



Journey to Joy! Healing for Life's Sorrows Part 4: Obstacles to Healing

[Click Here for Lesson 4 Video](#)

Theme: We can set up obstacles that prevent us from receiving God's healing.

Grace: I pray for the grace to remove all obstacles and hinderances over which I have control so that I can receive the healing God desires for me.

Prayer to St. Raphael for Healing:

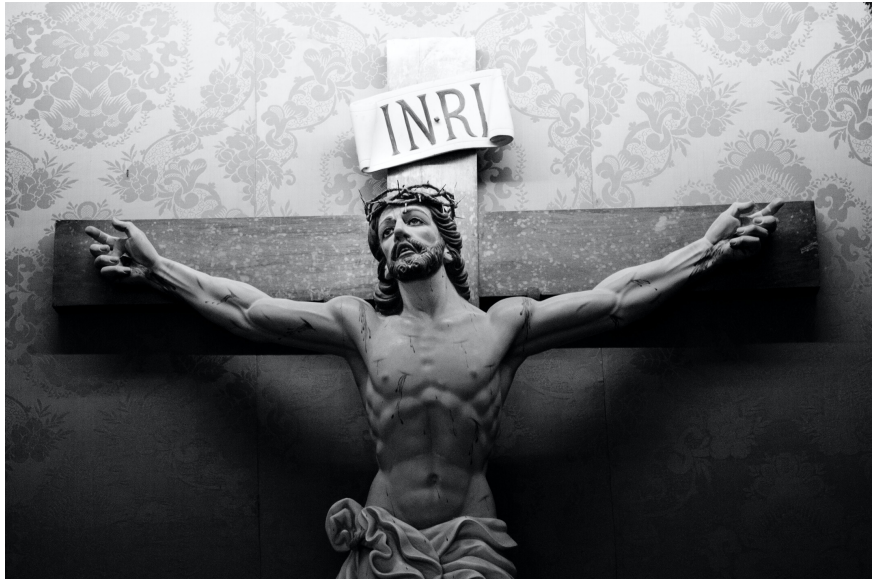
O Glorious Archangel St. Raphael,
Great prince of the heavenly court, you are illustrious for your gifts of wisdom and grace. You are a guide of those who journey by land or sea or air, consoler of the afflicted, and refuge of sinners. I beg you, assist me in all my needs and in all the sufferings of this life, as once you helped the young Tobias on his travels. Because you are the "medicine of God" I humbly pray you to heal the many infirmities of my soul and the ills that afflict my body. I especially ask of you the favor (here mention your special intention), and the great grace of purity to prepare me to be the temple of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Praying with Sacred Scripture Every Day

Recollection is part of our preparation for prayer. In the spiritual life, recollection means attending to the presence of God in the soul and its goal is to initiate an interior peace in which the soul is alone with God. Retreat to the “cloister of your heart” where God is waiting for you. With Him beside you, read the passage of the day. Discuss it with Him. Tell Him what it brings to mind. Share with Him your thoughts about it. Ask Him questions to clarify that which you do not understand. Then, be silent and listen for His response. Remember, He speaks in a still, small voice. Train your ears to know His voice. Be at rest under the mantle of Our Blessed Lady who intercedes for you during your prayer time.

Daily Passages for Meditation:

- Day 1: Exodus 15:26
- Day 2: Mark 1:34
- Day 3: Psalm 107:19-20
- Day 4: Jeremiah 30:17
- Day 5: Philippians 3:12
- Day 6: Exodus 20:2
- Day 7: Psalm 147:1-6



Going Deeper

"An injury is either sustained or destroyed - not by the disposition of those who injure, but by the disposition of those who bear it." St. John Chrysostom

As we have discussed, the greatest obstacle to healing the wounds of the heart is unforgiveness, and the difficulty to forgive is proportionate to the degree of injury, hurt, or offense. But, as St. John Chrysostom says, *"an injury is either sustained or destroyed - not by the disposition of those who injure, but by the disposition of those who bear it."* Our will, freely choosing to hold on to anger, bitterness, resentment, and hostility, becomes an impenetrable fortress preventing God's life from entering our heart, which, through the privation of grace, becomes stony, hard, and cold - a prison that keeps us in bondage to the evil perpetrated against us. The key that unlocks the prison door is forgiveness. But how do we forgive, especially in light of the painful and difficult emotions that flood our heart or when the wound is so grievous it has altered the course of our life?

