

# Bitterness

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**Bible Text:** Genesis 1

**Preached on:** Thursday, July 3, 2014

## Capital Baptist Church

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Welcome. We're so glad you're here tonight. We're doing something a little bit different this evening and there are three categories of people here: one is those who responded to an email blast that we did and said that they wanted to be part of this time; then there are at least two small groups that have forgone their normal routine to participate. I hope that you as participants are glad that your leaders made that decision. Let's give it up for those wonderful leaders. This is a lot different than what is normal.

Let me give you a little background on what we're doing. Some of you got the email and maybe some of you didn't but this is kind of a unique experience. What I'm trying to do tonight is produce a win-win situation. I have a motive; I have an agenda. My agenda is to record a talk here and to record any input you want to give that will be used for a book that another pastor and I are writing this summer that's going to be a wellness and health book for pastors. So I'm not a writer. I do research, I craft things, I'm a speaker and things like that but as far as getting things on paper in a written form, I have to have lots of people to help me. Basically, I'm going to be talking here tonight and we're going to record it and then eventually that's going to get turned into a chapter of a book that we're writing. So I'm going to be talking tonight and you're going to hear me talk about pastors and I'm going to give you some inside information on pastors. This is going to be worth the whole time being here. I'm going to let you in on some of the secrets about pastors. If you'd like to hear about secrets and I know some of you do, then you came to the right place. But also, I have an agenda for your life and that is I want to help you and I want to help not only pastors and myself as a pastor, but I want to help you. I know some of you are very burdened about this and very interested in this and struggling with this and so I pray that God would use me to be a blessing and to be a help to you. Hopefully when we're all done here tonight, we've got a win-win situation and that we all benefit from what we're going to do this evening.

What we're going to do tonight is we're going to talk about uprooting your bitterness. Uproot your bitterness and we're going to talk about what I think is the number one sin in the church today. I believe with all my heart there is not a greater sin in the church today than bitterness. The result is, it's draining the power of God out of our lives; it's draining the power of God out of our churches. So we have to understand that this is a really important topic that we're dealing with this evening. So when you think about bitterness, bitterness is a sinful root that produces troublesome fruit. Bitterness is a sinful root that

produces troublesome fruit. Let's say that out loud together, here we go: bitterness is a sinful root that produces troublesome fruit. I made that up myself, by the way.

Hebrews 12:15. Where did we get this idea of uproot your bitterness? Why would we use that terminology uproot your bitterness? Hebrews 12:15 puts it this way, "Looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any," listen, "root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled." Notice that last part there that kind of ties into what I said a few minutes ago, "many are defiled." God's word tells us that many are defiled. "Defiled" means "sin," right? The whole idea of being defiled and not being pure and the Bible says that many, many are defiled by this sin. You know, pastors are part of those that are defiled by this sin and this is a big, big struggle that pastors face and there are a lot of different reasons for that but one of the biggest reasons is, I guess I'm prejudiced because of what I do, but I think one of the greatest challenging forms of leadership is to lead a volunteer organization. Yes, churches have some staff and things like that but overall we'd be considered a voluntary organization and people can come and people can go. I know that is true in the workplace, you can quit your job or whatever, but you do have that thing called a paycheck, I don't know if you've ever heard of one of those or not. So basically, there's a lot of disappointment. You make a lot of investment in people and you give yourself to people and you care about people and what happens? Well, a lot of times it doesn't go too well.

The other thing is that the type of people that come to church, a lot of times they're hurting, right? And hurting people hurt people. Hurting people hurt people so we are an organization, an institution, that's designed to help those that are hurting. That's what we're about but the bottom line thing is that hurting people do hurt people and so you've got this whole culture of what the church is supposed to be doing and yes, we're here to help hurting people but at the same time it can create some difficulties and some challenges. Pastors struggle with this and I learned this early on when I was in seminary, I came up here on weekends for almost two years and actually worked for a church on weekends: I'd come up on Friday night and I would stay through Sunday night and then go back on Sunday night. I'm all new to this pastoring stuff and I'm all fired up and I'm all excited and I'm believing God can do anything and all this stuff and I go to work for this pastor and he taught me a lot of good stuff but he also taught me that pastors can get bitter. I just said at that time, "God, help me to never go down that path," and I'm going to share with you my testimony. I did go down that path but God helped me and I'm going to show you how he helped me in just a little bit.

The bottom line is: I don't know how you view pastors, you might view us as we're invincible or whatever or we can handle anything or we can take anything, well, we can't. We can't. We're human. We hurt. We deal with disappointment like you do. We do pain just like you do. We're all in the same boat is what I'm trying to say and many are defiled by this. Many are defiled by this including pastors and the Bible says it's a root. It's a root, in other words, it gets down into your life; it digs into your life. There is a consequence and that is that it springs up and causes trouble. Bitterness is a troublemaker. Bitterness is a troublemaker. It gets into your life and gets deep into your life and what does it do? It causes trouble.

Now, it causes trouble on a lot of fronts. 1. It will trouble you spiritually. It will trouble you spiritually. The Bible says in Ephesians 4:26-27, “Be angry, and do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your wrath,” listen to this, “nor give place to the devil.” That is one powerful statement there. God is talking about how do you deal with anger. The purpose of this talk is not to talk about righteous anger and unrighteous anger but the point is that there is anger that goes across a line and part of that is letting the sun go down on your wrath. Now, what happens when you let the sun go down on your wrath? Eventually that root of bitterness starts getting into your life and it starts festering. That's why in marriage it's so important that we resolve our problems day-by-day and we might not come to a conclusion, sometimes you have to agree to disagree and say, “Okay, this is too big. We're not going to solve this today but I love you and you love me and let's whatever, let's go to bed.” It's okay. We're not mad at each other but we know we've got an issue we need to work on and things like that. God tells us “do not let the sun go down on your wrath” because here's the deal: when you do that, you are giving place to the devil. You are actually spiritually opening up a spot in your life for the devil to come into your lives. Think about that: you're giving a green light to the devil saying, “Come on in.” Again, with the whole marriage idea, how many times have I had somebody come to me, a spouse come to me and say, “I just don't love them anymore.” I could tell you what that means is, “I'm bitter at the person.” That's just code language, “I don't love them anymore.” What it is is that you've allowed a layer of bitterness just to so coat your heart that it's cemented your heart and the result is that you don't feel that love anymore for them. We have to understand that and we have to realize that it's serious. You are giving the devil a place. When we allow bitterness in our church and the church is us as people, and we allow bitterness behind our pulpits, the pastors, we are giving the devil a place. We are saying, “Devil, come on in. You've got the green light. You're welcome.”

