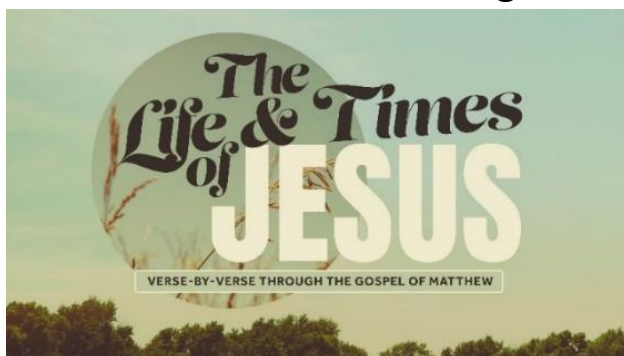


FELLOWSHIP NOTES ~ SUNDAY, August 17th, 2025



Part 11: “BEWARE of Hypocrisy” (Part 5) **Matthew 6:14-15; Hebrews 12A:15**

Last Sunday we saw here in chapter 6 that when Jesus gave his teaching on how to pray, he tacked on to his teaching a further explanation and warning about one particular aspect of prayer.

READ Matthew 6:9-15

So last Sunday we took some time to consider what Jesus meant when he said that if we fail to forgive others their sinful offenses against us, God won't forgive us of our sinful offenses either.

And we saw that Jesus wasn't talking about the forgiveness of sins we experience through salvation. Once we place our faith in Christ for salvation we have an eternal relationship with God through Jesus and that relationship with the Lord is eternally secure.

But since we're not yet in our perfected state in heaven, we all still sometimes sin, and our sin negatively impacts our fellowship with the Lord unless we deal with it by confessing that sin to the Lord and asking His forgiveness.

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"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

1 John 1:9

And this is the forgiveness Jesus is referring to here. If we refuse to forgive others when they sin against us, then when we seek to confess our own sin to the Lord and receive His forgiveness so that we can enjoy a close fellowship with Him...

He has no intention of forgiving us until we deal properly with the sin debt that exists between ourselves and others by forgiving them. And that's scary, because that leaves us in a spiritual state of separation from the Lord.

Our fellowship with the Lord isn't right and it's not going to be right until we seek out those we haven't forgiven and extend forgiveness to them just like the Lord has given us.

So last Sunday I think we can all agree that as we considered Jesus' words here and many other passages of Scripture that implore us to live with a forgiving heart toward others...

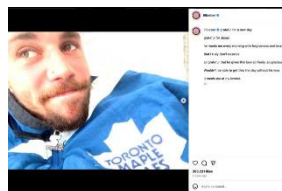
The concept of forgiveness and the command that comes with it in Scripture is sometimes a touch nut to crack. Forgiveness might well be among the most difficult of qualities that mark the Lord Jesus that we are responsible to emulate in order to be like Him.

So as our services concluded last Sunday, before I even left this stage, I felt compelled by the Lord that He didn't want us to move on in our study of the Sermon on the Mount, but rather wanted me to take some more time on this topic this morning, and that's what we're going to do.

I shared with you last Sunday Pastor Bill Elliff's testimony about his father's unfaithfulness to his mother and the pain that caused their entire family and the amazing forgiveness his mother extended toward him. I'm indebted today to Bill's teaching on this topic.

I don't know if it's me just being more sensitive to this right now or not, but it just seems like forgiveness keeps coming up in the news. One interesting item was this news report about of all people, Justin Bieber.

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Here's a screenshot of Justin's Instagram post – of course I take the time to follow these kinds of things very closely – and you can't read it, but here's what he said...

"Grateful for a new day, Grateful for Jesus he meets me every morning with forgiveness and love that I truly don't deserve." So grateful that he gives this love so freely, so graciously, Wouldn't be able to get thru the day without his love. It meets me at my lowest."

Apparently Bieber has been attending church in Beverly Hills. You know, I really do hope and pray that Bieber is authentic in what he says. It can be easy for us however to be skeptical when he also posts photos of himself smoking marijuana and giving the middle finger to the camera.

As our Lord so clearly reminded us, what matters is not our words, but our fruit. Spiritual fruit is the only biblical evidence of a changed heart, one that's been surrendered to Jesus Christ through salvation. And a changed heart will always result in a changed life.

And when it comes to forgiveness that is likewise true. For us to say that it's important to us to want to be like Jesus is one thing...

