



The Influence of Forgiveness on Health and Healing

2021 ADVENTIST CONFERENCE ON
FAMILY RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

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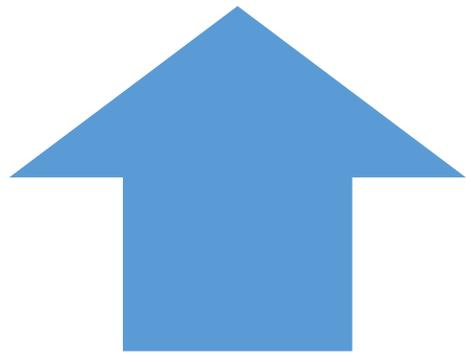


Forgiveness is a gift to myself.

**I FORGIVE, AND
I SET MYSELF FREE.**

Louise Hay

Relationship of Chronic Stress and Health



Perceived
Chronic Stress

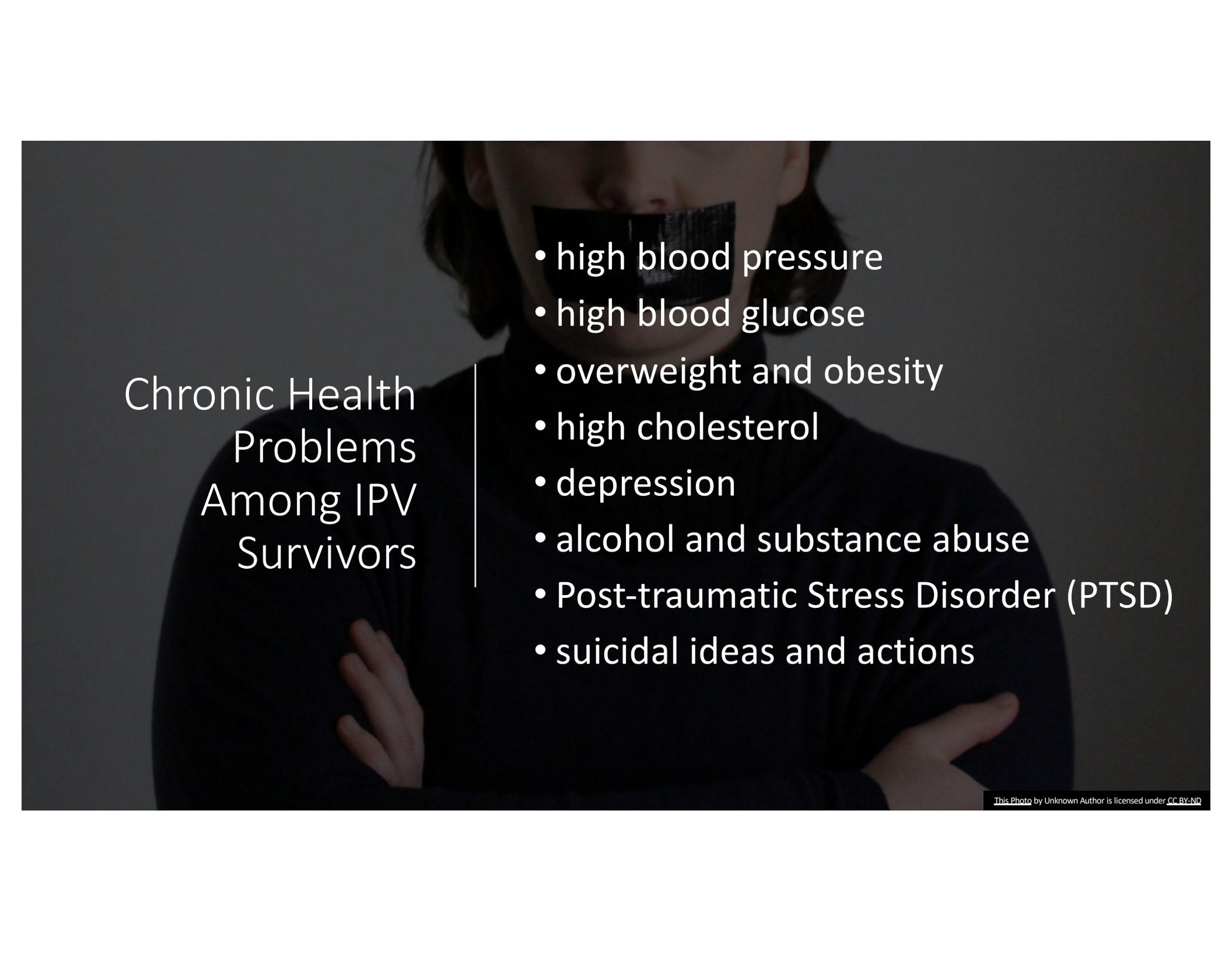


Health

Psychobiological Stress

- Hormones released by the hypothalamus (HPA-Axis) in response to stress activate the release of cortisol
- **Sustained release of cortisol leads to:**
 - Hypertension
 - Immunosuppression
 - Cardiovascular disease
 - **Brain:** causes atrophy of neurons and structural changes in the hippocampus and amygdala.





Chronic Health Problems Among IPV Survivors

- high blood pressure
- high blood glucose
- overweight and obesity
- high cholesterol
- depression
- alcohol and substance abuse
- Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- suicidal ideas and actions



Other Health Outcomes

frequent
headaches

chronic pain

difficulty
sleeping

activity
limitations

poor physical
health

poor mental
health

asthma

irritable bowel
syndrome

diabetes

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE)

*Felitti et al

Abuse

- Emotional
- Physical

Neglect

- Emotional
- Physical

Household dysfunction

- Domestic violence against the mother
- Substance abuse
- Depression or mental illness
- Parental separation or divorce
- Incarceration

ACE Study:
increased
incidence
of...
*Felitti et al

- STD's (250%)
- Severe obesity (160%)
- Cancer (190%)
- Stroke (240%)
- Diabetes (160%)
- Ischemic heart disease (220%)
- Liver disease (240%)
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) (390%)
- Multiple (>50) sexual partners (320%)

parentheses denotes
risk increase for
ACE scores 4 or
more vs. 0

ACE Study:
increased
incidence
of...
*Felitti et al

- Suicide attempts (1,220%)
- Depression (460%)
- Decreased health-related quality of life (220%)
- Alcoholism (740%)
- Illicit drug use (470%)
- Current smoking (220%)

parentheses denotes
risk increase for
ACE scores 4 or
more vs. 0

Adverse
Childhood
Experiences
Study findings
(Felitti & Nanda)

- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are common, threatening, & often denied.
- ACEs have a profound effect on **later addiction, health risks, disease, and death.**
- This combination makes ACEs the **leading determinant of the health and social well-being** of the USA.



