

We have been exploring the three essential principles of how God designed the body of Christ to function.

The principle of **diversity**

The principle of **unity**

The principle of **mutuality**

The Holy Spirit inspired the writers of Scripture to address the issues of relationships within this amazing group of people called the church, the body of Christ. I emphasized last week that these three principles are as natural and necessary to the body of Christ as they are in our physical bodies. You don't have to learn them. They occur naturally as designed by God. Only disease causes dysfunction in the harmonious working of the members of our body.

When the disease of sin and selfishness infects the body it creates a disruption of unity, diversity and mutuality which results in body dysfunction which hinders the cause of Christ in a dysfunctional world. It is the healthy operation of relationships that draws attention to the gospel in a self-centered and broken world. The Holy Spirit issues numerous directives related to our relationship with other members of the body in the form of “one another” commands.

We have so far considered seven of them related to principle unity.
Adherence to these commands both promote and preserve unity in the body.

PROMOTE AND PRESERVE UNITY

The Holy Spirit both describes and prescribes unity in the body of Christ.
There is essential unity by reason of our connection to the same head; Jesus.
There is practical unity by reason of control by the Holy Spirit.

“LOVE ONE ANOTHER” (Don't be indifferent to one another)

“RECEIVE AND GREET ONE ANOTHER” (Don't reject or ignore one another)

“DO GOOD AND BE KIND TO ONE ANOTHER”

Now in Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which translated in Greek is called Dorcas); this woman was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did. Acts 9:36

“AGREE AND LIVE IN HARMONY WITH ONE ANOTHER”

“HONOR ONE ANOTHER”

“FORBEAR AND FORGIVE ONE ANOTHER”

To round out the one another passages related to promoting and preserving unity, there are a few prohibitions; things God instructs us NOT to do.

“DON’T JUDGE ONE ANOTHER”

This is a greatly misunderstood issue in the church. The problem comes because the Bible seems to issue two opposite commands. On the one hand we are told to judge.

“Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.” John 7:24

But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? But those who are outside, God judges. REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES. 1

Corinthians 5:11-13

Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day— things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. Colossians 2:16-17

On the other hand God tells us NOT to judge.

“Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned. Luke 6:37

Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. Romans 14:1

Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother’s way. Rom 14:13

The whole 14th chapter of Romans addresses the act of judging other members of the body.

Paul warned the Romans about judging worship practices of others.

One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. Romans 14:2-4

This can apply to a whole list of things.

Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you. Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor? James 4:10-12

The word "to judge" is a broad term which means "to separate, distinguish, think, consider, reach a decision, condemn, pass judgment". We judge, or make distinctions and value judgments every day of our lives both in relation to ourselves and to others. The issue here is what we judge, the motive and the desired result.

The key to understanding the difference appears in the Luke passage above. The command “don’t condemn” immediately follows the command “don’t judge.” The kind of judgment God prohibits is the kind that comes with a declaration of condemnation. God call attention to those who judge for the purpose of tearing down not building up. The truth is that there is only one infallible judge. Only God has all the facts of a case and can judge rightly. Only God can judge the actions and motives of the heart.

According to Matt 7:1-5 we should never attempt to judge or discern error in the life of another Christian until we have dealt with the error in our own life. Our tendency is to see the faults of our neighbor for the purpose of making us look good and to avoid a close examination of our own areas of need.

Any of our judgment is subject to limited knowledge and a skewed perception. We don’t have all the facts and we don’t have a pure heart.

Do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men’s hearts; and then each man’s praise will come to him from God. 1 Corinthians 4:5

For some, judging others has not redemptive purpose. We are only interested in focusing on others flaws. We call such people “judgmental” because they have no intention of being involved. Our motive for godly discernment or judgment must be to HELP not to HURT our fellow Christians, not to try to make us look better or compare our self-righteousness with that of others. The intent of discernment is to remove hurtful issues out of genuine love not to revile fellow Christians out of envy.

Such discernment must be done with great care and pure motive.

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Galatians 6:1-3

If we are not willing to put in the time and energy necessary to help someone, then we should KEEP QUIET.

John offered instruction for dealing with sin in another’s life.

If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this. 1 John 5:16

My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins. James 5:19-20

“DON’T BE EMBITTERED AGAINST ONE ANOTHER”

The Bible addresses this issue of bitterness or failure to forgive.

We did a whole series on the destructive nature of bitterness.

See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; Hebrews 12:15

Failure to address wounds leads to infection. Failure to address offenses develops bitterness which eventually “springs up”, “causes trouble” and “defiles many”.

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Ephesians 4:31

BE ANGRY, AND yet DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil a beachhead in your life. *Ephesians 4:26-27*

But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. James 3:14

For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. James 3:16

Jesus pointedly proclaimed the destructive consequences of unforgiveness – torment.

Failure to realize forgiveness results in guilt. Failure to reciprocate forgiveness results in

bitterness. It may stay hidden as a root but eventually breaks the surface as a poisonous plant.

“DON’T PROVOKE ONE ANOTHER”

If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another. Galatians 5:25-26

This word is used only once in the Greek New Testament. It is a word which means to "speak before, to call to first." This command discourages pressing one another's "hot button" for the purpose of getting them upset. It is deliberately stirring up controversy for the sake of controversy. It communicates in such a way as to stir up defense in another. It can be done by words, tone, or manner. This way of relating is the product of a proud boastful spirit that feels the need to dominate and control by comment and challenge to every action or statement made by another. Rather, we are to foster an attitude of mutual learning and sharing and working together within the body to display the beauty of God's grace.

Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person. Colossians 4:6

Refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels. The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will. 2 Timothy 2:23-26

Does your interaction with people stir up argument or put people on the defensive. Remember, “A person convinced against their will is of the same opinion still.” Is your purpose to enlighten or win an argument?

