Chapter 23
The Scientific Study of Religion/Spirituality, Forgiveness, and Hope

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Theologian Lewis B. Smedes eloquently argued, "Sometimes hate only nibbles at the edges of the heart; it does not always burn out the lining of the heart…. But whether your hate is a carcinoma growing hell-bent for death inside your soul, or only a pesky heartburn, it will hurt you if you do not use the right remedy…. But eventually, unchecked hate will do you in. Such hate can be healed" (Smedes, 1984, pp. 27–28). Smedes (1996) advocated forgiveness as the healing potion acting between humans' power to imagine the future and their weakness at controlling it. "The answer to the problem of imagining a future we cannot control is hope. And the way to hope for a better future after a bad past is the way of forgiving" (Smedes, p. 171).

In short, forgiveness and hope are intertwined. Forgiveness is often motivated by the hope that relational problems will be healed through willpower that finds a different way through problems than conflict. When forgiveness occurs and is accepted by the one offended, it often motivates hope that the relationship, having survived a crisis, will now persevere.

People who seek counseling for relationship problems have often repeatedly transgressed against each other. Many relationships end because people cannot forgive their partner. Partners lose hope. Willpower erodes. Ways have dead-ended. Perseverance finally evaporates. However, if people begin to forgive, hope can be rekindled, and other aspects of their relationship can flourish. In fact, a meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials using forgiveness interventions found that when people forgive, even though the interventions did not even mention hope, their level of hope increased at least as much as did their forgiveness (Wade et al., 2014).

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Hope and forgiveness seem bound together. The five major religions value both (Rye et al., 2000), and empirical evidence on religion/spirituality (R/S) suggest a potential synergy. Yet few psychological theories have tied them together (cf. Ripley & Worthington, 2014).

In positive psychology, forgiveness and hope are usually studied as character strengths or virtues. Each is intertwined in various religions and in broader concepts of spirituality, making them popular foci in the psychology of R/S as well. With R/S frameworks, theorizing about how forgiveness and hope are connected is sparse, suggesting a need for theoretical attention. In this chapter, we build on an established theoretical model of forgiveness and relational spirituality, supported by basic and applied research (for a review, see Worthington & Sandage, 2016). We make theoretical suggestions about how hope can be incorporated into this model, and we review recent research that studies hope. We seek to create a basic theory that relates forgiveness, hope, and R/S and then to parlay that broadened theory into suggestions about interventions.

Definitions

Davis et al. (2015) have considered definitions of terms related to R/S. *Spirituality* is defined as a sense of closeness or connection with the Sacred. The Sacred is whatever a person believes is set apart as deserving veneration, such as God, the divine, ultimate reality, humanity, environment, the transcendent, or temporal objects like marriage or a holy book. *Relational spirituality* recognizes that such closeness or connection depends on relationships, so it must be contextualized within whatever people perceive to be sacred. *Religion* is defined as the system of shared basic beliefs about ultimate concerns, repetitive practices, and individual religious behaviors engaged in by a community of similarly minded (although not identically minded) individuals. *Religiousness* is one's search for and experience of whatever one perceives to be sacred, within the context of a religious tradition (Hill et al., 2000). Closeness or connection with something considered religiously sacred is called *religious spirituality*. It is differentiated from other types of spirituality that involve closeness or connection with other sacred objects like nature, humans, or something transcending the mundane.

Worthington (2020b) recently evaluated key conceptual definitions and theoretical frameworks of forgiveness. Although forgiveness broadly conceived can include divine forgiveness (by a deity), self-forgiveness, and societal forgiveness, in the present chapter, we focus mostly on person-to-person forgiveness. Not all researchers agree on definitions or theories of forgiveness, but most agree that forgiveness involves internal prosocial changes toward a perceived transgressor. The internal experience of forgiveness includes reduced negative (and in some cases increased positive) emotions, motivations, behavioral intentions, and cognition toward the offender. It might eventuate in changed behaviors (Fehr et al., 2010), which are not, strictly speaking, part of forgiveness. The most frequently studied theory of

forgiveness is stress-and-coping theory (Worthington, 2006). At least two types of person-to-person forgiveness are identified (Worthington, 2020a). *Decisional forgiveness* is a behavioral intention statement that foregoes vengeance or getting even and intends to treat the offender as a valued and valuable person. *Emotional forgiveness* is the intentional replacement of negative unforgiving emotions with positive other-oriented emotions like empathy, sympathy, compassion, and love.