Negative
Health
Outcomes
from Child
Abuse &
Neglect

- cardiovascular disease,
- type 2 diabetes
- dysregulated immune system
- substance abuse
- cancer
- obesity
- overweight
- premature mortality
- Substance use and other addictions



Mental Health Consequences

- Smaller Frontal Lobes
- Negative psychological consequences and poor mental health outcomes
 - Fear
 - Shame
 - Guilt
 - Stigma
 - Depression, Anxiety, PTSD
- Increased stress load further impacts physical health and quality of life



PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Like with prevention, the identification of **protective factors** can reduce the negative health impact of abuse

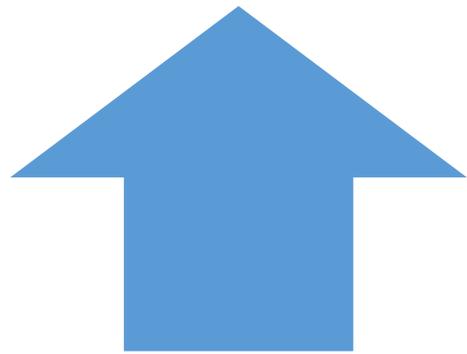
A small green plant with several leaves is growing out of a crack in a concrete surface. The background is a dark, textured concrete with several cracks. The overall image is dimly lit, with the plant being the central focus.

Resilience

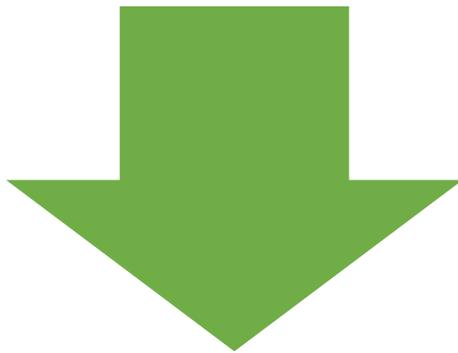
Positive coping, adaptation, and persistence, ability to “bounce back” successfully despite exposure to adverse circumstances, severe risk, or trauma.