The work of Dr. Robert Enright (Forgiveness Institute) and Dr. Richard Fitzgibbons (the Institute for Marital Healing) gives us great guidance and leads us along the path to wholeness that comes by way of forgiveness. In their watershed book, *Helping Clients Forgive*, they maintain that *"people, upon rationally determining that they have been unfairly treated, forgive when they willfully abandon resentment and related responses (to which they have a right), and endeavor to respond to the wrongdoer based on the moral principle of beneficence, which may include compassion, unconditional worth, generosity, and moral love (to which the wrongdoer, by nature of the harmful act or acts, has no right)."* This very definition implies that there is a process to be engaged. And, it requires virtue - patience, consistency, perseverance, hope, fortitude, and long-suffering. But the effort is well worth the reward. Forgiveness sets us free from the consequences of the sins against us and helps us to once again experience the abundant life of Jesus Christ.

According to Enright and Fitzgibbons, forgiveness implies transformation. It makes a qualitative difference in a number of areas: forgiveness changes previous responses toward the offender; the forgiver's emotional state may make a change for the better; the relationship between the offending party and the offended party may improve. These changes are echoes of what Scripture tells us will occur when we forgive - *"...forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For the measure you give will be the measure you get back..."* (Luke 6: 37-38). How then, do we enter that process? Enright and Fitzgibbons outline "The Phase Model of Forgiveness." Basically, this model is comprised of four phases, not necessarily consecutive nor exactly the same for each patient or client.

Going Deeper Continued

The Uncovering Phase

In this phase the individual begins to see how the injustice and subsequent injury have affected his life. He may see these offenses through the lens of the psychological and emotional impact of the event as well as the physical implications he may have been left with. He may recognize the potential permanence of the injury, or, he may see the offenses through other adverse effects not so long-lasting. In either case, these insights can bring with them a host of emotions, which include anger and hostility. And, even if the injury took place years before, the new clarity with which the individual views the event can produce an emotional response as strong, if not stronger, than his initial reaction.

Two suggestions can help us through this phase. The first is to identify or name the emotion(s) or hurt(s) involved. Ask the questions, "What loss did I experience?" or "What negative effect have I experienced because of the offense?" The answers to these questions point the direction to healing and help to identify what needs to be resolved. Is it a loss of fidelity, a loss of security in a relationship, the negative effect of rejection, a loss of good name, or the loss of someone we love?

Secondly, once the emotion or hurt has been identified, express it. Write it out in a journal, talk with a friend, confessor, spiritual director, or mental health counselor, take it up with God during prayer time. The important thing is to get the emotion or hurt out into the open.

Other aspects of the uncovering phase outlined by Enright and Fitzgibbons include admitting shame (common with cases of incest or rape), depleted emotional energy, "obsessional thinking" or "preoccupation" with thoughts of the offender, comparing the self with the offender (your diminished capacity or loss with his full capacity and intact status), and having an altered sense of the world (from safe to unsafe, fair to unfair, kind to cruel).

The Decision Phase

Enright and Fitzgibbons underscore the fact that the emotional pain experienced in the Uncovering Phase can serve as a catalyst to continue the process. The lack of comfort produced by sustained anger, the deep psychic pain caused by the effects of the injury, and the change in life often precipitated by the offense work together to lead the individual to resolution.

Often, this phase comes after a period of seeking revenge, harboring animosity, and expressing anger. When these strategies prove useless in resolving the pain, a "change of heart" can occur whereby the individual seeks another alternative to his misery. For Christians, this moment often comes after prayer, soul-searching, and a fundamental acknowledgment that such behaviors and attitudes are in opposition to Christ's mandate to "love your enemies and pray for your persecutors."

Going Deeper Continued

Certainly, the grace of the sacraments, especially Penance, works to move the individual to this stage. Recognizing that he, too, is a sinner in need of God's mercy, accepting God's mercy for his own sins and failings, and then looking to extend God's mercy to others often lead the individual to consider forgiveness as an option. Ultimately, the person makes the decision to forgive.

Two things are important to mention at this point. The first is that just as forgiveness itself is a process, so too is the decision to forgive. This process of decision can be quite laborious and extend over a long period of time. Often the pain is so deep, or has been buried for such a long time, an individual doesn't want to forgive and can't ever imagine doing so. However, this negative response does not justify his anger according to the law of God. For the Christian, forgiveness is not an option. How then, can we overcome this resistance to forgive?

First, we must pray for the grace to enter the forgiveness process. Then, pray for the "desire" to forgive. If that is still too difficult, pray for the "desire to desire" to forgive. And, if even that causes us to bristle with indignation, pray for the "desire to desire to desire" to forgive. Go back as far as necessary and begin there, moving forward one "desire" at a time.