But if we're ignoring Jesus' command for us to be like him by being forgiving of others, then our words belie our heart condition, and our lack of spiritual fruit speaks volumes about our true spiritual condition.

The reality of life is this: everyone gets hurt by other people – everyone! We live in a fallen world where all of us by nature are broken people and broken people hurt other people. And that's true of Christians and non-Christians alike.

And when you boil all this down, we each have 2 available options to us in dealing with our hurt:

First, we can harbor our hurt – hold it in and let it fester – and if we do we experience the hurtful consequences of that decision which include primarily bitterness, but also depression, unresolved conflict, anger, broken and strained relationships, a distant relationship with the Lord, etc.

Or we can allow our hurt to be healed God's way – and experience the blessed consequences of that decision which include freedom, peace, a clear conscience, right relationships with others, a close fellowship with the Lord, etc.

The key to being healed God's way is by choosing the path of forgiveness. Only forgiveness will allow us to get through the minefield of our hurts and come out the other side having conquered the bitterness that is waiting to destroy our lives.

When we stockpile our hurts and fail to resolve them God's way through forgiveness, bitterness wraps itself around our emotions, and our thoughts, and impacts every aspect of our lives - our words, our actions, our mental state and our relationships, leaving us emaciated in every fiber of our being.

And the sad thing is, many people suffer from bitterness and don't even know it. In fact, I'll go out on a limb and say that all of us have suffered from bitterness at certain times in our lives...

And the only difference between all of us here this morning are those who have learned to deal with it God's way through forgiveness and have escaped, and those here who are still being held sway by its destructive clutches.

So I'll be the first here this morning to admit that I've dealt with bitterness. Satan has used it to try to hijack my life many times and sometimes he has succeeded and other times he has failed.

But I have learned that if I don't carefully tend to the soil condition of my heart, and deal with the weeds of bitterness God's way, I have no peace in my soul.

With our recent 30-year anniversary, many pastoral friends have brought up the topic of ministry longevity. It seems I'm now not so much older than these friends in some cases, but I'm longer tenured than many of them and they ask me how I've persevered all these years in the ministry especially in one church.

When these questions started surfacing even several years ago now, I kind of had a hard time coming up with a response. But after further reflection, I believe there are several factors that the Lord has used and I won't bore you with a list,

But certainly, on that list is you, the people of this church. God has been good in providing you as the family I've had the privilege of serving and shepherding.

I've known pastors who have been chewed up and spit out by the people of their church. And it's heartbreaking to hear those stories. I thank God that me and my family have not been treated in such ways but have been loved and cared for by you. So I thank God for you.

But another huge factor is what we're talking about here today: forgiveness. The nature of the ministry itself invites personal attack, and many other situations where it can be easy for pastors to become bitter toward people.

And the Lord has convicted me about not allowing these attacks to give me an embittered spirit, but to with His help forgive others instead. But to do so, I have to constantly check my heart and be on guard for a root of bitterness that wants to take root in my heart and life.

And I have to humble myself before the Lord. It takes a spirit of humility to be willing to say to the Lord, "Lord, if there is any bitterness in my heart toward anyone, would you reveal it to me today?"

I believe this is a prayer the Lord would want EVERYONE in this room to humbly pray to Him today.

Turn to Hebrews 12. Last Sunday, we briefly looked at this verse in Hebrews but we need to look closer at it this morning. Verse 15 says (if you don't have a Bible its up here on the screen)...

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***“Make sure that no one falls short of the grace of God
and that no root of bitterness springs up,
causing trouble and defiling many.”***

Hebrews 12:15

Here’s what God teaches us about bitterness in this verse...

(Slide) 1. Bitterness grows quickly like a weed – Heb. 12:15b

The middle part of the verse says... *“and that no root of bitterness springs up...”*.

Have you noticed in your yard this summer it seems like weeds are everywhere? And they’re popping up so fast! And when it comes to the hurts of life, they can pop up quickly too and have a life of their own.

We start thinking about someone at church who seemingly ignored us last Sunday, then our mind starts thinking about that and we remember a while back that same person didn’t shake our hand during the fellowship time cause they were talking with others.

Then it seems like when you sat near them under the tent a couple of weeks ago eating lunch you looked over at their table and you couldn’t hear what they were seeing but you swear they were talking about you.

And then...and your mind takes off, and the next thing you know you've convinced yourself that person doesn't like you for reasons known only to God and you start sizzling and getting angry about that and you think the only way to get even is just to avoid that person from now...

