

No Place for Bitterness

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[0 : 00] All right. Y'all ready?

Well, Fred came home from a late night at the office. After scarfing down his reheated supper, he went into the bathroom to brush his teeth. The moment he opened the vanity drawer and spied the tube of toothpaste that his wife had squashed in the middle for the umpteenth time, he flew into a rage.

Slamming the door closed and flailing his arms, he began verbally accosting Wilma in a rather loud and irritated tone of voice. That woman, she always is squeezing the toothpaste tube in the middle.

I've asked her a thousand times to roll it from the end. But does she listen to me? Never. I might as well talk to the toothpaste tube itself rather than ask her to do something for me.

She is the most stubborn, pig-headed woman I've ever met. How would she like it if I ignored her incessant requests? She wouldn't like that one bit.

[1 : 16] Well, at this point, Fred stopped speaking out loud but continued to muse over the toothpaste tube as he internally plotted to get even. I'll teach her a lesson.

She hates it when anyone in the family forgets to replace the cap on the toothpaste tube. So I'm going to leave it off. Tomorrow morning when she comes in here to brush her teeth, she'll be furious that I forgot to replace the cap.

And that will ruin her whole morning. And maybe, just if I'm lucky enough, the toothpaste will harden overnight in the neck of the tube. And when she goes to squeeze some of it out, she won't be able to.

And just maybe, she'll be looking in the neck of the tube as she tries to squeeze it firmly and a little pellet of hardened toothpaste will pop out of the tube and hit her smack between the eyes.

I see some of you smirking and laughing. Does anyone know a Fred like that?

[2 : 23] Are you married to a Fred? Do you see a Fred when you look in the mirror? You know, if we find ourselves exerting inordinate amounts of emotional energy over such trivial disappointments, like we saw and heard Fred did, you know, it would be a really good indication that we are dealing with something that we call, the Bible calls, bitterness.

And so that is the topic that I've chosen to go over this morning with us and look to Scripture and God's Word, is bitterness. The title of my sermon this morning is No Place for Bitterness.

There it is up there. We're going to anchor in Ephesians chapter 4, but we're going to be sort of all over the Bible. Perhaps the title of my sermon could be No Place for Bitterness in the Life of a Christian, but my goal here is to make things short and concise this morning and simple as we look at God's Word.

And so I'm straying from the standard three-point outline that most preachers and pastors do. I've got two points. I've got two parts of the sermon this morning. I'm not saying it's going to be any shorter than normal, but we've got two points, okay?

So we're going to look at a biblical understanding of bitterness, right? So what exactly is bitterness? How do we recognize it in ourselves? How do we recognize it in others?

[3 : 49] What impact does bitterness make in our lives and the lives of others? So a biblical understanding of bitterness. And then the second half of today will be how do we, as believers in Jesus Christ, how do we rightly, and when I say rightly, I mean biblically, battle bitterness?

All right, so that's the outline. That's the map and where we're going this morning. No surprises here. I don't want to surprise you as to where we're going. I need you locked in and loaded and focused on where we're talking about bitterness and its impact.

So let me pray. Rico prayed for us. Thank you, Rico, for doing our call to worship this morning, leading this church in prayer, praying back God's Word. And I would just like to ask God just for His guidance for our time together.

So bow with me just very briefly. So, Father, I do want to pause, and I want to thank you, Lord, that this church family, we can gather. We have guests here, and we have a room full, Lord. And we thank you that you allow us the privilege and the honor and the freedom to worship you this morning, Lord.

So, Father, as we open up your Word, guide us in our thoughts, Father. May you give us courage and boldness to look at our lives. May you instruct us and equip us as we come alongside family and friends, Father.

[5 : 04] Help us, Lord, to understand truth and to impart truth to those who you allow us to come in contact with. Father, I pray that you would talk to us, that your Word would talk to us this morning.

In Christ's name, amen. Amen. All right, so turn your Bibles to Ephesians 4, if you haven't gotten there already. And so, ladies who do the Wednesday study, you all have done an overview, as I understand, of Ephesians.

And then you've gone back and you've sort of went through the first chapter of Ephesians. And so, you know, this should be a reminder to you, that when you look at the book of Ephesians, the epistle to the Ephesian church, to the Ephesian believers, that there's a total of six chapters.

And as Paul normally does, Paul will write sort of doctrine and theology in the first half of his book or his letter. And then he shifts and then looks at practical application.

How do you put into practice what we learn and what we know? And Ephesians does that. So if you turn to Ephesians chapter 4 and just take a quick glance at verse 1, you're going to see a pivot term, right?

[6 : 12] Therefore. For those of you who have studied Scripture, you know how important therefore is, right? It signifies a transition and a looking back of what was just taught or read.

And Paul writes, I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, encourage you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called. And so, again, we see that transition. And then Paul, throughout chapter 4, talks about a couple of key themes.

He talks about unity in the body, right? That we are to protect and we are to preserve unity in the church body. And as you keep going through chapter 4, you get over to the second half of it, starting in roughly verse 17.

And then Paul talks about old life, new life, right? Old self, new self. Verse 22, right? We read, put off your old self, right?

This is an imperative. And then in verse 24, he talks about putting on the new self created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness, right?

[7 : 15] This is salvation. This is the start of your salvation. This is where God takes your old heart, your hardened old heart. And you remember how Jeff reminds us, he doesn't give us a new version of yourself, a refurbished version of yourself, right?

When we come to the Lord, when the Lord calls us, we are given a new body, new life. Not a new body. That comes later. That's glorification. That's later. A new heart and a new life.

And so Ephesians 4, Paul is instructing, this is the context. Paul is instructing, this is how to live a Christian life. Unity in the body. Old self, put it off.

New self, put it on. And so I'm going to pick up in verse 25 and set some of the closer context. And we're going to focus on verse 31. Again, that's where we're heading because you'll see a reference to bitterness in verse 31.

