

Forgiveness

*“In your anger do not sin:
do not let the sun go down while you are still angry,
and do not give the devil a foothold.” Ephesians 4:26-27*

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do...” - Jesus

*“By age 50 every man has the face he deserves!”
– Abraham Lincoln*

Our Goal: – Freedom from Bitterness!

- *Why is it so important to forgive?*
- *What forgiveness is, and is not!*
- *How to forgive?*



Why is it so important to forgive? Three Testimonies

Testimony of a Dying Woman

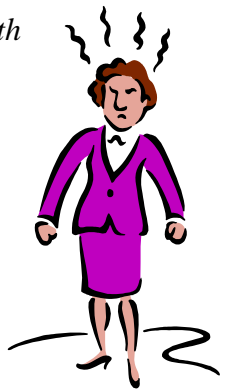
A grandmother we will call “Mary” was gravely ill in the hospital and at the point of death. She had accepted Jesus as her savior in a sincere prayer before slipping into a coma. Following her wishes, the doctors and family decided to disconnect the respirator machine. She wavered between life and death for a few days and afterwards awoke, horrified by what she had experienced. Mary shared how she had entered into a dark dimension and knew that before dying in peace, she must forgive a certain person who had done her “much harm.” Right there from her hospital bed, she requested a phone and called the woman in question. After expressing forgiveness for her, this grandmother lived on for a few more months, seeking God and enjoying rich time with her family. Shortly thereafter, Mary died with a holy and sweet peace.⁴

The case of Sister “Bitter Betty”

Betty has been called a “feisty” believer. She seems to bounce from one conflict to another, constantly arguing with her husband, kids, employers and co-workers. She demonstrates intense and passionate love for God and a desire to serve, but she always seems to end up in conflicts with others.

As a child who grew up amidst very difficult circumstances, Betty learned early that one must fight to survive in this world. She says, *“I forgive but don’t forget. When people mistreat me I have the right to get even. It’s just the way I am and I cannot change!”*

In this lesson we attempt to convince Betty that forgiveness is the key for a life of joy, peace and fruitful service in the Kingdom of God.



⁴ Included with the family’s permission

John Wimber's Testimony

John Wimber, the Founder of the Vineyard Churches, which now exist around the world, ministered with an exceptional gift of healing. Under his ministry thousands were healed and the churches he founded still minister with distinctive anointing in the area of healing. He shares the story of how he once prayed for a man who suffered from a relatively minor ailment. As he ministered, Wimber felt the Spirit in a truly unusual way – as if electricity were flowing through his hands. He was certain that the man was healed.

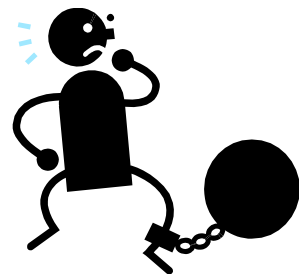
Some time later he heard the news that this man had died suddenly!! Brother Wimber felt perplexed by this, being so sure of the man's healing when he had prayed for him. Upon further investigation, he learned from acquaintances of the man that he had indeed experienced complete healing after Wimber prayed. Shortly afterwards, however, he received a call from an estranged family member with whom he had not spoken for many years. This relative asked forgiveness for his failings in the relationship, but the man refused.

Within a week, he was inexplicably dead.

.....Forgiveness is indeed a matter of life and death!

Why forgive?.... We forgive for our own good!

- 1. When we forgive – we are forgiven!**
If we refuse to forgive – God refuses to forgive us!
- 2. When we forgive – we are free!**
Bitterness is a Spiritual Bondage
- 3. When we forgive – we are delivered!**
Bitterness can provide an opening for Satan in our lives
- 4. When we forgive – we are healed!**
Bitterness is an emotional infection
- 5. When we forgive – our worship is acceptable!**
Bitterness contaminates our spiritual disciplines
- 6. When we forgive – we are filled with the Holy Spirit!**
Bitterness grieves the Holy Spirit
- 7. When we forgive – we have greater capacity to love!**
Bitterness contaminates relationships in the future



We forgive for our own good!



- 1. If we do not forgive, God does not forgive us!**
When we forgive --- we are forgiven!

The Lord's Prayer



"Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your father will not forgive your sins." Mateo 6:12-15

According to these words of Jesus, why is it so important for us to forgive others?



Read Matthew 18:21-35 - Parable of the Unmerciful Servant!

How do we often behave like this "unmerciful servant?"

When we are "hard" on others – God will be "hard" on us!



"Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." (Luke 6:37-38)



Preachers usually use these verses to introduce the topic of tithes and offerings. When read in their proper context, however, these verses deal not so much with our *material* generosity, but rather with our *emotional* generosity with others when we choose to forgive and overlook offenses. We reap what we sow. Those who come down hard on others, experience similar treatment when it is their "turn" to fall short!

According to Luke 6:37-38, above, how will a kind and forgiving person be treated when they fall short or fail in some way?