Campbell, 2011

Relationship of Chronic Stress and Health

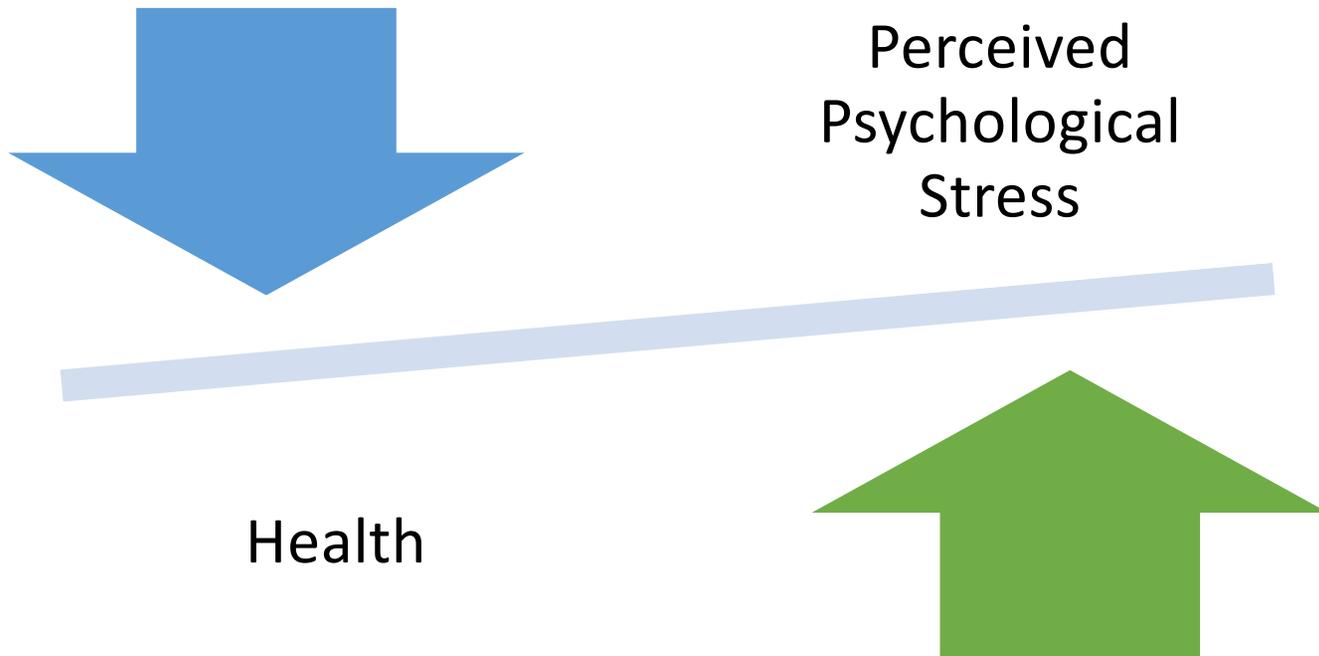


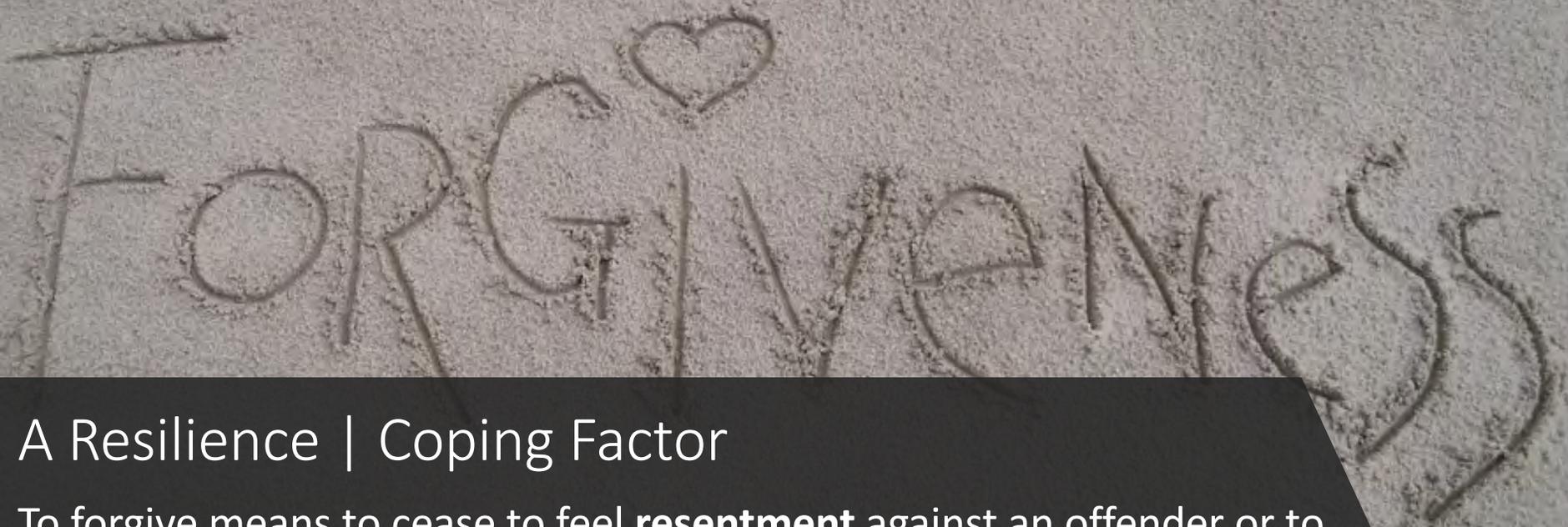
Resilience Factors



Perceived Stress

Relationship of Perceived Chronic Stress





FORGIVENESS

A Resilience | Coping Factor

To forgive means to cease to feel **resentment** against an offender or to grant relief from payment of a debt. (Merriem-Webster)

To forgive implies that one gives up **vengeful feelings** against another.

Resilience Equation

Perceived Stress
(allostatic load)

Selective Vulnerability
& Propensity to illness

=

Resiliency Factors
such as Forgiveness

Types of Forgiveness

- Divine Forgiveness
- Self-forgiveness
- Intergroup Forgiveness
- Forgiveness of others:
 - Decisional Forgiveness
 - Emotional Forgiveness





Forgiveness Influence on Health

Physical
Health

Mental
Health

Social
Health

Forgiveness and Physical Health

(Davis, Green, Reid, Moloney, & Burnette, 2015)

Cardiovascular Risk Factors

- Lower Blood Pressure if high forgiveness trait (desire to forgive)
- Lower blood pressure and heart rate if high state of forgiveness (having forgiven someone)
- Higher blood pressure and heart rate if failure to forgive

Motivation Important

- If motivated by religious duty (or pressured to forgive) tended to hold on to anger and had higher BP while describing offense or conflict
- Workplace study: those who forgave due to moral duty had less stress but not better overall health.
- If they had no choice but to forgive, experienced more stress and worse physical health

Forgiveness and Physical Health

(Toussaint & Worthington, 2017)

Perceived Stress

- In one study where college students described being wronged or betrayed by a close friend or relationship partner, those who reported greater forgiveness also reported better health. The better health was explained by their reduced perception of stress.

Emotional Forgiveness

- There is evidence that *emotional forgiveness* has the most health effect because it reduces stress-related problems. This type of forgiveness toward others takes away the negative effects of anger and anxiety.

Forgiveness and Physical Health

(Karen Swartz, Johns Hopkins)

Other benefits

- lowers the risk of heart attack
- improves cholesterol levels
- Improves sleep
- reducing perception of pain

Forgiveness and Mental Health

(Karen Swartz, Johns Hopkins)

Chronic Anger and Unforgiveness

- Increases risk for depression
- PTSD
- Anxiety

Forgiveness

- Decreased levels of depression, anxiety and stress

Forgiveness and Mental Health

(Davis, Green, Reid, Moloney, & Burnette, 2015)

College students and depression

- Survivors of abuse who experienced a recent breakup, unforgiveness was associated with greater depressive symptoms explained by a loss of control and perceived threat.
- Those in a 90 min forgiveness intervention had less depressive symptoms and more well being.

College students and anxiety

- Among students who experienced significant trauma (sexual assault, child abuse, dating abuse, etc.) with follow up feelings of fear, helplessness and loss of control, those who forgave the perpetrator experienced less symptoms of PTSD compared to those who did not.

Forgiveness and Social Health

(Davis, Green, Reid, Moloney, & Burnette, 2015)

Forgiveness is associated with stronger likelihood of resolving a betrayal and predicted greater relationship satisfaction for both survivor and perpetrator.

Forgiveness predicted relationship commitment, increased levels of closeness, less revenge, avoidance and more benevolence towards the offender.

Research Study Among Adventists



Predictive | cross-sectional study design

Secondary analysis of data from the Biopsychosocial Religion and Health Study (BRHS) – an epidemiological study of **Seventh-day Adventists (N=10283)** BRHS-1R01AG02634¹

Subgroup of the Adventist Health Study (AHS-2)

Reinert, K. Campbell, J., Bandeen-Roche, K., Sharps, P., & Lee, J. (July 15, 2015), Gender and Race Variations of the Intersection between Religious Involvement, Early Trauma and Adult Health. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 47(4), 318-327. Epub June 28, 2015. doi: 10.1111/jnu.12144.