For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.” But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another. Galatians 5:14-15

“DON’T LIE TO ONE ANOTHER”

Therefore, laying aside falsehood, SPEAK TRUTH EACH ONE of you WITH HIS NEIGHBOR, for we are members of one another. Ephesians 4:25

The reason given not to lie to one another is that we are connected. If one part of the body gives conflicting signals to the other part the body ceases to operate efficiently.

but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, Ephesians 4:15

God designed the body to operate in unity. He gifts individuals to equip the members to serve one another until unity in the faith is achieved.

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. Ephesians 4:11-13

It is this unity that inspires belief in the deity of Christ.

"I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. John 17:20-21

The second principle of the body is diversity.

Promote and preserve unity.

Celebrate Diversity.

Diversity comes into play mostly in the area of function.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. 1 Corinthians 12:4-6

Not everyone has the same capabilities. Not everyone engages in the same ministry. Not everyone experiences the same results. Yet everyone contributes to the whole.

For the body is not one member, but many. 1 Corinthians 12:14

But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. If they were all one member, where would the body be? But now there are many members, but one body. 1 Corinthians 12:18-20

Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaint. As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. 1 Peter 4:8-11

The point here is serving one another to the glory of God. Whether it is a serving gift or a speaking gift, we are to use it to serve the body. The four passages that address the diverse gifts can be found Romans 12, 1 Cor 12, Eph 4 and 1 Peter 4. God instructs every believer to do most of the activities mentioned in these four passages. But God imbeds a higher level of capacity and desire in individual members.

Each member will exercise their diverse gift in a particular context or ministry and experience varying levels of results. God is in charge and distributes gifts, assigns ministry and generates effects. That leaves NO room for jealousy or pride. All the glory goes to God.

The Holy Spirit gifts as He wills. The Holy Spirit places as He wills. The Holy Spirit brings about results as He wills. Unfortunately some people rely on natural talent to try to bring about supernatural results and take personal credit.

Then he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel saying, 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the LORD of hosts. Zechariah 4:6

And when I (Paul) came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God. 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

We have taught on spiritual gifting before but will take just a short time in review.

First, according to the quote from Peter's letter, the gifts can be divided into two categories.

Those who speak

Those who serve

Paul's list in Romans suggests a basic eight gifts.

For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. Romans 12:4-8

Paul expands the kind of things that build the body in his letter to the Corinthians.

For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. 1 Corinthians 12:8-11

The central factor in the exercise of gifts in the body is not the gift itself but the exercise of your gift in love. The exercise of a gift without genuine love will not have the desired effect or benefit to the body. The purpose of the gifts is the growth of the body; body building. Too many try to use their gifting for personal kingdom building. We are to focus on body building. *but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. Ephesians 4:15-16*

Encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing. 1 Thessalonians 5:11

Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification (building) according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. Ephesians 4:29

But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life. Jude 1:20-21

So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. Romans 14:19

Just as the various members of our physical body contribute to the growth of the body, so the various gifted members of the body serve to facilitate the growth of the body. As we saw earlier it is the proper working of the parts that bring about growth.

Teach one another

Admonish one another

Encourage one another

Build one another

Speak to one another

Serve one another with you special gifting

Consider your gifting. Consider your ministry. Consider how the Holy Spirit is using you to affect the growth of the body. Are we more concerned about our growth and comfort or the growth of the body of Christ?

DIGGING DEEPER

DAY ONE

I have previously mentioned the spiritual discipline or what I like to call the healthy habits of a healthy relationship with God. These are things the Scripture prescribes for us to do on a regular if not daily basis. As a reminder I am offering providing a suggested prayer that incorporates each of the habits when you are short on time. I suggest trying it on Day one and Day Five.

Busy schedule abbreviated practice of the spiritual disciplines.

Today is a tight schedule, but I realize the futility of attempting to proceed through this day without checking in with you and fueling up spiritually before I get on my way. Clear my mind to make most of these few concentrated minutes I have to communicate with you.

SOLITUDE AND SILENCE I need this alone time with You. Even though I don't always feel that need, I know it is true, and it is pure arrogance on my part for me to enter my day without this time.

SUBMISSION I yield my life to You again. I acknowledge that without You I can do nothing of significant value in this world. I submit my members as Your instruments, Your channels for displaying the life of Jesus Christ. For I have been crucified with Christ. Nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me. And the life that I now live in this body, I live by faith in Jesus Christ who loved me (unconditionally) and gave Himself for me that I should no longer live for myself but for Him who died and rose on my behalf. I entrust my soul to You today as my faithful Creator; that whatever comes my way, You have allowed for Your glory and my good. I yield all of my life to the filling of the Holy Spirit so that I may walk according to His power and not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. May my walk clearly display the fruit of Your Holy Spirit today.

CONFESSION Please bring to mind any specific sin issues I may need to clear before my day gets started or to clear up during this day. (Pause in silence to listen for any prompting of the Holy Spirit.) Grant that I may start my day with a clear and free conscience before You, my family, and all those in my sphere of contact. I purpose to deal with whatever You prompt me to do. I acknowledge my daily need for cleansing and forgiveness.

I thank you for Your forgiveness. I celebrate the fact that Jesus has paid for my sin and has made it possible to live above that sin through the power that mightily works within me. Because I am thoroughly loved and accepted and remarkably significant, I have nothing to prove to any one, nothing of eternal value to lose at the hand of any one, and therefore nothing to protect from anyone. I can live today as a channel of Your grace and a demonstration of Your love. I can find meaningful fulfillment through relationship with You and not submit to the drive of the flesh to demand it from others. I can purely desire and

enjoy significant relationships with others because You have touched my life in such a significant way. I am a fully loved and accepted and significant child of the King of the Universe. Empower me to live according to who I am today.