2. It will trouble you mentally. “Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a fatted calf with hatred.” This is a food passage. Solomon, he's like Steve Reynolds, he prefers the meat over the herbs or whatever. It's saying: it's better to have a dinner of herbs or whatever, be a vegetarian or whatever, than to have a bit fatted calf where you've got hatred. Why? Because, do you know what? when you are bitter towards somebody, you've got hatred towards somebody, it just controls your mind. It's all you can think about, it's on your mind: you can't sleep; you can't get your rest; it's always there. They can move 1,000 miles away, they can die, they can pass away but they're locked in your mind. They're locked in your brain and you can never enjoy life. The nice things of life, the fatted calf or whatever, having the nice stuff in life, you never can enjoy any of that external stuff because of the internal struggle you've got in your own life with what? With bitterness. It will trouble you mentally. Who comes to your mind right now? Just think about that. I can think of a few church members or former church members that are kind of popping in my brain right now. I guess I'm the only one that's got that problem.

3. It will trouble you emotionally. It will trouble you emotionally. Proverbs 18:14, “The spirit of a man will sustain him in sickness but who can bear a broken spirit?” Man, when you've got a good spirit about you, it's sustains you even when you're sick but who can bear a broken spirit? A broken spirit. To me that speaks to the emotions and really

bitterness, to me, is like frozen rage. It's frozen rage and a lot of times people will say, "Well, I'm depressed. I'm depressed," and they'll start masking it and taking this medication or do whatever and sometimes maybe that's necessary, I'm not saying it's never necessary but a lot of times it's just masking an issue going on in a person's life of bitterness and not dealing with bitterness and not handling the bitterness that's going on in their life. It will trouble you emotionally and, again, a lot of times our depression is really just unforgiveness going on. Again, we've got that whole replay of the tape or the cd or whatever it is these days, going on in our minds and we're just playing it over and over again: that conversation I had with that church member or that situation that happened with me with that family member or whatever it might be. You just keep playing it over and over again and what happens? You go down, down, down emotionally.

4. It will trouble you physically. It will trouble you physically and this is really what we're focusing on with this book. To my knowledge, there is no health and wellness book for pastors out there. To my knowledge, if you know of one, I'd like to hear about it because most books for pastors are written about how to do the church and how to take care of the church. Well, what about taking care of the pastor? And what about the pastor taking care of himself? 76% of pastors are obese, not just overweight, obese, 76% of pastors are struggling in this area. So the Bible says when you've got a broken spirit, it's going to affect your body, it's going to dry your bones. So we have to understand there are physical results that trouble us specifically as a result of bitterness.

One of your handouts that I'm going to just read highlights and I know this is a lot of reading but I'm going to read it to you anyway but I want you to look at this and this is something that we've put together and I appreciate that Pete has helped me a lot with this document here but this is just looking at a lot of different research that's been done between the connection between the physical health and the bitterness. So let's read this. The title is "Uproot Your Bitterness. Bitterness is a simple root that produces troublesome fruit, Hebrews 12:15."

"Have you considered that a healthy lifestyle involves more than eating and exercising? While these are both important aspects of dieting, more is needed to be successful. We must also consider how emotions factor into this quest for a healthier lifestyle. 'Emotional eating is eating for reasons other than hunger,' says Jane K., a registered dietician at the University of Maryland. Instead of the physical symptom of hunger initiating the eating, an emotion triggers the eating."

You want to underline that statement there.

"Instead of the physical symptom of hunger initiating the eating, an emotion triggers the eating. We must bring our emotions under discipline. If you've ever tried a diet

program before, you know that one of the first things discussed is emotional eating. So you eat when you're stressed? When you're angry? When you're excited?

“One of the most detrimental emotions with regard to weight loss is bitterness. I like to call bitterness—frozen rage. Bitterness is a poison that can destroy your body. It is a contributing factor to many diseases. It results in depression and a feeling that life is not worth living.”

If you're into this stuff, this person here has done the best research. I think they've done like 2, maybe 3, big projects on this. It's a school up in Canada, Concordia University and this Carston R. If you're really into this kind of stuff and you want to do some deeper research, look up these two studies that he did and they're good. He said,

“When harbored for a long time, bitterness may forecast patterns of biological dysregulation, a physiological impairment that can affect metabolism, immune response or organ function and physical disease.”

So he's saying it affects your metabolism and physical disease.

“In another study, Professor R. discovered that intense life regrets are associated with a larger volume and steeper morning rise of cortisol secretion and with higher levels of acute physical symptoms. Bitterness and unforgiveness – these negative emotions have specific physical consequences, including increased blood pressure, adrenaline and cortisol secretions, and immune suppression. Elevated cortisol levels tend to cause fat deposition in the abdominal area, which is referred to as 'toxic fat,' since abdominal fat deposition is strongly correlated with the development of cardiovascular diseases, including heart attacks and strokes.”

So you've got all this stuff going on here: blood pressure, adrenaline, cortisol, toxic fat, heart attacks, strokes.

“In addition, the chemicals and hormones secreted by this toxic abdominal fat, also called omentum, increase the risk of cancer of the esophagus, breast (postmenopausal), endometrium, colon and rectum, kidney, pancreas, thyroid, gallbladder, and even ovarian cancer. The cells that make up the omentum contain the biological equivalent of jet fuel. They feed the ovarian cancer cells, enabling them to multiply rapidly.”

I like word pictures like “jet fuel.” They feed the ovarian cancer cells.

“The fatty tissue of the omentum is rich energy-dense lipids which provide an energy source for ovarian cancer cells enabling the spread of the disease.