Religious Involvement effects on Health

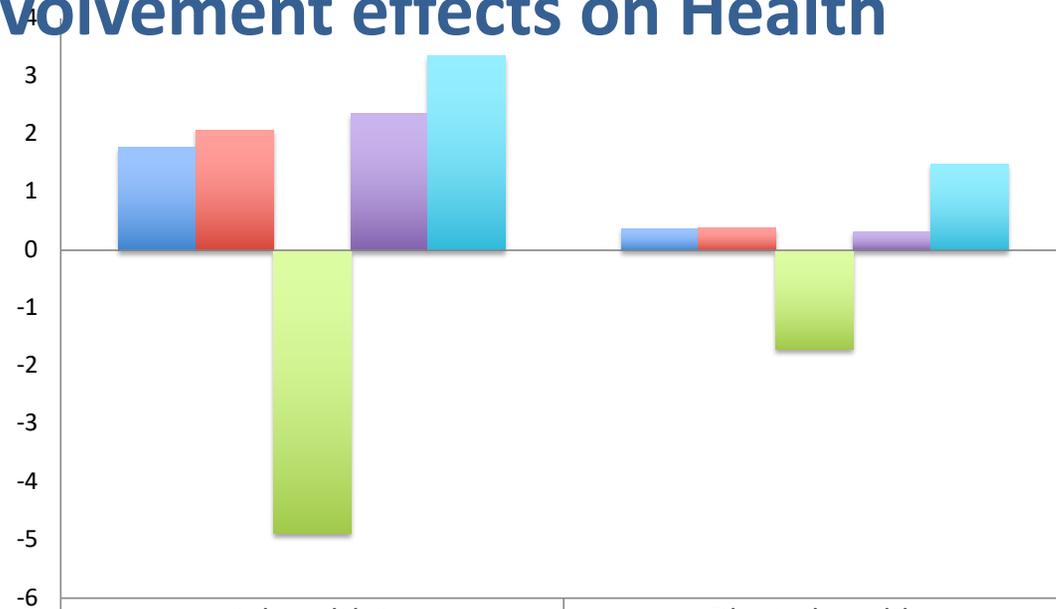
N=10,283

** p<.01

**p<.0001

Note. Controlling for age, gender, race, income, Education.

HEALTH SCORES (B)

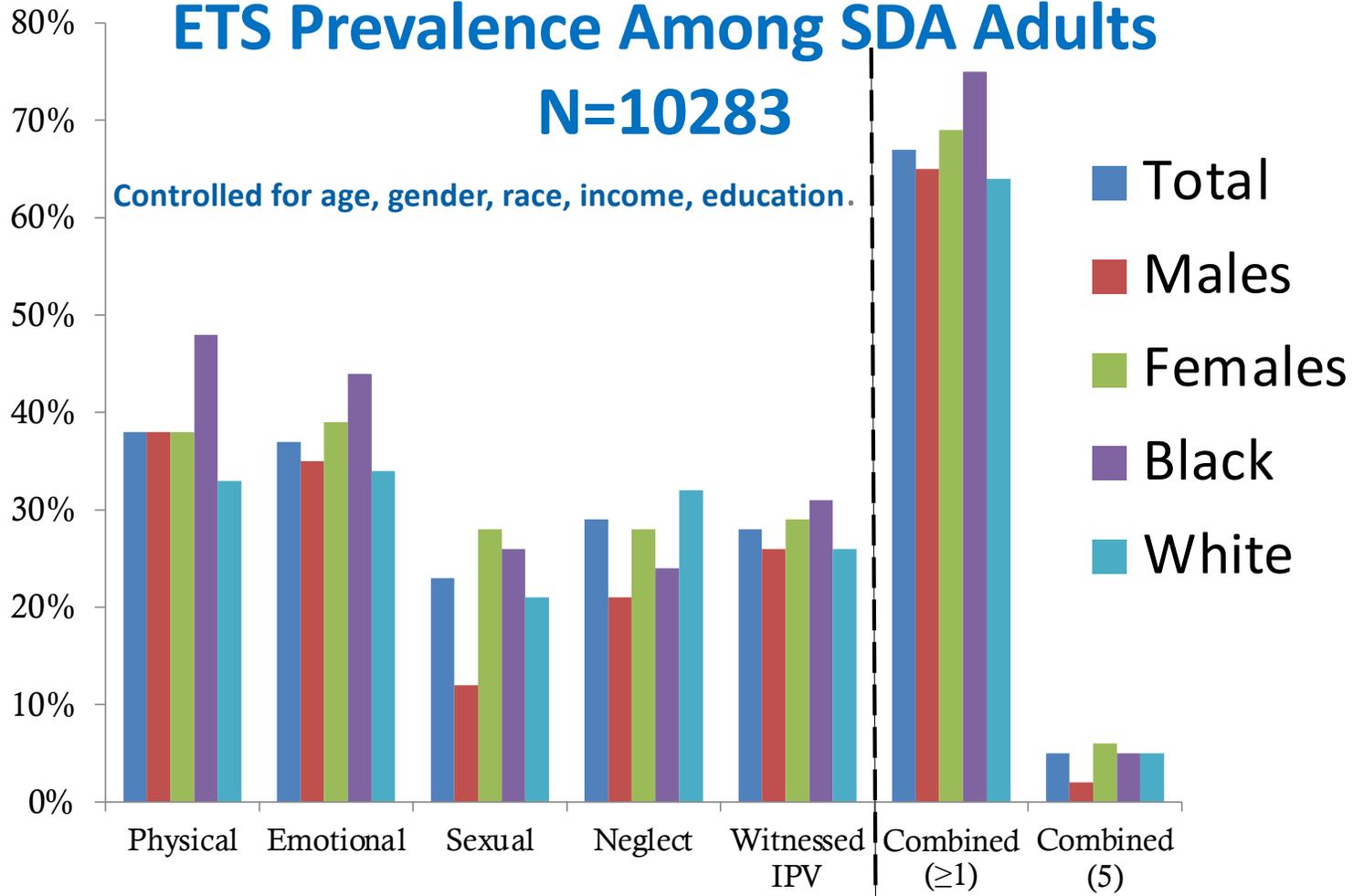


	Mental Health Score (B)		Physical Health Score (B)	
Intrinsic Religiosity	1.78	***	0.39	***
Positive Religious Coping	2.08	***	0.4	**
Negative Religious Coping	-4.89	***	-1.7	***
Forgiveness	2.36	**	0.34	**
Gratitude	3.36	***	1.5	***

Reinert, K. Campbell, J., Bandeen-Roche, K., Sharps, P., & Lee, J. (July 15, 2015), Gender and Race Variations of the Intersection between Religious Involvement, Early Trauma and Adult Health. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 47(4), 318-327. Epub June 28, 2015. doi: 10.1111/jnu.12144.