INTERACTION WITH SCRIPTURE I need the truth of Your word to penetrate my very soul that I may be mature, completely equipped for every good work today. Bring to mind a verse or passage I should read. Give me insight into your truth that my mind will be renewed. I embrace your truth today. I affirm my desire to live by your truth and meditate on it day and night. May your word come to mind all through the day.

FAITH I declare my trust in you today. I acknowledge that those who trust in the flesh or others are destined to disappointment and disillusionment. Without faith it is impossible to please You. I entrust my day to You. I acknowledge you as the God who is great. You are eternal. You know all there is to know. You are here with me right now and everywhere. There is nothing beyond Your ability. You hold all things together. You don't need me but want to use me. You are beyond my comprehension. You never change because You are infinitely perfect. You are so good. Your grace still amazes me. Your love overwhelms me. Your faithfulness astounds me. Your mercy comforts me. Your lovingkindness never fails. You are absolutely holy. You are right and always do right. You are the source of all truth and reality. You will bring all things to justice because you are just. These things I affirm today and embrace your truth. Your path is the best. Your way is the way to peace. Your word brings life.

WORSHIP I thank you for this day and rejoice in it. I purpose to give thanks in everything. (Thank Him for any specific things that come to mind) I worship You for both who You are, and for the works You have done in the past, and are doing in the present and have promised to do in the future. Enlarge my heart today to know You more fully and honor You more highly throughout this day in the everyday affairs of life. Perhaps if there is time read from a Psalm and express the praise expressed there as your praise. (Psalm 150)

PRAYER Take time to bring any specific request to Him at this time. Use your prayer list.

SIMPLICITY AND SACRIFICE I sacrifice the things I value most to your serve again today.

Family— I continually release them to God.

Time— I give you say over where I spend my time and continue to commit to this time with you.

Money — I affirm that my finances belong to you and I will regularly and freely give to you as a reminder that it is all your and keep open to where I might use my money to build Your kingdom. Possessions — I assign ownership of all my things to You and commit to be a good steward of those things. I affirm my desire to live more simply so that more resources can be

channeled to kingdom purposes and that I will not be controlled by stuff so I can be free to use things and love people rather than love things and use people.

Pleasure – I appreciate the capacity to experience pleasure and that you have given us all things to enjoy and that in your right hand are pleasures evermore but I yield the right to such pleasure to you and commit to denying immediate gratification for higher purposes. I am open to go without in order to not be controlled by passion for anything but you.

Power – I resist the urge to control or to wield power over others and offer myself as the servant of others as Jesus modeled service.

CONNECTION Who can I encourage today? Is there someone new to connect to? Bring to mind anyone I should be in contact with today or this week.

WITNESS Always have at least three unbelieving people you are praying to receive Christ. I pray that you will bring opportunity to be a witness for You today. Help me to be an effective witness when that opportunity comes. I look forward to all that this day may bring by way of opportunities to trust You and see You work in my life. I pray for the opportunity to share the message of Salvation either by my life or by words today.

WARFARE I stand against and refuse all of Satan's purposes and schemes this day and embrace Your design for my life. I break all curses against me and my family cast knowingly or unknowingly and I stand in the power of the Lord Jesus Christ to live free from the bondage of sin and Satan today. Grant me discernment to recognize the darts and schemes of the enemy today and the strength to stand against Him; fully armed with Your armor. Guard my mind from the lies of the evil one. Guard my emotions from the fears and worries of the evil one and the evilness of our day. Bring me into all truth that I may walk today in Your truth.

I wait for any orders and direction You may have for me today and invite You to go with me wherever I go. Keep me aware of all my Spiritual resources in Christ in the heavenlies and of Your eternal presence this day. I yield myself to You as Your hands and Your voice to a dark and hurting world.

If you have more time, take some time to review Sunday's notes. Listen for any nudges by the Holy Spirit. Don't look for application to others. Focus on examining your own life. Remove your defenses and allow the Holy Spirit to probe your heart and motives.

DAY TWO

Today I suggest you start your day with some verses from Psalm 56. You can reflect on the whole some or some excerpts below.

When I am afraid (verbalize some of your fears to God), I will put my trust in You. In God, whose word I praise, In God I have put my trust; I shall not be afraid. What can mere man do to me? Psalm 56:3-4

You have taken account of my wanderings; put my tears in Your bottle. Are they not in Your book? Then my enemies will turn back in the day when I call; This I know, that God is for me (think about that — do you believe it?). In God, whose word I praise, In the LORD, whose word I praise, In God I have put my trust, I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me? Your vows are binding upon me, O God; I will render thank offerings to You. For You have delivered my soul from death, Indeed my feet from stumbling, So that I may walk before You In the light of the living. Psalm 56:8-13

Read the whole story of Dorcas in Acts 9:36-42.

What would be remembered of us when we died. She was known for her abundant deeds of kindness.

God tells us not to judge others. Review the Scripture verses. Reflect on the two kinds of judgment. There is godly judgment and fleshly judgment. It would be helpful to actually read the whole context of the prohibition against judging in Romans 14. Try to think of some applications to our culture. Substitute eating and not eating with some other applicable issues in church culture today. What kind of devotional practices do we call into question that is none of our business? The issue is the heart motive and whether it pleases God or not.

Turn the Scriptures in the notes into prayers for God to work in your life.

Here is an example.

Lord help me not to judge so I won't be judged; and not to condemn so I won't be condemned; give me grace to pardon so I will be pardoned. Luke 6:37

Help me accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. Romans 14:1

I want to stop passing judgment on one another. Instead of judging I determine not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in my brother's way. Rom 14:13

Have fun with the other passages.