Secondly, our emotions may in no way match our decision to forgive at this point. But this should not deter us from our goal. Our emotions are gifts from God which give us important information about that which is stimulating them. But our emotions are not to rule us. We, by exercising our will, are to rule them. While we need to admit our emotions, they should not ride herd over our will. Of course, it needs to be said that our will is to be subordinate to our conscience, and our conscience is to be formed according to the laws of God and the teachings of the Church His Son founded.



Going Deeper Continued

The Work Phase

In order to accomplish the goal of forgiveness, work needs to be done. The work phase can be the most challenging step in the process of forgiveness because it represents a move away from our own pain to explore the reasons for the behavior of the other. Psychologists call this step "Reframing." Essentially, reframing is choosing to reappraise what has happened by considering other factors that we may have ignored. For example, it is hard to forgive someone if we perceive his action as only malevolent and unloving. But, it may be easier to forgive him if we see his actions as a result of his own deprived circumstances and personal limitations. Reframing causes us to look at the situation with a fresh perspective, and to begin to view the offender as a human being rather than the personification of evil.

A point of clarification here. Reframing is not meant to provide an excuse for the offensive behavior of the person who has injured us. In no way is it an attempt to blame behavior on social conditions, economic class, poor family background, or the injuries and offenses the perpetrator may have experienced in his own life. Rather, Reframing is an attempt to broaden our perspective of the offender to try to see him as a person created by God and a person whom God loves unconditionally.

Though it may take time, reframing will eventually move us along the continuum of forgiveness and it will eventually take us to empathy and compassion for the one who has hurt us. Only through empathy and compassion can we approach our "enemy" with Christ-like love. And only through empathy and compassion can we extend that love to our offender and call him "friend." This, indeed, is forgiveness at work. This, indeed, is the call of the Christian.

Bearing The Pain And Giving A Moral Gift

Two other aspects of the Work Phase are Bearing the Pain and Giving a Moral Gift. Bearing the pain refers to the ability of an individual to mature as a person by accepting what happened. It does not mean the individual should live with debilitating emotions, but rather he should admit those emotions, and move forward with his life by absorbing his loss into the framework of his day-to-day existence.

Enright and Fitzgibbons point out that *"...bearing the pain is not a passive step. It involves waiting, but with the expectation that the suffering will pass as forgiveness deepens."* The Sacraments of Penance and Eucharist are invaluable in helping us to bear the pain of injuries and hurts no matter how devastating or how slight. And, our assurance that God wants to heal us is a great consolation as we bear the effects of the injustice committed against us.

Going Deeper Continued

Ultimately, the Work Phase brings us to the point of expressing our forgiveness. In the nomenclature of forgiveness therapy this is called Giving a Moral Gift. Remember that part of the definition of forgiveness is willfully abandoning resentment in favor of beneficence or goodwill. At some moment, this goodwill must be shown or expressed. However, it should not be rushed nor should it be feigned: it must come from real healing and sincerity of heart. For many, this moment completes the forgiveness process. For others, it is a goal that may never be attained this side of purgatory. For all, it is point of true freedom.

The Deepening Phase

The Work Phase of the forgiveness process brings us to the point of beneficence. What, then, can be left? For the individual who has been injured through the actions of another it is important to find meaning in the suffering. Through the incarnation of Jesus Christ, and through His suffering and death, man's misery and pain were redeemed and given worth and value. The theology of suffering, so beautifully developed in Catholic teaching, reminds us that by uniting our sufferings to the passion and death of Jesus Christ, our own injuries and trials can become conduits of grace in the lives of those we love, and in the world at large. Such a perspective toward suffering infuses value and worth into the heartache of the injury sustained. It reminds us that God has a plan in all things and works all things to the good. And it also encourages us to be a source of consolation for others.

(Based on the Strategy Eight: Practicing Forgiveness, from Experience Grace in Abundance: Strategies for Your Spiritual Life, Johnnette S. Benkovic, Sophia Institute Press, 2003, 2015, All Rights Reserved. Used with permission)

Prayerfully, trustingly, and honestly ponder the following questions and record your responses in your journal:

1. Is there someone whom I need to forgive? What might hold me back from extending forgiveness to this person?
2. Can I make a decision to enter the forgiveness process? Why or why not? Am I at a place where I can make a plan for the Work Phase of forgiveness? What would this plan look like?
3. Often, we think of forgiving others only if they have committed a major offense against us. However, even the slights, injuries and hurts we consider "ordinary," or "small" can create serious spiritual and emotional problems for us. Who may I need to forgive for these kinds of offenses? Is there someone from whom I need to seek forgiveness? In what practical ways can I go about doing this? How will the Sacrament of Penance aid me in this pursuit?
4. Who is the person who has hurt me most grievously in my life? What type of "moral gift" could I give this person or act of kindness can I perform for this person? (Note: In some instances, it may not be possible to perform a physical act of kindness. What other kind of gift would be appropriate?)

