

When not to forgive essay sample

[Life](#), [Emotions](#)



Is forgiving always the right thing to do? For me the answer is a simple no. The best example of some of the dangers of forgiveness is in *The Sunflower* by Simon Wisenthal. *The Sunflower* is a book which describes Simon's, the Jewish protagonist in a concentration camp, encounter with Karl, a SS soldier on his death bed. Simon is pulled to Karl's side while Karl tells of his time in the SS with much regret. Karl, overcome with guilt and remorse for his actions, asks Simon to forgive him. Simon, unable to decide, leaves. I do not believe that Simon should have forgiven Karl for three reasons, Simon cannot forgive on behalf of others, Simon has no reason to forgive on his own behalf, and Karl is not deserving of forgiveness. Karl describes the time when he and other SS soldiers herded many Jews into a large house. The house was filled with people to the point of nearly overflowing. He, and other soldiers, then grenade the house, setting it ablaze.

They then kill those who tried to escape through the windows with machine guns. These people, hundreds of them, died at Karl's hand. Would any of these people have forgiven Karl? Simon should not forgive Karl on behalf of the people in the house. Doing so would be unethical, the reason is best described by Simon's fellow prisoner, Josek, " You would have no right to do this in the name of people who had not authorized you to do so" (Wisenthal 65). The problem lies with Simon not having the authority to do so. What if one of the people who died vowed never to forgive those who committed this atrocity? What if there is a survivor which still does not want Karl to be forgiven? It is very safe to assume there were people—dead and alive—from the burning which would not have wanted to forgive Karl.

Chances are that there is at least one person who might not be ready to part with their feelings of anger and resentment. Perhaps there are people who want Karl to suffer, as they have. If Simon were to forgive on the victims behalf Simon would be absolving their feelings of anger and resentment for them. In forgiving Simon would be assuming that the victims no longer wish to hold on to these feelings of anger and resentment. If Simon's assumption is not correct, then there is wrong done.

Simon, with his incorrect assumption, is depriving the victims of their feelings. This is the wrong being done. In forgiveness Simon would have decided to take from the victims their anger and resentment when they were not ready. By depriving these feelings, Wiesenthal is trivializing the victim's experiences from which created these feelings. Should Simon forgive on behalf of those in the house, he would be denying them their feelings and their experience. This is not Simon's right to do so. Until it is known from those Karl has acted upon that they wish to forgive Karl, Simon should not forgive Karl.

I do not mean to say that Simon cannot forgive Karl as I do not believe it. I do think Simon should not forgive on the behalf of others, however I do believe Simon can release his own feelings of resentment and anger towards Karl. These feelings arose in Simon when he listened to Karl's story. However, I do believe that this should not be done either, as the benefit does not outweigh the cost.

In order to forgive Simon must let go of anger and resentment. This is not a trivial process. To do so requires a great focus and determination. Carrie

Wrigley, LCSW, tells one of the most effective methods which help one move past these emotions in her article Six Steps to Forgiveness, “ Some meditate, releasing their cares through intensive and appreciative focus on that which is good.” (Wrigley). Wrigley mentions meditation because it is one of the most effective methods of letting go. What is ultimately required in letting go is a focus on the good, whether it is done through meditation or otherwise. For Simon, this would require great effort.

How can he focus on what is good when he is constantly at face with death? The time which Karl asks for forgiveness, Simon is a prisoner in a concentration camp. Simon is working hard, doing extreme manual labor. He is emaciated, having been underfed for years. He is constantly on the verge of death, each day consumed with the fear of being slaughtered, starving, and dying of disease. How can a person in this position be expected to go through the emotional work of forgiving? Josek describes it best, “ If we survive this camp—and I don’t think we will... then there will be plenty of time to discuss the question of forgiveness.” (Wisenthal, p. 75). Josek is reminding Simon that forgiveness is a very low priority. Karl is asking Simon to ignore the immense hunger pangs, the aching muscles, the eternal fatigue, the wounds, etc. to focus on Karl’s goodness.