But let me read starting at verse 25, and I'll read from there to the end of the chapter. As I read through these verses, you're going to see sort of a contrast between old and new, right?

[8 : 19] Bad, pre-saved, and then post-saved, okay? So verse 25, Paul writes, Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.

All right? So from lying to truth. That's verse 25. Verse 26 and 27. Be angry and do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger.

And give no opportunity for the devil. So old life, unrighteous anger. New life, righteous anger. Verse 28.

Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

From stealing to sharing. Old life, new life. Verse 29 and 30. Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

[9 : 27] And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. From unwholesome words to edifying, encouraging words. Old life, new life.

Verses 31 and 32. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. From earthly, natural vices, if you would, to supernatural virtues.

Old life, new life. All right? And so that's verses 25 through 32. You know, I always say when I read Scripture, man, that's good. I mean, we know all of Scripture is good. But this is good.

This is good in context of our opening Scripture this morning and focusing on this. So let's look at verse 31. So I've sort of gone from Ephesians, chapter 4, to the last half of chapter 4, and now we're looking straight at verse 31.

[10 : 33] All right, so 31. Let all bitterness, that's where we're going, and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

All right, now I don't want to spend too long going over these, but it's important to have sort of the basic understanding of these terms, and you'll understand later why we want to go through this. And so I think on one or two slides, I have some definitions for you of these terms, bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, and malice.

And I put these on the slides. You don't have to rush and write them down again. We'll make those available to you afterward. But briefly, but concisely, so bitterness. All right, the Greek word is pikria.

And it literally means acrid or an acidity, right, pungent, biting. Perhaps if you were to have walked through like a burned-out room or a burned-out building that was recently on flames or whatnot, you would smell.

That's usually where you would hear in the adjective how it smells acrid, right, just biting. And so when you think of bitterness, literally, that's what it means. You know, it's acrid or it's pungent.

[11 : 45] So figuratively, in the context of this morning, think of it as a smoldering resentment, right, a brooding, grudge-filled attitude.

Do you see how that sort of literal definition, the figurative definition are so related, right? A smoldering resentment, a brooding, grudge-filled attitude. So that's how the Greek describes bitterness, like all bitterness.

Second word is wrath, thumos. Thumos, or thumos is actually the accents of the second syllable. So in the NIV, I believe for those of you who use NIV, instead of the word wrath, you'll see the word rage.

And that's the definition of the Greek word wrath. It's like a wild rage, like filled with rage, a passion, or a personal venting.

Now, in the Greek here, it's not necessarily the outward expression of wrath. This is the one where, again, it's more internal, right? You're not just bitter. You're not just smoldering about something, but you've got something inside of you that's sort of a rage.

[12 : 50] I think about those who like watching Marvel movies. Think of Hulk, right? Before Hulk turns into the Hulk, right, there's a wrath or a rage that's building up in him that causes him to turn into Big Hulk, right?

So sort of think of that, that internal sort of rage. This is what Paul is discussing here. Let all bitterness and wrath, or internal rage. Next one, anger.

Anger, or gay, is the Greek word for here, the literal word. And it's more internal smoldering. It's somewhat like bitterness. It's a subtle and deep feeling.

Again, that's the definition of the word anger in this context. So again, think again. Internal smoldering. Subtle and deep feeling. You're angry about something, but you haven't quite expressed it yet.

The next word, clamor. Now we're getting into the expressions, right, of these bad vices. So clamor, crogay, a shout or an outcry of strife reflects the public outburst that reveals loss of control.

[13 : 56] All right? So if you think of a person who is clamorous, they're loud, they're out of control. Again, the NIV chooses to use the word brawling instead of the word clamor, right?

So let all bitterness and rage and anger and brawling, right? So that's definitely an outcry or a shout of strife. Clamor.

Next term, slander. All right? Blasphemia. Blasphemia. Do you recognize that word? Blasphemia? Blasphemy? That's where we get blasphemy. All right?

Think of slander. Think of words. Ongoing defamation of someone that rises from a bitter heart. Abusive or scurrilous language.

If anyone here has the New King James Version, instead of the word slander, you will see how the translator have used evil speaking. It's a great, great description, right?

[14 : 55] So slanderous, right? Ongoing defamation. Again, it's an outpouring of what's in the heart when one's angry or wrathful or bitter. And then Paul concludes, you know, put all of those away from you along with all malice.

So malice. Kakia. And that's a general term for evil or wickedness. That's basically the root of all these vices. So Paul, you know, instead of just going on and on and on and on with all sorts of words and lists, he said basically, you know, after bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, put those all away.

And hey, you all, that's not the only ones. Basically, along with all malice, all evil or wickedness that's in your heart. All right. So those are the six definitions.

Is the next slide, Josiah, I think we go back. Yeah. So let's look at that verse again. Ephesians 4.31. Right. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you along with all malice.

So some general observations. Right. We sort of broke it down, looked at the definitions a little bit, but some general observations about this verse. So did you notice, and I think I mentioned it as we were going over them, the first three sins, bitterness, wrath and anger.

[16 : 11] When you look at the definition, they're more internal in nature. Right. They're in the heart. You might not necessarily know if you're looking at someone, whether they're bitter or wrathful or angry.

Maybe so. Maybe facial expression or maybe body language. But those are more internal sort of vices, all in this umbrella of malice or anger.

The last two, clamor and slander, clearly, right, are external portrayments, if you would, of what's inside. Right. Clamorous and slanderous.

All of these sins, all six of these sins, these vices, involve person-to-person conflict. Right. We're talking these particular ones that Paul is addressing are all involved personal conflict.

And that makes sense. Right. Because what did we just learn about chapter four? Unity in the body, old self, new self. Right. And so he's continuing with some very practical instructions or commands or imperatives here.

[17 : 16] So involves person-to-person conflict. And unfortunately, that includes believer-to-believer conflict. Right. These things here, these sins, they break fellowship and they destroy relationships.