2. Bitterness is a Spiritual Bondage – Emotional Torture! *When we forgive, we are free!*

- *Resentment binds us to the person who has hurt us*
- *The memory of the person and the violation continues to cause emotional damage*
- *We “carry” our pain and mistrust into future relationships*

When we forgive we “release” the person – forgo the “right” for revenge.

“I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” Matthew 18:18

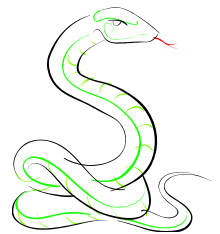
We often read this verse as in reference to spiritual warfare against Satan, but in its context, “loosing” and “binding” has more to do with forgiveness than struggles with demons! When we forgive, we can move on without carrying the emotional torture caused by the offense we suffered. Even secular psychologists teach this principle: *“There is freedom in forgiveness!”*

3. Bitterness can provide an opening for demonic oppression *When we forgive – we are delivered!*

Sometimes literal demons can attach themselves to those who refuse to forgive others.

“In your anger do not sin; do not let the sun set on your anger, and do not give the devil a foothold.” (Ephesians 4:26-27)

Anger in itself, is not sinful!



Anger can be healthy and appropriate. What is the difference between “good” anger and sinful anger, in your opinion?

Why does the verse say “do not give the devil a foothold?”

4. Bitterness is an Emotional Infection - *It grows and chokes out our life* *When we forgive, we are healed!*

Example: Cain and Abel – Bitterness compared to a beast that must be tamed.



If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.
Genesis 4:7

How could it be possible for bitterness to dominate our lives, in your opinion?

Bitterness compared to a weed: “Root of Bitterness... contaminate many.”

“Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.” Hebrews 12:14-15



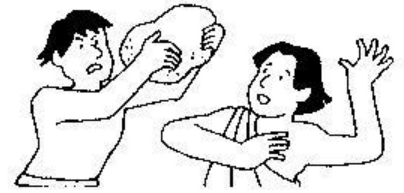
What do bitterness and weeds have in common?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

How can a conflict between two people “contaminate many?”

Doctors tell us that bitterness can cause physical ailments. What do you think? Any examples?

4. Bitterness contaminates our spiritual disciplines *When we forgive, our worship is acceptable!*



Some of the most bitter people are the most religious! As much as any other sinful attitude, bitterness can lace our spirituality.

“... Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast...” Genesis 4:4-5

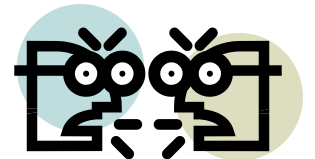
What caused the dispute that led to the first murder?

Don't be a Christian Pharisee!

The super-religious Pharisees prayed and fasted more than any others, but also allowed bitterness to taint their spirituality. With cruel jealousy they orchestrated the brutal murder of Jesus on the cross. If we allow bitterness to take root in our hearts and personality, we also can become “Christian Pharisees.”

“Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such ‘wisdom’ does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.” James 3:13-16

Have you ever seen Christians fight tooth and nail about theological or church related issues? According to the text above, how do we demonstrate true Christian wisdom?



Bitterness and witchcraft – Simon the Magician

Read Acts 8:18-23

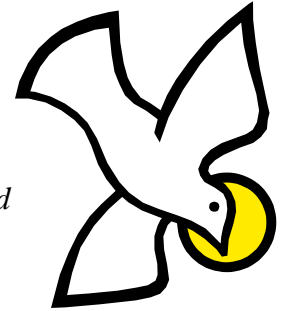


Why is bitterness compared to being “captive to sin?”

5. Bitterness Grieves the Holy Spirit

When we forgive, we are anointed!

“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” Ephesians 4:30-32



According to this text, list some specific things that sadden the Spirit.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

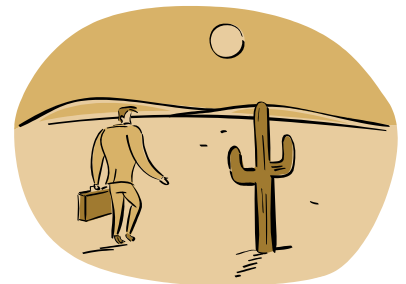
Bitterness renders our prayers impotent

“Have faith in God, Jesus answered. I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.” Mark 11:22-25

6. Bitterness contaminates future relationships

When we forgive, we have greater capacity to love!

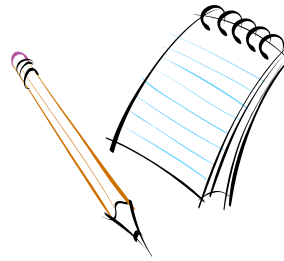
Cain becomes a “*restless wanderer*” as a result of his bitterness. (Genesis 4:12). Likewise with many of us – our bitterness prevents intimacy with others. Our bitterness condemns us to live in isolation and mistrust.



How can bitterness from a previous relationship poison future relationships?

****** We forgive for our own good!******

Forgiveness: A Definition



Forgiveness is...

