

Being Human Is Hard: Choose Forgiveness: The Power of Connections, Courage, Compassion, and Creativity

Christy Heacock

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Being Human Is Hard is a healing self-help book that equips people to choose to forgive.

Christy Heacock's narrative self-book *Being Human Is Hard* conveys the power and possibility of forgiveness.

Forgiveness, according to the book, is a universal virtue; all world religions extol its goodness. But in everyday life, many people struggle to embrace the idea, let alone practice it. The book introduces thirteen forgiveness heroes—people from a range of religions, backgrounds, and genders—who walked the road of forgiveness. Their stories are inspiring, empowering, and challenging. Each faced high stakes—including oppression in Palestine, systematic racism on an American Indian reservation, and an abusive childhood—and did the difficult inner and outer work of forgiving.

The book uses an approachable, compelling, qualitative research method to glean themes from its narratives. All the stories, the book shows, involve connections, courage, compassion, and creativity on the path to forgiveness. The book showcases the individuality of each story, but it leans into common patterns to equip those hoping to engage in their own forgiveness; for instance, all of the stories involve a role model who helped guide the focal person to forgiveness. The patterns are helpful; this self-help approach is inviting without being dictatorial, and is marked by soul-deep compassion for everyone, hero or otherwise, in the narratives.

Shared with academic detachment, the narratives take center stage, letting each person speak for themselves. This complements the book's direct, practical teachings for the mental, emotional, spiritual, and relational work that forgiveness involves. It addresses key topics like creating appropriate boundaries and the humility and necessity of self-forgiveness. It helps people embrace learning so that they can build the awareness they need to make choices that honor themselves and others.

As it moves from introducing themes toward explanations of the continual head and heart work involved in forgiveness, this progressive book manages to emphasize its themes throughout. It addresses common misconceptions about forgiveness, both through the stories and struggles of its narrators and through more direct instruction. It shows that true forgiveness doesn't sacrifice justice and does not ignore or excuse wrongdoing, and advocates for a clear understanding of what happened, without getting trapped in blame. It shows the power of self-honoring humility, too—a place of courage not controlled by fear, avoidance, or revenge. And it eschews any idea that forgiveness is weak, instead showing it to be a path of deep, life-altering courage.

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MELISSA WUSKE (October 26, 2021)

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