

## **James L. Holly, M.D.**

### **Hope - Health for the Soul**

**By: James L. Holly, MD**

At this time of the year, emotions run high and are mostly positive. Love and charity, joy and happiness, goodwill and well wishes are common, even between strangers. But mostly, at this time of the year, in the midst of the natural cycle of death, as leaves die and fall to the ground, as plants lie dormant, seemingly without life, there is in the human mind, a sense of hope. There is hope that the spring will come; that flowers will bloom, that buds will blossom and that plants will sprout new leaves. Without doubt, there are also pressures which attempt to obscure these emotions, but sometimes, those negative feelings do not win. All of these positive feelings and this sense of hope, with the expectation of resurrection, are part of the Christian celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. Few things could have been more hopeless than Palestine at the birth of Christ, yet into that seemingly hopelessness was born The One who would bring hope to the world.

Often the emotions with which we are more familiar are a cascade, which, while mental in origin, result in negative physical effects upon our bodies. Those emotions start with insecurity or anxiety; they progress to worry and fretfulness. Finally, they develop into fears, phobias and often paranoia. Not only do these emotions restrict our actions and choices, they can seriously and adversely affect our well being. These emotions are often associated with anger, guilt and a sense of doom.

These destructive emotions know no socio-economic barriers. They affect rich and poor, educated and not, leaders and followers. Often people in the most meager circumstances have great joy due to hopefulness, while those in the most abundant circumstances have no hope, no happiness and no joy. In the November 15, 2001 Examiner, in an article entitled "Faith and Health -- Prayer and Healing," we reviewed several articles in scientific journals which support the premise that hope built on faith is a positive mental and physical influence on human beings. It is our purpose in this article to recommend that a significant, if not primary, place in one's overall mental and physical health should be occupied by faith and hope.

As a child, we sang a song which declared, "Faith, hope and charity, that's the way to live successfully." These three deal with the three most important relationships in one's life -- faith deals with one's relationship with one's God, hope deals with one's relationship with one's self and charity (love) addresses how one deals with others. With faith toward God, with hope toward one's self and with love toward others, the cascade of negative emotions identified above can be interrupted. But, how?

At the root of many of the emotions which are destructive, particularly fear, guilt and anger, is a fundamental unforgiveness. Don't overlook the fact that these three emotions impact our principle relationships, i.e., fear results from insecurity and uncertainty because of lack of faith in God; guilt results from the inability to forgive ourselves and anger is the product of the inability to forgive others. The convergence of faith toward God, hope toward ourselves and

love toward others is in the simple act of forgiveness -- first God's forgiveness of us, second our acceptance of forgiveness for ourselves and third our extending of that forgiveness to others. Forgiveness is not the acceptance of failure; it is not an acquiescence to character flaws, or an excusing of frailties of the will, forgiveness is the affirmative acceptance of hope as a way of life for ourselves and for others.

Forgiveness does not come by pretending that something doesn't matter, in fact, the more injurious an act of others toward us is, or the more serious a failure of our own is, the more powerful is the effect of forgiveness which stems from faith, hope and charity. The beginning of mental health and of recovery is not reform but forgiveness. Whether it is the bitterness and anger which comes from parental neglect, or the betrayal of a spouse, the restoration of mental health and healing comes from the conscious act of forgiveness, not because it is deserved, or even because it is sought, but simply because the convergence of faith, hope and charity in one's own heart demands it.

And the most powerful emotional and physical benefits of faith, hope and charity -- of forgiveness -- comes when the mental act of forgiveness is turned into the action of doing good for the one toward whom anger, guilty or fear has been previously directed. Jesus Christ both taught and exemplified the powerful impact of loving your enemies and of doing good to those who had tried to hurt you. He showed by His life that the most powerful "weapon" was not "getting even" but in yielding your right for revenge and blessing those who hate you.

It is incredible to see the power of forgiveness in one's life. Perhaps the greatest illustration of this principle which I have personally experienced was seen in the life of a young man who is my dear friend. Abandoned at three-months of age by his father, who ran away with my friend's teenage babysitter, his life meandered through trouble and pain. He experienced some of life's most tragic experiences because of his fatherlessness. His anger toward and hatred of his father was at the core of his life.

When my young friend was twenty-eight years old, he had a passion to know and to meet his father. He felt compelled to just see him once in his life, but in twenty-eight years, he had never heard from him. One weekend, my young friend attended a conference at which I was speaking and heard me say that I was going to Seattle, Washington to speak.

He asked my wife if she thought I would let him go with me. The next week, we bought him a plane ticket to Seattle for our trip several weeks away.

The following weekend, I was speaking in Houston. My subject was the holiness of God, the first principle of which in human experience I identified as honoring your mother and your father. My young friend was with me and became very angry. He hated his father and now he was being told that he had to honor him. It was too much, but before the day was over, he had forgiven his father as faith, hope and charity converged in his heart. He determined that if he ever met his father, he would honor him, as he had already forgiven him.

The following week, my friend's mother called him and said, "You'll never guess who walked into your Grandmother's house in Arkansas yesterday." After a twenty-three year absence

from his own mother's home, my young friend's father had just "shown up" one day. My friend's mother said, "I have your father's address and phone number." It will not surprise some that as my young friend held his already purchased airline ticket to Seattle, his mother said, "Your father lives in Seattle, Washington." Coincidence or providence, your faith will dictate your choice, but three weeks later, my young friend met his father. He forgave him, honored him and loved him. The benefits in his life have nothing to do with his relationship with his father, they have everything to do with himself.

Forgiveness is a powerful expression of faith, hope and charity. It may be, along with gratitude, the most powerful action in human experience. And, forgiveness is the most valid expression of faith.

As you face the New Year, you should resolve to exercise, to quit smoking, to lose weight, to \_\_\_\_\_ well, you fill in the blank, but if you want to do the most important thing in your life, accept forgiveness for yourself and extend forgiveness to others. Think of the person who has hurt you the deepest. Forgive that person. And, that person may be yourself. Forgive yourself. The release and freedom you experience, will, as my young friend discovered, place you on a path leading exactly to where you wanted to go.

Remember it is your life and it is your health. It is your choice.