

## BATTLING BITTERNESS

Hebrews 12:14-15 “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”

### Slide 2

What do you know about your tongue?

Can anyone name the 4 basic taste categories that can be differentiated by the tongue?

First is elicited by caramel, ice cream, fudge - sweet

Second can be found in potato chips, nuts, French fries - salty

Third is what you get when you bite into a green apple or a lemon - tart

And last is some chocolates, some unprocessed roots

Bitter taste is often a safety mechanism

Many bitter things are bad for you and can harm you

In ancient times, one popular way of killing someone was to poison them

Many royalty and important people relied on taste testers

Can be dangerous if ingested. Did you know that cyanide smells of bitter almonds

Like putting bitter things in your mouth, harboring bitterness in your body can have effects

### Slide 3

#### Stress

Fight or flight response

Hormones in your system

Depletion of energy stores

Organ damage

Physical pains from constant tension

#### Emotion

Long periods of hyperalertness

Tired and worn out

Poor outlook

Disengagement

#### Behavioral

Anger

Lashing out at others

Depression

Anxiety

Paranoia

#### Spiritual

Alienation from God

Preoccupation takes focus away from great commandment and commission

Judging of God for not dealing with wrong done to you

Guilt over animosity toward other person

In small doses, most of the above can be worked through to no permanent damage

But if left to continue for extended period of time, can do permanent, irreversible damage

In order to keep bitterness from residing inside us and killing us from the inside out, we need first to define it

#### Slide 4

We don't become bitter immediately – it takes time, has to ferment

Like the making of alcohol – sugars are broken down by bacteria and the byproduct is alcohol

So to, our unwillingness to forgive ferments within us and gives of the byproduct of bitterness

Related to wrath which is anger that feeds on itself and adds to the wreckage on the outside while bitterness creates the wreckage on the inside

When we feel wronged, don't we get all self-righteous and feel hateful to the person or thing that did this to us

Antagonism plugs our ears and makes it hard to hear reason. It does not let us process what is being said

Don't we resent what people put us through?

How dare they say disparaging things about this lesson that I put hours into preparing?

Who gave them the right to hijack my class with their hidden agenda?

Why would they say such hurtful things about me, they don't even know me?

Ever wanted to hurt someone that harmed you?

If not, what about wishing that someone else would hurt the someone that harmed you?

Nothing major mind you, just a bump on the knee or maybe a speeding ticket?

That would serve them right, right?

Its only fair.

Holding a grudge is tough.

I wonder sometimes if bitterness comes before or after a grudge

Bottom line, it is a sin

We are advised to not hold onto bitterness but to give to God for him to judge

#### Slide 5

So where does bitterness come from?

Don't just wake up one morning and have bitterness eating away at you.

Unlike ingesting something that tastes bitter, bitterness grows within us

We experience an event and the seed is planted

If we let it, it grows into bitterness

Often the event is an episode where we feel we have been wronged

Someone said or did something we took as a personal affront to our integrity

Some examples (big and small)

Many times the feelings of bitterness can originate or be strengthened by a feeling of powerlessness

We have no recourse to prevent or set right the wrong that has occurred

The passage of time is often a factor in the development of bitterness

If you are hit by a car, your first emotion would probably not be bitterness

That may develop over time as you realize the person was drunk, uninsured, driving without a license and ran a stop sign

Often times bitterness is a result of unresolved issues that remain over time.

As we have time to relive the event and get angry and indignant over and over again, the wound festers and the resentment deepens

We all see events through a singular and unique viewpoint.  
Our experiences and emotions and education and relationships and everything that has happened in our life  
serve as a filter of how we perceive the event that has festered into bitterness  
Because every filter is different, the perception of events is often a misperception  
What we interpret one way is often intended a different way  
As we have only one angle on the event, that becomes our reality and perspective  
Someone looking from a different angle may have a totally different perspective  
Finally and most importantly, bitterness has its core in unbelief that God will address the wrong we have  
experienced

## Slide 6

So, how do we address this unbelief, this lack of faith in God to come to our rescue, to set things right, to avenge  
our honor?

NT says one way to overcome bitterness and revenge is have faith in promise that God will settle accounts with  
our offenders.

NT says we are free from vengeance by believing God will take vengeance for us.

Living by faith in future grace involves overcoming vengeance and bitterness by trusting God to settle all our  
accounts justly.

Jesus says to "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matt 5:44)

Why? "So you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the  
good" (Matt 5:45)

As sons and daughters of the Father, we want to imitate him, be like him

In this age, God gives blessings to the immoral and cruel

In this, He is showing undeserved "kindness and forbearance and patience" that should lead nations to  
repentance (Rom 2:4)

Commanded to "Love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will  
be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful,  
even as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:35-36)

Gods patience will not last forever

When He has seen his people suffer enough (Revelation 6:11), vengeance will come from heaven

"God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted ...  
when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance  
on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus"  
(2Thessalonians 1:6-8)

God will show his love and tenderness for us through his severity towards our enemies.

