

THE UNFORGIVING SERVANT

Then Peter came to Him and said, "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."
 —MATTHEW 18:21-22

[Read the remainder of chapter 11, beginning with the heading "The Unforgiving Servant."]

JESUS TAUGHT PETER AND THE DISCIPLES THAT FORGIVING OTHERS is based on God's unlimited forgiveness. To emphasize this, Jesus told the parable of the unforgiving servant.

Read again this parable in Matthew 18:23-35. Then complete these sentences:

For me, the main point of the parable is forgive others just as we have been forgiven.

What I hear God saying to me through this parable is I need to be merciful towards others and forgive just as I have been forgiven.

The offenses we hold against each other, compared to our offenses against God, are like \$4,000 compared to \$14.5 billion. We may have transgressions against God. When we realize that Jesus delivered us from eternal death and torment, we will release others unconditionally.

Rank the following offenses that are the most difficult (1) to the least difficult (7) for you to forgive.

- 4 Gossip against me
- 2 Someone physically or emotionally abusing me
- 1 Someone physically or emotionally abusing someone I love
- 3 Someone lying to me
- 5 Someone stealing from me
- 6 Someone manipulating me
- 7 Other disrespect

WRITE A PRAYER...

Asking God to remove the blockage in your heart that has been caused by unforgiveness. Pray specifically for the individuals whose offenses caused the blockage.

God, please remove all blockage or barriers in my heart. I release and forgive all those that caused offenses in my life that have caused blockage such as my husband, parents, past relationships, and church people. In Jesus name, Amen.

DAY 22

REVENGE: THE TRAP

Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.

—ROMANS 12:17

[Read chapter 12, stopping at the heading "A Potential King Defiled."]

HOLDING ON TO AN OFFENSE OF UNFORGIVENESS IS LIKE HOLDING a debt against someone. When one person is wronged by another, he believes a debt is owed him. He expects payment of some sort, whether monetary or not. However, it is unrighteous for us as children of God to avenge ourselves.

Read the following scriptures, and then, in a phrase, summarize what they teach about revenge.

Romans 12:19

Never take revenge. The Lord will take revenge and will pay them back.

James 4:12; 5:9

God is the judge, he has the power to smite or destroy. Don't grumble about each other.

Matthew 5:38-42

If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek. If you are sued ~~and~~ and they take your shirt give them your coat.

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DAY 22

Jesus eliminates any gray areas for grudges. In fact, He says that Jesus' attitude is to be so far removed from avenging ourselves that we are willing to open ourselves to the possibility of being taken advantage of again.

We are admonished to be rooted and grounded in the love of God.

Jesus likened the condition of our hearts to that of soil. We are admonished to be rooted and grounded in the love of God. The seed of God's Word will then take root in our hearts, will grow, and will eventually produce the fruit of righteousness—love, joy, long-suffering, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (See Galatians 5:22-23.)

However, ground will produce only what is planted in it. If we plant seeds of debt, unforgiveness, and offense, another root will spring up in place of the love of God. It is called the root of bitterness (Heb. 12:14-15). Bitterness is a root. If roots are nursed, watered, protected, fed, and given attention, they increase in depth and strength. If not dealt with quickly, roots are hard to pull up. The strength of the offense will continue to grow. Soon, instead of the fruit of righteousness being produced, we will see a harvest of anger, resentment, jealousy, hatred, strife, and discord. Jesus called these evil fruits worthless. (See Matthew 7:19-20.)

WRITE A PRAYER...

Thanking God that His peace has come into your life as a result of releasing the offenses that had blocked your heart.

Lord, thank you for the peace that has come into my life. Thank you for helping me release all strongholds of offenses that had blocked my heart. Thank you for my new found freedom! Thank you for setting me free.

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DAY 23

A POTENTIAL KING DEFILED

And Absalom spoke to his brother Amnon neither good nor bad. For Absalom hated Amnon, because he had forced his sister Tamar.
—2 SAMUEL 13:22

[Read the remainder of chapter 12, beginning with the heading "A Potential King Defiled."]

ABSALOM AVENGED TAMAR'S RAPE BY MURDERING AMNON. He also held bitterness in his heart against David for not punishing Amnon for the rape of Absalom's sister. Absalom's thoughts were poisoned with bitterness. He became an expert critic of David's weakness. Yet he hoped his father would call for him. When David would not, this fueled Absalom's resentment.

Out of this offended critical attitude, Absalom began to draw to himself anyone who was discontented. He made himself available to all Israel, taking time to listen to their complaints. He lamented that things would be different if only he were king. He judged their cases, since it appeared the king had no time for them. Perhaps Absalom judged their cases because he felt he had not been served justice in his own.

He seemed to be concerned for the people. The Bible says Absalom stole the hearts of Israel from his father, David. But was he genuinely concerned for them, or was he seeking a way to overthrow David, the one who had offended him?

The Holy Spirit convicts as He speaks through one's conscience.

DAY 23

Assistants to leaders in a church often become offended by the person they serve. They soon become critical, experts at all that is wrong with their leader, or those he or she appoints. They become defiled. Their sight is distorted. They see from a totally different perspective than God's.

Complete the following sentences:

When people come to me with criticisms of church leadership, I _____

I've learned to not engage in these types of conversations. I quickly change the conversation.

When I am critical of church leadership, I repent. I ask God to help me not talk in a

critical manner of church leadership.

The most effective way to handle offenses in the body of Christ is to go to the Lord in prayer, and be quick to forgive. God will avenge.

Make a list of any people in the church who offend you, including the leadership. Write down their names, and then write down the date when you will go to them and ask forgiveness for your offense.

Name _____ When you will ask forgiveness _____

Joel Prieto _____ Next time I see him _____

Chloide Martinez _____ Next time I see her _____

Christine Podoyez _____ Next time I see her _____

Stacy Martin _____ Next time I see her _____

Stephanie Manna _____ Next time I see her _____

Sometimes your observations about the weaknesses of church leadership are correct. Perhaps David should have taken action against Amnon. Perhaps a leader has areas of error. But who is the judge—you or the Lord? Remember that if you sow strife, you will reap it. The Holy Spirit convicts as He speaks through one's conscience. We must not ignore His conviction or quench His voice. If you have done this, repent before God and open your heart to His correction.

WRITE A PRAYER...

Asking God to remove a critical spirit from you.

Lord, please remove the unclean spirit from me. Help me not be so quick to find fault in others but help me be quick to repent. In Jesus name Amen!

DAY 24

ESCAPING THE TRAP

This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men.

—Acts 24:16

[Read chapter 13, stopping at the heading "Healing in Confrontation."]

IT TAKES EFFORT TO STAY FREE FROM OFFENSE. PAUL COMPARES IT to exercising. If we exercise our bodies, we are less prone to injury. When we exercise forgiveness and refuse to take up offenses, then we keep our consciences fit and clean.

It takes effort to stay free from offense.

Sometimes others offend us, and it is not hard to forgive. We have exercised our hearts so they are in condition to handle offenses; therefore, no injury or permanent damage results. But some offenses will be more challenging than those for which we've been trained to handle. This extra strain may cause a wound or injury, after which we will have to exercise spiritually to be healed again. But the result will be worth the effort. Are you facing a hurtful, serious wound? The exercise needed for recovery is listed below.

After reading each step, write down the specific response you will make in order to achieve recovery.

1. Recognize that you are hurt.
I have been hurt by Sister Rachel