In this chapter, we use the forgiveness and relational spirituality model (see Worthington & Sandage, 2016), which incorporates stress-and-coping theory within it. That model is directly applicable to the intersection of R/S, forgiveness, and hope. *Hope* is most often described using Snyder's et al.'s (1991) cognitive model of hope, recently supplemented with Rueger et al.'s (in press) model of persevering hope. In this chapter, we incorporate both conceptualizations. Snyder's model describes hope as the agency to bring about changes and the awareness of pathways to achieve those changes. Those types of hope are (theoretically) most important to the initiation of forgiveness. Rueger et al.'s (in press) persevering hope is both a motivation to persevere and an outcome, once forgiveness has occurred and positively affected the relationship. Hope can be based in sacred or human relationships. Interventions aimed at helping people recover hope and thereby motivate change in their psychological, physical, relational, or spiritual state have been found effective (for a meta-analysis, see Weis & Speridakos, 2011).

In this chapter, we describe the forgiveness and relational spirituality model, hypothesize ways that hope might be incorporated in the model, and summarize recent research on the model and hope. With limitations of our research in mind, we draw implications and recommendations for basic and applied research at the intersection of forgiveness, hope, and R/S.

Forgiveness and Relational Spirituality Model

Victims, Offenders, and Transgressions and Their Interrelationships

The qualities of victim, offender, and transgressions are important in whether a victim forgives. So are the interrelationships among these three members of the model.

Victims have personality, contextual, and other personal qualities that either promote or discourage them from forgiving. For example, personality traits like agreeableness and empathy are related to forgiving, but traits like neuroticism and vengefulness mitigate against forgiving. People forgive more easily in well-functioning relationships but struggle to forgive in conflictual relationships. Likewise, offenders contribute their own personal and contextual considerations into whether victims can forgive. For example, victims struggle to forgive offenders who are narcissistic, psychopathic, or Machiavellian (i.e., the dark triad); who

cannot empathize with those whom they have hurt; or who are in a derogated out-group. Victims might struggle due to the victim's perception of the offender or because offenders do not engage in the relationship-valuing acts (e.g., taking responsibility for wrongdoing, apologizing, and offering to make amends). When offenders are in contexts that do not value forgiveness (e.g., in active warfare, status-hungry gangs, or a network of vengeful friends), forgiveness is rarely an option. Transgressions similarly affect whether victims forgive. Offenses that are severe, have long-lasting effects (e.g., offenses causing spinal cord or traumatic brain injuries), and are committed by trusted others are particularly hard to forgive (for reviews, see Worthington & Wade, 2020).

The Forgiveness and Relational Spirituality Model Adds a Sacred Dimension

The forgiveness and relational spirituality model (Davis et al., 2008; Worthington & Sandage, 2016) adds a sacred dimension to how people handle transgressions. Our chapter is more concerned with the interrelationships among this model's elements (victim, offender, and transgression), because these elements relate to what the victim perceives as sacred. An initial review of this research (through 2014) was summarized in Worthington and Sandage (2016).

A Brief Explanation of Each Interrelationship When it comes to navigating transgressions, the Sacred–victim relationship can exhibit many characteristics. For example, it can be characterized by spiritual devotion or struggle (Pargament & Exline, 2021), religious attachment security or insecurity (Granqvist, 2020), or positive or negative religious coping (Pargament, 2007). The Sacred–offender relationship is seen from the victim's perspective. Victims are more likely to forgive offenders who are religiously/spiritually similar to themselves (for a review, see Worthington & Sandage, 2016). The Sacred–transgression relationship relates to whether a victim perceives (appraises) the transgression to have religious or spiritual meaning. A divorce or murder of a loved one might be perceived as a loss of something sacred, and if so, it might be hard to forgive. A perceived desecration of something held sacred is often even more difficult to forgive. Yet if forgiveness is sanctified or imbued with spiritual significance (by the victim or by the victim's religious community), this sanctification can make forgiveness easier.