Revelation 19:2 "His judgments are true and just"

Often in scripture, Gods wrath is awakened when Gods people are wronged and injured, and it is an instance of  
great love.

Matthew 18:6 "If any man offend one of his little ones, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged  
about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea"

The future grace of Gods judgment is promised to help us overcome a spirit of revenge and bitterness

Romans 12:19-20 "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written,

Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord. To the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he  
is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by doing so you will heap burning coals on his head"

God will settle our accounts

He will do it more justly and thoroughly than we could  
You cannot improve on His justice  
He sees every angle of the evil done against you  
Releasing a grudge is an issue of faith in Gods promises of future grace – judgment of the offender  
We should not belittle God with our paltry effort to improve upon his justice  
His justice included sending His son to earth for our sins  
He was grievously sinned against  
All animosity he bore was fully undeserved  
No one who has lived was more worth of honor  
When reviled, he did not revile in return  
When He suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting  
He had faith in the future grace of Gods righteous judgment  
He did not to avenge himself  
He left vengeance in Gods hands and prayed for his enemies repentance (Luke 23:34)  
1 Peter 2:21 “you have been called [to endure harsh treatment patiently] because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps”

## Slide 7

Forgiveness, at its root, is the same, regardless of the circumstances  
We however, do not treat it the same in every situation  
Ever heard the saying we are harder on ourselves than anyone else is?  
    We need to be sure we are following the word when we forgive ourselves  
    If God forgives us, how can we continue to carry the burden  
Speaking of God’s forgiveness  
    Ephesians 4:32-5:2 “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us”  
    It is total, erased  
    Psalm 103:3 “who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases”  
    The most important forgiveness  
Forgiving others can be even more challenging as we will see in a few minutes  
Why can it be so difficult to forgive another Christian?  
    Is it because we expect they should know better  
    They have been taught about turning the other cheek, not provoking to anger and the other lessons of Christianity  
    We need to remember that they are as fallible as we are  
    Many times the slights we feel were not even known by the alleged sender  
    We need to trust that our brother or sister did not do anything out of malice  
    We need to think about the forgiveness we would want from our brother or sister  
What about non Christians?  
    They are often not reading out of the same play book  
    They don’t necessarily have the same set of rules to play by  
    How do you forgive a shooter at Sandy Hook grade school or in an Amish classroom?  
    We need to focus on who knows the whole story  
    We need to rely on the one who tells us His grace is sufficient

The question should be "how can we not forgive  
There are plenty of reasons for why we have difficulty in forgiving

## Slide 8

Often times the reason we refuse to forgive is fear of loss

And there's **no denying that forgiveness requires us to give up attitudes and actions that are important to us**

Some people are reluctant to let go of the burning energy that rage generates.

It's like a fuel that keeps them moving.

Without it they would likely descend into despair and purposelessness because their anger is their purpose.

Those who are still smarting from pain are not eager to risk being hurt again.

They assumed that if they forgive the guilty party, he or she will feel free to repeat the offense.

This brings up an important point: *Forgiveness does not guarantee change in the other person's behavior.*

Forgiveness is an act of obedience, not a tool of manipulation.

It is a way of cleaning up the grudges and resentments that damage us.

Although we cannot stop people from hurting themselves, we can, in some situations (if we are not legally or morally tied to the offender), guard ourselves against repeated injury.

By removing ourselves from the relationship or by changing the rules of engagement, we can limit the person's ability to continue hurtful behavior.

Some people have expectations for friends and family that are too high.

As years go by, repeated foolish choices and ongoing evidence of serious character flaws devastate those who expect too much.

In such cases, it is necessary to forgive people simply for being who and what they are and to accept that they probably are not going to change.

Refusing to forgive keeps others in our debt.

In families, we often see parents who hold some wrong against an adult child, exacting payment in visits, gifts, and favors.

Although forgiving feels like an act of surrender, those who've done it know it's an act requiring tremendous strength.

Holding an offense against another person places us in a "good guy, bad guy" picture with ourselves wearing the white hat.

Imagining that we are better than others makes us feel good, but such a prideful attitude is unacceptable to God.

When we hold people captive to our judgment, we play God in their lives.

This places us in an unwinnable wrestling match with our Creator, who, as the apostle James reminded us, "sets himself against the proud" ([James 4:6](#)).

## Slide 9

Regardless, we are instructed to forgive, but there is a liberating power in that forgiveness

In Jeremiah's prophecy about the new covenant, God says: "I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

It is not that God becomes unaware of history.

God does not remember our sins in the sense that He doesn't hold them against us.

God wants us to move, with Him, in a completely restored relationship into the future.

Making forgiveness real happens when love is restored.

One day at a Pharisee's house, a woman with a bad moral reputation approached Jesus, crying.

Her tears wet His feet, which she wiped with her long hair.

