and the comet's history and characteristics.

As I read, I longed for stories about the comet during the 1910 apparition. Halley put on a spectacular display in 1910, and I found myself wondering what my grandparents' and great grandparents' lives were like back then as they watched the show. This is what caused me to stumble on the idea of putting a time capsule together so people like me in the year 2061—the next apparition—would know how life for my family was in 1986.

At the time, I was stalwart on the idea that I would not have children. It was my destructive way of putting an end to the abuse in my intergenerational family. If family could not be trusted, then I would not expand the family and would deny myself and my parents further offspring. But I felt that someone in the Hargrave family would be around at that time and would be interested.

It was as I began to think about the contents of the time capsule that my anxiety steadily increased. Time capsules tell the future about what life was like when the capsule was put together, and about the people who put their hearts and souls into the effort. My heart and soul were split. There was part of me that was actually okay. I had a wonderful wife who cared for me and some clear direction in life. But the other part was still waning from the burden of incompetence and loneliness. My destructive anger and self-justifying pain would seep out every now and then from
behind the strong wall that I had fortified to hold it back. There were times that I was surprised at how angry I got and how close I could come to being downright abusive myself.

So which part was I going to tell the future—only the good parts about myself or the bad parts on how I struggled with my family? I truly did want to be honest with myself, but honesty in this setting would mean that I would have to involve my parents and my intergenerational past. Questions flooded my mind. Could they be trusted? Would they love me enough to even participate? Would they be able to talk to me about the past without using it against me?

In the midst of this struggle, my grandfather on my mother's side was diagnosed with inoperable stomach cancer. The doctors gave him the option of staying in the hospital or going home to die. True to the tough old cowboy he was, he chose to go back to his home in the small town of Roy, New Mexico, where he had been a rancher for most of his life. My wife and I traveled with my mother to visit him for what I knew would be the last time. At the end of our weekend visit, I was at a loss for words. I felt rejection from him. It was not that he was directly physically or emotionally abusive to me, but I could tell that I was not held in high regard with him. Even then, I suspected that my mother had learned the pattern of abuse from her mother and father. His lack of trust was just as profound as that in my family, and it was kept just as quiet.

The time came to say goodbye for the last time. Something was desperately wrong. Although I cannot remember exactly what I said, I stepped up to his bedside saying something inappropriate and inadequate, like “Take care of yourself.” After I stepped back, my mother took his hand and said, “Daddy, I will see you next week.” No tears were shed between us, and we probably would have parted much in the same way that we always lived—alone, with pretense of intimacy—had it not been for my wife.

Sharon, who knows the severe pain of not being able to say goodbye to loved ones, stepped up to my grandfather's side with tears in her eyes. She took his chubby face into both of her hands and tenderly stared into his eyes and said, “I love you, and I will
Love, Trust, and Family

miss you." These simple words blew the lid off my family's cover. She unknowingly had exposed us for what and who we were. The void of intimacy, love, and trust was exposed. Although my grandfather, my mother, and I scrambled to put the genie back in the bottle, I suppose that we all knew that we could never act quite the same. It was only a few minutes after I left my grandfather's house that I realized that my wife's words were the ones that I wanted to say to him: "I love you, and I will miss you." I did not have the courage. The opportunity to address the issue with my grandfather was lost forever. I walked away, and my mother walked away, in pain that was outside the track of grief.

I suppose that with the passage of time my mother and I could have simulated not having had the issue of love and trust exposed and that we could have gone back to living life as it had always been. But I knew that there would be a day when it was my mother's or father's turn to be on that deathbed. I resolved that when it came that time, I would have this issue of love and trust settled so that I could say to them, "I love you, and I will miss you." So the decision for the time capsule was inescapable. I was going to tell the descendants of the family—the real family. There would be no pretense of intimacy. I would tell the story of the real people and the real family so they could decide who we were for themselves. If it was to be a capsule to the future intergenerational family, then the intergenerational family story would have to be told. For the real story to be told, however, I had to open myself up to the possibility of having a real relationship with my family once again. I would have to be open not only to reviewing the pain of the past but also to living with the possibility of having more pain inflicted on the future.

Why was it so painful? Relationships, and especially family relationships, are unique in their ability to tell us about ourselves. We do not discover that we are loved by nature, and nature certainly does not hold itself to be trustworthy. It is only in relationships in which we discover that we are lovable and safe. When any relationship, but especially one in the family, damages us with some heinous action, the pain is severe. Not only because
someone is guilty of irresponsible action that has insulted the balance of justice, but also because we feel shame that we are not lovable and that people who should love us will not put our interests above their own. When relationships are painful, they are painful because we feel victimized by an irresponsible person who cannot be trusted and shamed because we are not lovable. The guilt of a person who has treated us in an unjustified manner strikes hardest at our sense of trust and the shame strikes because we realize that we are not loved. It almost goes without saying that the more important the relationship to us, the harder the guilt and shame strike at our being.