Theoretically Hypothesized Roles of Temporal Hope Within the Model We might divide hope into two types. *Transcendent hope* is trust in a transcendent being or force someone believes is likely to lead ultimately to good outcomes. (Albeit, "good" is perceived from the vantage-point of the transcendent being.) *Temporal hope* (i.e., hope regarding earthly relationships) describes anticipated, valued outcomes in a relationship with another human being, either now or in the future. Both transcendent and temporal hope are pertinent to a Sacred–victim relationship. If a

person trusts the Sacred (i.e., transcendent hope), then that trust can empower hope. Based on this transcendent hope, both Snyder's cognitively oriented agency and pathways to change (Snyder et al., 1991) might be activated, and temporal hope could empower forgiveness of a transgressor. Similarly, persevering hope (Rueger et al., in press)—hope when goals do not seem reachable—might be maintained even in the face of a sacred loss (e.g., a murdered loved one). Transcendent hope that is rooted in ultimate good might motivate forgiveness of a murderer. Thus, aspects of R/S might produce hope and motivate action. Both transcendent and temporal hope might be at both endpoints of that causal chain—activating forgiveness and resulting from forgiveness. That hope can lead to better relational, mental, and physical health. Hence, hope can act as a causal path between R/S and temporal outcomes. But Sacred–victim relationships characterized by hope that a sacred being might intervene in relationship differences might build stronger R/S. Therefore, hope can be either a causal agent or product of R/S, or it can be a mediator (i.e., causal path) between R/S and temporal outcomes.

A Sacred–offender relationship is a victim's perception of the degree of similarity the offender's religious/spiritual life has to their own. A perception characterized by hostile religious differences—such as antagonists in a war over religious differences—may make victim–offender forgiveness virtually impossible. When people of similar religious beliefs, values, and practices harm each other, such as when a church splits, research has shown that the victims are more willing to forgive (Greer et al., 2014b). Thus, seeing the spiritual similarity of victim and offender can promote hope for forgiveness and reconciliation. Even if reconciliation is not seen as possible, persevering hope can remain, often motivated by R/S.

The Sacred–transgression relationship also might be either infused with hope or bereft of it. If a religious community interprets an event that occurs within it, such as the death of a beloved community member, as God calling the person to a just reward, then hope can flourish in that community. But if a sacred loss occurs, such as a religious person feeling that divorce irreparably damaged his or her relationship with the Sacred, then hopelessness can reign.

Empirical Foundation for Our Reviews of Research

We began with Davis et al.'s (2013) meta-analyses of R/S and forgiveness research through 2011. *Forgivingness* (or *trait forgiveness*) is a disposition to forgive across time and situations. *State forgiveness* is a one-off forgiving response to an unjust act. Davis et al. analyzed 64 samples reporting effect sizes of the relationship between R/S and forgivingness ($n = 99,177$) and 50 samples relating R/S and state forgiveness ($n = 8,932$). R/S was related to forgivingness ($r = .29$) and state forgiveness ($r = .15$). To avoid duplicating Davis et al.'s (2013) meta-analysis, we reviewed studies from 2012 to date that included hope, forgiveness, and R/S. We also reviewed studies since then that dealt with forgiveness and R/S (but not hope). The latter was

not our focus but informed the model. Finally, to inform implications for interventions, we reviewed select interventions that assessed forgiveness and/or hope as outcomes.

Method of the Review

We searched PsycINFO, PubMed, Academic Search Complete, and ERIC for relevant articles using this string of keywords: "hope" AND "forgiv*" AND ["religi* OR "spirituality" OR "R/S" OR "Coping"]. We included articles if they (a) examined R/S, forgiveness, and hope; (b) were published in English between 2012 and 2020 (inclusive); and (c) were empirical (quantitative or qualitative). We excluded nonempirical documents (e.g., newsletters and editorials), non-English publications, and reviews. We found 38 studies published between 2012 and 2020 (inclusive), of which 27 met inclusion criteria. Given the broad nature of R/S, we included studies that examined a wide range of R/S dimensions, such as religious service attendance, commitment, activity, involvement, interventions, centrality, coping, and denomination. We also included spiritual transcendence, spiritual appraisals, and relational spirituality. For each study, we coded information related to the specific forgiveness and/or hope construct(s) examined, other constructs examined, guiding theory, main study aim, method and study design (qualitative, quantitative, cross-sectional, longitudinal, etc.), sample characteristics, measures/instruments used, and main findings (see Appendix 23.S1, Table 23.S1).