Then she poured expensive perfume on His feet.

Witnesses were offended—"How dare she approach so closely! How dare she show such unrestrained adulation!"

But Jesus confronted His offended host by accusing him of not showing any such respect: "Her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little."

Second Chronicles 7:14 says: "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

Forgiveness is linked to health—health in the life of the individual and health in the life of the church. The people "who are called by [God's] name," the church, have to be ready at any time to repent and turn toward God. And then health will come.

The widow of the man who shot the children in the one-room Amish school wrote a letter to the Amish community, and it was released to the press.

It is a powerful letter—one you wouldn't expect.

One paragraph says this: "Your love for our family has helped to provide the healing we so desperately need," she wrote. "Gifts you've given have touched our hearts in a way no words can describe. ... Your compassion has reached beyond our family, beyond our community, and is changing our world, and for this we sincerely thank you."

Forgiveness is not just what the world needs; forgiveness is what changes the world.

#### Slide 10

Forgiveness is many things to many people. Some of the more commonly recognized attributes of forgiveness include

To forgive means to choose someone whom you have been holding in your debt, holding in resentment and bitterness, and release him or her.

It is taking a debt that you felt was owed to you and marking it paid

It is liberating in that you remove the control that bitterness has over your life

You are not bound to think of the act or person over and over

You are not required to get angry or frustrated at the hopelessness of trying to undo something that was done to you

It is certainly a gift you give to yourself

You give yourself permission to move on, get past the issue, refuse to make it a core of your life

Forgiveness simply means that you choose to release somebody from personal obligation to you—even though that person will have to face the justice of God.

Forgiveness is release—being released by God, and then we are able to release other people in our lives.

Forgiveness is a new way of looking at others

Forgiveness means looking at people who really have wronged you and deciding that you'd like to set things right—but in the end, you're not going to play God.

Forgiveness is a decision and a process.

You can release someone from obligation to you personally, even though resentment smolders

#### Slide 11

Some of the greatest obstacles to forgiveness are the misconceptions about what it is. Realizing what

forgiveness is *not* may make it easier.

*It is NOT Condoning the Behavior.*

Once we understand that the act of forgiving does not compromise our moral standard by condoning the offense, we are in a position to forgive even the worst of sins.

To forgive is not saying, "What you did is okay."

It is saying, "The consequences of your behavior belong to God, not to me."

When we forgive, we transfer the person from our system of justice to God's.

To forgive is to recognize that the wrong done against us is a debt of sin, and all sin is against God.

Therefore, in forgiving, we transfer the debt from our ledger of accounts to God's, leaving all recompense in his hands.

*It is NOT Forgetting What Happened.*

It would be foolish to erase from mind some of the wrongs done to us.

If we were to do so, we would never learn from our experiences and would walk right back into the same or a similar situation, only to face the same disappointments.

What can eventually be forgotten are the raw emotions associated with the event.

When we forgive, the terrible memories and feelings gradually diminish.

*It is NOT Restoring Trust in the Person.*

Trust is earned.

It is something we give to those who deserve it.

To blindly trust someone who has hurt us is naïve and irresponsible.

If a person is a thief, it is foolish to give her a key to your house.

If he were a pedophile, you would be derelict to hire him as a baby-sitter.

We can forgive people from the wrong they've done without extending to them an open invitation to do it again.

It is foolish to trust and untrustworthy person.

*It is NOT Agreeing to Reconcile.*

Forgiveness is a necessary step toward reconciliation, but reconciliation is not necessarily the goal of forgiveness.

In fact, there are some situations when reconciliation is not a good idea.

It is silly, if not dangerous, to press for reconciliation when the other person is unrepentant, unchanging, or unwilling.

*It is NOT Doing the Person a Favor.*

In Judaism, forgiveness is not required unless repentance is demonstrated and pardon is sought.

But Jesus raised the standard of forgiveness to a higher level.

According to him, we are to forgive even those who remain unrepentant.

Forgiveness benefits the giver at least as much as the receiver, so we extend it whether or not the person asks for it.

*It is NOT Easy.*

Forgiving is difficult enough when it involves a one time transgression.

It verges on the impossible when the offense is ongoing.

Such circumstances require an attitude of forgiveness, not simply an act of forgiveness.

When Peter asked Jesus how often he should forgive, Jesus gave an unsettling answer: Peter came to him and asked, "Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?"

"No!" Jesus replied, "seventy times seven!" ([Matthew 18:21-22](#))

Can you imagine forgiving anyone, even for a minor offense, 490 times?

Jesus is asking us to do something that is humanly impossible.

In and of ourselves we don't have enough forgiveness to go around.

But God does.

So when our limited resources run out and we are unable to forgive, we can ask him to forgive others through us.

In so doing, we take one more step of obedience and allow ourselves to become a conduit of God's grace.

Slide 12

Play a real life situation of forgiveness.

Slide 13