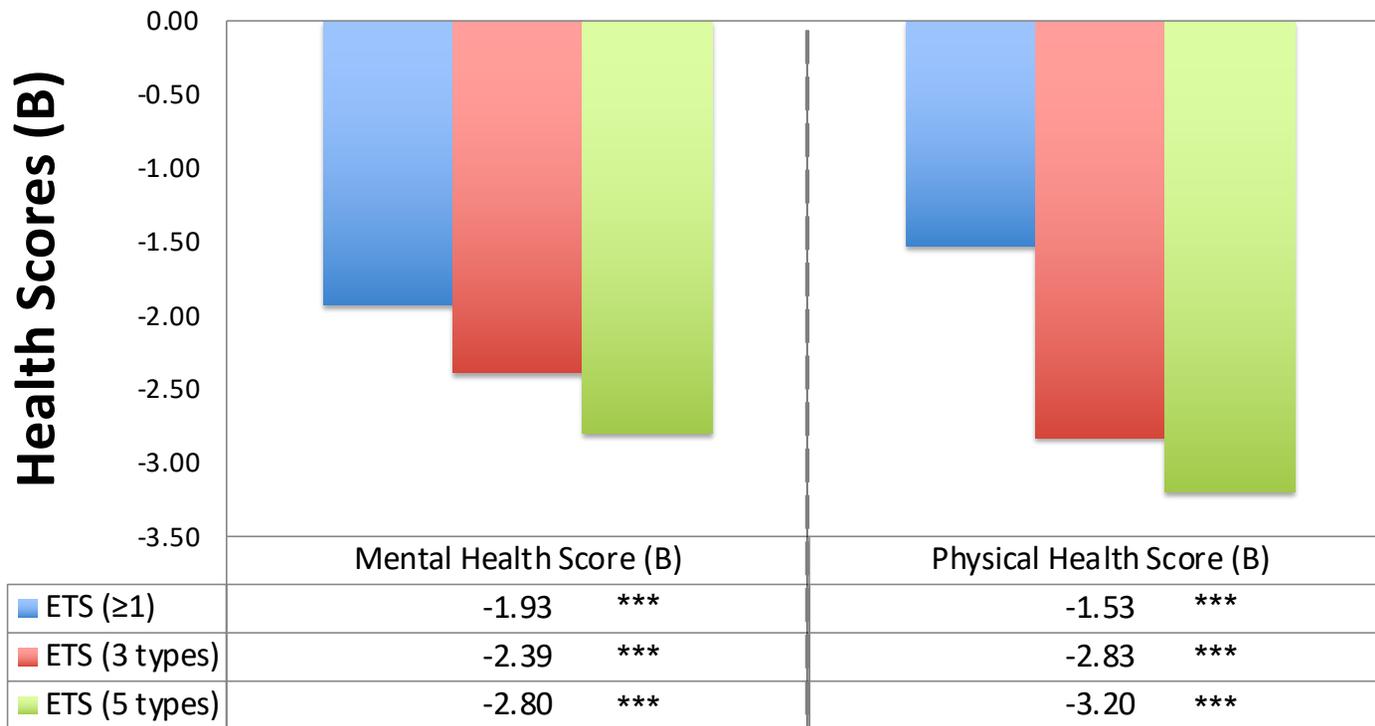
ETS Prevalence Among SDA Adults

N=10283



Reinert, K. Campbell, J., Bandeen-Roche, K., Szanton, S., & Lee, J (September, 2016) The role of religious involvement in the relationships between early trauma and health outcomes among adult survivors. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Trauma*, 9, 231-241. doi:10.1007/s40653-015-0067-7. First online on November 23, 2015. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4969318/>

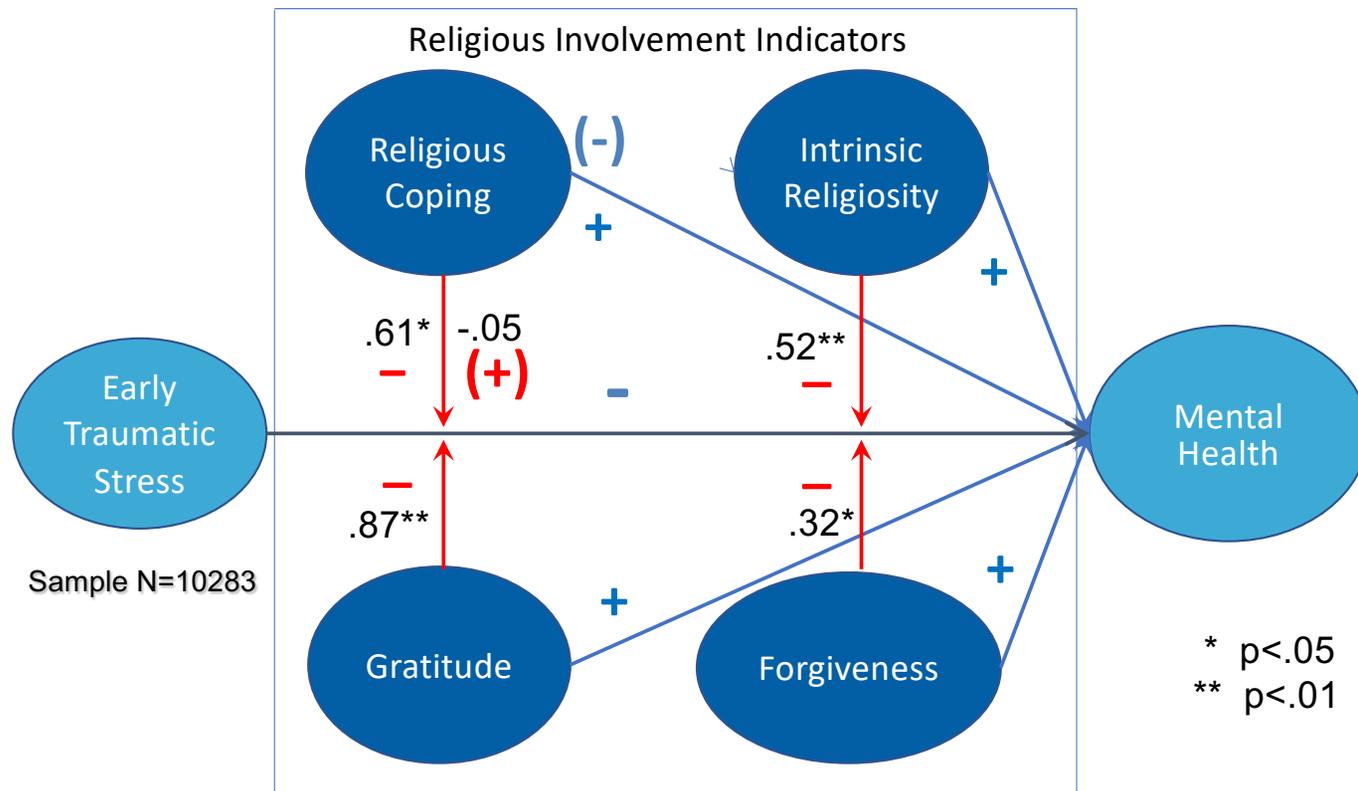
Early Traumatic Stress Effects on Health



