

1. THE EXTRAORDINARY POWER OF FORGIVENESS¹

<https://youtu.be/JQ-j7NuhDEY>

Hello there, my name is Dr. Andy Knox and I'm going to talk in this vlog today about a subject that is not easy and can stir up a whole host of different emotions. What I want to talk about is the extraordinary power of forgiveness.

There are many times people come and see me as a GP with physical pain, with mental health problems and, when we try and explore and uncover what the reasons are behind the things that those people are experiencing, we don't always find a particularly easy answer.

I remember, maybe four or five years ago, this guy came to see me with the most horrendous back pain and I examined him very thoroughly and couldn't really find a reason for the severity of his pain. I couldn't really find anything that would explain the kind of shooting pains that he was getting. So, I sent him for a MRI scan and that was completely normal. So, we tried him on a host of different stretches, we tried him with physio, we tried him with deep tissue massage. We tried him with various different painkillers, getting right up to some extremely strong stuff, and nothing really touched the pain or made any difference at all. And he was getting very fed up and I was feeling inadequate, to be honest.

So, I went back over the story with him and I said to him, *"Listen, can you remember when this pain started, if you had to try and understand what the root was to this pain?"*. Because sometimes physical pain is a manifestation of deeper emotional pain that we might be feeling. And he said, *"I know exactly what caused this pain, but I don't want to face up to it"*. I said, *"Well, so would you rather live with the pain?"* and he said, *"No, no, no, no. But what caused this pain is just too difficult for me"*. And he went on to tell me about how his wife had an affair and it had absolutely crushed and broken his world and he'd lost everything, and he'd felt so angry and so bitter and so resentful. He knew that was the very point at which the pain started.

So, I said to him, *"Well, medicine is complicated and it's not always very straightforward, and sometimes there's a spiritual aspect to health that can explain some of the physical stuff that we go through. It's not something we're very comfortable talking about in the West, but the Maori people in New Zealand have no problem talking about this, and most of the*

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*eastern nations have no problem talking about this either". And so he said, "Well, I don't know if I can forgive her for what she did" and I said, "Well, do you feel that you can live with the pain?" and he said, "No, I don't feel I can live with the pain". I said, "So, how about **trying** to forgive and let it go?"*

And I watched him make an incredibly brave and difficult decision to do that, to face up to his pain and to hold it for what it was; to recognize all the difficulties it had caused him and then to forgive. That guy walked back into my room a week or so later with no pain in his back at all.

A couple of years ago, in January, a lady came to see me after a Christmas break and she said, *"Andy, I know why I'm depressed"*. I said, *"Why is that?"* and she said, *"Well, ever since the age of nine, I watched my dad beat my brother every day, as an alcoholic, and I felt so angry towards him and so resentful of him that I know that's the root cause of why I feel so down. But, I've never ever been able to forgive him or had any respect for my father"*. And she said, *"...and I think that's partly what causes the tiredness within my MS; I haven't been able to clean a room in my house for over five years"*. I said, *"Wow, that sounds like a really important revelation for you."* And she said, *"Yeah, it's been huge. I don't feel like I need my antidepressants anymore"*. And I said, *"So, if it's possible that your depression and part of your MS has its roots in this feeling that you've carried around for a long time, do you think it might be possible to forgive your dad?"* and she said, *"No, there's no way I will ever forgive that man"*.

I said, *"But, what if it meant that, by doing so, that you yourself could be more free, and you could be more well?"* and she said, *"Then I suppose I'll forgive him. But I don't know how"*. So, we talked through a process that I'm going to go on to in my next vlog about how you actually can work through forgiveness. But she worked that through and she came back and she was like a different person and she said to me, *"Do you know what? I've got so much energy. I clean my house from top to bottom; I feel like a whole weight has been lifted off my shoulders and I feel like I can become a light"*. That's an amazing statement. She's one of my favourite people to have a consultation with; I feel like I get more healed when I see her than when she sees - you know, than anything she gets from me.

Forgiveness is not saying that what happened is okay. Forgiveness is not saying that what happened was just to be forgotten about. Forgiveness is an incredibly brave, gutsy, difficult choice. It's not this lovely emotion that you feel; it is facing up to the full horror of what

happened, the upset, the appalling negative consequences that are hard on you and being able to draw a line and say "*no more*". The consequence of not forgiving can sometimes be more severe; that bitterness, that resentment which twists inside of us might be the root to some of the physical pain that you carry, or some of the mental illness that you have. What if, by forgiving, you could be more free, that you could be more well and that, actually, in doing so, you might set that other person free also.

One of the things our society needs more than anything is forgiveness. And look at its power. Look at the amazing work of the prime minister in Canada, Justin Trudeau, as he's working through age-old generational hurt. Look at the incredible healing that has taken place in Rwanda. Look at Mothers Against Violence in Leeds and Manchester. When we consider the kind of conflicts we still see in Israel and Palestine, in Syria, in Iraq, in Libya - what hope do we have without forgiveness? Without the ability to face up to these appalling atrocities, the things that we have done to one another, unless we're willing to draw a line, say "*no more*"; forgive, and find a different kind of future?

Forgiveness is possible because of this amazing thing called grace. Grace doesn't demand retribution. It faces the fact that no punishment is going to make right the wrong that was caused. Forgiveness sets us and others free and I would invite you to explore whether there is unforgiveness, resentment and bitterness that you carry that might be a root to some of the illness you have. Wouldn't it be great if we were more well? I believe part of that is being able to be people who forgive. In doing so, we set ourselves and other people free. It's really hard and, in my next vlog, I'm going to talk about how we go about forgiving.

Dr Andy Knox