

Homewrecker #5//Bitterness//Romans 12:17–21

I personally had an incredible week with ServeRDU, being able to see some of our ministry in action.

- Christian Life Home—unwed mothers; One of our World Relief partnerships with Nepalese families; these are both ministries very involved in our church and we are honored to serve. Converting Hearts is another.
- This week is supposed to be a catalyst...
- Victor... ESPN and Bravo TV
- In our post-Christian culture, the kind of preaching I do in here is ONLY effective if it's accompanied by you living out the love and service of the gospel *in the community*

I read a really disturbing article this week about the Brady Bunch. How many of you watched that as a kid? It's a show about a innocent little American family in the 1970's (a lovely lady that was bringing up 3 very lovely girls and so forth).

Well, Maureen McCormick, who played Marcia in the show, released a book revealing what was happening “behind the scenes” on the Brady Bunch. Turns out that Cindy's lisp and Greg's butterfly collars were the least of their worries. She talks about trading sex for drugs; reveals that the guy who played Greg, her older brother simultaneously had an affair with her and Florence Henderson, who played the mom, and that the dad, Mike, was gay. Plus, a lot of other things that never made it into the program. (Imagine that some of that stuff working it's way in to the plot of the story? Last week, Jan got hit in the nose with a football. This week, Marcia bleeds out of her nose because of her Coke habit.”)

Of course, that whole story screams Hollywood, but it reminds you that a lot of families are not what they seem on the surface. Marcia says this in the book: *“As a teenager, I had no idea that few people are everything they present to the outside world. And here I was, hiding the reality of my life behind the unreal perfection of ‘Marcia Brady.’”*

One of the things I love about the Bible is that it is not at all like the Brady Bunch. Sometimes people in the church are fake, but the Bible is not. When the Bible presents families, it presents them as they are. Reading through family stories in the OT is like watching the Jerry Springer show.

That means that there are families and marriages in here with issues. We have a statement around here that “everybody's normal until you get to know them.”

Now, some of you have great families and you came from great families (not trying to imply that behind every family is some dark secret—my mom and dad were faithful to each other and they never abused us; I grew up in a great home); regardless, however, everybody's family looks a little different on the outside than it does on the inside.

It is in our families is where our sin and our selfishness becomes the clearest. It's that way in mind. You want to see me at my least sanctified, follow me around the house. So, regardless of how great your family was, if you are going to survive, you're going to have to learn how to deal with hurt and disappointment.

Listen: There are two ways to have a great family: everybody can learn to be perfect to each other all the time; or you can learn to show grace.

The first one is not an option. So today I want to explore the second with you—what it looks like to have a gospel-centered, grace-saturated marriage and family.

For many of you, one of the deadest parts of your heart goes back to family hurt. It is wrecking your life.

- “A sound heart *is* life to the body, but bitterness *is* rotteness to the bones.” **Proverbs 14:30** (it rots you down to the bones. It affects everything. Parts of your life that have nothing to do with the hurt are affected.)
- “See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God (or lives up to it); that no bitterness springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled.” (**Hebrews 12:15, ESV**) This place of bitterness is defiling your whole life.

Some hurt in the past; from a parent; a spouse; a boss; a friend, somebody, and it’s this open cancer sore seeping poison into your life.

- You’re dominated by it. Affects your emotional wellbeing; your marriage.
- I agree with one marriage counselor that the greatest foothold of the enemy in many of you is a place of unforgiveness.¹
- By God’s grace, It ends today.

One of the most important passages on conflict and forgiveness: **Romans 12:17–21 (ESV)** ¹⁷ Repay no one evil for evil...

- When somebody hurts you, and you hurt them back, that’s what you’re doing; they smack you; you smack them back.
- People with different personality types have different ways of doing this:
 - **Aggressive...** *Some of you* grew up in a family that yelled a lot. Hit
 - **Passive... takes it in... they withdraw.** *They look patient but the rage and disappointment is boiling.*
 - A lot of times they’ll just slowly turn off the fountain of love until there’s nothing left. Or they’ll keep taking it in until they hit a limit and then explode: they leave the marriage; they have an affair; they go postal and shove their spouse into a wood-chipper one night. It’s all of a sudden.
 - (Aggressive: people who fight; passive: people who flee. Fight or flee—a combo of both... a smack and run guy.)
 - **Passive aggressive:** this person responds, just not by attacking frontally. More subtle...
 - **Go cold on them.** Freeze them out. Turn them away. You’re treating them like God with Jesus. Turn your face away.
 - **Punish by withholding sex:** “I’m going to give you a chance to devote yourself to prayer and fasting.”
 - **Crying.** It’s a way of re-wounding them.
 - John Piper summarizes this – “Personalities differ. Your retribution may take the form of tears that look like hurt. But the heart has learned that this may be the only way to hurt back. It may come out as silence because we have resolved not to fight. It may show up in picky criticism and relentless correction. It may strike out at persons that have nothing to do with its origin. And it will feel warranted in its actions by how wrongly it has been treated.”²