DAY THREE

Try beginning the session with turning one of Paul's prayers into a personal prayer.

Father I ask that the Chico family may be saturated with the knowledge of Your desires in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that we may to live our lives in a manner worthy of You. May we be fully pleasing to You, bearing spiritual fruit in every good work and increase in the knowledge of You. May You strengthen us with all power, according to Your glorious might, that will enable us to endure (hang in there) and show longsuffering with joy, giving thanks to You Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. Colossians 1:9-12

Today is a day to consider the command not to be embittered. I didn't spend time on the subject so following is an extended treatment. Years ago we spend numerous messages on the subject that is available upon request along with the audio of a series on anger and one on bitterness.

“Uprooting Bitter Roots”

Hebrews identifies three deadly infections that critically cripple the church. God calls the entire Christian community to guard against their spread in the community.

- 1. Guard against anyone falling short of God's enabling grace**
- 2. Guard against the spread of bitter roots**

➤ **The character of bitterness**

Definition

Bitterness describes the presence of negative thoughts and emotions in the soul toward those I hold responsible for an actual or perceived offense intentionally or unintentionally inflicted upon me or someone I care about.

These negative and destructive thoughts and emotions can be directed toward God, myself or others. Whoever I deem responsible for failure to live up to my expectations, didn't come through for me or caused me discomfort becomes the object of my negative thoughts and emotions. Bitter roots develop due to the failure to properly address wounds and offenses. Wounds and offenses are unavoidable – bitterness is.

God instructs the community of Christ to passionately “see to it” that root out bitterness. All of us must passionately guard against the spread of bitter roots in the Christian community.

Description

Bitterness is like an infected wound.

Bitterness is like a polluted stream.

Bitterness is like an aggressive plant that takes over the garden.

Characteristics from Hebrews 12:15

...seeing to it that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled
Hebrews 12:15

Bitterness is a community issue

Bitterness is distasteful and poisonous

Bitterness begins underground

Bitterness eventually surfaces

Bitterness entangles us

Bitterness defiles others

➤ **The cause of bitterness is pride**

The bitter plants of negative and destructive thoughts and emotions toward God, myself or others flourishes in the soil of self-centeredness or pride. The selfish focus of “me and mine” becomes the perfect environment for the germination and proliferation of destructive bitter

roots. Scripture clearly traces the source of all relational meltdown and dysfunction to selfish ambition and bitter jealousy arising from selfish pride; energized by the world, the flesh and the devil.

➤ **The consequences of bitterness**

Bitterness creeps its way into every person's life. There is no shortage of stories illustrating its devastating effects on the kingdom of God over the centuries. Its destruction can be traced all the way back to the very first family. God counseled Cain (Adam and Eve's firstborn son) to beware how he dealt with his negative thoughts and bitter jealousy toward his brother Abel. God counseled him to master the temptation to harbor those negative feelings toward another. He ignored the counsel and it quickly led to murder – the ultimate expression of bitterness.

Bitterness has severe consequences on the giver and the receiver. It destroys churches. It destroys families. It ruins marriages. It severs relationships. It ravages spiritual, mental and emotional health as well as physical health. Paul indicated that a failure to forgive makes us vulnerable to Satan's schemes.

But whom you forgive anything, I also; for indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, I did it for your sakes in the presence of Christ, in order that no advantage be taken of us by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his schemes. 2Cor 2:10

An unforgiving spirit is like a hot coal. The longer and tighter it is held, the deeper the burn. Stanley

➤ **The cure of bitterness**

Prevention of bitterness

Prevention starts with a decision to apply the inoculation, the vaccine. It is like that stuff that you can spread on the garden to prevent the germination of weeds. It doesn't work once the plants become established. It was developed to prevent germination. Here are four decisions we must make. They are the core of what it means to be a follower of Christ. They were the foundations of everything Jesus did.

Fully trust God

Sacrificially serve people

Completely forgive those who offend me

Genuinely bless those who offend me

The continual attention to these four things will prevent the germination of bitter roots no matter how slight or severe the offense. But what do we do if about already established roots?

Cure for bitterness

If you are a Christian, the primary biblical response to offense is love and forgiveness. Jesus entrusted His life to God. Jesus sacrificed His life for the offenders. He not only dismissed our debt but lavished undeserved blessing upon us in spite of the offense. We are called to do the same thing.

To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing. 1 Peter 3:8-9

Over and over again, the Scriptures prescribe a new way to relate to one another. Love for one another and even our enemies is the ultimate evidence of a true follower of Christ.

But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him— Colossians 3:8-10

So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. Colossians 3:12-17

This kind of fruit grows out of the soil of humble trust in the father's love and care.

This kind of fruit grows out of the soil of service to the needs of others.

The failure to forgive the offenses of others is a serious offense in itself. In fact, Scripture indicates it is unforgivable.

Following an accurate diagnosis, there is a six-step antibiotic that effectively eradicates bitterness and builds up the immunity in the soil of your life to fight any further infection or infestation. As you will notice, many of the preventative elements are the same as the curative elements. They serve both as vaccine and antibiotic.

Honestly examine your life for bitter roots (detection)

Because bitterness can mask itself as something else, it is imperative that we carefully identify its presence. It can often masquerade as righteous anger, standing up for what is right, justifiable response, tough love, self preservation, our spiritual gifting. Jesus had all of these and was never known by his negative reaction to life even when He had to get tough on occasion. He was known for His gentle spirit, not His angry spirit. Allowed to propagate, these bitter roots will eventually break the surface and manifest.

a. Look for the bitter and poisonous surface plants

Observe the outward expressions of negative thoughts and emotions.