This is why forgiveness is necessary in relationships. We want to know that we are loved and that people are trustworthy. Shame, guilt, and fear become overwhelming to us if we believe otherwise. But the task of forgiving takes enormous courage because we may enter back into relationships only to find that people still do not love us and that they still cannot be trusted. However, if we cut ourselves off from our families, we lock in the shame and guilt in such a way they cannot be addressed. How, then, do we help ourselves and others constructively change the past and forgive where it can be changed and move on in other relationships where no change is possible?

The work of forgiveness in families, in my opinion, fits into two broad categories of exonerating and forgiving. Exonerating and forgiving are both on the same road and neither is inherently better than the other. Exonerating is the effort of a person who has experienced injustice or hurt to lift the load of culpability off the person who caused the hurt (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986). Instead of subjecting the wrongdoer to endless condemnation, the exonerating person learns how the environment and patterns of the injustice develop and understands and appreciates the wrongdoer's situation, options, effort and limits. It is by gaining insight and understanding that a person who has experienced a tremendous injustice from another family member is able to go about the work of exoneration.
Forgiving differs from exonerating in that forgiving requires some specific action regarding the responsibility for the injustice that caused the hurt. When a relational injustice occurs in a family, the person who is victimized is hurt and it is reasonable for him or her to hold the wrongdoer responsible for the hurt. Trust in the relationship is at risk. Forgiving involves the victimized person’s being given legitimate reason to believe that the wrongdoer accepts responsibility for the injustice and hurt caused, while promising to refrain from further injustice. Forgiveness is accomplished when the victimized person no longer has to hold the wrongdoer responsible for the injustice; the wrongdoer holds himself or herself responsible. The relationship between the two can then be reestablished because trust has been restored. Forgiveness can be accomplished by allowing the wrongdoer to compensate for past injustices by being trustworthy in significant ways in the future, and also by overtly addressing the responsibility of the injustice between the two parties. Forgiveness is accomplished by giving the opportunity for compensation and by the overt act of forgiving.

The road of forgiveness, therefore, has the two broad divisions of exonerating and forgiving (Figure 1.1). Exonerating has two stations of insight and understanding, while forgiving has two stations of giving the opportunity for compensation and the overt act of forgiving. It is clear that even though exonerating and forgiving are along the same road and are aimed at the work of forgiveness, the two are very different and appropriate in different relationships at different times. Also, even though there are four stations in the work of forgiveness, it should not be interpreted that they are stages, such that insight precedes understanding, and so on. The stations of forgiveness are of course intertwined, but it is inappropriate to assume that people move through them sequentially or that they do not oscillate between stations many times in the course of the same relationship. The stations of forgiveness are simply constructs for us to better understand the work of forgiveness.
Exonerating and forgiving differ in several ways, but primarily in their demands on the future relationship. Exoneration does not demand responsibility for the injustice, so it does not demand reestablishment of trust. Most often, however, this will limit the type of relationship that two people can have in the future. Exoneration frees a person from the burden of the past hurt or injustice while allowing the person to maintain protection from the relationship that caused the hurt. This is extremely appropriate, especially in relationships that still present risk or where there is an unwillingness from the wrongdoer to accept responsibility.

Forgiveness demands that trust be reestablished between two people after a relational hurt. Essentially, forgiving is relationship reconstruction. For this reason, forgiving puts a person back into a relationship that has caused hurt from injustice in the past. It puts the person in a position of risk in order to build trust. Although forgiving is enormously fruitful, it certainly is not appropriate for every relationship. If I have a parent who was physically abusive when I was small and still threatens me, I would put myself in unwise danger to pursue a forgiving relationship. However, the four stations of forgiveness provide powerful access to alleviating
the guilt and shame caused by injustices. Every station represents an effort to come to grips with the relational realities of love and trust in the intergenerational family.

**MY FAMILY OF ORIGIN APPARITION**

As I reviewed the pain of my family’s past, the anger and hurt over abusive acts, lost memories, uninvolvelement, and lack of love began burning in me like a raging fire. But the more the fire raged about the past, the more it met memories of parental sacrifice and care that served as fire walls to the anger. There were two sides to the story much in the same way that there were two divisions in my heart and soul. Halley’s comet was coming and I had made a decision about including my past—and my parents—in what I would pass along to the next generation.

Painfully, I came to the point where I was able to issue a half-hearted invitation to my parents to join me in my trip to view the comet and take part in putting together the time capsule for their descendants. To my surprise, they enthusiastically accepted. This encouraged me to invite my parents in for a second look at the past in a constructive manner. Again to my surprise, they were not only willing to talk about the past, but willing to acknowledge responsibility.

In our conversation, they confirmed the abuse in my family, but then went on to tell me the story of their own pain. My father told me about the pain he felt when he and my mother separated when we were children. He told me the stories of his depression after being stationed in Greenland with the Air Force. While he was there, a litany of horrible events occurred: Men froze to death trying to get back to the barracks after using the toilet; he spent 10 straight days in a sleeping bag buried in the snow in sixty-below weather while his group waited for a break in a blizzard; it was an agonizing separation from my mother, with only two items of mail allowed during a yearlong stay. He found out about the birth of
my second brother three months after his actual arrival. He spoke of his pain growing up in a large family where there was a lack of love and a profound lack of security.