“A study from Ohio State University found that highly stressed women had lower levels of natural killer cells, which are NK-cells, than women who reported less stress. Engaging in forgiveness actually increases your chance of beating cancer by increasing the number of NK cells. Natural killer cells have an extremely important function with regard to cancer because they are capable of detecting and killing cancer cells. Psychological interventions such as forgiveness have important roles in reducing stress and improving quality of life but also in extending survival. Barbara A. a professor of Psychology with Ohio State University.”

“That's right, toxic emotions lead to toxic fat. Conversely, letting go of bitterness and learning to forgive is not only a weight loss technique but also could save your life. Your body was not designed to house bitterness.”

Underline that: our bodies were not designed to house bitterness. They are a foreign substance in our body.

“Your body was not designed to house bitterness. Hebrews 12:14-15 says, 'Pursue peace with all people, and holiness...looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled.' Think about it? Who do you need to forgive?

“At the heart of bitterness is a lack of forgiveness. Not forgiving someone drives the issue underground where it festers and grows into a 'root of bitterness.' Forgiveness is not an option. It is a command: 'Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.' The command is repeated in Colossians 3:13, 'Forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.'

“Once again: research supports the notion that biblical values such as forgiveness according to Dr. Wirthington, a psychology professor at Virginia Commonwealth University. Chronic unforgiveness causes stress. Every time people think of their transgressor, their body responds. Decreasing your unforgiveness cuts down your health risk. Now, if you can forgive, that can actually strengthen your immune system. The cost of not forgiving others, and allowing a root of bitterness to grow inside you, is too costly to you and to your body. You must forgive, and forgive early when you have taken on an offense. Think about your own life and evaluate if an unforgiving attitude and a root of bitterness are affecting your ability to change your lifestyle so that you can lose weight.

“Remember, resentment only punishes you so don’t use food as a medication for it. The Bible says, 'Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice.' Ephesians 4:31. Obedience to this command will definitely help you to lose weight and be healthy.”

So, I don't know exactly what drying the bones means but maybe it's tied into some of these factors here and so this is going to trouble us physically and really, I think the big thing – all of that gobbledygook in there – it's a foreign substance. Our bodies were not designed to handle it. Our bodies were not designed to take in bitterness and that's the big thing we've got to remember and that's how it's going to affect us physically. Indeed, it produces troublesome fruit: it will trouble you spiritually; it will trouble you mentally; it will trouble you emotionally; and yes, even physically.

The text we're going to look at is Psalm 55 and this text does not have the word “bitterness” in it, it does not have the word “forgiveness” in it but this is a passage that God used to change my life and one of the things I’m giving you tonight is a little keepsake or whatever, we went to the trouble of making this up kind of nice or whatever so you can file it away somewhere or hang it somewhere or whatever. But there's a story behind Psalm 55. Remember I told you that I worked for that pastor and I remember I’d tell my wife, we'd be going up and down the road from Lynchburgh, a three hour drive and listening to that pastor complain all weekend and complain about this, complain about that and talk about this church member, talk about that person and I would say, “I'm never going to be like him. Never, never, never, never.” Well, I didn't ever get quite that bad but my story is – how can I say this correctly – pretty much in my life up until the time I started the church, anything I touched succeeded or whatever. Any area of my life growing up and getting involved in the things I got involved in, I was always at the top of the group of leader or senior president of the student body. Things went well so when I started the church, I had lots of pride. Do you know what? God can't use a prideful person. He has to break us. He has to break us and what I learned earlier in the ministry when I started a church was that God wanted to grow me more than he wanted to grow the church. God wanted to do a work in my life and so in 1982, I started a church over in Vienna, Marshall Road Elementary School right there on Nutley Street. Where the Vienna Metro Station is, that was supposed to have been the church. My church. They didn't get the memo or whatever. I actually walked around that property many times praying over that piece of ground where that Metro Station is asking God to give us that land. I don't know if you've noticed but he didn't give it to us.

I had a vision, I had a dream. I was spoiled. I would say I was a spoiled whatever. I mean, there was a lot of expectation from pastors and university and seminary that I was going to be this whatever and God decided he wanted to do something different in my life and it was a very challenging time, a very challenging experience starting that church. So I got into it and things were kind of cranking along, moving along, and we hired our first – it was Pastor Bob and I so we were together and we're still together. Bringing on, we had a team of people: it was Pastor Bob and I and then another guy who came here. He was going to be President of the United States, that's what he was here to do but at the same

time he was going to help me and that was his deal. He was going to be the President and I was going to be the greatest pastor in the world or whatever. So we both had these egos that we fed and so they were a real blessing. He was the first person ever to call me "Pastor." He called me Pastor on the football field. It was the first wedding I did. He and his wife, we still have a very special close relationship. His name is Roy Jones. He's in "Get Off the Couch"; I talk about him in that book.

Pastor Bob and I we looked at each other and, "Who is going to do music?" I said, "I know who's not going to do music and it's me." He said, "Well, all I ever had was high school choir." Well man, you're hired. I didn't have that and that's kind of how we got going. Then we decided, okay, we've got to get somebody to work with the youth so that's important, we've got to work with the teenagers. Previously, that's what I did when I came up on weekends, I worked with the teenagers. You don't think I'm a youth pastor but I am. I'm just going undercover. So we sacrificed, we scraped together money to hire our first youth pastor. Lo and behold, what happened, I don't know how long he'd been there, maybe a year or whatever. The Bible says be sure your sins will find you out. Be sure your sins will find you out. Now, at that time, Fairfax County wasn't over one million people, it was probably like 800-850,000. This guy was messing around on his wife; he was an adulterer. Guess who he tried to pick up in a bar? My secretary's friend and so this friend has this picture that she wants to show my secretary, "I met this cute guy," and she shows the picture and who is it? It's our youth pastor. Devastating. Man, that was hard. I mean, I felt so betrayed. So betrayed. We were already struggling, we were already having a hard time. We're not a megachurch but only 5% of the churches are large than our size church so we're like in the 95<sup>th</sup> whatever. If you have a church of 7-8-900 people, only 5% are bigger so things happen here and they affect us but when you're in a church with like 75-100-150 people, then it rocks the whole boat big time.

