

God's Healing Words for the Christian Struggling With Unforgiveness

Revenge is a powerful, negative, emotional force that demands justice for a wrong that has been done to us. It is the antithesis of forgiveness. Every person living has most likely experienced this innate drive to "get even" with a person or organization by which they feel harmed, duped or otherwise humiliated. Yet medical science is recognizing the harm to your health—spirit, soul and body—revenge and similar negative emotions cause.

When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He included a very important petition for help to forgive our enemies:

Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come; Your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen (Matt. 6:9-13).

Immediately after instructing them to pray this way, Jesus continued, "For if you forgive men for their sins, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men for their sins, neither will your Father forgive your sins" (Matt 6:14-15). Of the five petitions in the prayer, why did He clarify the one about forgiving our debtors, those who have wronged us?

Are you aware that a relatively new branch of science called "forgiveness research" exists and is growing exponentially? It is showing that there is not just a psychology underlying

forgiveness but a physiology as well. The conclusion of researchers are startling.

Larry Dossey writes in "Forgiveness in Health Research and Medical Practice," published in *Explore: The Journal of Science and Healing*:

A society that cannot forgive is one without a heart. We should not wish to live in such a society—or a world—in which forgiveness is never extended. With the escalating religious and political hatreds around the world, and the increasingly sinister ways of seeking vengeance, it is uncertain whether a civilization that is devoid of forgiveness can continue to exist.

Jesus understood that unforgiveness, manifested through revenge, anger, hostility and hatred, would wreak havoc with your entire being as an individual and also with society as a whole. Not only would it affect your human relationships and your personal well-being, however. He taught that it would also affect your relationship with God in a negative way as well: "... neither will your Father forgive your sins" (Matt. 6:15). While theologians may differ in their explanation of these consequences of unforgiveness, it is clear that the choice to harbor unforgiveness hinders your personal relationship with God.

In his book *Total Forgiveness*, R.T. Kendall relates that a television series depicting Christians who had forgiven those who had hurt them was produced by a non-Christian. The producer said that he could take or leave a church sermon but could not ignore the "unnatural" reality that these people could forgive those who had hurt them. He was profoundly moved. There is no greater testimony to the lost. It is "unnatural" to forgive; true forgiveness requires the supernatural grace of God working in a heart, filling it with His love. {eoa}

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