And I'm sad to say that this is something that probably some of you, I don't need to tell you that. You know that. You've had relationships that have gone south because of bitterness or wrath or anger.

Fellowship has been broken. Relationships, friendships have been destroyed. That's what this sin does. In the church context, these sins adversely impact the church as well by weakening the church and marring its testimony before the community and before the world.

So think of it. When an unbeliever sees Christians acting like the rest of society, when unbelievers are witnessing and watching, believers, we have claimed Jesus Christ.

When they see us being angry, being bitter, being wrathful, being slanderous. The things we say online, the things we say when you think no one's listening or looking, but they do hear that.

[18 : 36] When an unbeliever sees that, two things are bound to happen, if not more. Number one, the church is blemished in that unbeliever's eyes.

You are a representative of Jesus Christ. You are a representative, for you who are members, you are a representative of Grace Church Williamsburg. And when you engage in sinful vices like this, and unbelievers see that, you are blemishing the church.

Number two, in his own eyes, in the unbeliever's eyes, it perhaps even affirms his resisting of claims of the gospel, right? So he probably looks at that and he thinks, yeah, yeah, hypocrites, because, you know, they're trying to share Jesus Christ and good news with me, but at the same time, they're acting anything like Jesus Christ and good news, right?

And so there's sort of an affirmation, if you would, in his heart and his eyes that, yeah, I think I'll just keep resisting. I think I'll just keep ignoring those claims of the gospel.

So, as we look at verse 31, we see that the impact, these sins not only impact you personally, we'll get there in just a moment, but they impact others as well.

[19 : 56] All right. So let's focus back on, specifically, on bitterness. So as we defined earlier, right, bitterness is a smoldering resentment, right, a brooding, grudge-filled attitude.

Does that sound about right? Just your gut shag of what you know in your life and experience about bitterness. That's a pretty good definition. Brooding, grudge-filled attitude.

Basically, bitterness is long, is drawn out, perhaps it shouldn't be, but it could be, a slow accrual of anger within the heart.

Do you know if you have an issue with bitterness? Bitterness, do you know? Just don't raise your hand and don't answer. Don't even blink. Don't even make eye contact with me. But if I were to ask you, do you have an issue with bitterness in your own heart?

Would you know that? Don't turn there, but Proverbs 14.10, if you want to, turn there, but let me read Proverbs 14.10. It says, the heart knows its own bitterness, and no stranger shares its joy.

[21 : 06] Now, what that means is basically, you know, bitterness and joy, right, right, both, both extremes. You know, it's a private matter in the heart for so many of us, right?

The heart knows its own bitterness, and so you're likely aware, not guaranteed, but that proverb sort of makes us, helps us understand, makes us think that, yeah, if you were to look in the mirror, if you would be transparent with yourself, more often than not, you probably know when you're dealing with bitter.

Your heart knows it. But what about others, right, friends, family, acquaintances? Rob and I were just chatting, again, right before we started, like, yeah, holidays are coming up, right?

So we're going to probably, many of us are going to be with family members that we haven't seen. How are you thinking about that? How are you feeling about that? Perhaps some opportunity there for both bitterness or frustration or maybe an opportunity to restore relationship.

But when you look at others, right, when we as believers look at others, right, it's sort of hard, it's a challenge to know if someone is dealing with bitterness because, again, it's a private issue. It's an issue of the heart.

[22 : 26] Paul was really good at giving us this verse because he didn't just leave us. Do we have a verse back? Can you pull verse 31 back up, Josiah? So when Paul gives us not just references to bitterness but references, right, to wrath and anger and clamor and slander and malice, you can sort of think of it that bitterness doesn't ride alone, right?

Bitterness has cohorts, right? And bittersesses, if you would, cohorts are those other terms. And that's why we sort of went over them. So basically it's the where there's smoke, there's fire sort of thing.

You may not know that someone's dealing with bitterness, but if you see someone maybe dealing with some of these other issues, then as a friend, as a counselor, as a discipler, that should give you a clue that, hmm, maybe there's something deeper in one's heart that he or she is dealing with.

So let's put on, so let's pretend it's Thursday night in our grace gathering, right? And we're going to put on our counselor, our discipler hat, right? Biblical counseling is biblical discipleship.

We all disciple. We all counsel. And so what I'd like to do is take just a moment, take the focus off of you for a moment, right? You can take a breath. And now let's see how we can equip ourselves to see and detect bitterness in the lives of others, okay?

[23 : 57] So I've got a whole list of symptoms, if you would, or behaviors that might indicate, no guarantee, but they might indicate, especially if you see several of them in one person, that, yeah, he or she might be having a heart issue with bitterness, all right?

So the first one, biting sarcasm. Snide remarks, mean-spirited joking, caustic comments, scornful replies, and other such forms of sarcasm are often generated from a resentful heart.

Have you been with someone who has not, they're not just sarcastic, but it's sort of biting. It's like, hmm, there was more to that than just, you know, being goofy or funny.

Have you seen someone with biting sarcasm? It might be that he or she has a resentful heart. The second one, criticism.

Sort of related in the same family of sarcasm, but this is different. This is having a critical, condemnatory, right? Condemning, condemnatory, judgmental attitude. Do you know people like that?

[25 : 08] Who are constantly, constantly criticizing, constantly being critical, judgmental. It might be there's a root to that.

Bitterness, resentment in one's heart. Third one, condescending communication, all right? So this is one where speaking to your offender as though he or she were a child or some inferior being, right?

If you're bitter or if you're resentful about something, sometimes the best way you just want to jab them is talk down to them, right? Have you seen that?

Have you experienced that? Someone may be bitter to you. What is this all about? They're talking down to me, right? Fourth one, I think we all might be guilty of this one at some time in our life.

Fourth one is withdrawal, also known as the silent treatment or giving a cold shoulder. So when we give our offenders the silent treatment, now some of you are biting your tongue, I know, because you're afraid to smile because I'll see you smile.