And before you know it, you've been led astray by unconnected thoughts from the evil one, and he's succeeded in planting a root of bitterness in your heart against someone else for something in some cases they haven't even done.

It all sounds way out there like it could never happen to you, but the truth is, that's how it works in all our minds and hearts when we don't guard against bitterness, and we aren't quick to forgive or to give others the benefit of the doubt.

Seeds of bitterness grow into roots of bitterness which spring up and become full-fledged living objects in our lives, UNLESS we deal with them at the seed level first.

Anytime you feel like not forgiving someone when they hurt you in some way, that seed of bitterness has been planted in your heart and unless you deal with it immediately it will eventually begin to take root and if not attended to with forgiveness will become a destructive force of power of bitterness in your life.

DON'T UNDERESTIMATE THE SMALLEST OR EVEN SIMPLEST OR BRIEFEST AMOUNT OF BITTTERNESS OR TEMPTATION TO TOWARD BITTTERNESS. It's like fentanyl.

Two ounces of fentanyl can be deadly to the human body. The smallest amount brings death. Bitterness is no different. We have to deal with it at the seed level before it matures into the root level, before it ever springs up and becomes a threat to your heart and soul.

(Slide) 2. Bitterness leads to self-destruction – Heb. 12:15c

The verse goes on to say that when a root of bitterness springs up it's inevitably going to cause trouble. I've already mentioned some of the other powerfully negative impacts that can accompany bitterness: Depression, anxiety, physical and mental maladies, anger, rage, and strained and broken relationships.

A person's life only goes in one direction if unforgiveness and bitterness aren't dealt with, and that's SOUTH!

(Slide) 3. Bitterness impacts everyone around us – Heb. 12:15d

The end of the verse says, "*defiling many.*" Just like COVID was when it hit our nation and our world, bitterness can't be contained. It can't be quarantined.

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When COVID was spreading, even people who tried to quarantine contracted the virus. For some people it took a while, but they eventually got sick. Millions of people got sick and millions died.

Just think about this: in a very real sense, there are millions upon millions of people in our world who are carrying around an endless list of roots of bitterness in their lives. And compounded by millions of relationships that are impacted by these people who are bitter toward someone.

I think it's safe to say everyone here and everyone you and I know is somehow negatively impacted by someone else's bitter feelings toward us. And that destructive force can only be eradicated by one thing: forgiveness. Forgiveness is the vaccine that heals, that restores and that diffuses all the powerful effects of unforgiveness and bitterness.

So let's get practical now in how we should administer this powerful vaccine into our heart and soul.

The Path to Freedom

(Slide) 1. Recognize and admit your own sin

The path to freedom begins when we focus on our own heart and ask God to help us discern any sin that we have in it. This is where healing begins.

If we've allowed bitterness or resentment or anger or a critical or retaliatory spirit towards others to sit in our hearts, then we're in sin and we need to ask the Lord to forgive us for such sins.

Starting here (our heart) is ALWAYS the place to begin if we're ever going to experience spiritual freedom and a right relationship with the Lord.

So ask yourself this question: Am I willing to humbly admit my own sin?

(Slide) 2. Embrace God's sovereignty

Just as important as the first step is this second step. It can be easy for us when we experience a traumatic event in our life at the hands of others to instead of turning TO God for help, we turn ON God with a blaming spirit and attitude.

This is one of the tempting tactics of the devil that he uses against all of us. If he succeeds and we turn ON God instead of turning TO Him, we've torpedoed ourselves because He's the only source of true help we have in the fight against bitterness and toward forgiveness.

We have to remember that God is not the author of sin or temptation. Whatever sinful thing another person has done to you did not originate with God in came from a sinful world that is being orchestrated by our enemy the devil.

But God truly is sovereign and He's the only one who can take a bad situation and turn it around for something good – if we let him.

If we'll run to God and seek His counsel and His wisdom and His divine healing in our hurt and pain from others, He will meet us and help us to let go of our unforgiveness and the bitterness that always accompanies it.

So let's ask ourselves this question: "Am I willing, right now, to begin to embrace God's sovereignty over my life? "

(Slide) 3. Release the debt by forgiving

If someone has hurt you, there's no other way around it, you have to, with God's help, unconditionally forgive the person who has offended you. There is no other way to remove the hurt that's in your heart.