I'm struggling with all this stuff and so I decided to go over to this pastor's meeting and my brother was having this pastor's meeting. Our family: my brother is a pastor; he's pastored the same church; they just had their 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of him being the pastor. His two sons are pastors; his older son John Reynolds is up in Indiana; his younger son, Donny, is over in Anapolis, Maryland. Then there's me so you can imagine what Thanksgiving is like with us with four pastors being together. Preachers need to be preached at; we need preaching just like you do. We need the word poured into us and so I decided I was going to go over there to this pastor's meeting and it was actually at my brother's church and he was actually one of the speakers as well. On that day, I heard a sermon that literally changed my life. This is around 30 years ago, 25-28 years ago, maybe 30 years ago. My brother that day preached on Psalm 55. Psalm 55. Can I tell you something? This passage changed my life. I was heading down that road of being like that pastor and I'm not going to tell you that I'm perfect and I don't struggle with bitterness to a certain extent but honestly, I do well. I do well and the number one reason I do well is because of this impact this passage had on my life right here.

Psalm 55. We're going to break it down here but I want you to keep this. If you don't have your Bible, I want you to look at it but if you have your Bible, maybe you can look in there. What's the background of Psalm 55? What's the background. I bet a bunch of you



don't even know anything about this Psalm. Well, there's a guy name Absalom. Who was Absalom? He was David's son, right? Do you know what he did? He betrayed his dad, in fact, if you read that passage 2 Samuel 15:5-6 says, "And so it was, whenever anyone came near to bow down to him," meaning David, his father. So when the people would come to see David, this is what Absalom would do, "he would put out his hand and take him and kiss him." So he starts getting buddy-buddy with the people. "In this manner Absalom acted toward all Israel who came to the king for judgment." Underline this, "So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel." This is his son. This is his son. I've only got one son but I just can't imagine my son doing this to me. He's showing disrespect for his father; he's showing disrespect for the position of king, his father. What does he do? He undermines him. He comes in and he undermines him.

I meant to say something: we're not positive this is the background of this passage. This is my best educated guess. We do not know for sure Psalm 55. We don't know 100% for sure but this is what I would speculate but there's more to this. There was also this guy named Ahithophel who was like a major adviser/counselor to David and Absalom was also successful in turning his heart. Just let that sink in a little bit. Have you ever been betrayed? Have you ever been betrayed? Have you ever trusted somebody and thought you could count on them, you thought they had your back or whatever? That's the situation here.

Out of that kind of pain, whether it was this situation or a situation like it, David wrote Psalm 55 and my brother got up that day and he preached this passage and I'm telling you, I don't have the passage, I called him this morning to ask him the passage and he said it was somewhere but he doesn't know where it is. I said, "You've got to find that passage." I don't know what his points were that day, I don't know exactly what he said but these are my points here tonight, but the point is, that was a defining moment in my Christian life where I decided as a pastor I wasn't going to go down that road of bitterness. I was not going to be like that other pastor. I was not going to let it happen in my life. Paul said, "I'm going to finish my course with joy," and I fully intend to die between 100-110 years old, I'm planning to pass away, and whatever day I die, I'm praying I finish my course with joy. With joy. I don't want to be some bitter person. I don't want to be some old bitter pastor or whatever. I want to finish with joy.

How can we do that? 1. Expect painful relationships. Listen, you have got to understand what you're dealing with and what I'm dealing with and what you're dealing with is this: "the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it?" So right here before me tonight and right here standing before you tonight is a person and people who are desperately wicked. We are desperately wicked and if you don't think you are, you're the most desperately wicked one in the room. That's who we are and part of our desperately wickedness is that we, unfortunately, let each other down. There are times when we disappoint each other. There are times when we fall. Only by the grace of God, I'm not what that youth pastor was. I mean, it's not that I'm any better than he is, I'm fully capable of committing adultery and so are you. A person that thinks they can't commit a sin is the most dangerous person because the Bible says "take heed." Why? Because what happens before a fall? Pride. You'd better fear God. You'd better fear sin.

You'd better understand your personal depravity. You'd better understand your frailty. We have a heart that is desperately wicked. It's deceitful. We're deceivers and if we let that heart get a hold of us, it will take us down that path.

So we have to realize as we're dealing with one another, that's going to happen and because people are going to bring us our greatest pleasure but they're also going to bring us our greatest pain. I mean, the greatest pleasure I've ever had in my whole life came from people. The greatest memories. When I go to my grave or whatever and I die, the memories I'm going to cherish forever, the most are going to be people memories. People memories. People that have blessed me. People that have been precious to me. People bring me my greatest pleasure but you know what? They also bring me my greatest pain. So you need to expect it. It's going to happen. It's going to happen to all of us.

So David experienced pain in two areas: 1. David was in pain because his enemies had attacked him. In Psalm 55, he's crying out to the Lord and he says,

“1 Give ear to my prayer, O God, And do not hide Yourself from my supplication. 2 Attend to me, and hear me; I am restless in my complaint, and moan noisily, 3 Because of the voice of the enemy, Because of the oppression of the wicked; For they bring down trouble upon me, And in wrath they hate me. 4 My heart is severely,” listen, “pained within me, And the terrors of death have fallen upon me.”

Why? Because they are enemies that have attacked him. He's being attacked by his enemies. When you have people attacking you, it can be hard. Going back to pastors just a little bit, we'll kind of go back and forth, anytime you're a public figure, you're going to have to deal with conflict, controversy. The biggest, hardest thing about pastoring is so oftentimes you know things you can't say and if you could say them, everybody would go, “Way to go. That's good.” But because of the situation, you can't say that and you're misunderstood and things like that. You run into situations of building this building here which took many years to build and not only financially but because pretty much this whole neighborhood, hundreds of people were against us. Hundreds and they would go off to the school up here and they would meet. They would have big meetings up there, “How can we stop Capital Baptist?” Listen, I don't ever walk into this building without realizing that I'm on sacred ground. From a human perspective, this building should not be standing here. Not just financially, it took years and years of sacrifice. We raised half the money about 3 million dollars and we raised half of it and we're paying off the other half through a mortgage and we did these Time To Build campaigns over and over again and people sacrificed and people gave. So I'm over here trying to raise this money which is difficult because you always have people leave when you go into building programs because we're talking about sacrifice. We're all going to have to sacrifice. People say, “I'm not sacrificing,” and away they go, off they go. That happened. For me during that time it was like people that I thought would leave didn't leave and people that I thought wouldn't leave, left. It was just whacko.