A Word to Grow By

Mercy - "compassionate or kindly forbearance shown toward an offender, an enemy, or other person in one's power; pity or benevolence; an act of kindness, compassion or favor; blessing."

Etymology: late 12c., meaning "God's forgiveness of his creature's offenses," from Old French *mercit, merci* (9c.) "reward, gift; kindness, grace, pity," from Latin *mercedem* (nominative *merces*) "reward, wages, pay, hire" (in Vulgar Latin "favor, pity;" in Medieval Latin "thanks; grace"), from *merx* (genitive *mercis*) "wares, merchandise" (see market (n.)). In Church Latin (6c.) it was given a specific application to the heavenly reward earned by those who show kindness to the helpless and those from whom no requital can be expected. (from etymonline.com)

- Which step in the healing process does the etymology of "mercy" confirm and how?
- When, how, and for what has mercy been shown to me? To what extent does this help me to extend mercy to another?

A Healing Meditation: St. Mark's Account of the Passion

Many of the great saints speak to the efficacy of meditating on the passion of Jesus and spending prayerful time in front of a crucifix. It is there, they tell us, that we find hope, healing, and every grace we need to triumph in the midst of the travails of life.

St. Paul, for example, writes to the Corinthians about the message of the cross. He says, "*The message of the cross is complete absurdity to those who are headed for ruin, but to us who are experiencing salvation it is the power of God*" (1 Corinthians 1:18).

St. Paul of the Cross advises us to learn the lesson the great saints discovered about the cross. He writes, "*Here learn the science of the Saints: All is to be found in the passion of Jesus. Make every effort to remain hidden in the wounds of Jesus, and you will be enriched with every good and every true light, enabling you to fly to that Perfection which is consonant with your way of life.*" He also wrote, "*The passion of Jesus is a sea of sorrows, but it is also an ocean of love. Ask the Lord to teach you to fish in this ocean. Dive into its depths. No matter how deep you go, you will never reach the bottom.*"

And St. Theodore the Studite teaches, "*With the cross, we are freed from the restraint of the enemy and we clutch on to the strength of salvation.*"

Let's take the wise counsel and wisdom of these holy men of God and enter into a time of prayer and reflection on the Passion of Jesus. We will use the account of St. Mark found in his Gospel, Chapter 14:12 - 15:47.

A Healing Meditation: St. Mark's Account of the Passion Continued

1. First recall the five questions we ask to discover a wound of the heart.
2. Using the link below, listen to a reading of St. Mark's account of Jesus' passion and death.
3. Note words and phrases that express a particular suffering Jesus endured. An example would be "betrayed."
4. Be present to the action of God moving in you. Which words or phrases strike a chord in you? Are they revealing a wound of your heart that has been encapsulated in a painful memory or situation?
5. Pay attention to the reflection following the Gospel reading. As you do so, *"Entrust yourself entirely to God. He is a Father and a most loving Father at that, who would rather let heaven and earth collapse than abandon anyone who trusted in him."* (St. Paul of the Cross).
6. Following the Gospel account and the meditation, journal your thoughts, responses, inspirations, and graces received.

Link to "A Healing Meditation"

Help from the Saints

"Place your hopes in the mercy of God and the merits of our Redeemer; say often, looking at the crucifix: There are centered all my hopes."
St. Paul of the Cross

Go to <https://www.saintpaulofthecross.com/> for more about this mystic and apostle of the Cross.

- What one aspect of the life of St. Paul of the Cross impresses you the most? Why?
- To what extent does the Saint's perspective of and devotion to Christ's passion and death inspire you to a deeper acknowledgement of God's love for you? How can it lead you to greater healing and hope?



"No matter what path we take to seek God, it always passes by the Cross."
Blessed Maria (Conchita) Concepcion de Cabrera

In Closing

O Lord and Master of my life, Grant not unto me a spirit of idleness, of discouragement, of lust for power, and of vain speaking. But bestow upon me, Thy servant, the spirit of chastity, of meekness, of patience, and of love. O Lord and King, grant that I may perceive my own transgressions, and judge not my brother, for blessed art Thou unto ages of ages. Amen. -St. Ephraim