- *A decision by faith to let go of the right to revenge...*
 - *To release the person emotionally*
 - *To cancel the Spiritual debt*
 - *To bless instead of curse*

Forgiveness is not ...

- *A feeling of affection*
- *Minimizing, justifying, excusing or indulging sin*
- *Tolerating abuse*
- *Protecting the offender from the consequences of his actions*
- *Becoming intimate friends again, necessarily*

Thinking of real life examples; for an abused woman, what does it mean to forgive the abuser?
What does it not mean?

How to forgive?

1. *Prayer of faith*
2. *Emotional release (Letting go of the right to revenge)*
3. *Blessing*

1. Prayer of Faith

Feelings may not change over night!

The prayer to forgive is a step of faith, much as the prayer to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. Feelings may change gradually as we reaffirm this forgiveness by faith again and again. If anger and resentment persists, repeat the prayer, even for years if necessary, until our heart is free and healed!

A Model Prayer of Faith

“Lord, I recognize that you have forgiven me for my sins.

Therefore, I forgive _____.”

I release the right to “get even” and seek revenge,

And I put him/her in your hands.

I give you my feelings of resentment and my desire for revenge.

Heal my heart, I pray.

I bless him in the name of Jesus.

Amen.”



2. Emotional Release – Giving up the right to “get even”

Place the person in God’s hands – “Vengeance is mine, says the Lord.”

Example: Joseph forgave his brothers (Genesis 37-50)

The story of Joseph reads like an adventure novel (with a hint of soap opera!) Out of envy and bitterness, his brothers abused him and sold him into slavery. He experienced an amazing odyssey of tragedy and blessing, until finally ascending to a position of supreme authority in the nation of Egypt. After many years, his brothers came to Egypt seeking food during a famine, and did not even recognize their long lost brother! Instead of executing vengeance upon them, Joseph responds in this way...



“... his bothers then came and threw themselves down before him. ‘We are your slaves,’ they said. But Joseph said to them, ‘Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don’t be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.’ And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.” Genesis 50:18-20

What an example of forgiveness!! According to Joseph’s reassurance to his brothers, what are the reasons behind his forgiveness?

1. _____
2. _____.

3. Bless the offender – Jesus’ idea!!

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” Mat 5:43-44



Overcome evil with good - What does it really mean to love our enemies?

Read Romans 12:14-21

Based on this text, mention some specific strategies for loving our enemies.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

What does it mean to “heap burning coals” on the heads of our enemies?

“If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” Romans 12:20-21

Some read the following meaning into this text: *If you bless your enemies then God will punish them more!* Not only does this interpretation belie the underlying message of love and forgiveness, but it fails to understand the most likely meaning of this image. In certain cultures of the ancient near east, repentant sinners carried “burning goals” in containers upon their heads as an act of penitence and contrition. As we bless our enemies we shame them into contrition, provoking repentance in them and the desire to confess their wrongdoing.

Actions of Love – Medicine for our souls!

What to do with your enemies “ass” – kick it or save it??!!

“If you come across your enemy’s ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to take it back to him. If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it there; be sure you help him with it.” Exodus 23:4-5



Even in the Old Testament Law, God taught the principle of love for our enemies, returning the lost donkey to the grumpy neighbor. Consider one of your own “enemies” (or a person who annoys you!) Can you think of specific “loving acts” that we can do to help heal the bumps and bruises of interpersonal conflict and prevent the growth of resentment?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____



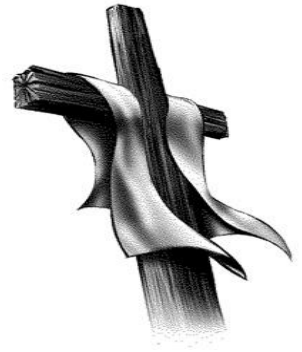


Prayers of Blessing – Canceling the bad vibe!!

“Bless those who curse you... pray for those who mistreat you...” Luke 6:28

Jesus on the Cross!

“Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Luke 23:34



Stephen the Martyr

Read Acts 7:54-60

How do we observe that Stephen follows Jesus’ example?

Note that Saul, (future Apostle Paul), was there at the execution of Stephen. Considering this detail, highlighted in the text, how might we see the way Stephen’s prayer was answered?!!

Some questions for reflection and clarification about forgiveness

What do I do if the person who offended me is not sorry!?? Is forgiveness possible in such a case? Why or why not?

What do I do if the person continues to hurt me? (case of abused woman)

What do I do if I still have feelings of resentment even after praying? Is it hypocrisy to say I have forgiven the person?

Does forgiving the person mean we must become as close friends as we were before?

What if I serve in a position of authority and someone has violated a rule or law under my supervision? (Judge, police officer, teacher..etc.) What does it mean for me to forgive in such a case?

If I have not forgotten what happened, does that mean I have not forgiven the person?

Review

List some good reasons (from the lesson) why we should forgive others.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

How can we define true forgiveness?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Mention some ways to “bless” a person who has done you harm?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____