¹ ‘Most of the ground that Satan gains in the lives of Christians is due to unforgiveness.’ From Neil Anderson’s *Bondage Breaker*, 194

² John Piper, “Kill Anger Before It Kills Your Marriage,” *Life as a Vapor*, 36–7.

¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

- It is not always possible to live peaceably with someone seeking to harm you, and sometimes you have to remove yourself. We'll get to that.

¹⁹ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

- As a believer, you have this sense that justice will be served.
- You see, when a wrong has been done, there is a deep, deep desire in the human heart to see justice done. It's like a little tuning fork that tells you that the wrong must be righted and the guilty must pay.
- That is God-given. He put it in you. It's why we enjoy revenge movies so much and they are so fulfilling. It's what made 24 so popular.
- **Paul says that you don't have for the believer, you don't have to avenge yourselves, because you can rest assured that justice will be done.** For that one who wronged you, either Christ will pay the full penalty for their sin like he has yours, or they will suffer for it in hell. Justice will be served. And that's huge in developing the ability to forgive.
- **Ironically, it is only when you believe in a God of perfect justice that you'll be able to forgive.** Miroslav Volf, a Croatian who survived the Serbian genocide, but watched much of his family die, said that sometimes people say that if you believe in a God of judgment and wrath that you will become judgmental and wrathful yourself. He said that people who say that have never experienced real suffering at the hand of others in their lives. He says when someone has stolen from you something precious, like a child or a parent, the only way you can not let hate and revenge eat you up is knowing that there's a God in heaven who will get justice, either through Jesus' death or hell, and because He will, you don't have to, and you can release yourself from the hatred and develop even a compassion and love for those who have hurt you.

²⁰ To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Here's the heart of the passage (vs. 21). Don't repay evil for evil. Repay good for evil. And don't be overcome by evil; but overcome evil with good."

OK: When we're harmed or hurt, our natural response is to harm back. To return evil for evil. Several motivations for this:

- Again, we have this **sense of justice**. The justice balance in the universe has been knocked off, and we feel right, nigh unto deity, when we restore it.
- A lot of times it is hatred; I hate you for how you hurt me and I want to make you suffer for that.
- Sometimes it is a sense of self-protection: I've taken advantage of; I've got to take a shot at you.
- Sometimes it's a sense of that this is how we'll change them. They're never going to learn if we don't make them pay.

This passage overturns all of those by teaching you two REVOLUTIONARY things about grace:

- By the way: A lot of people say that all religions teach the same things. C.S. Lewis said in *Abolition of Man* that it's true that the world religions bear a striking similarity on ethical issues. But not on this one. This NT teaching is in a class all by itself on this one.

1. Grace absorbs evil and gives good

- You borrow my car...
- In the same way, when you sin against me, and wound me emotionally, I have a choice: **I can make you suffer in return, and take vengeance; or refuse to take vengeance, give you love,**

and then I suffer alone. Your sin costs me, not you; and I, not you, bear the effects of your sin.

- **No one who has been deeply wronged “just forgives.”** Grace always involves suffering. If you forgive, you are agreeing to absorb the wrong for their reaction and not give retribution.
 - This is, of course, what Jesus did for us. He absorbed the effects of our sin and released us from the liability of punishment. He didn’t “just forgive us;” He absorbed into His body the effects of our sin.
 - Again, no one who has been deeply wronged “just forgives...” **Tim Keller** says **“There is never forgiveness without suffering, nails, thorns, sweat, and blood. Never.”**³
- The myth about forgiveness is that you just “forgive and forget.” When you’ve been hurt, that is almost impossible. Insane people “forget.” God never “forgives and forgets.” God suffered for our sin and put it away by choice. Every time He thinks about it He chooses to see it resolved in Jesus. You have to make that same choice. Their sin was put away forever in Jesus or will be vindicated in hell.