[26 : 17] So when we give our offenders the silent treatment, you know that we're being vindictive, right? We are essentially saying, look, I've tried to tell you over and over how much it bugs me or hurts me when you do or don't do such and such.

But you don't get it. The only thing I know to do is to punish you by withdrawing from you. And when I think you might have an inkling of how much you've hurt me, if you're smart, maybe a couple hours, but if not, maybe a day or two, then maybe I'll start talking to you again.

All right. The cold shoulder, the silent treatment. If you or a friend of yours or acquaintance of yours withdraws given the silent treatment, it might be an indication that there's some bitterness at play.

Suspicion and distrust is the next one. So when bitterness causes a breakdown in communication, so think about it. If you're giving someone the silent treatment, the cold shoulder, guess what? By definition, you're breaking down in communication, right?

So when bitterness causes a breakdown in communication, both parties might become suspicious of each other, right? Small offenses that would typically be dismissed as a, oh, he didn't mean anything by that, or she's just having a bad day.

[27 : 40] Those things are now interpreted with less charitable motives. Do you understand? No longer giving the other person the benefit of the doubt.

You become suspicious and distrustful. And when you're characterized by never giving someone who you're used to the benefit of the doubt, are you bitter about something for that person, with that person?

Next one, intolerance. And again, remember, this is equipping, right? Building your inventory of things to look for, symptoms to look for. We'll get to how we address bitterness here in just a little bit.

This is still sort of the assessment part. So intolerance. So similar to suspicion and distrust, bitterness disposes us to not put up with, or a biblical term would be forbear, right?

Disposes us not to forbear with our offenders' idiosyncrasies, right? Resentment makes mountains out of molehills. And so one becomes very intolerant with someone else.

[28 : 47] Well, they're idiosyncrasies, something that didn't used to bug you. Now it drives you up a wall. Why is that? Next one, hypersensitivity, right?

This is called the treating a little pinprick as a knife thrust through the heart, right? Hypersensitivity. Proud individuals are especially prone to fall into this snare, right?

The thought is, well, you haven't offended just any old person. You offended me. See the pride there? You offended me. And even the smallest offense sort of overreact.

You're hypersensitive toward the smallest of things. Well, why is that? Could it be that you're harboring some resentment toward that person? Rebellion to authority.

That's the next one. Rebellion hardly ever occurs apart from bitterness. And so the process goes something like this. Someone's offended you, has hurt you, so there's that seed of hurt that gets planted.

[29 : 54] And if that isn't addressed biblically at the time, it sprouts to bitterness. And if that isn't addressed biblically at the time, it matures into stubbornness and perhaps even insubordination.

And if that isn't addressed biblically, then it develops into full-born rebellion to authority. Do you know someone who is just out and out rebellious to authority?

Could it be that they've been nursing and sort of allowing bitterness to grow in their hearts over time? It's gotten larger and larger and larger. That little seed went to a sprout, went to a weed, and now it's a really strong vine, perhaps.

Rebellion to authority. One more. Remembering with great specificity the details of an offense. Remembering with great specificity the details of an offense.

You know, old Bob over there, he doesn't remember what he ate for lunch last week. But he remembers exactly, word for word, an argument that happened three and a half years ago.

[31 : 05] He knows what he was wearing. He knows what the offender was wearing. He knows exactly where they were. Why is that? Why is it that you're able or one's able to remember with great specificity the details of an offense?

Well, bitterness eulogizes the particulars of an offense in your mind and in your heart over and over and over and over.

Bitterness causes you to rehearse that in your mind and you remember. And if that's not bad enough, you may not remember the details, but like a fish tail, it could grow.

It could grow over time. It could grow. And then you sort of remember it, not just the details, but you could remember it not exactly as to how it happened because your bitterness is forcing you to remember things that may have not been there.

But remembering with great specificity the details of an offense. Now, we've just gone over three, six, seven, eight, nine. We've just gone over nine or ten bullets. And again, we could probably spend a lot longer going through other symptoms.

[32 : 14] There are others. Those who are impatient with someone. Those who are disrespectful to someone. Depression. Someone's depressed. Perhaps acts of vengeance. You know, and again, an outpouring of bitterness from the heart.

There's lots of other symptoms that we as friends, as counselors, as disciples, that we can be on the lookout for to see if someone is truly dealing with a bitter heart.

So let me ask you. Let me pause here. Let me ask you. So as we walk through these, did you happen to have anyone think of someone in your circle of friends or coworkers or family right now that came to mind as we were going through some of those symptoms?

Look at those for a minute. So think of your interactions with those who you've been with, let's say, in the last week. Does, when you think of someone, does maybe four or five of those bullets, do you check them off?

Like, hmm. No guarantees, but perhaps there's a heart thing going on. Think of folks you work with.

[33 : 26] Think of those who your kids do school with, folks that you minister to, family even. Where there's smoke, there's fire.

And then I have to ask this question only because this is heart surgery. Do you see yourself in any of those? Hmm.

And this is why my week has been so miserable this week because I see myself in all of those. But there's hope, right? On Thursday nights, we talk about there's hope coming.

You know, those songs, Micah, those were awesome. Those songs we sang the last two, knowing what I was going to preach, those are spot on. I'm okay if we sing those two again when we're done. I don't know what the last song is.

We didn't coordinate the songs. But when I think about how big of a failure I am, how critical I am, right, how condescending I can be. No one taught me that. But, man, I'm good.

[34 : 37] I'm good at being condescending. Right? Hypersensitive? Oh, my gosh. Intolerant? Yeah. Heart surgery.

Heart issue. Well, it's crucial that we understand, if you said yes, either to those maybe you know or even you look in the mirror and you see some of this in yourself, it's crucial that we understand that bitterness is the result of responding improperly or unbiblically to an offense.

That's sort of the bottom line there. Man, that's a tough pill to swallow in hearing that. Like, what? It's not the other person's fault? It's a result of us if we have the bitterness issue of responding improperly, unbiblically.