N=10,283 ***p<.0001 Note. ETS (3 and 5 types = secondary findings). **Controlled for age, gender, race, income, education.**

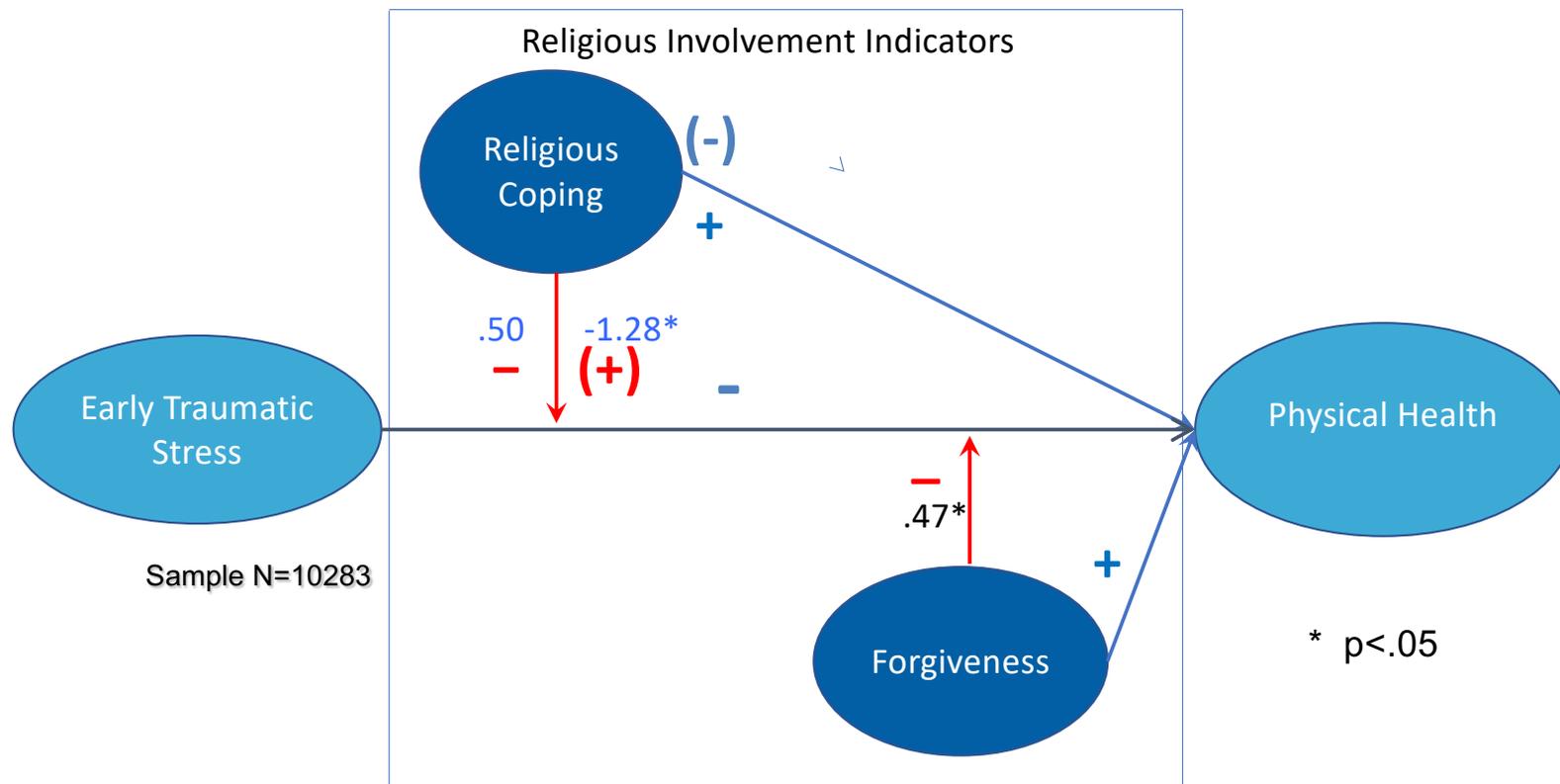
Reinert, K. Campbell, J., Bandeen-Roche, K., Szanton, S., & Lee, J (September, 2016) The role of religious involvement in the relationships between early trauma and health outcomes among adult survivors. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Trauma*, 9, 231-241. doi:10.1007/s40653-015-0067-7. First online on November 23, 2015. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4969318/>

DATA SUPPORTED: ETS-RI-Mental Health Model



Reinert, K. Campbell, J., Bandeen-Roche, K., Szanton, S., & Lee, J (September, 2016) The role of religious involvement in the relationships between early trauma and health outcomes among adult survivors. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Trauma*, 9, 231-241. doi:10.1007/s40653-015-0067-7. First online on November 23, 2015. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4969318/>

DATA SUPPORTED: ETS-RI-Physical Health Model (FEMALES)



Reinert, K. Campbell, J., Bandeen-Roche, K., Sharps, P., & Lee, J. (July 15, 2015), Gender and Race Variations of the Intersection between Religious Involvement, Early Trauma and Adult Health. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 47(4), 318-327. Epub June 28, 2015. doi: 10.1111/jnu.12144.