2. Grace overcomes evil

- Paul says that in giving good, you actually *overcome* evil.
- “Overcome” is a great word. It’s a war term. It means “conquer” or “wrestle to the ground.”
- See vs. 20: “by repaying good for evil you will put burning coals on their head.” I love that phrase because on the surface, you say, “That’s exactly what I wanted to do in the first place. Pour burning coals on their heads.” But Paul is not talking about doing that to hurt them (that would be against the entire spirit of the passage); he is talking about doing it to wake them up. That’s what that image means. You’re in bed and someone pours steaming coals on your head, that wakes you up. When you give kindness to someone who has wronged you, it often wakes them up to the selfishness and stupidity of their own sin.
- **There is another deeply ingrained myth in us that the way we change people is by repaying them evil for evil.** Like I explained last week, that is not true.
- Repaying evil for evil doesn’t overcome evil, it only continues it.
 - Story: Zip/zip
- Showing grace overcomes it. Again, how did God change you? By repaying you for your sin; no, he changed your heart by showing you grace. He **OVERCAME** evil in you; he changed your heart and woke you up, he dumped hot coals on your head, by dying for your sin.
- So, you overcome evil in someone (***and in yourself***) by showing grace.
- You see, when you have hatred in your heart for someone, evil is also growing in you. It’s like the ring in Lord of the Rings. That’s what those 1st two verses we read showed us:
 - Proverbs: bitterness that is rotting your bones
 - Hebrews: a root of bitterness and unforgiveness that is defiling you and all your relationships.
 - John Ruchana: it’s not about them; it’s about you.
 - Some of you are holding yourself in a prison of bitterness.
 - Lamentations 3:22: God’s mercies are new every morning
 - Romans 8:28: He is weaving it all for good.
 - Get out of the prison of past bitterness and into the promises God’s present and future grace.

So let me summarize these verses: **Christians don’t respond to evil aggressively; passively; or passive aggressively. Christians overcome evil by showing “aggressive grace.”**

³ Tim Keller, “Serving Each Other Through Forgiveness and Reconciliation,” 2.

Let me deal with some **objections**, and then I'm going to walk you through a **process** to put this into effect.

Objection #1: "If I forgive, who will take care of me, take up my cause, and nurse my wounds?"

- Short answer: God will. You have to believe in God's sovereignty in your pain.
- Joseph.
- God has a purpose: **Genesis 50:20: "...You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive."**
- I frequently bring up the cross here: There was a never a time where it looked like injustice was winning than at the cross. That was when God was doing His greatest work. So in your life.
- Movie: Signs

Objection #2: "If I'm being hurt, are you just telling me to be walked on?"

- Not at all! First of all, part of overcoming evil is confronting someone in their sin.
- Scripture talks a lot about this.
 - It tells us to **"speak the truth (to each other) in love"** (Eph 4:15).
 - It tells us Galatians 6:1 **"restore them with a sense of humility"** (Galatians 6:1) that when we see someone caught in a fault we go and restore them. Part of restoring them is confronting them.
 - **Luke 17:3-4 - "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him."**
 - This is not yelling at them; you're not verbally whipping them; it is lovingly confronting them for their sake, which means you do so without the slightest trace of malice or hatred or vengeance.
 - Jesus had a great way of talking about this (He usually did): **Turning the other cheek**
 - It is not loving to fail to confront someone in their sin. When you see them doing something that is destroying them or their relationships (whether with you or others) and you say nothing, that is not loving!
 - A lot of times we just don't say anything to someone about their sin and we pass it off as patience or we feel like a martyr but all we're doing is being selfish and cowardly.
 - **Tim Keller** says this: **"Ultimately, any love that is afraid to confront the beloved is really not love but a selfish desire to be loved."**⁴
- The other thing I'll say here is that this passage recognizes that there is a time when you have to remove yourself from a situation because it is not possible to live peaceably with someone.
 - Go back to **Romans 12:18:** ¹⁸ **"If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. (Romans 12:18)** It's not always possible!
 - Do you know what comes right after Romans 12? Romans 13. (Brilliant). Romans 13 is about the government having the right to bear the sword and put people into prison. He's telling us to forgive, but recognize that there is a time where it's larger than that and somebody needs to go to prison. We should still to forgive them in our hearts, but we need to remove ourselves from the situation or maybe they need to go to jail!
 - This would be the case in:
 - Abuse
 - Alcoholism
 - Constantly taking advantage of you
- I want to be very careful here, because I don't want some of you to use this as an excuse to break relationships or leave your marriage. Don't confuse wounded feelings with lasting damage. There's a difference between "you are insensitive" and "I'm being abused."
 - **Proverbs 19:11 A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense.** Sometimes you just need to overlook it!

⁴ Keller, 5.