Let's use that term. To an offense. So, what do we do about it? Right? What do we do about it? All right? So, that was all part one of the sermon. So, part two, or the second part of the sermon, is how to rightly, biblically, when I say rightly, battle bitterness.

All right? So, in our few minutes we've had together as we've gone through Ephesians 4.31 and sort of drilled down on some of those sins, those vices, perhaps the Lord has created in your heart and your mind an awareness.

[36 : 04] Again, awareness of yourself and awareness of perhaps others. So, now that we have that awareness, what do we do about it? How do we rightly, how do we biblically handle, deal with, battle bitterness?

So, before we can understand what the battle plan is, right? We're on war footing, right? We are fighting sin. This is war footing. Before we can rightly understand what the battle plan is, we first need to understand what we're battling against.

Because, folks, it's not bitterness. Okay? It's not necessarily bitterness. May I be so bold as to suggest that the bitterness against which we struggle is usually caused by our own unbelief.

May I suggest that to you? I'm going to lay out a case for that. It's not bitterness that we necessarily struggle directly with, but that's caused by our own unbelief.

And that unbelief, in turn, hinders us from trusting in and taking action consistent with God's counsel and His Word regarding fighting bitterness. In other words, I can stand up here all day.

[37 : 28] Jeff can stand up here all day. You, in the privacy of your own home, can have the Word open and be reading it. But if you don't believe it, I don't think it's going to help.

Right? We boldly say that Grace Church Williamsburg has a high view of Scripture. Right? We teach God's Word. We cherish God's Word.

But along with that comes our responsibility to believe it. Right? You can argue that, well, having a high view of Scripture does mean, it infers that I believe it.

And perhaps. But as I looked at those vices and those behaviors earlier, I tell you, I had to ask myself, do I believe everything that I read?

Truly believe? All right. Turn to Matthew 6. Let's flesh this out a little bit. So you're in Ephesians. Turn back to Matthew 6. We're going to look at a couple of references in Matthew, having to do with having a forgiving heart.

[38 : 35] Melanie and those who are studying in the ladies' study on Tuesday night, you may know where I'm going for the first one. We're going to stop by the mount, the sermon on the mount, and take a look at what Jesus has to say.

You all may not be yet in chapter 6, but you'll get there. Where are you on Tuesday nights? Yeah, we're still just going. We're in like Beatitudes. Oh, you're in Beatitudes. All right.

All right. Well, we're going to go over to Matthew chapter 6. And the context here is the Sermon on the Mount. So let me read verses 17 through, I'm sorry, verses 7 through 15.

So Jesus is speaking. He says, And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words.

Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. Pray then like this. And this is what we know as the Lord's Prayer. A model of our praying. Our Father in heaven.

[39 : 36] This is, I'm reading from the ESV. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts.

Or in this case, debts is actually trespasses or sins, right? And forgive us our debts, our sins, as we also have forgiven our debtors, those who have trespassed against us, those who have sinned against us.

We'll come back to that, right? This is the model prayer that Jesus is teaching, right? Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Verse 14. For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Those are hard words. Do you believe it? Keep that in mind. Turn over to chapter 18.

[40 : 47] We're not done. We're not done. Chapter 18, as we're looking at these references. Another passage regarding to having a forgiving heart. Chapter 18, verses 21 through 35, right?

This is the parable of the unforgiving servant. Now, this may sound familiar either through your own reading, or if you recall about a month, five, six weeks ago, we had a gentleman here, Eric, who brought us the word.

And he preached on reconciliation. But he did reference this parable. So if it's vaguely familiar, you've heard this. If you haven't read it recently. All right. So I'm going to read the parable of the unforgiving servant.

If you're familiar with this parable, again, you know where God's word is taking us here. Verse 21. Then Peter came up and said to him, Lord, came up to Jesus, right?

Lord, how often will my brother sin against me and I forgive him? As many as seven times. And Jesus said to him, I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.

[41 : 55] And then Jesus goes to share this parable. Therefore, the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents.

And again, what's ten thousand talents? It's over a lifetime of debt. It's such an astronomical amount to repay that it's impossible to repay. Okay, that's the point. And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold with his wife and children and all that he had in payment to be made.

So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, have patience on me and I will pay you everything. And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt.

But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. And a denarii is a day's wage.

So a hundred days wage, about three months of wages is the debt here. So he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. And seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, pay what you owe.

[43 : 05] So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, have patience with me and I will pay you. Well, he refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt.

Well, when his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed. And they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. Then his master summoned him and said to him, you wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me.

And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant as I had mercy on you? And in his anger, his master delivered him to the jailers until he should pay all his debt.

So also, and Jesus says, verse 35, so also my heavenly father will do to every one of you if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.

Hard words, right? Do you believe that? Sobering words. God will not forgive our trespasses or sins if we don't forgive others' trespasses.

[44 : 18] Or sins or offenses against us. Matthew 6. And God will figuratively deliver us to the jailers, right? The parable, which basically means severely punished, until we pay back our debt.

But that debt is insurmountable, right? There's no way that we can repay that debt. So what do you think about that?

Now some of you theologians in here may be thinking, wait a minute. So Greg, are you saying that this is works-based? That in order for God to forgive me, I need to forgive others?

And the view there might be forgiveness means salvation, right? We can't get into heaven unless we're forgiven and clothed in the righteousness of Christ, right? So some of you may be thinking, I don't know, but may be thinking, this sort of hints a little bit like this is a works-based sort of thing going on.

And that's what I thought as I was reading these verses. Like, wait a minute. We know, we know. What's Ephesians 2 say, right? Ephesians 2, verses 8 and 9.

[45 : 25] For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing, right? It is a gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

And so let's not even be tempted to think that these verses, these references in Matthew 6 and Matthew 18, that what Jesus is teaching here in that lesson is some sort of works-based salvation.

Like, you can't get to heaven unless you forgive others. Because God's not going to forgive you unless you forgive others, right? That's not what's happening here. But how do we rightfully understand this, right?

