

Health Through Forgiveness

1. Forgiveness as a Path to Healing

Among the many teachings of Jesus, few are as challenging and at the same time as liberating as forgiveness. In a culture that often values pride, self-protection, and immediate reaction to offenses, Jesus calls us to a completely different path: the path of grace. And this path is not optional. It is a command.

When Peter asked Jesus how many times he should forgive, perhaps expecting a reasonable limit, Jesus answered: *“I do not say to you up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven”* (Matthew 18:22). In other words, forgiveness is not a choice based on emotional convenience; it is a permanent posture of the heart.

Forgiveness is not only a spiritual act. It is also a powerful instrument of mental health. Modern science confirms what the Bible has taught for centuries: holding on to hurt makes us sick; forgiving brings healing. Bitterness corrodes the soul, poisons the thoughts, and affects the body. Forgiveness, on the other hand, creates space for peace, lightness, and restoration.

As I often say: *“I may know many Bible verses by heart, but if I do not know how to forgive, I have learned nothing about the Bible.”*

2. The Invisible Weight of Bitterness

Bitterness is like a silent, deep, and destructive root. Hebrews 12:15 warns us: *“See to it that no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled.”* The image is precise: bitterness does not remain still; it grows, spreads, and contaminates everything around it.

A bitter heart:

- constantly relives the pain of the past
- interprets the present with suspicion
- loses the ability to trust
- becomes emotionally reactive
- experiences anxiety, irritability, and sadness
- pushes people away and destroys relationships

Bitterness is an emotional prison. It traps a person in the moment of the offense, as if time had stopped there. The mind returns repeatedly to the same episode, feeding resentment and reinforcing the wound. It is like drinking poison while hoping the other person will suffer.

Jesus knew this. That is why His teaching on forgiveness is not merely moral, it is therapeutic. He calls us to forgive not to minimize the pain, but to prevent the pain from dominating us.

3. Forgiveness as Command and Liberation

Jesus did not treat forgiveness as a spiritual suggestion. He placed it at the center of Christian life. In the Lord's Prayer, He taught us to say: "*Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors*" (Matthew 6:12). And immediately after, He reinforced: "*If you do not forgive others, your Father will not forgive your offenses*" (Matthew 6:15).

Why such emphasis?

Because forgiveness is the deepest expression of the Gospel. We are called to forgive because we were forgiven. The cross is the greatest reminder that God did not treat us according to what our sins deserved. He reached us with grace, and that grace must flow through us.

But forgiving does not mean:

- forgetting what happened
- approving the wrong
- allowing abuse
- denying the pain

Forgiving means releasing the weight, placing justice in God's hands, and freeing the heart from emotional imprisonment. It is a spiritual decision that, over time, produces emotional healing.

Forgiveness does not change the past, but it transforms the future.

4. The Relationship Between Forgiveness and Mental Health

Contemporary psychology confirms what Jesus taught: people who forgive experience lower levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. Forgiveness reduces

blood pressure, improves sleep, strengthens the immune system, and increases the sense of well-being.

On the other hand, the lack of forgiveness is associated with:

- constant emotional tension
- obsessive thoughts
- difficulty concentrating
- irritability
- a constant sense of injustice
- physical and mental exhaustion

Bitterness creates a cycle of suffering. Forgiveness creates a cycle of healing.

When Jesus commands us to forgive, He is not placing a burden on us. He is offering a path to freedom. He knows the human heart was not created to carry resentment. We were made to love, restore, and live in peace.

5. How to Cultivate a Forgiving Heart

Forgiving is not natural. It is spiritual. And like every spiritual exercise, it requires practice, humility, and dependence on God. Some attitudes help in this process:

1. Acknowledge the pain

Forgiving is not denying what happened. It is facing the wound with honesty.

2. Surrender justice to God

Romans 12:19 reminds us: *“Vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord.”*

Forgiving is trusting that God will do what is right.

3. Pray for those who hurt us

Jesus said: *“Pray for those who persecute you”* (Matthew 5:44).

Prayer breaks internal chains.

4. Remember the forgiveness we received

Those who understand grace become more gracious.

5. Repeat forgiveness as many times as necessary

Sometimes we forgive today and the pain returns tomorrow. Then we must forgive again.

Forgiveness must become a process in our lives.

6. Conclusion: The Health That Comes From Forgiveness

Forgiveness is one of the greatest expressions of spiritual and emotional maturity. It draws us closer to Christ, frees us from the past, and restores the lightness of the soul. A forgiving heart is a healthy heart.

Lack of forgiveness, on the other hand, is a slow poison. It destroys relationships, corrodes inner peace, and compromises mental health. Jesus calls us to forgive not to burden us, but to heal us.

True emotional, spiritual, and even physical health flows through forgiveness.

And in the end, the question is not whether the other person deserves to be forgiven.

The question is: do I deserve to remain imprisoned by this pain?

Forgiving is choosing to live.

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