

CHICAGO BRIDE

Exploring Self-Acceptance vs. Self-Forgiveness and the Impact on Overall Life Satisfaction

Forgiveness Expert Dr. Michael Barry's Clinical Research Has Also Found That Unforgiveness Actually Hinders Healing

A new study by a university psychology research group suggests that being unable to forgive yourself may be linked to a decreased overall life satisfaction. **Dr. Michael Barry, Director of Pastoral Care at the Cancer Treatment Centers of America in Philadelphia, suggests that self-acceptance vs. self-forgiveness** is the key to releasing harbored negative emotions and assist in the path to healing.

The group that conducted the study, part of Sheffield Hallam University in the United Kingdom, recently conducted a series of studies examining the dynamics of anger, forgiveness, mental health, physical health and overall life satisfaction. The findings were published in a recent edition of the *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*.

Researchers found that individuals who were unable to forgive themselves experienced reductions in both psychological well-being and life satisfaction. The study also discovered that anger was directly related to a person's ability to forgive others but not themselves. However, shame, guilt, anxiety and anger were all predictors of self-unforgiveness.

Dr. Michael Barry, a forgiveness expert who has conducted his own clinical research on the link between negative, stressful emotions and cancer recovery, **says that self-forgiveness helps us focus on our past failures and it is much easier to forgive others than to forgive ourselves. Therefore, self-acceptance is the key (although some may confuse it with self-forgiveness). Why is self-acceptance more helpful than self-forgiveness? Among many other reasons, we cannot change the past. Dr. Barry has also found that unforgiveness and the feelings associated with it can actually hinder the healing process.**

Through his years of clinical studies at the *Cancer Treatment Centers of America (CTCA)*, **Dr. Barry** discovered that stressful emotions can prevent physical healing within the body. The disease of unforgiveness, and the stress that goes along with it, can impact every organ and is an emotional disorder that can be prevented, treated and cured.

“It’s never easy to forgive,” said Barry, author of The Forgiveness Project : The Startling Discovery of How to Overcome Cancer, Find Health and Achieve Peace , “especially when we feel that someone else has wronged us. But oftentimes we can get past those feelings and let that other person free from bitterness and anger. However, when we are holding ourselves hostage with unforgiveness, there is a constant reminder of all that we think is unforgivable about ourselves. Being unable or unwilling to let that go only keeps us in the mental and physical prison of unforgiveness. Not only are we compromising our own physical health, but we are making it nearly impossible to truly enjoy life, as this study suggests. However, when it comes to ourselves and our own mistakes, I advocate for self-acceptance vs. self-forgiveness as the true path to healing since we are more readily able to forgive others than ourselves. We cannot change our past actions but we can accept them.”

Barry’s research has found that the constant stress of negative emotions produces stress hormones, such as cortisol and adrenaline that actually reduce the production of natural killer cells, or the “foot soldiers” in the fight against disease. These stress hormones also put our bodies in a constant “fight-or-flight” mode, like an alarm system that never shuts off.

Release! The Healing Power of Forgiveness is a triple-faceted program based on **Dr. Barry’s** book *The Forgiveness Project* , where patients spend time learning about forgiveness research; complete “homework assignments” that explore personal feelings of unforgiveness toward oneself, others or even God; and finally, talk with staff members about their experience into exploring these emotions. **Barry** finds that the people who complete the program are able to put out the fire of their unforgiveness and negative emotions and begin the journey to a true healing process.

At CTCA, Barry specializes in the connection between spirituality and health. He has served in ministry for more than 20 years and has appeared on numerous national, regional and local radio and television shows around the country. He is the author of *A Reason for Hope, A Season for Hope* and *The Art of Caregiving*.

Dr. Michael Barry specializes in the connection between spirituality and health, particularly as it relates to cancer. He has written several books on the topic and his most recent book, *The Forgiveness Project: The Startling Discovery of How to Overcome Cancer, Find Health and Achieve Peace*, (Kregel Publishing, Grand Rapids) details the spiritual and physical benefits of forgiveness, as well as teaches readers how to forgive based upon his years of experience in mentoring cancer patients. **Dr. Barry** earned a Doctor of Ministry degree at Fuller Theological Seminary. He earned a Master of Divinity degree at Princeton Theological Seminary, and a Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of Texas, Austin. www.ChicagoBrideMagazine.com