My mother told me about the regrettable acts of abuse in her own family. She told me about her struggles as she tried to grow up while dealing with her own legacy of shame and guilt. She told me about her mother and her mother's mother and how she believed she learned this lack of care and nurture from them. She said, "I just never realized how important it was to hold and love children. I didn't know you were supposed to rock and cuddle babies. It simply did not occur to me that security given by touch was important." I parked my mother's words in my mind and for the first time in my life I began to understand why she had always defended her parenting skills, saying that she was a good parent. Considering their backgrounds and compared with their parents, my parents had indeed done better.

As I talked with them, they became less powerful and more vulnerable. In response, I became less defensive and it became easier—even enjoyable—to recount the efforts of love and nurture that they had made during my childhood. Issues of the past were certainly not erased, but love and trust in our relationship had shifted it significantly. The more I understood, the more I trusted them. The relationship was changing. After one of these discussions with my parents, I drove outside the city limits and with my telescope I caught my first glimpse of Halley's comet. This time, the sighting was with my own eyes and was not some secondhand report. I had the proof that the great comet was returning.

A few months later, my wife and I, along with our parents, traveled to the Davis Mountains in Texas to view Halley during the peak observation window. During the two nights of observation, I had planned several ritualistic activities. We opened a bottle of wine and toasted our unborn descendants as we recorded what was said. While watching the comet, we read a passage from the Bible declaring the handiwork of God. We made predictions about the future, composed lyrics about the comet, and took pictures of
ourselves. The more rituals we performed, the more I realized that I was discovering a unified heart and soul. I no longer felt like two people with a past and a present; love and trust were becoming unified across my life span.

The capsule gave my parents the essential opportunity to express love and trustworthiness to descendants yet unborn. When they expressed the love with their newfound resources, they used me as the medium. The past was not obliterated, but the capsule began to represent a promise of childhood; a contract between my parents and myself that no matter what happened in the past or what would happen in the future, we loved one another and we could be trusted.

At 4:00 a.m., out in the desert mountains, I joined with my parents. The great comet Halley was extremely low in the south-southeast, dimmed by the haze of the horizon and the tremendous distance between it and the earth. It was, by all accounts, the poorest apparition in almost two milleneum. But it was there. Its gentle tail stretched upward across the constellation Scorpio, silhouetted against the background of the Milky Way. My family's beginning of love and trust was not a burst of light of automatic reconciliation, but the clear bond between us secured the intergenerational transition. No matter how unimpressive our first moves toward one another, a new relationship had begun between me and my parents.

Within months, my pain and anger had disappeared. Even with the knowledge of the family past, the pain and anger were gone. For the first time in my life, I began to want children. I desired to pass myself and my parents along to my offspring. Since the apparition of Halley's comet, there has been a steady growth of love and trust between me and my parents. Not all has been rosy, but there is a security and a continual effort to build the future of the family away from the past injustices and pain.

In 1991, my mother and father went on a mission trip to Brazil with their Presbyterian church group. After two weeks, part of the mission group returned and some others, including my parents, stayed to do some touring. One of the returning members of the
mission team reported that my mother was such a loving and caring woman. I must admit, even with the tremendous work that my mother had done through the years at becoming nurturing, my first response was to think, "My mother?" But then came the story.

My mother had taken on as her mission the very young children who were quarantined in the hospital with tuberculosis. For six months, these children would be separated from the care and nurturing of their families. My mother, as reported by the mission team, would sit for six hours a day rocking, holding, and singing to those needy children. My mother knows how important it is to impart love, security, and trust to children. She always did, it was just that now she was able to access the resources she had to give away. And as she rocked those children in Brazil, she was saying to me in a very real way, "If I could do it over again, I would do this for you." And when my mother now holds, rocks, and sings to my children—and holds me as she does—she empowers me and my whole intergenerational family with love and trust.

There is a wooden box containing a time capsule that sits on my bookcase. The following words are inscribed on a brass plaque:

*To the south-southeast, ours in Winter wanes*
*Capricornus, Sagittarius, Scorpio and on.*
*But to the north-northwest, yours in Summer soars*
*The reed of time, to recount and recall.*
*Hail Halley! Our generation mark!*

The issue of love and trust is settled for me because of the powerful healing work of forgiveness. My exonerating and forgiving through the various stations of forgiveness has reestablished a broken relationship between me and my parents. When it comes time for my parents to die, I will take their hands, look them straight in the eyes and tell them, "I love you, and I will miss you." My belief is also, that in 2061 when my descendants open the time capsule under the blaze of the comet Halley, the apparition of love and trust will be even stronger and they will be able to say the same to one another.
REFERENCES