That's going on in the inside here and then on the outside, we've got all these neighbors against us. This house up here, basically that was my house, that big house up there with the naked woman statue out on the front there. That was my house. I'm not building a big church, I'm building a big house up here. They were saying that that was my house I was building. That's not my house. I'm still emotionally wounded from that whole experience. I can just feel right here. You might not be able to feel it but I can feel it because pastors, we like to be liked. I don't know if you know that or not. We like to be liked. We're like you. How many of you like to be liked? I don't like conflict. I'm a big guy, I know that and I'm a sissy when it comes to conflict. I don't like conflict. I think if you like conflict, you've got other problems going on in your life. That's not natural.

So your enemies are sometimes going to attack you but the worst part of this was the pain because his friends had abandoned him. Some of the saddest words in all the Bible are right here in this passage, verse 12,

“12 For it is not an enemy who reproaches me; Then I could bear it.”

I didn't like all these neighbors out here coming against me but I understood that was okay. They weren't part of our church and we're back in this neighborhood. I understood what they were maybe trying to do. I don't know. “I could bear that,” he says, “I could understand that. It wasn't one who hated me, who exalted himself against me, then I could have hidden myself from them.” It wasn't that person that hated me because if I was that person I would have gotten out of the way but listen to this,

“13 But it was you, a man my equal, My companion and my acquaintance.  
14 We took sweet counsel together, And walked to the house of God in the throng.”

What's he saying? He's talking about a friend. He could be talking about his son here. He could be talking about his adviser. But this was a youth pastor to him; somebody that great sacrifice was given to bring that person in, a lot of discipleship and a lot of doing whatever to try to help this guy be successful. They were close. They were tight. They were in the house of God together, they took sweet counsel together, they walked in the house of God together.

You've got to expect painful relationships. It doesn't mean you're negative. I still think the best in people because most people are good. Most people are good but you're going to have this happen to you and expecting it is part of winning the victory, just knowing it's going to happen.

2. Never give up. Have you ever heard of that before? Never give up. I can't let loose and never give up. Why? Why have you got to never give up? Because you are going to be filled with unbelievable emotion during this time. When you are dealing with bitterness and betrayal, you are going to be an emotional basket-case. It is going to be hard. 1. You will experience fear. What did he say in verse 5?

“5 Fearfulness and trembling have come upon me, And horror has overwhelmed me.”

Wow. “Fearfulness and trembling have come upon me, And horror,” what a strong word, “And horror has overwhelmed me.” Man, when you're going through this, you're going to be afraid and there is a special verse in Psalm 118:6 and this goes back to that building deal going on. By the way, I forgot to throw in the county. The county was a mess. I'm telling you, we won the vote but I'm telling you, it was a miracle. We won by one vote to build this building. This is holy ground you're on. I'm telling you, this is a miracle of God. We built this building into this hill here with 3,000 truck loads of dirt coming out of the side of this mountain to put this building in. One day I came in and there was a sticky on my phone. I'm not talking about a cellphone, I'm talking about one of those things called a telephone, it sits on a desk and it's got a handle on it. Have you ever seen one of these? So I come in and there's this sticky note and there's a verse written on it. Somebody had stuck the sticky note to the top of the handle and it was this verse, Psalm 118:6, “The Lord is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?” Amen? Amen. The Lord is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me? Man, I held onto that sticky note. I'm sure I've still got it in one of my piles. I've got lots of piles. You say, “I've never seen your office.” You never will see my office. I've got 2-3 of them and I'm trying to clear one of them out right now. I'm spending a little bit of time every day trying to work on that.

Listen, “The Lord is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?” You're going to experience some fear and let the word of God, verses like that, comfort your heart. Never give up. Because of your fear, you're going to want to quit. Because of your fear, you want to give in. It gets worse, 2. Emotionally you experience flight. Flight. You want to go. You want to leave. Psalm 55:6-7,

“6 So I said, 'Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest. 7 Indeed, I would wander far off, And remain in the wilderness. Selah.”

What does that mean? It's a command. It means “stop and meditate.” God actually in his word says, “Don't keep reading.” He's trying to say to you, “Have you ever felt like this?” Have you ever felt like this in your marriage? Have you ever felt like this in your job? Have you ever felt like this in your church? Pastors feels this way. The average person, they just rotate around. I'd say 75% of my friends I went to seminary with have pastored half a dozen churches in their career. Why? “Well, God led me.” I don't know about that. I'm not for sure believing that. What happened more than likely was there was a conflict or there was a betrayal or there was a problem and that's what happens. You get this emotion that you want to fly away. “I want to get out of here. I want to go.” Can I tell you, “Don't go.”

One of the best other passages like this is 1 Kings 19. I'll just summarize the story. Here is Elijah. This guy just stood down all kinds of prophets of Baal and this one woman comes after him. This is a great lesson here guys, right? I'm talking about he has stood up

against hundreds of men and this one woman says, "I'm gonna get you," and the guy just falls apart. There's got to be a lesson in there somewhere. I'm not sure what it is and so what does he do? He's getting attacked. He's got this woman who says, "You're dead meat, man. I'm coming after you. It's all going to be over," and he gets this emotion, "I want to fly away." Guess what he does? He does it. I don't have the whole passage here but if you want to study it you ought to but I just want to read verse 9. So God comes in and says, "There he went into a cave," this is talking about Elijah, "And there he went into a cave, and spent the night in that place; and behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and He said to him, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'" What are you doing here, Elijah? Elijah was a prophet, he was a preacher. He was supposed to be out there preaching. He wasn't supposed to be in a cave. And we get in our caves, don't we? Because we want to fly away.

One book that I really like and I'm not sure if it's in print still or not and it's called "How to Get Along with Difficult People," Florence Littauer. This is a good little book talking about all kinds of different personalities and how to get along with different people and I love her introduction, the very first statement here that she writes here called "A Personal Challenge." I like this. "Is your life full of difficult people? Then be happy for when the way is rough, your patience has a chance to grow so let it grow and don't try to squirm out of your problems. For when your patience is finally in full bloom, then you will be ready for anything: strong in character; full and complete." That is awesome.