There is no reason for Simon to go through the effort which forgiving takes. I do not think that Simon has anything to benefit from by forgiving Karl. Anger and resentment are normal emotions to keep. They are appropriate reactions to oppression and injustice, which Simon has faced. Some might say that Simon is haunted by these feelings, citing the time in which Simon

realizes that he is still dwelling on his encounter with Karl. Those who argue that Simon is haunted have not looked at the text closely enough.

Simon asks himself, " Why is this business not finished and done with? That seemed to me the most important question." (Wiesenthal, p. 81). Simon is haunted not by his emotions of anger or resentment but by his indecision. He is wondering why the situation has continued on, and I strongly believe that this is because he did not make a decision to forgive or not to forgive.

Deciding not to forgive Karl would provide Simon with just as much relief, and require much less emotional work. Karl would find this relief without the work of forgiveness. For those who still believe that Karl would benefit for forgiveness, I have one final argument to persuade otherwise.

Karl has not atoned for his crimes. I believe that there is no limit to what we can forgive, however a person should earn forgiveness. Would you forgive someone who has caused you much emotion turmoil if they only felt guilt? I would not, as the wrongdoer should make up for what he has done. In forgiving a person we are absolving their feelings of guilt. Forgiveness is telling the wrongdoer they are no longer bound by the consequences of their actions. For Karl these consequences are guilt, regret and remorse. Karl should still face these feelings as he has not earned his right to be free from the suffering he has caused himself and the people he killed. I believe that a person should try to negate or make up for the impact their wrongdoings have caused. In doing so, a person would show progress towards changing themselves. In making up for our mistakes we are solidifying the lesson we have learned.

This progress is crucial in changing ourselves as a result of our mistakes. A mistake is a natural thing, regardless of how severe, however the process of changing oneself as a result is what allows us to put it behind us. If we were not to change from our mistakes they will likely be repeated again. This process ensures that we have not only learned from our mistakes, but also changed from them. This is the best way to ensure that they do not happen again. Some might say that Karl has learned from his mistake. This I agree with because his desire to repent and atone for his mistakes, I believe, is real. This is a very important first step in the process of learning from mistakes. That is all it is, the first step, which deserves accolades but more must be done to deserve forgiveness. No change has been solidified in Karl. There is a danger in forgiving people too early.

If Simon were to forgive Karl, and Karl survived, how do we know that he might not repeat the same mistakes he made before? Sometimes people wish to right their mistakes on their deathbed and make the same mistakes once they recover. How do we know this is not the case? Simon does not know that Karl would continue on the path of redemption. I believe the guilt and shame which results from acknowledging our wrongdoings serves as a motivator to correct them. It is certainly why Karl seeks forgiveness, he wishes to abolish his suffering. If these emotions are released before the transformation is complete there will be no motive to finish changing oneself. If one has not changed then they will repeat the same mistakes they have made before.

We do know that Karl is unable to repeat any of the same mistakes he made as he dies within hours of meeting Simon. Some might argue that Karl should be forgiven, he does not have time to change himself. This is still very dangerous as it sets a bad precedent for those still alive. Consider this scenario: another SS soldier, riddled with guilt, learns Karl was forgiven for only having expressed remorse. This other soldier might come to believe all he needs to do is express his remorse and guilt to be free of it. If this happens then he will likely repeat those same mistakes. Change is needed to prevent ourselves from making the same mistakes.

This is why one should only be forgiven once change is made. Rewarding those for only doing some of the work should never be done. 251. 45 Michael Hyland 3212349977 Simon should not decide to forgive for others, nor should he go through the work of forgiving on his own behalf. Lastly, Karl is undeserving of forgiveness altogether. These three points touch on some of the negative aspects of forgiveness. This goes against what I was taught when I was young, and I assume it does for many others. It is typical for children to be told that forgiveness is best. We were all children who were taught this at some point. If we were all to blindly believe that forgiveness is best we run the risk of having some of the negative consequences of forgiveness, described above, come true.

Works Cited

Wrigley, Carrie. "Six Steps to Forgiveness" Morning Light Counseling. Morning Light Counseling Resource Library. 2013.