How do you know when to walk away? I could give you some guidelines about it's when you're being significantly hurt and the person has demonstrated a consistent hardness of heart, but at the end of the day, like Proverbs 19:11 tells you, it comes down to *wisdom*.

- In the words of that great theologian, Kenny Rogers: *Secret to surviving is knowing what to throw away, and knowing what to keep. Know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em; know when to walk away, know when to run..."*
- It's hard to make decisions like that on your own. Wisdom is found in the counsel of others in the church. Why you should be in small groups so that other people can help you think clearly, because when you're hurt or mad I assure you that you are not thinking clearly.

Objection #3: "Should we never let someone bear the consequences for their sin?"

- No, sometimes, you let people suffer the penalty for their sin.
- **Prov. 19:19** 'A hot tempered man must pay the penalty; if you rescue him, you will have to do it again.'
- Which means sometimes you let people suffer.
- I do this with my kids. Just because I forgive them doesn't mean they face consequences of their sin.
- Again, it takes wisdom to do this.

11 Practical Steps of Aggressive Grace (me thinking through the process)

1. When possible, overlook the offense

- a. "A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense." **Proverbs 19:11**
- b. Tennis: Let the ball pass by. I'm not talking about confronting over every little thing. You confront where there is a repeated offense that is significantly damaging the relationship. Other stuff you should just absorb and "let pass by."
- c. Let me go back to something I said last week because I got some good questions about it this week: I said, "In Christ, you are secure enough to be taken advantage of every once in a while." I don't mean by that that you put yourselves in harm's way. What I mean is that "if you know God's love and forgiveness, then there is a limit to how deeply another person can hurt you. He or she can't touch your real identity, your real wealth and significance."⁵
- d. Some of you, everything really bothers you—every time you are snubbed, overlooked, or disappointed, because you are not healthy in Christ. If you were complete in Christ, you could handle a lot more in relationships.
- e. These relationships (horizontal) are fragile because this one (vertical) is fragile. If this one got healthy (vertical), so would these (horizontal).

2. Forgive in advance

- a. "When you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him." **Mark 11:25** (You're in prayer and you think about someone who ticked you off... forgive right then! Before you stop praying and before they've had a chance to repent.)
- b. **Luke 17:3-4** – 'If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him.' If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him.'
 - i. Doesn't mean that you keep a scorecard that goes to 490 and when you hit 491 you tear up the scorecard and go OT on them. 7 is number of completion. 7x70 is basically a way of saying "eternally."

3. Take time

⁵ Keller, 3.

- a. You are wondering how you should respond to someone who has wronged you. It's almost never good to respond to the moment. Because when you're mad you will almost always respond with vengeance, not love.
- b. So you ought to have the rule that when you get mad in a discussion you just walk away. Stop the argument. Walk out of the kitchen. Get out of the office or the situation.
- c. When you respond in anger, it's almost always bad. Anyone experienced that?
 - i. Flock of birds coming out.
 - ii. George Castanza in Seinfeld
 - iii. STORY: Brad and email.
 - iv. Smashing the boom box.
- d. So yell: "Serenity now!" and walk away!

4. Ask God what He is teaching you

- a. During that time you should pray, and ask, "What is God trying to teach me through this painful situation?" And know that God can and does speak to you through very flawed people.

5. Reflect on your own depravity

- a. "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted." **(Galatians 6:1)**
- b. Realize that they are no different than you.
- c. Miroslav Volf said this was key to forgiveness, too: dividing line between good and evil.

6. Rejoice in your own forgiveness

- a. Being in Christ gives you the security and the grace that makes forgiveness come naturally.
- b. When you're in Christ, you can forgive others more naturally, because there is a limit to how deeply they can hurt you.
 - i. Remember: "In Christ, I can give up all that I have, because in Christ I have all that I need."
 - ii. How well you understand the gospel, how much you get it, is measured by how much pain you can endure and still have joy.
- c. The more aware you are of how much God has forgiven you of, the more easily you'll forgive others. People who realize how much grace has been shown to them ABOUND in grace for one another.

7. Take the initiative

- a. "When you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him." **Mark 11:25**
- b. Luke 17 said that if your brother sins against you, you go to him.
- c. You say, "So if I am the offender, I take the initiative to go and ask for forgiveness?" Yes. "And if they have offended me, I take the initiative to confront them and tell them I've forgiven them." Yes. **You always have the initiative.**
- d. Tim Keller says this. "...if any relationship has cooled off or has weakened in any way, it is always your move. It doesn't matter 'who started it.'"⁶

8. Apologize for your wrongdoing without qualification

- a. You ever ask for forgiveness which is really just a gateway to fleece the other person for what they did wrong? I'm sorry I said that... but you are such an idiot. And if you weren't

⁶ Tim Keller, 1.

such an idiot, you wouldn't force me to act this way." Come on, now. Testify. You act this way.