Be aware of a constant struggle with anger, negative attitudes, hurtful actions and words that persistently slip past the guard on our mouth. Are we continually saying hurtful things and having to go back and apologize later? Eventually, we will get the reputation as a “hot head”, an angry person, “short fuse”, negative person. How do others perceive us? Are we known for our encouragement or our criticism? Do people seek us out or avoid us? Scripture devotes significant space to exposing negative thoughts and emotions toward others and encouraging positive ones.

*...enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying... Gal 5:20-21
...being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful... Rom 1:29-31*

Jesus made it clear that unaddressed bitter roots in the soul eventually manifest on the surface. The conversation of our mouth will ultimately reveal the condition and contents of our soul.

The things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile the man... Matthew 15:18-20

We must do more than try to just control our words. That is like trying to control the weeds in our yard by only cutting them off at the surface. It is much more effective to remove the entire root system. Bitter plants on the surface (words, attitudes and actions) confirm bitter roots underground.

b. Look for a controlling spirit

Failure to properly address hurtful past wounds will drive us to expend excessive energy preventing wounds in the present by controlling our environment. Like favoring the twisted ankle or the sore shoulder we will overly compensate to protect open wounds. Listen carefully. We cannot prevent offenses. We cannot prevent painful circumstances. Emotional self-protection by controlling others is futile. Self-promotion is repulsive. The end result is continual frustration and bitterness at those who defy our attempt to control people and life to protect ourselves from the pain of living in a fallen world. Until we entrust our souls to the “Blessed Controller of all Things”, the “Faithful Creator”, our life energy will be absorbed in the futile exercise of trying to prevent the unpreventable.

c. Identify sensitivity

Are we easily offended. Easily hurt. Overly sensitive to certain things. These may be a sign of a bitter root, an infected open wound. Completely healed wounds don't hurt when touched. Unaddressed wounds fester and continually cause pain and are super sensitive. If the mere mention of an offender's name brings back a fresh round of negative thoughts and painful emotions, the infection remains. If memories of a particular event continue to cause extreme distress, we may require further healing. We need to apply the cure. We need a fresh round of antibiotics to get rid of the bitter infection once and for all.

d. Look for a self-centered focus (pride)

Remember! Where there is selfishness, there will be bitterness. Where there is bitterness, there will be pride. Is it about me or is it about serving others? Is it about my way or God's way? Do things always have to be about me? Does my conversation always center on me, my feelings, my needs, my pain, my desires? Do I need constant reaffirmation and attention? Chances are, the problem is pride which becomes the perfect breeding ground for bitterness. If it is always about me, I will always be offended by those who don't meet my expectations. If I expect others (my spouse, my friends, my children, my parents, my coworkers) to fill the void only God can fill, I will continually be disappointed and offended and angry. I will continually fight with bitterness toward others. That goes for personal expectations of myself. If my sense of well being is dependent on my personal performance or abilities, I will continually be disappointed in myself and harbor negative feelings toward myself. Depression is really negative thoughts and emotions turned inward.

If I expect God to make life comfortable and protect me from the difficulties of life in a fallen world or do things my way, I will continually battle bitterness toward God. I will become like the unbelieving grumbling Israelites demanding God to answer to me or I will find another way.

e. Track any history of relational “train wrecks”

Do people make a wide berth around us? Are you uncomfortable to be around? Do I have trouble making and maintaining friends; burning them out with my negativity? Loneliness sets in as bitterness hardens our hearts. Don't assume it is always a problem with other people. Take an honest look at how we have treated others.

Repent of any pride and self-centeredness

Follow the remedy for pride prescribed in James 4:6-10.

Fully trust God

This is a conscious decision to entrust everything about my life into God's hands. It is a commitment to view all the people and events in my life as something arranged or allowed by God to work His purposes in me or through me.

Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right. 1 Peter 4:19

It is that commitment that will enable us to see life's difficult people and events from an eternal perspective and reduce the opportunity for negative thoughts and emotions to flourish.

Sarah was able to willingly submit to her husband Abraham's leadership because her trust was in God not her husband.

If we truly trust God concerning everything that comes into our lives...

If we truly believe that God has allowed even this offense to accomplish something in my life...

If we believe that He intends this unpleasant circumstance to bring about His purposes...

...THEN there is no ground for bitterness to develop.

Rather, there is great opportunity for deeper trust, thanksgiving and obedience.

Sacrificially serve for the good of others

Husbands are to sacrificially love their wives as Christ loved the church and not be embittered. We are to focus on pouring into the lives of others. It is hard to harbor bitterness toward those we have chosen to serve.

If I view this circumstance as an opportunity to minister for God and to people...

If I understand that even this offense is an opportunity to demonstrate the love of Christ...

If I have truly offered my life in service to God and others...

THEN there is no ground for bitterness to develop.

Rather, there is opportunity for rejoicing at the chance to suffer for Christ and further His purpose on earth.

Personally embrace God's grace and forgiveness

Over and over again the measure and motivation to forgive others is our forgiveness by Christ. It stands to reason then, that we must first apprehend and appreciate the marvel of our own forgiveness before we can extend any level of forgiveness to others. Until we understand the magnitude of our forgiveness, we will forever struggle with forgiving others. Forgiveness not only conditions but cleanses the soil of our soul. Bitterness blocks true ministry and genuine expression of Christ's love. The more we understand the enormity of Christ's love and forgiveness toward us, the more we will eagerly love and forgive others.

The core concept of forgiveness has to do with releasing from debt. Forgiving does not have to do with forgetting. It has to do with consciously releasing the debt of our debtors.

I like the older translation of the Disciple's Prayer.

"Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors."

If we are struggling with our own personal debt it is much more difficult to consider releasing others from their debt to us.

Say I own the bank \$5,000. You owe me \$500. The bank calls and demands immediate payment. I ask for mercy and additional time to pay. Request denied! I anxiously in turn demand immediate repayment of your debt. You ask for mercy and more time to pay. What will be my likely response?

