



## Dr. Chalmer's Newsletter - Issue #21

Everything about relationships! Be kind, don't panic, and have faith.



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### Welcome to Issue #20!

If you want to catch up on earlier issues, you can find the archive [here](#).

Is it possible to forgive someone who raped you?

What a horrible question to have to ask. But in my work with people who have survived being sexually assaulted, I've heard that question.

**There's no simple answer.** It depends on what you mean by forgiveness.

As I define it, forgiving some kind of betrayal is when you can let go of the preoccupation with anger and panic when you're reminded of the betrayal. It's a form of healing from trauma. When you're healed, you can think about the trauma without clicking into a panic reaction.

When you think of forgiveness that way, you can theoretically forgive anything--because forgiving someone doesn't imply that you can trust them. You can forgive someone and still maintain a restraining order against them (as did one of the people I talk about in my forthcoming book, *Betrayal and Forgiveness*). You can forgive someone who shows no remorse.

In other words, forgiveness as I use the term isn't about anyone else. It's an inside job. As Ann Lamott has pointed out, not forgiving someone is like drinking rat poison and waiting for the rat to die. In that sense, forgiveness gets the poison out of you, so you can think clearly about how to deal with the rat.

But many people use the term forgiveness to imply that you can restore your relationship with someone who hurt you. To forgive someone in those terms means that you're willing to get past what happened and continue your relationship. That means you shouldn't forgive someone unless they've earned your trust. At the very least, that would require that they offer a sincere apology, as well as clear evidence that they've learned when they need to learn so they can guarantee they won't hurt you that way again.

The reason I prefer my definition of forgiveness is that making forgiveness contingent on what someone else does or doesn't do disempowers you.

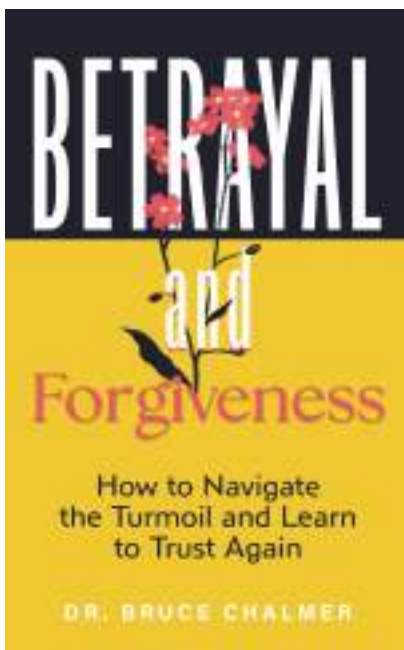
Why should you forgive? How do you know if you're ready? How can you forgive?

In addition to the forthcoming book I mentioned (and I'll let you know about how to get it as soon as those details are available), Judy and I talk about those questions in [this episode](#) of our "Couples Therapy in Seven Words" podcast.

I've also posted some videos on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) on the subject, so please follow me on those platforms if you'd like to check those out as well.

That's all for now--bye!

[Send me a message!](#)



**Here's the cover of my forthcoming book!**

I'll let you know when it's available for preorder.

**P.S.** If someone forwarded you this message, and you'd like to subscribe yourself, [go to my website](#) and watch the magic box appear that says "Click here to sign up for Dr. Chalmer's Newsletter!" I'd love to welcome you on board!

Please take a moment to make sure these emails actually make it into your inbox! The easiest way (at least for those of us in Google-land) is just to add me to your contacts.

[Here's a link](#) that tells you how to do it for various email services. Please let me in--it's lonely in the Spam or Promotions folder!

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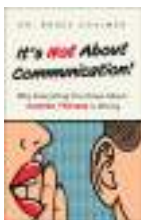
### Podcast

Couples Therapy in Seven Words



### Website

Dr. Chalmer's website: Books, couples therapy practice, blog



### It's Not About Communication!

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### Dr. Bruce Chalmer

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