- b. "When you explain your wrongdoing, you're not asking for forgiveness, you're asking for understanding."
- c. Their wrong should be a separate conversation.

9. Confront where appropriate

- a. A lot of people have been hurt by their parents. Won't say anything... feel like it is 'honoring' their parents
- b. To honor your parents is to grow up into the adult that they were to model for you.

10. Forgive fully

- Ken Sande gives the 4 promises of full forgiveness:
 - I will not think about this incident.
 - I will not bring it up again or use it against you:
 - I will not talk to others about it.
 - I will not allow it to stand between us or hinder our relationship

11. Repay with good

Conclusion:

- When I as growing up in church, we had the marks of what it meant to be saved...
- The one mark of the gospel is that you forgive. In Christ, you are secure enough that you are able to forgive; in Christ, you are grateful enough that you are eager to forgive.
- Have you known the grace of the gospel?
 - You are guilty of sin. Rejected God's authority; lived for our glory in not His. A penalty is required. Jesus absorbed it. He took the pain of our sin and gave us the forgiveness, blessing and reconciliation with God. But it is a gift and you have to receive it. You receive it by repenting of your sins and inviting Jesus to be your Lord and Savior.

Bullpen:

- covers a multitude of sins.' Prov. 10:12 – 'Hatred stirs up strife, but love
- to forgive. Being healthy in Christ is essential to the ability
- But there is a time when you can't absorb it, and
you must remove yourself from the situation. The Bible is realistic: "It says as much as is possible live at peace with all men."
- And it's about God: 'Forgiveness is not so much about us as it is about Him. Every opportunity you
encounter to practice forgiveness is an opportunity to draw attention to the God who so delights
to show mercy and to pardon sinners that He gave His only Son to make it possible (p. 214).'
- *Choosing Forgiveness, Nancy Leigh DeMoss*
- When you show grace like Romans 12:1-2. In light of God's mercy, we were transformed; in light of our mercy
- Many of you live in an OT family; you need to upgrade to a NT one.
- ¹ Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. ² Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

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- But you're doing it not in a way for vengeance. Jesus on this: Turning the other cheek
 - "True love never aids and abets the sin of another...Forgiveness does not mean you become a helpless and passive doormat for their continual sin." Sam Storms
 - 70x7 Always forgiving. But confrontation.
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The writer of Hebrews warns:

- "See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no bitterness springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled." **(Hebrews 12:15, ESV)**
- "A sound heart is life to the body, but bitterness is rotteness to the bones." **Proverbs 14:30**

No one who has been deeply wronged "just forgives."

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- *"My wife took off her wedding ring and threw it across the room. Got down on hands and knees with a fork trying to fish it out of a crack in the floor, laughing about our sin." F. Schaeffer and wife Edith*
- *Wife got in car in anger, backing out to leave, and he stood between her and the street, knowing she probably wouldn't kill him. She looked in the rear view mirror and thought, "Will this be 1st degree or manslaughter?" Bill Bright*
- *"A man who did a marriage conference, surprised his wife she was going to do small group seminar, didn't tell her. She said, you ever do that again, I'll stand you up. Oh yeah? Yeah. They drove home in total silence from the marriage conference." H. Hendricks*
- *If you use a Scofield or Ryrie study Bible, you are using the notes by a man whose wives left them*
- *Woman who came to husband and said, "You may be a top man in our denomination but you're finished. I'm leaving." Chuck: "Give me another chance, I'll listen." She said, "You've never listened and this is it, Chuck Swindoll."*

Illus. James Dobson tells the true story of a guy who was asked by his wife to zip up her blo use: zip, zip, zip and breaks zipper. She sees him under the car and does it to his zipper. Feeling sense of smug satisfaction goes inside and sees her husband. 'who's under car?' neighbor. He's out cold. Did what any guy does when someone touches his zipper, sat straight up! Knocked out cold!

Cookies

Grace is aggressive, not passive

- Waking them up with burning coals
 - Overcoming evil in them
- No malice intended:

God has a purpose for you in suffering

We should never have the other person's harm in mind

Grace absorbs punishment

- Reminder, Christ has paid, or they will pay

Grace overcomes evil

- "Ultimately, any love that is afraid to confront the beloved is really not love but a selfish desire to be loved." (5)
- "The first thing to do when hearing or seeing something negative is to seek to 'cover' the offense rather than speak about it to others." (9)