The truth is, when we harbor forgiveness and bitterness, we're actually keeping a record of those hurts caused by others in our heart, hoping for the day to somehow collect on that debt and get even, make them pay for what they've done.

Again, remember what Jesus said in His model prayer, He wants us to forgive our debtors. When we do, we're releasing them and what they've done, to the Lord.

“Never pay back evil to anyone... Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of Gode, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord... do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

Romans 12:17-21

When we let go of the debts of others to God, we are giving Him the green light to be debt collector and He's the only one qualified to fill that role in the right time and in the right way – we are not.

So let's ask ourselves this morning, “Will I right now choose to release the debts of others against me by forgiving them, and letting God take care of it His way?”

(Slide) 4. Ask God to fill your heart with His love

We saw back in Matthew chapter 5 of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, His command that we love even our enemies. Once we let go of our hurt debts caused by others through our forgiveness of them, the next step is to ask God to give us a love for that person or those people – a divine love that only comes from Him.

Because we know that is God's will for us, we can be confident that that is a prayer that He will honor, and He will bless us as a result. He will do a divine work in our heart and give us a love for them that can only come directly from Him.

Love always vanquishes the residue of unforgiveness and bitterness that might linger in our heart against others.

So ask yourself this morning, "Am I willing right now to ask God to flood my heart with His love for those who have hurt me?"

(Slide) 5. Thank God for the experience

The Bible says in 1 Thessalonians 5:18 to "*Give thanks in everything; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*" (NOT FOR EVERYTHING)

When we turn our hearts toward thankfulness it's like saying to God, "Lord, I don't understand this whole situation completely, but I believe you are sufficient for what I need in this situation, and I thank you for being with me through it. You have given me your grace and I am grateful."

So would you be willing this morning to pray this simple prayer to the Lord, "God, give me a thankful heart that through this difficult situation you have been and you are with me right now, and I choose with your help, to be thankful."?

(Slide) 6. Keep continually and instantly forgiving

Being hurt by others is something we will always deal with as long as we're alive in this sinful world. You know what that means, right? We have to grow accustomed to, and get really good at, forgiving.

It requires a close walk with the Lord in order for that to happen. Only with God's help and strength can we do this. But each time we forgive others we are bushwacking bitterness at the door of our heart and not letting it deposit its seeds in our heart.

We are keeping it at bay outside our heart as we release others of their sins against us and let God handle them in His way, in His timing. We're practicing the command in Ephesians 4:32 which tells us to...

"Let all bitterness, anger and wrath, shouting and slander be removed from you, along with malice."

So the final prayer we should pray is this, "God, help me to continue to forgive until I'm at home in heaven with you."

Answering Questions about Forgiveness (back of notes)

Personal Bible Study about Forgiveness at the tower in the Lobby

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This is Simon Weisenthal. Simon was a Jew who was imprisoned in a concentration camp during W.W II. His job in the camp was to clean out the garbage in the building used as the hospital in the camp for the SS soldiers.

One night a nurse grabbed him by the hand and led him to a hospital bed where a 21-year-old SS soldier was lying, his face covered in a pus-filled rag. That young soldier grabbed Simon's tightly and told him he needed to talk to a Jew.

He said he needed to confess his sins against the Jewish people to a Jew before he died. He told him about participating in killing many Jewish men, women and children, mowing them down with his machine gun.

After he finished, Simon jerked his hand out of the soldier's hand and walked away without having said a single word – he had refused to forgive that SS soldier. He couldn't bring himself to extend forgiveness.

Many years later he wrote a book about his experiences in that concentration camp and at the conclusion of the book he asked one simple question: "What would you have done?". When the book was published many people responded to Weisenthal's question.

Most said they wouldn't have forgiven that soldier, one even said, "Let that soldier go to hell." Is that what Jesus would have said? Is that what Jesus would have done? Is that what Jesus taught?

As followers of Christ, as citizens of His kingdom, there's a standard of forgiveness that goes above and beyond that of Simon Weisenthal's. It's a standard that Jesus lived out and it's the one He wants us to live by.

"For if you forgive others their offenses, your heavenly Father will forgive you as well. But if you don't forgive others, your Father will not forgive your offenses." Matt 6:14-15.

So I ask you Fellowship, what will you do – with the debt of hurt and pain caused by others against you? Will you forgive and walk the path of your Master Jesus? Or will you go down the path of bitterness and darkness and pain for the rest of your life. The choice is yours.