You see, God has a reason for these things. It's holy sandpaper is what it is. Jesus said, I don't have the verse there, Jesus said, "Do you think you're better than me?" He said, "Do you think you're not going to go through some of the stuff I go through, I went through?" He said, "Who do you think you are? I mean, I had a Judas. Do you think you're never going to have a Judas in your life?" He said, "Who do you think you are? You think you're better than me or whatever? No, you're going to go through things that I go through." We have to understand that and we have to realize that. We never give up. Never give up. Never give up. Never give up because I'm telling you, you run away, I'm telling you, I tell these pastor friends of mine and they call me, "I think I need to leave." I'm telling you, dude, Joe, Big Mouth is going to be the greeter when you walk in the door. His name might be Sam, it might be Jennifer, it might be Sally. I don't know who it is but God has a purpose and that is to make us more like Jesus and we can try to escape it and we can try to get away from it but listen, we can't.

3. You will experience fight. Fight. Man, he prays one of these prayers, these Old Testament prayers basically, "God, get 'em." Why do you have this fight? Because of your pride. Your pride has been hurt. By pride comes nothing but strife. Nothing gets resolved without humility. It takes lots of humility. For God to remedy the situation with us, there had to be humility. Jesus had to come and suffer and sometimes you will suffer trying to heal a broken relationship. It's all part of the process but it's never going to happen without humility. And whenever there's strife, there's pride. There's pride. There's pride and you're always looking at it your way and seeing it your way. James 4:1 says, "Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?" Where do wars and fights come from? They

come from your desires. “You did that to me. You crossed the line with me. You offended me. You talked about me. You let me down. You disappointed me. You betrayed me.” It's all about your desires and things like that.

You can't ever give up but just know when you're going through it you're going to be afraid, you're going to want to get away from it and you're going to want to get back at them. That's all, I wouldn't say healthy but normal emotions. Those are human emotions that you're going to have to process and work through. 4. Rely on God. He starts talking to God. Look at verse 16 to summarize because we're running out of time here.

“16 As for me, I will call upon God.”

As for me, I will call upon God. As for me, I will call upon God. As for me, I will call upon God. You see, here's what we've got to realize: we can't control other people. Do you understand that? If I please God, it doesn't matter who I displease. I'll never please this whole church of people. Have you lost your mind? Do you think I'm going to get everybody in this church to agree on anything? No, so the question is when I go to bed at night: did I please everybody in the church? No, the question is: did I please God? That's not being prideful, it's just being realistic. It's just being human. It's just being truthful. If you please God, it doesn't matter who you displease. If you displease God, it doesn't matter who you please.

He says, “As for me, I know what they're doing. My son has gone against me or whoever it was but as for me, I'm going to call upon God.” This is important because bitterness is natural, forgiveness is supernatural. It is only natural we get bitter. That's natural. That's a human response. We have a vengeful world out here. We go out here every day in this culture and you deal with it at your workplace. You deal with it here, you deal with it there. You probably do it in your family, “I'm gonna get you.” It's called malice, “I'm going to get even with you. I'm going to get back at you. You hurt me, I'm going to hurt you. You did this to me and I'm gonna do this to you.” That's natural. That's totally natural but forgiveness is supernatural. It's not going to happen without us calling on God. It's not going to happen without us leaning on God.

I don't have time to break down this passage but Galatians 5 just breaks it down. This church, it says they're biting each other, they're devouring each other. This is a church, in fact it's a group of churches. Galatians was written to more than one church in this area called Galatia, this region called Galatia. They were biting each other; they were devouring each other; they were consuming one another. They were fighting up a storm and Paul says, “What's the answer?” The answer is to walk in the Spirit. The only way you and I are going to be bitter and bite people and devour people and consume people is that you've got to let the Holy Spirit control you. You've got to let the Holy Spirit control you and he goes and gives a contrast there. The war that goes on there, verse 17, and the works of the flesh. What are some of those works of the flesh? Look at verse 20: hatred, contentions, outbursts of wrath, dissension. All those are terms dealing with bitterness and broken relationships, right? But the fruit of the Spirit is love and joy and peace and longsuffering and kindness and goodness and faithfulness and gentleness and self-

control. I mean, we've got to rely on God. To forgive is supernatural. It is absolutely divine. Absolutely divine.

Lastly, choose to forgive. Choose to forgive. Psalm 55:22-23,

“22 Cast your burden on the Lord, And He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved. 23 But You, O God, shall bring them down to the pit of destruction; Bloodthirsty and deceitful men shall not live out half their days; But I will trust in You.”

What is he saying there? He's forgiving is what he's doing. Three words that heal: I forgive you. I forgive you. What does forgiveness look like? 1. It's releasing someone from a debt that was caused by their offensive actions toward you. God really used this whole concept in my wife's life. I was not only not doing too good as a pastor, I was doing even worse as a husband. I was totally into this church. This is a true story. Friday night was the only time I was home. I called it family night and honestly, I thought I was the greatest husband, I would preach on being a great husband. I still work many hours as most of you know but here my wife is and we're producing these babies and things like that and she's sacrificing with me and taking Crystal and putting her in the back of her car and driving down the road in an old yellow Toyota that literally had one door strapped with a rope and our little girls is in the back street and she's driving an hour to work for her sister so she could bring the baby. That was the only job she could get where she could bring the baby because we couldn't afford daycare, it was just that simple.

I'm just trying to give you a picture of what my wife is like. So here I am not taking care of her, not being the husband I should be and so one Sunday morning, God leaves her home with a sick baby. Guess who comes on television? Charles Stanley. You want to talk about somebody on forgiveness and brokenness, he's the best there is. You want to go deeper on forgiveness and brokenness, you read his stuff. He's got a new book on emotions right now. Man, I haven't read it but I've heard it's fantastic. I don't have the book and on his reviews, it's a perfect 5. “Bob for God” is like 4.8 on Amazon. A perfect 5. That must be some kind of good book because you're always going to find somebody who doesn't like something. That's good. Do you know what? He got on there and preached on that television and do you know who my wife had in debtor's prison? She had me in debtor's prison and do you know what God said to her? “You've got to release him. You've got to release him.”