Forgiveness is not:

Ignoring	Ignoring the offense
Denying	Denying the reality of the offense
Diminishing	Diminishing the importance of what happened
Excusing	Excusing the offender
Holding	Holding the offender hostage

REACH Model

Everett Worthington

Recall the Hurt

Empathize with the offender

Altruistic gift given

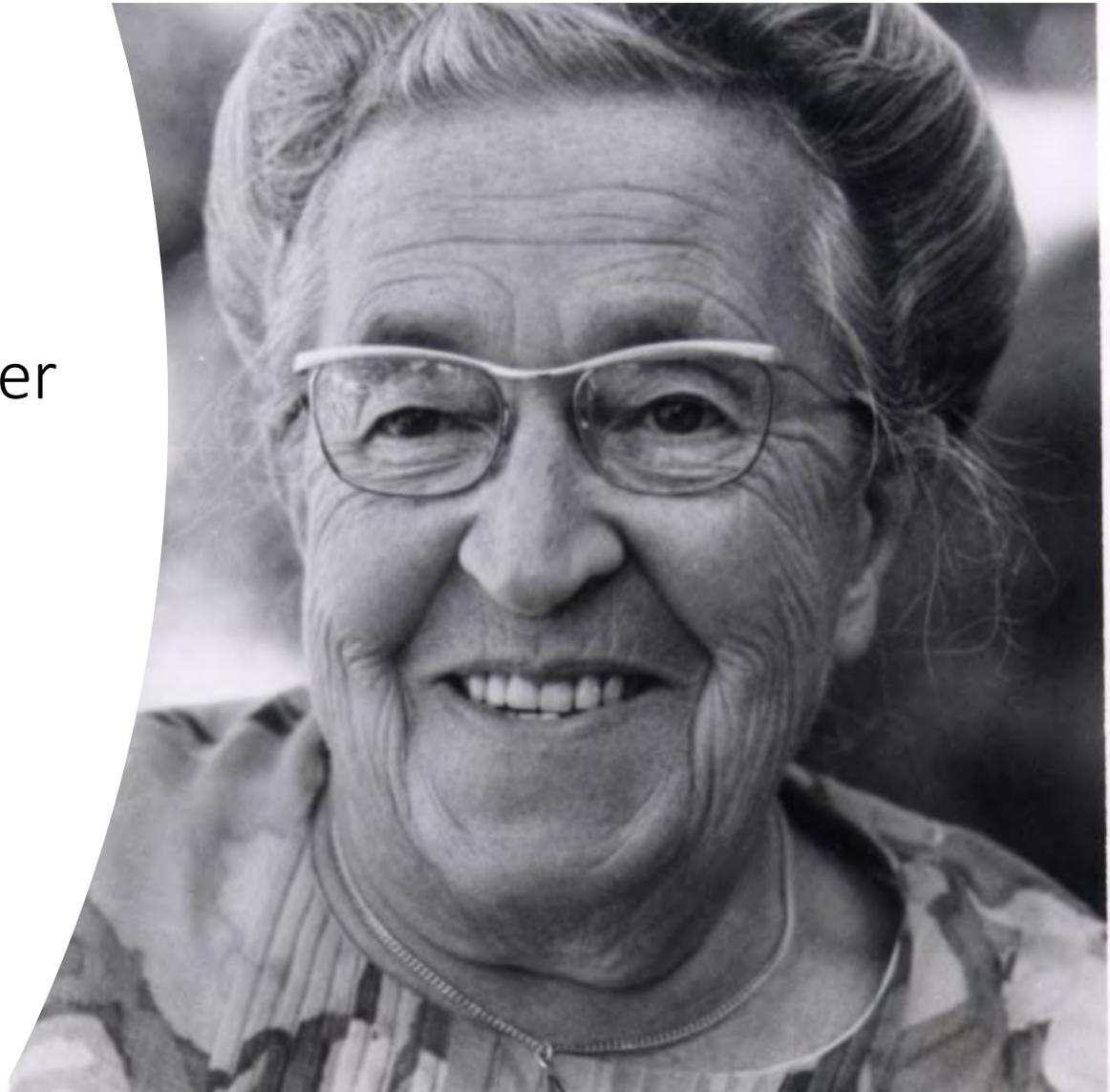
Commitment to Forgive

Hold on to Forgiveness

Corrie Ten Boom

Survivor, Writer, Preacher

- WW2 - Harlem, Holland
- Taken to Concentration Camp
- Lost father and sister Betsy
- Movie: The Hiding Place
- Book: Tramp for the Lord





Corrie Ten Boom

“Forgiveness is the key which unlocks the door of resentment and the handcuff of hatred. It breaks the chains of bitterness and the shackles of selfishness”