Second, we searched "forgiv*" AND the religious terms identified above. Our initial search produced 2,299 articles from 2012 to 2020—1,946 after duplicates were removed. Two independent reviewers screened them using inclusion–exclusion criteria indicated in Appendix 23.S1. "Fit" by both reviewers resulted in 72 studies (see Appendix 23.S1, Table 23.S2).

Third, we sought to provide some guidance for practitioners (e.g., religious counselors, clergy, pastoral counselors, and lay leaders). Thus, we also nonsystematically reviewed 15 intervention studies that had assessed hope and/or forgiveness as outcomes (see Table 23.S3).

Results of the Reviews

Review of Hope in Relation to the Forgiveness and Relational Spirituality Model

Worthington and Sandage's (2016) book, *Forgiveness and Spirituality in Psychotherapy*, summarized 25 studies that directly evaluated aspects of the model. Of those, six studies assessed hope. We extended the model using findings from our

and Worthington and Sandage's (2016) review. Where possible, we illustrate our points with a recent study rather than an older study.

Hope and the Victim–Sacred Relationship

A victim's relationship with the Sacred depends on the victim's religious beliefs, values, and behaviors and R/S-related virtues, which in turn are associated with forgiveness, relationships, and mental and physical health. We hypothesize that hope is causally involved in those connections. In the research reviewed in Table 23.S1, few studies used experimental or longitudinal designs. Thus, it is hard to determine if hope produces forgiveness and other outcomes, forgiveness produces hope and other outcomes, or a more complex causal chain exists. Even so, the victim–Sacred relationship was related to hope in four areas.

Times of Intense Suffering During intense suffering, well-being and life satisfaction might depend on disengaging from the pain and anguish of suffering, employing positive religious coping, and finding cause for hope—either in restored relationships or in one's relationship with the Sacred. For example, Chen et al. (2021) studied 272 survivors in civil war conflict (Study 1) and 1,651 people (Study 2) who were displaced to an area in which a devastating landslide killed and injured many—piling on three potentially traumatizing factors. In Study 1, survivors' trauma was associated with greater negative religious coping and lower hope, forgivingness, and well-being. When people suffer, the world looks bleaker, and hope and forgiveness erode. In Study 2, findings were replicated, but positive coping was related to higher well-being, suggesting that *the way people cope* may affect hope and psychological well-being.

Ways People Treat Others Sutton et al. (2014) studied Pentecostal and charismatic Christians. Love of God predicted neighborly love. Hope was treated as a predictor, not an outcome. Attachment to God and religious spirituality were related to hope and forgiveness.

Engaging a Complex of Virtues Bushlack and Bock (2018) found evidence that hope and forgiveness are linked to wisdom and mindfulness, which are related to fewer psychological symptoms and higher well-being. Practical wisdom was related to higher mindfulness, hope, and forgiveness, which in turn were related to lower stress, anxiety, and depression. Forgiveness and hope were not merely motivators of functional living; they were related to better health.

Personal Spirituality's Benefits Berthold and Ruch (2014) assessed 20,538 people categorized as (a) nonreligious people, (b) religiously affiliated people who do not practice their religion, and (c) religious people who actively practice religion. Those who practiced their religion—presumably those with a closer relationship to

the Sacred—were happier, felt their life had more meaning, and had higher levels of hope, forgiveness, gratitude, and kindness.

Summary A close victim–Sacred relationship seems to mirror a good human–human relationship (e.g., a strong marriage or good friendship). When hurts or disappointments are perceived, a close victim–Sacred relationship is associated with higher hope and forgiveness.

Hope and the Offender–Sacred Relationship

Yet it is not merely the victim's relationship with the Sacred that is connected to forgiveness and hope. Victims judge whether offenders are ingroup or outgroup members. Identity similarity to the victim may often foster willingness to forgive. Worthington and Sandage (2016) reviewed six studies that reported positive correlations between forgiveness and spiritual similarity of the offender to the victim. Hope was also correlated with differentiation of self, commitment to social justice, positive religious coping, and recent spiritual transition.

Hope and the Transgression–Sacred Relationship

Our review of studies examining a spiritual desecration and forgiveness revealed no studies that included hope. Worthington and Sandage (2016) found seven studies showing that transgressions perceived as spiritual losses or desecrations were difficult to forgive. However, none of those studies assessed correlates with hope.