We sort of have a little bit of a conundrum here, possibly, right? And so do you all remember when I preached back in July, there's one of the principles of biblical interpretation is you allow what's clearly taught in Scripture to interpret maybe areas that don't seem quite as clear.

And so again, we want to do that. We allow Ephesians 2, 8 and 9, the clear part of Scripture, to make sure that we don't get down a rabbit trail with understanding Matthew 6 and 18, that this has to do with works-based, that you have to forgive others in order to earn salvation, right?

[46 : 39] So that God would forgive you. So I looked up some Bible commentators and was sort of trying to understand what is the easiest and clearest way to describe how to properly and biblically interpret Matthew 6 and Matthew 18.

And by the way, let me go back to Sermon on the Mount. Not just those two verses. Matthew 5, 7. Melanie, you all may have done this. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

So are you saying that if you're not merciful, you're not going to receive mercy? See, as we start to look through Scripture, we're going to start to see a pattern. This teaching is all throughout Scripture.

And it may appear like, wait a minute, it's conditional. I've got to do something in order to get something? I have to forgive others in order to be forgiven? I have to be merciful in order to receive God's mercy?

But that's not it. And so, Josiah, if you could pull up, this is what one Bible commentator explains about Matthew 6, 15, and Matthew 18, 35.

[47 : 47] When Jesus teaches, and I'll read from the board here. So when Jesus teaches that an unforgiving spirit or bitterness leads to judgment and not to salvation, he means that bitterness is a kind of unbelief.

And that's why I'm trying to go with this. And the way to fight against it is to fight the fight of faith. That is, the battle against bitterness in our hearts is not an effort to work our way to heaven.

It's a battle to believe the word of God and to trust on the promises of His grace. That was what one Bible commentator said.

I have another quote that I think even makes this more clear and may resonate with some of you. So let's go to the next slide. This is what another person says. He says, the way I would put it is like this.

If the forgiveness that we received at the cost of the blood of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, if it's so ineffective in our hearts that we are bent on holding unforgiving grudges and bitterness against someone, we are not a good tree.

[48 : 54] And he's referring back to Matthew 7. Good tree bears good fruit. Bad tree bears bad fruit. Right? We are not a good tree. We are not saved. We don't cherish the forgiveness.

We don't trust in this forgiveness. We don't embrace and treasure this forgiveness. We are hypocrites. We are just mouthing.

We haven't ever felt the piercing, joyful wonder that God paid the life of His Son. I mean, how in the world could I hold a grudge against somebody when I have not been offended nearly like God has been offended, so highly that He has to pay the life of His Son in order for me to be forgiven?

So, this commentator is saying, hey, if you are willing to hold a grudge against someone and not forgive someone, have you totally forgotten the fact how Christ has forgiven you a debt that you cannot repay?

There's something very hypocritical about that, right? There's something that you don't believe about either God's Word or what God has done. You don't, I think He said, you're not cherishing the act of forgiveness from God the Father through the blood of Jesus Christ.

[50 : 27] And so, when we look at Matthew 6.15 and 18.35, and when we read that you will not be forgiven unless you forgive, what you want to remember is, wait a minute, why is it, why is it that I'm not willing to forgive?

There's something inconsistent with that. As a follower of Jesus Christ, as a born-again believer, as someone who's been saved from eternal hell and damnation, why are you unwilling to forgive a debt that's far smaller than the debt that Jesus Christ forgave us?

It's almost inconceivable. And so, it does sort of make one realize, are you really saved? Are you really saved?

If you're that unwilling, if you're willing to hold a grudge and be unforgiving, then that should raise a red flag that maybe there's something that's larger that's wrong.

And the larger issue here is unbelief. All right? That, as best I could research and understand and pray through, that's a biblical sort of interpretation understanding of Matthew 6 and Matthew 18.

[51 : 49] So, we're battling not against your bitterness, but maybe, just maybe, we're actually battling against your unbelief.

All right? So, now that we know what we're battling against, now we can put the battle plan together. And I have four points to go over for our battle plan, and then we'll wrap up.

Okay? So, Josiah, let's go to the next slide. We're battling bitterness by battling unbelief. Four steps. Now, these aren't necessarily consequential steps.

You don't do necessarily two before one and three before two, but these are four actions that you can take to battle bitterness. All right? What I wanted to do this morning, what I didn't want to do this morning was come up here and preach that, yeah, if you're battling bitterness, you need to forgive.

Amen. Let's pray and let's leave. Right? I wanted to equip you with, okay, so how am I able to forgive? Greg, I've been battling with bitterness for the last five years for something that someone did to me.

[53 : 06] And I know that I need to forgive, but I just can't. I've been harboring resentment. I've tried to ignore it. I've asked people to pray for me. But I just am having trouble.

I just can't forgive this particular person. It could be that you've had some offense against you where, I don't know, maybe a parent, maybe a spouse, maybe a close dear friend, whatever the offense is.

But my desire, my heart's desire for you this morning, and as your shepherd and as your elder and as your brother in Christ, is to equip you as best I can with not just a terse, overcome your forgiveness and go forgive, but instead to equip you that, hey, let's battle the big battle.

Let's fight the big fight. And that's with perhaps, maybe, you're unable to forgive for another reason. And that's because truly we need to be praying about your unbelief, your lack of trust and hope in what God's Word says.

So here we go. So first step, don't ignore God's counsel. Don't ignore God's counsel. Trust it and do it. So what do I mean by that?

[54 : 26] Take pains to get God's counsel in your mind and in your heart. Don't ignore it. Don't reject it.

So how do you get God's counsel in your mind and in your heart? You commit to read it. You commit to memorize it. You commit to putting it in front of your face everywhere that you are, on your sun visor, on your refrigerator, on your bathroom mirror.

You need to drink in. God's Word and His counsel. Memorize it. You know me. I never miss a chance to encourage our church to memorize. Memorize.