On the other hand, let's say the bank not only completely forgives ALL my debt, but promises that no further debt will ever be incurred because they have granted an unlimited line of credit to cover any future expenditure that never has to be paid back. I will never be in debt to the bank again! What effect might that have on my response toward the one who owes me \$500?

Just before His death on the cross, Jesus uttered those most powerful words: "It is finished!" It could actually be translated "paid in full" "To conclude, finish, complete, execute, discharge a debt, pay."

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us. Ephesians 1:7-8

When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us ALL our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Colossians 2:13-14

How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered!

How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit! Psa 32:1-2

Not only did we inherit the debt of our ancestors back to Adam, we added plenty of our own. It was a debt none of us could ever hope to pay. It was a debt that condemned us to an eternity of punishment. Jesus paid it all in full. He took all of our sin and guilt.

He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. Psa 103:10-12

Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses. Acts 13:38-39

The Lord is good, ready to forgive, abundant in lovingkindness to all who call upon You. Ps 86:5

Completely forgive those who have offended you

Once you come to grips with the extent of God's forgiveness through Christ's sacrifice, it becomes completely unreasonable and even criminal to demand payment or punishment from those who offend us. Forgiving our offenders is not only reasonable, it is **REQUIRED**.

'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 'And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]' "For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions. Matthew 6:12-15

Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions. Mark 11:25

There it is! Failure to forgive others prevents our forgiveness. If we refuse to forgive others, the Father refuses to forgive us.

Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him." Luke 17:3-4

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. Ephesians 4:32

bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Colossians 3:13

Forgiveness does not mean I forget. Forgetting offenses is not only impossible, it is unhealthy. God does not forget our offenses. He can't forget! He is omniscient. He doesn't forget anything.

"for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." Jeremiah 31:34

That means God will not remember them against us. He will not bring them up and charge us with them ever again. I cannot forget the things done to me but I can choose not to demand payment or exact punishment or hold it against the offender.

The foundational teaching of Jesus concerning forgiveness is recorded in Matt 18:21-35 in response to a question from Peter.

I identify at least six characteristics of genuine forgiveness from this passage of Scripture.

Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. "When he had begun to settle them, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. "But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. "So the slave fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay*

you everything.' "And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. "But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.' "So his fellow slave fell to the ground and began to plead with him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.' "But he was unwilling and went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. "So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. "Then summoning him, his lord said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 'Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?' "And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. "My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart." Matthew 18:21-35*

f. Confrontive

The master had a legitimate right to collect on the debt and chose to settle accounts. There are times when we need to lovingly communicate someone's offense and how it has affected us. We must realize that most of the time repayment is impossible. People cannot change history. We cannot take back words said or actions done. The most we can hope for is a realization of the offense and a request for forgiveness leading to reconciliation. Confrontation is not always the best course of action. The key is what brings God greater glory and best achieves the purposes of the Kingdom. In this case, the slave asked for more time to repay. He did not realize that it was beyond his capability to repay. His pride did not allow him to perceive what actually took place.

g. Character based

The Master felt deep compassion. This is the key to forgiveness. Love for the offender is central. Becoming God's channel of love is key. This kind of love is supernatural. God's people have powerfully demonstrated this kind of love and forgiveness for centuries in the face of horrific suffering and abuse.

h. Costly

Forgiveness is not free. Someone must bear the cost. In the case of the parable, the Master absorbed the cost to forgive. He absorbed the millions of dollars of debt incurred by the servant. Any time we forgive another, there is a cost to the one forgiving. Sometimes there is great emotional cost. Sometimes there is great personal cost. There is at times a significant monetary cost.

Because Jesus grants us an unlimited amount of forgiving grace, we can easily afford to release the debts of others and absorb the cost. Jesus paid the ultimate cost for our forgiveness by His death on the cross. Can we do less?

i. Complete

We must completely forgive. The master forgave ALL the debt of the slave. He didn't just give more time. He discharged the WHOLE debt. No conditions.

j. Continual

Jesus answered Peter's question concerning how often we should forgive. His answer basically advocated continual forgiveness. Not just seven times (which Peter probably perceived as a very generous gesture) but 490.

k. Cleansing or cathartic

Failure to forgive imprisons us just as surely as bitterness imprisons those we fail to release. Unforgiveness obligates us to become prison guards over those we incarcerate by our bitterness. In the parable, the slave becomes imprisoned by his own bitterness and unforgiveness. He suffered at the hand of the tormentors. Failure to forgive others invites torment on us. It eats us up. It drains our energy. It distracts our attention from Kingdom matters. It keeps our focus on the negative and thwarts our blessing. God will not dismiss the designated consequences of unforgiveness. That is what it means when it says that the Father will not forgive us if we fail to forgive others. It does not mean He withdraws eternal forgiveness because Jesus paid for all sin. It means the debt or consequences of unforgiveness cannot be dismissed in this life. The all-encompassing consequences of bitterness and unforgiveness will encompass us. We will fall into the hands of the tormentors. Only repentance and confession will free us from their torment. Forgiveness not only frees our offenders, it frees us.

Genuinely bless those who have offended you

It is not enough just to forgive those who offend us. That is only half the cure. Scripture call to bless them; to speak well of them.

To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing. 1 Peter 3:8-9

Blessing others enriches the soil of our soul like a good fertilizer. It sweetens the soil to produce the sweet fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Romans 12:14

God instructs us to speak well not evil of all people. We are to only let words that encourage others and build them up proceed from our mouth. To do otherwise violates God's word and invites His discipline. It is difficult to control our tongue. It is set on fire by hell itself. James tells us that anyone who can control his tongue is a perfect man. The perfect man has a perfect heart. The only way to control the tongue is to cleanse the heart from which the mouth speaks.

Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord. "BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Romans 12:19-21

But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either. Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back. Treat others the same way you want them to treat you. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners

love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same amount. But 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 Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Luke 6:27-36

See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people. 1 Thessalonians 5:15

But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either. Luke 6:27-29

You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. Matthew 5:43-48

APPLICATION

1. Honestly examine your life.

Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way. Psalms 139:23-24

Enlist the help of others. Sometimes they can detect bitterness before we do.

God – Ourselves – Others

Write down the names and events that come readily to mind. They are the most critical.

2. Confess pride and bitterness and repent.

Father, I acknowledge my bitterness toward _____ and I realize that its presence points to pride in my life. My self-centered agenda and comfort were more important than Yours or the good of others. I confess my pride and bitterness and purpose to love and forgive even my enemies. I confess the times that I have even entertained bitterness toward You for not meeting my expectations or answering my prayers the way I thought You should. I will honestly acknowledge where my words, attitudes or actions have offended others and purpose to humbly make an honest effort to make it right.

3. Entrust your life to God.

I confess the times I have taken control of my own life. I affirm that You always know what is best for me and have my best interest at the center of Your heart. I affirm that everything that comes into my life has some eternal purpose. Not everything at the time seems good from my point of view but Your word affirms You work everything together for good. Therefore, I thank You for the opportunity to trust You in difficult times and I now choose to view every past offender and offense as an opportunity to pinpoint and purge pride from my life, draw closer to You, develop deeper trust and impact this world for Christ. I refuse to be bitter about what You have allowed to come into my life.

4. Offer your life in service to others

I offer myself as Your instrument in the lives of those You bring into my life. I chose to consider others more important than myself; their needs above my needs. I chose to give my life in service to others. I refuse to become bitter against those You have brought in my life to serve.

5. Embrace your own forgiveness by Jesus

My sin, O the bliss of this glorious thought;

My sin, not in part, but the whole is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more.

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord O my soul! It is well with my soul.

I humbly and gratefully acknowledge and accept Your forgiveness and will not proudly try to repay what is impossible to repay. I accept Your cleansing forgiveness and the grace to forgive others.

6. Forgive (release) all those who have offended you

I refuse to harbor bitterness toward You. I refuse to demand payment from or punishment on any who have offended me. I choose to forgive them. I will not punish by my words, attitudes or actions. I will not demand payment by expecting anything from them as a condition of my forgiveness. I choose to personally absorb the pain and cost through the grace You so abundantly supply. I choose to no longer harbor or express negative thoughts and emotions toward You, myself or any one.

7. Bless those who have offended you

I choose to bless all who have offended me. I choose to bless You. I choose to bless myself.

I choose to bless others. I purpose to spend time everyday cultivating positive thoughts and emotions.

I refuse to vent negative words to or about any who have offended me but to bless them instead.

DAILY AFFIRMATION

I will honestly search my heart

Continually expose any bitter roots in my life.

I choose to trust You today

Everything in this life is an opportunity to deepen my trust in You and prepare me for the next.

Therefore I will not harbor negative thoughts or emotions toward You, myself or any person that offends me or disappoints me.

I will entrust my life into Your hands today.

I choose to serve others today

You have called me to be an instrument in Your hands to impact this world for Christ.

Therefore, I will resist focusing on me and offer my life to serve others.

I will resist negative thoughts and emotions toward those who make my life more difficult.

I will not expect others to provide the sense of wellbeing that can only come from You.

I embrace Your forgiveness today

I rejoice in the wonder of my forgiveness.

I am deeply grateful that You have forgiven all my sin against You.

Because of Christ I can face this day without debt.

I choose to forgive myself and all who offend me today

*I refuse to harbor negative thoughts or emotions toward anyone or speak evil to them or of them.
I will forgive all who offend me as You in Christ have forgiven me.*

I choose to be a blessing today

*I bless You.
I rejoice in what Christ has done in me and what He wants to do through me.
I choose to bless those You bring across my path today.*

DAY FOUR

Today begin with an affirmation of God's attributes. Give praise to God for His Excellencies.
*But you are **A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION**, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 1 Peter 2:9*

Prayer based on a brief Summary of the Attributes of God

➤ Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you are GREAT.

You have existed as the source and essence of life itself (**self-existent**) from eternity past to eternity future (**eternal**). You have no necessary relationship with anything or need for anything outside of Yourself (**self-sufficient**) yet still choose to involve your humble creation in your purposes. You are present everywhere at the same time (**omnipresent**) and thus always available to your children. You know everything there is to know about everything (**omniscient**) and are fully aware of everything and know just what to do and how to do it and when. By the mere exercise of Your will You are able to produce whatever You will (**omnipotent**) and are definitely able to handle anything I may bring before you. Everything about You is **incomprehensibly infinite**. You are greater than me or anyone else can conceive. Being infinitely perfect You have no need to ever change (**immutable**) and can be counted on to remain the same.

➤ You, O Lord, are so GOOD.

You are **good** in every sense of the word. You are the very definition and standard of goodness. It is Your goodness that disposes You to act beneficially toward Your creatures. That goodness manifests in a number of wonderful responses to us Your people. You, loving Lord, continually seek to engage in meaningful relationship with Your creatures (**love**) which manifests in unconditional acceptance and selfless service. Because of Your great love, You look with pity on sinful, suffering creatures and withhold deserved judgment (**merciful**) for significant periods of time (**long-suffering**). On the basis of the price already paid by Christ, You do not demand payment from us for our offenses (**forgiving**) freeing You to lavish measureless undeserved blessing (**full of grace**) on those who believe. You continually and gently draw us (**gentleness**) to Yourself through Your continuous acts of **kindness**. Thank You that You remain forever true to Your own word no matter what (**faithfulness**).