Recent Research on the Forgiveness and Relational Spirituality Model

In the research on forgiveness and R/S since Davis et al.'s (2013) meta-analysis, all aspects of the forgiveness and relational spirituality model have been studied. Because our review is focused on the potential expansion of the model by including hope, we will not review each aspect of the model in the studies that did not include hope. Rather, we refer readers to Table 23.S2 in Appendix 23.S1. We make three summary comments based on that research.

First, most existing research has studied the Sacred–victim relationship; less scholarly attention has been dedicated to the Sacred–offender or Sacred–transgression relationship. Greer et al. (2014b) found that people experienced more hurt when offenders were ingroup than outgroup members, but people forgave ingroup members more readily. McElroy et al. (2014) found that desecration predicted intergroup forgiveness beyond the effects of religious commitment, personality characteristics, hurtfulness, and closeness.

Second, as of yet, there is limited cross-cultural examination, application, and generalizability of this model. Cultural understandings of forgiveness and its

meanings differ, as do concentrations of religions. Better understanding of culture is vital. Some research has been conducted in Iran (Ghorbani et al., 2017) and Hong Kong (Ho et al., 2017). Much more research is needed.

Third, relatively few longitudinal studies have been done. Little is known about how forgiveness changes over time and how changes in R/S and forgiveness affect one another.

Interventions to Promote Forgiveness

Context New studies must be seen in context of evidence on forgiveness interventions. In a meta-analysis, Wade et al. (2014) found that (a) REACH Forgiveness (Worthington, 2020a) and the Process Model (Freedman & Enright, 2020) have been the most used, investigated, and efficacious models; (b) time spent trying to forgive predicts total forgiveness; and (c) the longer people try to forgive, the more hope and the less depression and anxiety they experience.

Intervention Studies Between 2012 and 2020 Aimed Directly at Forgiveness Most often, the REACH Forgiveness model has been either accommodated to Christian settings (e.g., Greer et al., 2014a) or used in secular form within explicitly Christian settings (for a review, see Worthington, 2020a). In religious settings, secular interventions work similarly to religiously accommodated versions, probably because highly religious people draw on their own R/S even when participating in secular interventions (Rye & Pargament, 2002). Greer et al. (2014a) used a Christian-accommodated REACH Forgiveness intervention and found that completing a 6-hour do-it-yourself workbook increased forgiveness in Christians who had been hurt by other Christians. Hernandez et al. (2012) found that after a religiously integrated forgiveness seminar, participants were more likely to forgive offenders.

Interventions Aimed at Spiritual Practices Hypothesized to Increase Forgiveness

Some interventions have aimed to increase people's R/S practices in order to promote forgiveness. Vasiliauskas and McMinn (2013) conducted a randomized controlled trial with Christians (two experimental conditions: prayer or religious devotion). Participants who prayed for their offender increased empathy, religious commitment, and forgiveness the most (see also Toussaint et al., 2016). Those in the religious-devotion intervention reported less increased forgiveness than those in the prayer condition but more than those in the control condition.

Forgiveness Interventions Assessing Hope

To provide an applied perspective regarding forgiveness, hope, and R/S, we nonsystematically reviewed 15 studies (see Table 23.S3). One salient finding of this review was that changes in hope as an outcome did not parallel changes in forgiveness. For example, Freedman and Enright (1996) treated people trying to forgive incest. Treatment lasted a mean of 60 hours. By treatment's end, people were more forgiving and hopeful. By follow-up, the enormous improvements in forgiveness had been maintained, but changes in hope had eroded to pretreatment levels. This finding indicated that (a) hope and forgiveness were distinct constructs and that (b) hope (such as Snyder's agency and pathways hope) might motivate change, but (c) hope as an outcome that reflects expectations about the relationship's future seems dependent on more complex life circumstances. Forgiveness was specific to an event (i.e., incest). Once that incident was forgiven, participants considered it dealt with and seemed to move forward.

Discussion

What We Know—Theoretical Integration of R/S, Forgiveness, and Hope

We have sought to show that hope might be included in the forgiveness and relational spirituality model. We theorized about how such inclusion might work. We reviewed research on hope in each sacred interrelationship. Overall, virtually none of the existing research would lead a basic researcher in positive psychology or the psychology of R/S to doubt the model itself, but almost all the research has been cross-sectional and done within Western countries. Therefore, the extant research has not strongly supported the model either. Virtually no research, on its own merits, has opened a new vista for basic researchers. We found correlational support for hope's involvement in the model but not support for how hope might be related to forgiveness within the sacred relationships. No studies tested mechanisms (e.g., by hope affecting stress or coping, making the Sacred–victim relationship stronger, or operating via another mechanism). For the model to continue to be heuristic, researchers need to conduct new, hope-relevant investigations.