You're a horrible memorizer. I would beg to differ. I bet you there's lots of TV commercials that you can rattle off just like that. Right? Jingles that you've learned two or three decades ago that you just know in your sleep.

Right? You can memorize. Maybe not huge chunks of Scripture, but start. Don't let that be a hindrance to getting God's counsel in your heart and in your mind. If God is instructing you, if He's counseling you through Ephesians 4.31 to put away bitterness and anger, and there's no if here.

[55 : 36] It's since. Since He's instructing you. This morning, no one is without excuse now to know that God is instructing each of us, instructing me, to put away bitterness and anger.

Remember, don't ignore it. Don't walk out this morning and shelve that in the shelf of your mind and move on to other things. Right? Don't ignore it. Don't allow any room for excuses.

I'm the best. You know, I can rationalize with the best of them. I can make all sorts of excuses why I can't do something. Don't allow room for excuses to ignore God's counsel.

Purpose it in your mind and do it. This goes for both men and women. But get your big boy pants on. Commit to it.

It's serious. It's life-changing. It's life-impacting. Purpose in your mind to do it. And may I remind you, 2 Peter 1.3 says, His, meaning Jesus Christ, His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness.

[56 : 46] You know what that means? Let me rephrase that. You have no excuse. All right? Jesus Christ, we have at our hands His divine power.

Oh, man. Don't even give me an excuse. I lovingly say that. But for every excuse and every rationalization that you have why you can't do this, if you're a believer, if you're a follower of Jesus Christ, if you've been born or reborn, you have the Holy Spirit inside of you.

You have the Holy Spirit. You have the power of God. Right? It says, Peter's clear. His divine power has granted us not some things, but all things that pertain to life and godliness.

And that's what we're talking about. All right? So don't ignore God's counsel. Trust it and do it. Okay? So that's one. That's sort of the tough love step. You've got to do it. All right.

Number two. Step two. Cherish being forgiven by God. The very last verse that we read in that section of Ephesians 4, the very last verse, verse 32, says, Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another.

[57 : 55] But what was the last part? As God in Christ forgave you. Ah, there's the key there. As God in Christ forgave you. Being forgiven by God should have a powerful effect on being forgiving, for forgiving people and not holding grudges and being bitter.

Right? Being forgiven, you being forgiven by God, you and I being forgiven by God should have a powerful effect on our being forgiving to other people and not to hold grudges and bitter.

How? By having faith in being forgiven. By truly believing that we are truly forgiven. Do you believe that you're truly forgiven?

Do you understand what that means? Saving faith is not merely believing that we are forgiven. Right? Saving faith, if you're a believer in Jesus Christ, you have saving faith.

Saving faith is not merely believing that we are forgiven. Saving faith means believing that God's forgiveness is an awesome thing. Saving faith looks at the horror of sin and then looks at the holiness of God and it believes that God's forgiveness is staggeringly and unspeakably glorious.

[59 : 16] Do you feel that way? I know it's not about feelings, but are you persuaded in that way? Is your mind that way? That what God has done for you, it's not that you're forgiven, but it's staggeringly and unspeakably glorious.

If you really feel that way, if you know that way, feel that way, know it, then perhaps you are able to overcome the bitterness and the resentment that's lodged in your heart.

Faith in God's forgiveness does not merely mean confidence that we're off the hook. Right? It means confidence that this is the most precious thing in the world to you. Is it the most precious thing in the world to you?

Saving faith cherishes being forgiven by God. And here's the link, right? One more point on step two.

Here's the link, the significance. Here's the intersection with this battle against bitterness, right? We're trying to figure out how to battle bitterness by battling unbelief. And this is where that intersects with cherishing being forgiven.

[60 : 28] You can go on holding a grudge if your faith simply means to you that you're off the hook. But if faith means to you standing in awe of being forgiven by God, it's impossible for you to continue to hold a grudge.

Why? Because you have fallen in love with mercy. Mercy and forgiveness is your life. So, you battle bitterness by fighting for the faith that stands in awe of God's forgiveness of your sins.

See that? It's more than just a warm and fuzzy feeling about cherishing God's forgiveness. It's one that compels you to action. Step three.

Two more. Step three. Trust that God's justice will prevail. Trust that His justice will prevail. One cause of bitterness could very well be that you were truly wronged by an offense, by someone, right?

You were lied to. You were stolen from. You were unfaithful to. Or someone was unfaithful to you. Someone rejected you. Someone let you down.

[61 : 48] Disappointed you. All right? You were truly wronged, right? There was an offense that was truly done against you. And your sense of justice. Anybody have a sense of justice in here?

I've got a really strong sense of justice. I think some of you all do, too. Your sense of justice mandates that they should be punished. Right? Right? Y'all have a sense. Come on. Come on. Are you with me?

All right. You're afraid to move. What's Greg going to say next? All right. I'm not going to call anyone out. All right? Your sense of justice mandates that when you have been wronged, they should be punished. And you dwell on the injustice of it.

Right? And it makes you mad and angry and bitter and upset. And in your mind, you imagine all the things that you can say or do to ensure that justice is deserved to the other person.

Right? All right. My brothers and sisters, my dear loved ones, God is not pleased by your bitterness because it comes from an unbelief in the certainty that God's justice will prevail.

[62 : 54] If you're bent on seeking out your own justice, you know what you're saying? You know what your thinking or feeling? I don't trust God. I don't trust that His justice will prevail.

I'm going to seek out my own justice. If that means withdrawing, cold shoulder, right, the silent treatment, if that means in my mind rehearsing all the things that I'm going to do to get even, to get revenge, don't shoot the messenger.

Right? This is a scripture that you're not trusting that God's justice will prevail. All right. Turn with me to Romans 12, 19. Just to make sure you're not going to get mad at the messenger when we're done and we leave.

Let's go to Romans. Romans 12, 19. Romans 12, 19. I love how Paul writes it here.

Verse 19 starts, Beloved, beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God. For it is written, vengeance is mine.