It comes from Matthew 18 and I'll just summarize the story, maybe you know it and maybe your don't. This is a picture of God's forgiveness and how God forgave. This guy owed 50 million dollars and he went to the king and he asked for mercy and the king, which represents God, gave him mercy. He goes out and finds one of his fellow servants, this is a picture of bitterness here, who owed him 100 denarii. That would be very little money. He just got forgiven 50 million bucks, God forgave him. That's our sin, that's a picture of our sin. God forgiving us. He goes out and finds one of his fellow servants who owed him this little bit of money here. He laid hands on him, took him by the throat saying, “Pay me what you owe.” That's bitterness, “You owe me. Pay me. You hurt me

and you owe me.” The fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him saying, “Have patience with me. I'll pay you off.” He would not. That's bitterness right there. He would not. He would not forgive him. He would not. That is bitterness, “I am not forgiving you.” This fellow servant saw what was done. By the way, one of the best things as parents we can teach our children is forgiveness. They're looking. People are looking. One of the things I realized as a pastor, people are watching how am I dealing with conflict, how am I dealing with broken relationships, how am I handling what's going on. They're looking. The servants were looking; the servants were paying attention to what was going on. They were grieved. They came and told their Master all that he had done and the Master called him in and said, “You wicked servant. I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant just as I had pity on you?”

We go to God. August 16, 1968, my spiritual anniversary is coming up here in a few weeks. I came forward at a Baptist church to ask Jesus to be my Savior and he forgave me my sin. I had a 50 million dollar debt, I deserved hell, he forgave me my sin. He forgave me my sin. Here he is saying, “Okay, I forgave you and now somebody has hurt you, somebody has offended you, you're a wicked servant.” That is a powerful statement. “You are a wicked servant. I forgave you all that debt and you begged me?” Powerful statement. And he delivered him to the torturers. When we don't forget, we're delivered to the torturers. We already talked about that. You've got to forgive from your heart, it says. What's he talking about? He's talking about taking people and letting them out of prison and my wife had to let me out of prison and she had a good talking to me that I deserved and I started becoming a better husband. That's for sure.

Secondly, as we move towards the end, it's surrendering your right to hurt those who have hurt you. The biggest problem have is they say, “I'm so angry at this person.” Another emotion that we has is, “Okay, well, you know, they can't get away with it. Somebody's got to pay.” I'm sure David is feeling this way, again, the son, I can't imagine it. This is the background and I just can't imagine Jeremiah doing this to me. I cannot imagine it. The pain this man must be going through right now, it's just incredible. But what does he say? “I'm going to cast my burden on you, Lord. You're going to sustain me. God, you're going to bring them down.” In other words, he's saying, here's the deal, vengeance is not on your job description. Do you understand that? It's nowhere on your job description. Nowhere on your job description does it say to get even with people. You say, “Well, they're going to get away with it then.” No, they're not and before you're so happy about that, you'd better be thinking about yourself. A lot of times you say, “Yeah, they're not gonna get away with it.” Then I think about people that I've hurt. I've hurt people. I've done an Absalom to people, have you? So maybe I'm not quite as excited as I thought I was.

But the point is: he says, “Okay God, you're going to take care of this. You're going to take care of this and I'm going to trust in you. I'm going to trust in you.” It's surrendering your right to hurt those who have hurt you. Romans 12, “Repay no one evil for evil, have regard for good things in the sight of all men.” If it's possible and it's not always possible but if it is possible, as much as depends on who? You. You. Much as it depends on you.



This lady down here in the corner. She's still there. She was a ringleader and an attorney right down the street there. They were the ringleaders. I'd like to be friends with that lady, I think, I'm not positive but I would like to hope I would but she doesn't want anything to do with me. I tried to reach out to her; I tried to be a friend to her. We're probably never going to be best of buds but I've got to look at my life, as much as it depends on me, me, live peaceably with all men. Here's the deal: what do you do with your wrath? Here's what you do with your anger: you say, "It is written, vengeance is mine and I will repay," says who? "Says the Lord," not Steve Reynolds, the Lord. Not you. So "if an enemy is hungry, feed him. If he's thirsty, give him a drink and in so doing you'll heap coals of fire on his head. Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good," Roman 12:17-21.

I don't know what my brother preached that day. I hope to see his outline. He said to me, my brother is so wise, he says, "I don't know where it is. God's going to tell you what to say about it." Don, I need that outline. I don't want to have to spend all these hours. Where is your outline? He said, "I don't know where it is. I have a thousand of them and they're in these drawers." He said, "I'm not like you. I don't do all those series all the time. I'm not organized. Just one week at a time usually. I'll find it somewhere." But I said, I need it now. "Naw, you don't need it. God's going to tell you what to say," and so this is what God showed me. I don't know who to give credit for this, I didn't make it up, it's been around a long time, I'll have to Google it and figure out who said it. Did Charles Spurgeon say it? Some famous person said it: "Bitterness is like drinking poison expecting the other person to die." That's exactly what it's like.

So pray for me. Pray for pastors. This is big deal for us and maybe the reason it's the number one sin – you see, the pulpit and the pew are connected. I don't know if you know that or not. If 76% of us are obese, no wonder Christians are the most overweight people in the world or in the country at least, at least America. Why? Because what goes on here and if there's a mist in the pulpit, there's a fog in the auditorium and that's why clarity can be important.

I know we've gone a long time already and we can just shut it down but if anybody has a question or a comment, a snide remark, a testimony, you agree, you disagree, you think this is good, you're not sure about that. You have to come up to the microphone. I'm sorry, you've got to walk up here. Yup, yup, I know that's going to keep most of you away right there. But don't be afraid. I'm going to try to answer but guess what? I'm going to let other people help us answer. Stand right behind the microphone right there.

Q. Part 4, choose to forgive, verse 34, "and his master was angry and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him." What does that mean? Who are the torturers?