➤ You, O God, are mysteriously TRANSCENDENT

You are completely separated from all that is contrary to Your own moral law (**holy**) and You absolutely conform to Your own standard of what is right (**righteous, just**). You always act

responsibility and decisively toward all that is evil (**wrath**) and you will not endure anything less than full devotion from Your servants (**jealous**).

To You most High God I lift my praise and acknowledge Your majesty this day.

I exalt your greatness.

I acknowledge Your goodness.

I stand in awe of your transcendence.

Grant me greater understanding of Your greatness.

Cause me to be a channel of Your goodness.

May I reflect Your transcendence as a child of the KING.

Summary of Anger Management Principles

For Details see notes from sermons series on anger

Definition

Anger is the soul's response to perceived or actual events, people or circumstances considered wrong, evil or threatening to my well-being or to those I love that empowers me to act in relation to God's purposes.

Step ONE: Reflect on beliefs, expectations and perceptions

❑ Do I embrace some basic anger controlling beliefs?

1. My longing for love and acceptance is and can only be realized through vital relationship with God.

People cannot fully satisfy my deepest longing for acceptance

2. My longing for significance is and can only be realized through my identification with Christ.

Power and prestige cannot fully satisfy my deepest longing for significance.

3. My longing for holiness will only be realized through relationship with Jesus Christ.

Performance through the flesh cannot fully satisfy my longing to be righteous

4. I have been uniquely called to minister to the needs of others by proclaiming God's truth and expressing God's love.

We are called to minister to the needs of others not manipulate others to meet my needs.

5. We live in a fallen world where all systems are subject to the law of deterioration.

Things will always break down and people will always fail sooner or later.

6. Struggle or tribulation in our life leads to spiritual maturity.

Internal and external encounters with evil are a fact of life and are intended to bring me into deeper trust and more intimate connection with God.

7. God is the ultimate controller of all things who will eventually bring everything into conformity with His perfect will.

We cannot control people's heart or actions or the circumstances of life. He will work all things together for good in His way and time. We entrust our lives to Him and pray.

☐ Are my values and beliefs and convictions Biblicallybased?

☐ Are my expectations reasonable and Biblical?

☐ Am I sure my perception is accurate (do I have all the facts?)?

Step TWO: Reflect on the event

- ☐ Unmistakable evil (clear violations of a Biblical standard not just my perception)
- ☐ Unintentional action (no evil motive intended)
- ☐ Uncontrollable circumstances generated from a fallen world.
Usually anger stirred by uncontrollable circumstances (rain on the picnic) or uncooperative things (flat tire) are not evil and needs to be defused by a belief and expectation adjustment.
- ☐ Unfulfilled personal expectation
- ☐ Unaddressed soul issues causing or intensifying my anger?
 1. **Guilt -- Unconfessed or unaddressed sin in our life**
 2. **Doubt of God's basic goodness and love results in codependency and fear**
 3. **Self-centered focus**
 4. **Bitterness**
 5. **Old Wounds**
 6. **Demonic strongholds**
 7. **Old ruts of response**
- ☐ Unbiblical belief
- ☐ Unimportant personal difference of opinion
- ☐ Unverified perception

Step THREE: Reflect on the emotion

- ☐ Is my anger under control? (I direct it.)
- ☐ Is my anger out of control? (It drives me.)

Step FOUR: Reflect and choose an appropriate response

Purpose or motivation behind my response

1. **Redemption – to serve as God's instrument in the lives of others**
2. **Restraint – to expose evil and protect from evil**
3. ***Revenge – to punish the evil doer***
4. ***Regulations – to selfishly manipulate or control***

Whatever my chosen response may be it MUST honor God and advance His Kingdom.

Prohibited Responses

Never take our own vengeance.
Never pay evil for evil or insult for insult.
Never revile in return.
Never harbor bitterness.
Never gossip and pass on an evil reports.
Never hold malice

Never hate.
Never act unbecomingly
Never rejoices in unrighteousness
Don't bite and devour.
Never express abusive speech or slander
Judge not lest we be judged.

Prescribed Responses

In relations to ourselves

1. Repent and put away ALL selfish, unrighteous anger
2. Rejoice, knowing that trials cause us to grow more mature in Christ.
3. Praise Him! "*In everything give thanks!*"
4. Don't lose heart
5. Encourage others in their struggle as we have been encouraged in ours.
6. Pray at all times.
7. Persevere; remain under with a view to the accomplishment of eternal purposes.

In relation to the offender

Always pray for those who persecute
Always do good.
Always show forbearance.
Always forgive.
Always bless.
Always pray

Always demonstrate kindness.
Speak the truth in love.
Speak seasoned words that build up others.
Always love even your enemies.
Show mercy.
Correct in gentleness.

For this, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. Romans 13:9-10

Promoted Response (options)

Proper purpose - glorify God and His eternal purpose

Proper focus -- God-centered not self-centered issues

Proper motive -- God centered not man centered ends

Proper expression -- expression within the bounds of scripture.

Proper action -- directed by eternal purpose

Proper timing -- At the right time, for the right length of time. "Anger lasts for a moment"

1. Responses related to renewal, restoration and reconciliation

Respond with Kindness

Respond with loving Correction & Confrontation

Respond with silence and personal prayer

2. Responses related to restraint

Correction, avoidance, exposure, warning

3. Responses related to removal from fellowship and disassociation

Day Five

Since there was so much material this week I suggest taking time to contemplate what your spiritual gift might be and how God is using it in some kind of ministry context. Focus on the list in Romans 12.

Begin your time with the “Busy Schedule” Healthy Habits prayer suggested on day one.