Ten Boom & Buckingham, 1974

Corrie Ten Boom *Tramp For the Lord*

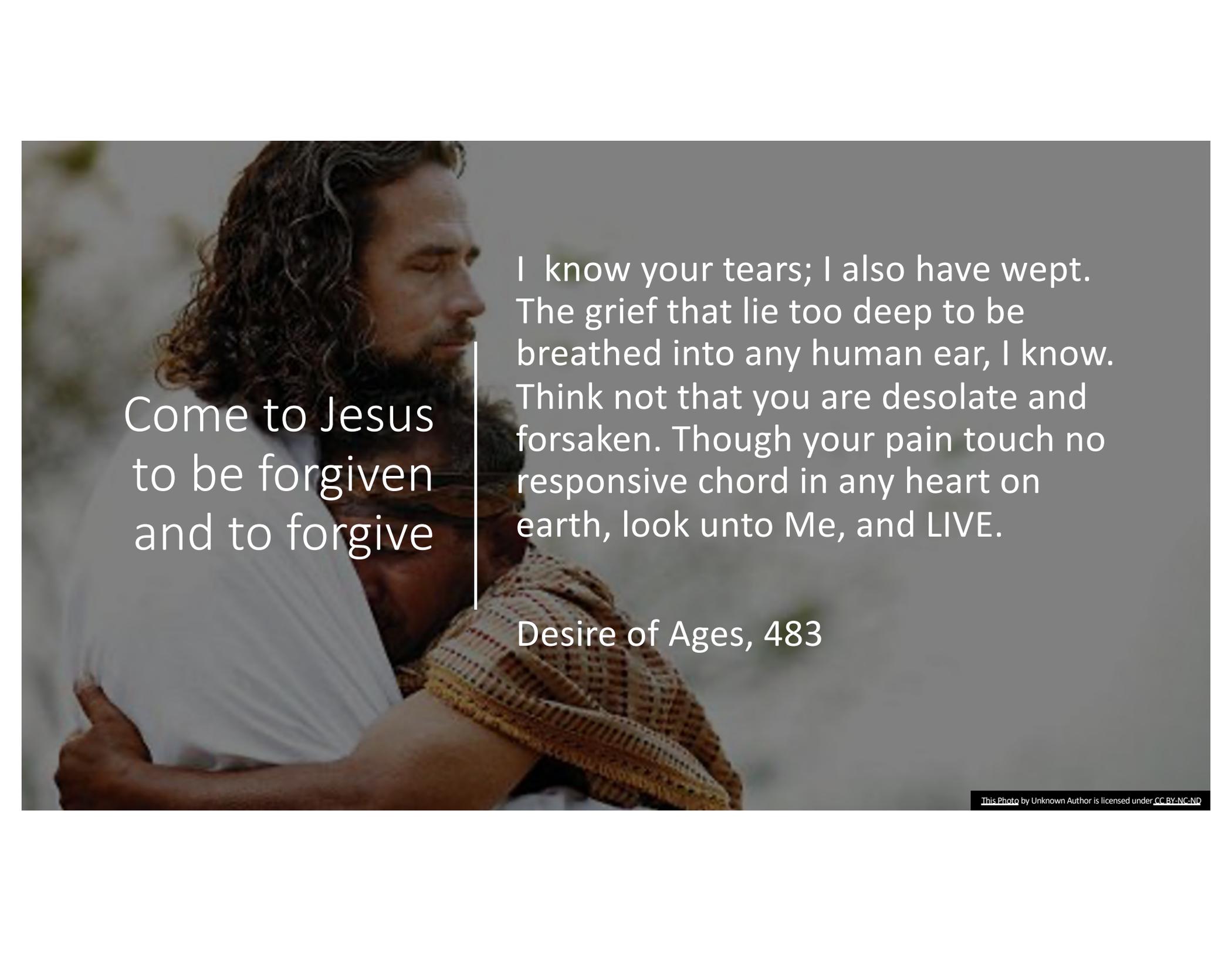
“Those who were able to forgive their former enemies were able also to return to the outside world and rebuild their lives, no matter what the physical scars. Those who nursed their bitterness remained invalids. It was as simple and as horrible as that.”



2 Corinthians 4:8,9

We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.”





Come to Jesus
to be forgiven
and to forgive

I know your tears; I also have wept.
The grief that lie too deep to be
breathed into any human ear, I know.
Think not that you are desolate and
forsaken. Though your pain touch no
responsive chord in any heart on
earth, look unto Me, and LIVE.

Desire of Ages, 483

The Role of Faith Communities

1. Promote **resilience**
2. Foster accountability as well as teach the forgiveness process
3. Provide love, support, community and healing environment
4. Develop training/resources, referrals, and ongoing research on resilience in the face of abuse
5. Foster trauma-informed churches



It begins with Me

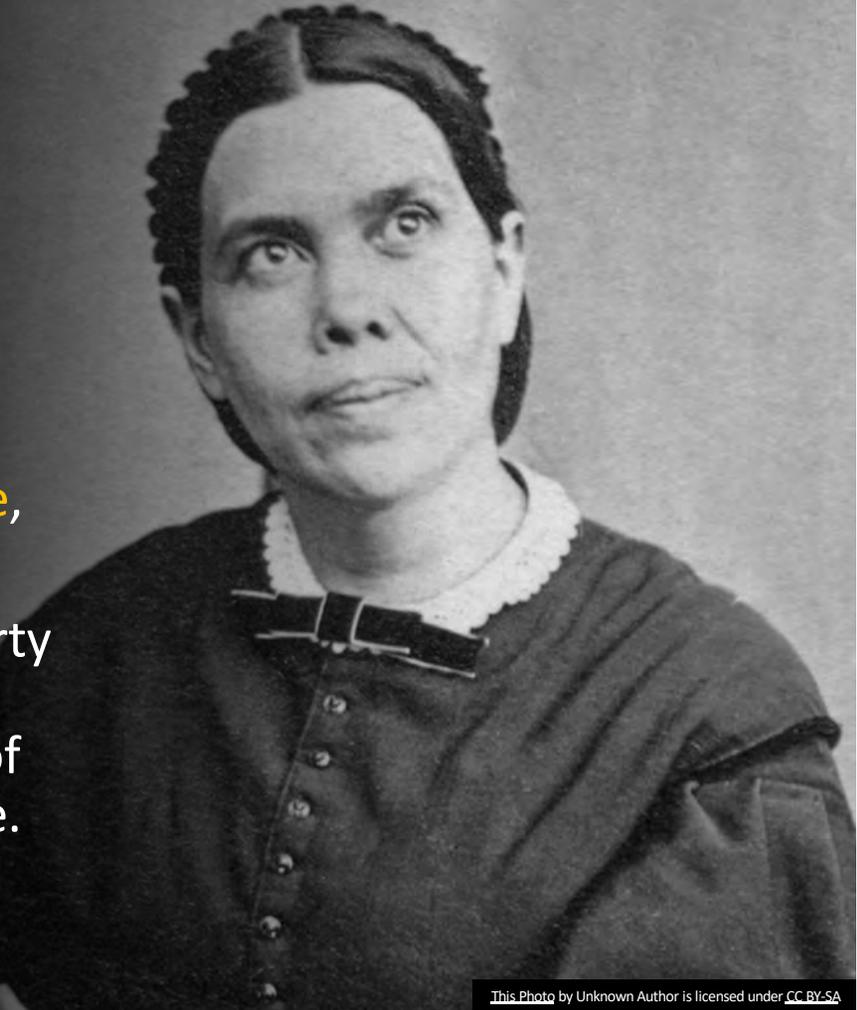
Adventist Home, p. 178.

How many dishonor Christ and misrepresent His character in the home circle!

How many do not manifest **patience, forbearance, forgiveness, and true love!**

Many have their likes and dislikes and feel at liberty to manifest their own perverse disposition rather than to reveal the will, the works, the character of Christ. The life of Jesus is full of kindness and love.

Are we growing into His divine nature?"



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