

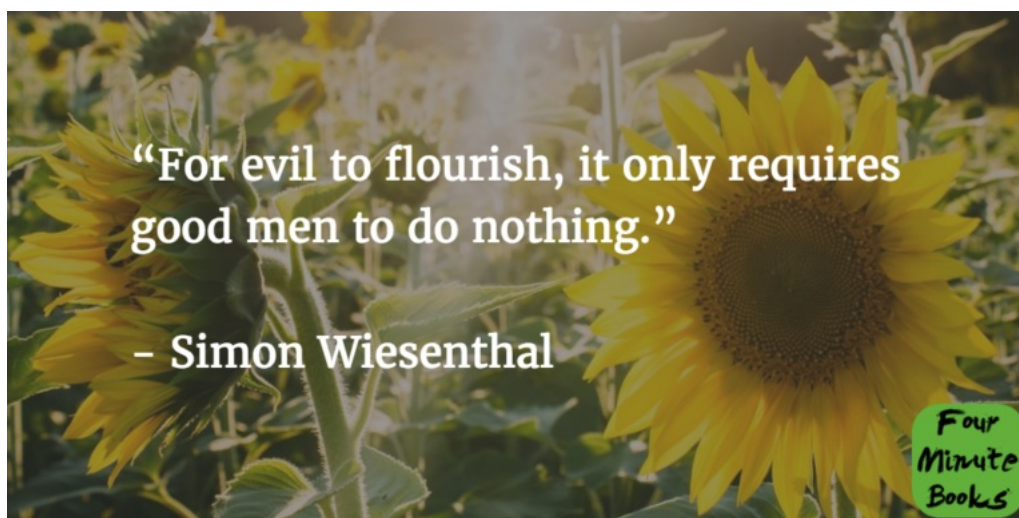
The Sunflower Summary

 fourminutebooks.com/the-sunflower-summary

1-Sentence-Summary: *The Sunflower* recounts an experience of holocaust survivor Simon Wiesenthal, in which he had to make a tough choice about whether to forgive or not, and explores over 50 different perspectives on forgiveness from people with various religious, cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



Here's a 2-step solution to the problem of extreme, nationalist, right-wing political parties gaining too much traction and eventually getting to run a country and lead it to despair:

1. Send every member a book written by any holocaust survivor.
2. Force them to read it start to finish.

That'd shut them right up and would likely make them never even consider voting for a Nazi-esque party ever again. This book in blinks is no exception. Just reading about some of the unimaginable atrocities sends shivers down my spine.

But *The Sunflower* is not a book about terror. The Sunflower is about forgiveness and the incredibly complex questions that come with it. When a dying Nazi soldier asked the author, Simon Wiesenthal, for forgiveness, the latter remained silent, just listened and said nothing, which sent him on a life-long journey to learn from as many different perspectives on forgiveness as he could.

Here are the 3 most important lessons from the book:

1. People arguing against forgiveness often base their points on religion and our freedom of choice.

2. A strong case for forgiveness is that it's beneficial not just for the forgiven, but also for the forgiver.
3. It's impossible to live your life with just one, fixed perspective on forgiveness. You have to keep asking questions.

Let's show our respect to Simon Wiesenthal by carrying his lessons forward!

Lesson 1: Arguments against forgiveness are backed by religion and our freedom to make choices.

Imagine your girl- or boyfriend cheated on you. You break up with them when you find out, because you think cheating is a no-go. However, there are still two ways you can play the breakup:

1. Forgive them, move on with your life and stay good, if not close friends.
2. Tell them to f**k off and that you never want to see them again.

Think about your closest three friends. Which of the two options would they point out to you, if you asked them for advice?

Those who would tell you option two is the right choice would probably base their arguments on one of two things: religion and/or our freedom to choose.

For example, in Judaism, God forgives only those, who have been forgiven by the victim of their spiteful actions. However, this automatically infers there's no way murder can ever be forgiven by God (because the victim is dead and thus can't forgive the murderer). **So within some religions, there are some cases, in which forgiveness is not an option by definition.**

Second, in the case of Karl Seidl, the Nazi soldier who asked Wiesenthal for forgiveness for participating in a killing of over 300 Jews, **he chose to follow the orders he'd gotten** – which he could've disobeyed (and likely not even be severely punished for it).

Thinking that your partner was fully aware of the consequences of their actions, and still chose to cheat, can make it very tough to forgive them...

Lesson 2: The best pro argument for forgiveness is that it heals both the forgiver and the forgiven.

...but then there's the other side. There are also several strong arguments *for* forgiveness.

For example that not all people are equally responsible in different situations. Seidl, for example, was mostly following orders, not giving them, which is still bad, but not as horrible as the plans Nazi puppet masters thought of and then told others to execute.

Another good reason to forgive your unfaithful ex-partner in crime is that forgiving and forgetting are two different things. Just because you forgive them, does not mean you automatically have to pretend nothing ever happened.

But the biggest reason to forgive, by far, is that **it doesn't just heal the person who's forgiven, but also the forgiver.**

If someone really shows regret and true guilt, how else can you possibly transform their misery into something positive? Not just that, forgiving is also the only way to let go of your own anger, hate and resentment. Otherwise, you'll just hold on to it forever, and we know nothing good will grow from that.

Lesson 3: There is no one-size-fits-all-forgiveness attitude, so you have to keep asking yourself questions about it.

As you can see, the question whether to forgive or not is tricky to answer, and in fact, can't be just answered once and then you're set for life. That's not how it works.

I love the conclusion of this book – that there's no conclusion at all. The most important thing Wiesenthal learned about forgiveness is that there are many different perspectives on it, which makes it essential to **always keep asking questions about it.**

Why do good people do bad things? How can societies tolerate terrible actions at scale? Is guilt different for individuals than it is for groups? Where's the line?

Sometimes, some of these will be impossible to answer, and maybe that's just the way it should be, because whenever we're not at peace with our decisions, we keep asking questions, learning, and trying to do better next time.

The Sunflower Review

An entire human life and its lessons, condensed into a couple hundred pages. *The Sunflower* is one of the books that makes me awe-struck at the power of reading. Thank you Mr. Wiesenthal, for leaving behind this legacy.

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What else can you learn from the blinks?

- The pre-cursor to Wiesenthal and Seidl's exchange
- What Wiesenthal offered Seidl, if not forgiveness

- In which post-war situation Wiesenthal most struggled with the pros and cons of forgiveness
- Why some people are more deserving of forgiveness than others
- An example of forgiveness from the Dalai Lama
- How Jewish and Christian views on forgiveness differ

Who would I recommend The Sunflower summary to?

The 16 year old, who's just been left by his first girlfriend, the 32 year old refugee mother, who's filled with thoughts of hate and revenge towards the forces that forced her to leave her country, and anyone who's having second thoughts about someone they didn't forgive when they had a chance to.