[64 : 04] I will repay, says the Lord. Again, do you believe that? Do you believe that?

Never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God. For it is written, vengeance is mine. I will repay, says the Lord. You don't need to be ashamed about that.

God says, I will repay. Rest in that. Find confidence in that. Find encouragement in that. That God's justice will prevail.

God has made a promise here that he himself will repay all wrongs in perfect measure. His justice will prevail.

No wrong has escaped his notice. Do you think maybe you got wronged when God wasn't looking? When he was distracted with some other issue that he was dealing with, right?

[65 : 03] No wrong has escaped his notice. He sees its evil far better than you do. He knows you've been hurt.

But more importantly, he sees the evil that was done against you. And brothers and sisters, he hates it far more than you do, right?

We can't get to heaven because of one imperfection, right? We have to be perfect in the eyes of God. And again, we do that through the righteousness of the blood of Christ. But evil, God hates.

And perhaps he hates it more than we do. And he claims in his word here in Romans 12, his right to take vengeance. Not your right.

Mm-mm. You may have had an offense against you, but it's not your right to exact justice. It's God's right. Hands off, y'all.

[66 : 01] It's God's right to do that. So do you believe it? Do you trust God to settle accounts for you far more justly than you could ever settle them? If you do, if you do truly believe it, this text says you will stop savoring revenge, and you'll leave it to God.

Now, turn to 1 Peter. We have a couple more minutes. Turn to 1 Peter. Let's see how Jesus handled this. The perfect example. 1 Peter 2, verses 21, 22, and 23.

Let's look at what Jesus did. 1 Peter 2, 21 through 23. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you.

Now, there's an instruction here, right, regarding submission to authority. That's the immediate context here. So, verse 21. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.

Jesus trusted his father. He committed no sin. Neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return.

[67 : 26] When he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself. To whom? To him who judges justly.

Jesus trusted his father. Jesus trusted his father. He entrusted himself. He entrusted all the offenses against him.

He was the least deserving, right, of any offense, of all of us in history. He entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

No one was wronged or worse than Jesus. No one abused more. No one rejected more. No one was as innocent as he was. So what did he do when his heart was filled with moral indignation, perhaps?

He handed his grievance over to his father, and he showed us, as an example, that vengeance is God's and that justice will prevail.

[68 : 28] So step three, fight your unbelief by believing and trusting that vengeance belongs to the Lord and that he will repay, rest in the fact that his justice will prevail.

That should allow you to release the bitterness and for you to have a forgiving heart. All right? One more. One more.

We're getting our battle plan together. Three down, one to go. This is it. This is it. Step four, trust God's purpose to turn the cause of your bitterness for your good.

Trust God's purpose to turn the cause of your bitterness, the bitterness that you're working through right now, the challenge before you. Trust him that God's using it, turning it for your good.

You don't have to turn here, but 1 Peter 1. Actually, we're there. Look back in chapter 1. 1 Peter 1, 6 and 7. And coincidentally, there's no such thing as coincidence, but next week, if Jeff follows his schedule, he's going to start his exposition through 1 Peter.

[69 : 39] So this is a good little warm-up, a little bit, maybe. So for 1 Peter 1, 6 and 7, God allows trials in our lives that could make us very angry and very bitter, right?

If they didn't, they wouldn't really be a trial, right? Well, the reason he does this is to refine our faith the way gold is refined by fire.

God uses the trials. He ordains those trials. He refines our faith the way gold is refined by fire. If you don't really believe this, if you don't really believe this is true, then your battle against bitterness in the midst of trials is nothing more than the battle against unbelief, right?

Will we look to the sovereign goodness of God and believe that He means us good in the refining fire? Or will we just surrender to our unbelief and just let bitterness grow?

So trust in what 1 Peter 1, 6 and 7 says, right? Believe that the tested genuineness of your faith in the midst of trials may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

[71 : 17] So trust that you're going through what you're going through right now, through bitterness, through anger, through whatever challenge, trial is before you. Trust that God's using this.

Sometimes we use the word, it's a sanctifying experience, right? He's refining you. He's conforming you into a closer look of His image, right?

He's conforming us. So trust. So step 1, don't ignore. Trust. Step 2, cherish. Step 3, there's another trust. Step 4, there's another trust.

There's a lot of trust there, isn't there? Trust and believe. That's our battle plan. For battling bitterness. And whether it be you or whether it be God has sovereignly ordained you to come alongside a family member or a friend who's dealing with this trial right now, now hopefully you're a little better equipped with what God's word has to say about how to battle bitterness.

Don't go after the symptom. Not necessarily go after bitterness, but perhaps we need to be smarter and go after the root. And that could be, as a believer in Christ, it could be unbelief.

[72 : 33] More lack of trust in what God's word says. Like I said, heart surgery. This has been hard. It's been good, but it's been hard to prep this week.

I just pray that we would trust and love the benefit of being unencumbered by bitterness. There's so much good and benefit in following this game plan.

All right, let's pray. So, Father, we thank you, Father, for your word and for your truth. We thank you for how your truth teaches us, how it convicts us, how it opens our minds, how it opens our hearts, how it opens our eyes, Father.

Father, I pray for my church family right now, Lord, and I pray that if hearts have been pricked, if a raw nerve has been touched, Father, I pray that it was not my words, Father, but it was you moving in my church family members to do that.

And, Father, I pray that we would respond. Perhaps it's a renewal today, now, of our commitment to believe your word, no matter what the cost, no matter what the implication.

[73 : 56] Father, we love you. We know that your word is living and active and sharper than a two-edged sword, right? We believe that. We know that. We read that from Hebrews.

So, Father, would you give us an eager anticipation that your word would live and be active in us and would change us, Father, not for our glory, not that we would receive accolades or recognition, oh, but, Father, that we would glorify and that we would honor you in being closer to the image that you would have us be, Father.

So, thank you. Father, thank you for listening ears. Thank you for my church family. Thank you for your word. In Christ's name, amen.