I think it goes back to the first point that it's going to spring up and trouble you. That's what I think it means. There is not a third option: either you forgive or you are bitter. There is not an in-between option so if you forgive, you get the benefit of the forgiveness. What's that like? What's forgiveness like? Forgiveness: 1. Spiritually, you know you're not giving a double place in your life. That's pretty cool, right? Amen? 2. Mentally,

you're not thinking about that person, they're not always on your mind. When you pray, you don't see their image coming across or emotionally, you don't have this frozen rage or depression. You're freer. Then physically, hopefully, we're not getting some of these diseases or whatever because we've got this foreign substance in our bodies. So I think he's just saying, "I'm going to deliver you. You don't want to forgive?" Just think about the context, this is a picture of God. How hypocritical to look at God and say, "Oh, I'm so thankful for your forgiveness," and all the things we've done to him and then we turn around and we won't forgive each other. It says "you're a wicked servant." Man, that's some strong language. That's my interpretation of it. It might be right, it might be wrong but that's how I view it.

Q. First, great message, I agree with everything you said but I do have a question about and I don't know if I'll phrase the question properly: what happens after the, "I forgive you," but then you can't walk away from relationships sometimes because you know that okay, you've done your part, you've forgiven but that may not necessarily change the other person or their behaviors so if you feel like you're continually getting attacked by that same person and I know the Bible says you keep forgiving, but is it wrong to try to distance yourself? That's where I feel like there's a lot of open air space. How do you handle those difficult relationships that you, for whatever reason, just can't walk away from whether it's a relative or somebody that you just can't do that to? How do you manage that?

For me, this is a great question. It's the difference between, you run into my car and I'll just take you down to the car repair store and I'll get it fixed. You kill one of my kids and I'm going to have to deal with that forever. That's an extreme illustration but that's how extreme I see it. You've got this one thing that happens, it's a one-time event and then you've got this one thing that alters your life forever. Anybody else want to speak to that and then I'll share mine? I'm not trying to dodge the question. You've been listening to me for a long time so I want to give you a chance to speak so go ahead.

S. One of the things that addresses that might help a little bit is forgiveness isn't trust. Forgiveness is "I forgive you," but just like you were saying, you can forgive somebody who was a drunk driver but you would not put your child in their car to have them drive them down the road. There's a big difference between forgiveness and trust. The other thing is that I have lemon balm that grows in my garden and it is probably the hardest thing to ever get rid of and I felt like the Lord really showed me that that's what forgiveness is, it's walking on a path of forgiveness that we can pull these roots up, give them to God and say, "I forgive you," but there's times when those little things start growing back up and the enemy would want you to believe that you didn't forgive that person but I believe that it's a path. It's a constant road of pulling up those times when it comes back. I don't know if that helps but...

That's good. I think that's perfect. You know, I'll forgive that youth pastor but it's going to take a long time for me to trust him again. He ended up leaving his wife and has gotten married to somebody else. But really, what Heather is speaking of, I think all of that is good but sometimes we have to boil it down to like our spouse, a child, a coworker,

situations where it's not that easy to get away. Anybody else have any insight on that? Yes sir. Come up, Solomon.

S. I have a testimony.

Is it similar to what she's describing?

S. Something like that. Bitterness, how do I know that I have bitterness? How do I know that there is something? You would not know. Let me tell you my story. Some time ago, I ??? counseling three days in a week. After six months of counseling, we got to know that we could not get married to each other so we have to announce to the pastor that, no, we could not. We talk about it but I knew that I had forgiven her but she had not forgiven me. ??? We slept together, we did everything together but at this moment ??? whenever I entered the room ??? run away and hide. God would not come out until I left her and my own house. That shows the ??? Those of you who have got a ???, study that ???, that ??? will determine who you are. ??? It took me a long time for me to relate to this ??? That tells me a different story altogether of bitterness and forgiveness. Spiritually, you have not forgiven yourself but always spiritually ???. That's my testimony. So take note of saying that you have forgiven somebody ??? you have ??? My experience came from ??? It shows me that spiritually I have not forgiven her. Let's forget about the emotions, the physical...

But we can't forget about the emotions. We are emotional so we can't forget. You can't just say, "Forget about them." Do you forget about them? Emotions? Most of us don't forget about them. Anybody else?

For me, Heather, I have to be fully transparent and tell you forgiveness for me is very selfish, first of all. What I mean by that is that with God's help, like if that person is continuing to hurt me or whatever, I'm going to forgive them not for their benefit but for my benefit. First of all, I would kind of look at it from that perspective. The second thing is: as hard as it is, we've got to understand that God has allowed us to be boxed into that situation to some degree but do we put our hand out there and let them hit it again? No, I don't think we do. So I think as far as altering some or whatever, yes. I think you can use some wisdom. It's a great question. It's a complicated question and it's a specific question that demands a specific answer so I'd be glad to if you want to talk to me more about it individually, I would love to because this is true. This is a true scenario and these are the hardest ones that we deal with in our life.

Anyone else have a question, comment, snide remark or testimony? Yes sir. Come on up. We've got a pastor and a medical doctor and a man of God here coming up to talk to us.

Q. I like the point you raised that forgiveness is a supernatural experience. We forget that. We try to forgive. We try to forgive it will never happen except if we come to God and ask him to lead us in the way of forgiveness. This is the first point of humbling ourselves. Humble ourselves is not to humble ourselves to the people, it's to humble ourselves in the presence of God himself. When we humble ourselves in the blessings of God, he is the

one who can tell me to forgive and at this point I would forgive. Actually, it's always a problem that Heather was raising because I cannot forgive every day 100 times, 7 x 70, I cannot do this. This is not natural. This is supernatural and if we will try to practice forgiveness, we will fail again and again and again but when God will tell me to forgive, he will say I need to be humble enough, obedient enough and obey him and to go for forgiveness and it will work. When it works once, it will continue forever. It's an experience which we learn how to practice it easily after we have it the first time. I feel it's like that.

Good. Thank you. Okay, it's getting late so anybody else? I don't know what time you normally end here. Step right on up and we can shut it down and I can stay longer myself. I don't know what time you normally end. Go ahead.

Q. I understand the concept of forgiveness. I'd like you to say something about what do you do with the wounds if you've been hurt? That's another whole ballgame of how do you deal with the wounds that you've had and you don't trust the person to a certain extent but you have to do something with those wounds.

Right. What is the wound?