Sacred–victim relationships are related to transcendent and temporal hope, as the Sacred superintends the temporal relationship. Sacred–offender relationships that indicate spiritual similarity of the offender to the victim can also be important. When the victim deems the offender is spiritually dissimilar, transgressions are harder to forgive (Greer et al., 2014a). But when transgressions are inflicted by a trusted ingroup member—such as sexual abuse by a clergy member—they can be devastating, because transgressions damage trust.

Our review of research on hope, forgiveness, and R/S, which reveals robust correlations among these variables, supports the hypothesis that forgiveness is bidirectionally related to hope within the context of R/S. That is, hope helps people forgive, forgiveness helps them maintain or regain a sense of hope, and R/S helps support both forgiveness and hope. Transgressions damage trust in relationships, especially when they are serious, hurtful, repeated, and piled onto other transgressions (Worthington & Sandage, 2016). Damage to trust is magnified even more when a transgression is appraised as a desecration of something sacred (Pargament et al., 2005).

What Theory Suggests We Would Like to Know

R/S is theorized to be involved with both forgiveness and hope, because people develop a relationship with whatever they hold to be sacred. Relationships are the basis for hope—hope to pursue meaningful goals and to persevere with fortitude when goals seem unattainable. Thus, relationships with the Sacred are a ground for hope. Also, relationships among people can be damaged by transgressions. When repair of relationships seems impossible—especially when people appeal to the Sacred for repair—the relationship with the Sacred (as well as between the people involved) can be damaged, because the victim might think sacred trust was violated. Damaged relationships that seem either to degenerate further or to stagnate can disappoint people; they may come to believe that whatever they hold to be sacred is not powerful or loving enough to redeem the relationship, which then could lead to religious/spiritual struggles (Pargament & Exline, 2021). Temporal relationships can be the ground for gaining or losing trust in the Sacred, which can affect hope that is perceived to emanate from divine sources.

Theory suggests hope can affect people's sense of agency or open new pathways toward reconciliation (Snyder et al., 1991). Forgiveness also can help people become more willing to persevere when they might not see a way forward (Rueger et al., in press). Agency, pathways, and persevering hope can motivate forgiveness. Theory also suggests forgiveness can lead to a resurgence of hope, which may in turn lead to a desire to reconcile. Yet even if reconciliation may look promising in the aftermath of forgiveness, persevering hope that envisions a positive future for the relationship likely depends on other contextual variables. Recall the Freedman and Enright (1996) findings in which forgiveness was maintained but hope was not. Our review's findings are consistent with causal reasoning in which hope can affect forgiveness and forgiveness can affect hope. But to date, these causal pathways have not yet been tested in longitudinal or experimental studies. We suggest three hypotheses to guide such research.

R/S Can Produce Hope, Which Produces More Forgiveness

R/S can produce hope when the R/S is characterized by trust, dedication, and other measures of the Sacred–victim relationship. That in turn can empower people through a sense of agency, through knowledge of pathways, and through a motivation to persevere when one does not see desired goals as reachable. In this relational context, people can therefore risk forgiving.

R/S Can Promote Forgiveness and Hope, Which Produce Better Mental Health

Both forgiveness and hope can be religiously inspired—not only by a positive Sacred–victim relationship but also by Sacred–offender relationships in which offenders are perceived to have similar sacred relationships as the victim has. Hope can decrease depression because depression is characterized by hopelessness. Hope can also provide confidence in oneself or in a sacred agent, which thus can mitigate anxiety. Spirituality—one's private experience of closeness or connection with the Sacred—can motivate people to let religion affect them. Both hope and forgiveness produce better relationships between ingroups and outgroups. Those improved relationships can in turn reduce stress (for reviews, see Worthington, 2006) and thereby lead to better mental and physical health (for reviews, see Toussaint et al., 2015).

Forgiveness Can Lead to Hope, Which Can Lead to Closer Relationships with the Sacred

Emotions and motivations change through forgiveness, especially when forgiving is religiously motivated. These changes in emotions and motivations build hope. Hope feeds into a spiritual closeness to God (i.e., a more trusting Sacred–victim relationship), which promotes further willingness to forgive, trust in God, and pursue a better future. However, a large caveat is that the Sacred–victim relationship depends on much more than forgiveness (for reviews, see Worthington & Wade, 2020). If some other relational variables poison the relationship, forgiveness alone will not keep it positive, and if the relationship fails, it will likely cause religious/spiritual struggle rather than a closer relationship to the Sacred.

Causal Pathways Need to Be Mapped Through Longitudinal Research

Overall, the theoretical connections among R/S (closeness with the Sacred), forgiveness, and hope seem to act along multiple causal and correlative paths, as our three hypotheses posit. Generative theory is needed to identify the conditions under

which each causal or correlational path is active. Longitudinal and experimental research is needed to map the causal sequences. Only with additional theory and research will other generative hypotheses be possible.

Applications of the Hope-Inclusive Relational Spirituality Model of Forgiveness

Psychotherapy Worthington and Sandage (2016) applied the forgiveness and relational spirituality model in brief and longer-term psychotherapy, couple and family therapy, and group psychotherapy. Most of that application was with secular clients, which included religious, spiritual-but-not religious, and nonspiritual/nonreligious clients. The model did not specifically consider religious or spiritual populations, such as people from different religions or different denominations within a religion. Theology was not included. The model can be profitably expanded to religious and spiritual populations by considering and articulating more fine-grained descriptions of people's religious and spiritual beliefs, values, practices, and behaviors.

Clinical practice with religious and spiritual clients (and to inform treatment when clients do and do not want their religious/spiritual beliefs, values, and practices explicitly included in their treatment) could be improved if hope were considered more explicitly. On one hand, many patients say that their religious or spiritual beliefs, values, and practices are not treated with respect by mental health providers or that the use of "secular" evidence-based practices feels like clinicians are using a one-size-fits-all psychological approach instead of a patient-sensitive approach (Vieten & Lukoff, 2022). On the other hand, some people who receive psychological treatment from R/S-identified professionals complain that sometimes such clinicians spiritualize psychotherapy and treat helping as a one-size-fits-all spiritual problem that has a prescribed spiritual cure (e.g., prayer for healing or divine comfort). Relational spirituality seeks to discern the person's relationship with the Sacred (and the relationship between the offender and the Sacred and the transgression and the Sacred) to design a holistic and patient-responsive treatment.

Clergy Counseling Counseling by clergy must be contextualized within broader interventions in the religious or spiritual community. Those interventions include religious/spiritual education about forgiveness and hope (to congregants across the lifespan), ministry by lay helpers, provision of material and social resources to congregants, and leadership from clergy. The hope-inclusive forgiveness and relational spirituality model can inform preparation of clergy's public expositions of sacred texts, which then can influence the congregation through psychoeducation. In addition, a relational theology can help form the theology that is used to inform ministry and spiritual practice throughout the congregation.

Recommendations for Research

Limitations to our reviews of research should be seen in light of Davis et al.'s (2013) meta-analysis. They noted that we need more theory-driven research, culturally diverse samples, longitudinal designs, and intervention studies. Those limitations still hold in 2021, and we again offer those as goals for the next decade. We emphasized the need for more theory and research of the hope-inclusive forgiveness and relational spirituality model. Forgiveness and hope are not clinical variables whose deficit yields diagnoses. However, they deserve their place in studies of the mechanisms involved in interventions. Both basic and applied research are sorely needed.

Conclusions

In the present chapter, we have outlined a hope-inclusive forgiveness and relational spirituality model. Over the last decade, hope has been correlationally related to important aspects of the evidence-based relational spirituality model of forgiveness. In this chapter, we have theorized that hope might also be related via Sacred–victim, Sacred–offender, and Sacred–transgression interrelationships with forgiveness. Future research must investigate the hope-inclusive forgiveness and relational spirituality model, using causal-testing research designs.

We began with Smedes's (1996) observation that people can imagine the future but not control it. Smedes (1996) suggested that hope was the answer to that dilemma. We have suggested that interventionists might help religious and spiritual people to experience more positive outcomes from their wrestling over whether to forgive if they consider the motivating role of hope and the effects forgiving can have on long-term hope.

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