

Forgiveness and Freedom

(continued)

Pastor Eddie Ildefonso

Obviously his son was too young to understand that his father's comment was directed at his music, not at him as his son. And the father was too insensitive to understand that the budding young artist saw little distinction between his work and his personhood. And so the father crushed him; and the son held it against him. By his son's own admission, the resentment he held in his heart toward his father spilled over into other relationships in his life, primarily those having to do with authority.

What I want you to understand is that the cause of his resentment was perceived rejection. I say "perceived" because his father did not intend to reject him. His response, however, was the same as if it had been intentional.

Lost and Found

After years of listening to people recount how they have been hurt and mistreated by parents, spouses, kids, employers, and even pastors, I am convinced that at the beginning of each story is an experience that has been interpreted as rejection. As the rejection evolves into an unforgiving spirit, and eventually into bitterness, it takes a terrible toll.

The person is left with a deep sense of emptiness, an inner sense that something is missing. Consequently, the individual seeks to regain what has been lost---and almost always in the context of relationships that are unrelated. Let me give you an example to illustrate.

A pastor I know told me the following story. He said a father brought his daughter in for counseling after the father learned she had recently had an abortion. As the father began conveying his concern about the spiritual welfare of his daughter, it became apparent to

to the pastor that the girl deeply resented her father. It was also clear that the daughter felt no remorse about what she had done, and she frankly did not want to be there.

She paid no attention to anything being said until the pastor began to explain the usual sequence of events that leads a young girl to become sexually active. The he described what a father-daughter relationship should be like: how a father should spend time with his daughter, how he should show her proper affection and praise her for her character and accomplishments. He explained that when a father loves his daughter, she does not feel compelled to look for love the way his daughter had.

Before he could finish what he was saying, the girl interrupted looking at her father, she said, "You never loved me that way! You never spent time with me! You never listened to anything I had to say!"

Then to the shock of the pastor, she turned to him and said, "I have never had love the way you described it, but I am willing to give anything to get it." As she spoke, she slowly slid her skirt up several inches.

An extreme example? Maybe, but not unrealistic. Some people will go to almost any extreme to find what they have lost through intentional or unintentional rejection. People harboring unresolved resentment can feel driven to explore all kinds of avenues--usually ones that are not in keeping with the Christian life.

THE WAITING GAME

The Fourth reason:

There is a fourth reason an unforgiving spirit can devastate a life. Since the person with the unforgiving spirit is usually waiting for the other person to make restitution, a great

deal of time may go by. During this time, fleshly patterns of behavior and incorrect thought processes develop. As I mentioned before, other relationships are damaged. Even after an unforgiving spirit is corrected the side effects can take years to deal with especially in the area of relationships.

The irony of the situation is this: **By refusing to forgive and by waiting for restitution to be made, individuals allow their personal growth and development to hinge on the decision of others they dislike to begin with.**

They allow themselves to be held hostage. They say,

- 1) "If he apologizes."
- 2) "If she comes back to me."
- 3) "If he rehires me."
- 4) "If they invite me."

They play the game of waiting for others to make **the first move**. In the meantime they allow an unforgiving spirit to weave its way into the total fabric of their lives.

Another ironic element is that sometimes the person who has done the wrong has no idea anything is wrong. A senior in the high-school department of the church of a pastor friend of mine had a good relationship with his son who was serving as youth pastor at the time. His son began to notice that Alicia a member of the youth group was not as friendly as she had been and that she became less and less involved in the youth department. He would make a point to speak to her, but his kindness was rarely returned.

After several months went by, he took the youths skiing. It so happened that late one evening on the trip Alicia approached his son, the youth pastor, and said she needed to talk. She began by apologizing for her attitude. She admitted she had been hurt by him and she had been holding something he said to her against him for some time. Then she asked him if he knew what he had said that hurt her so badly. His son thought and thought and came up with nothing. She looked surprised, reprimanded him for his insensitivity, and said, "Several months ago, I spoke to you in Sunday school and told you our family had just bought a new pet."

He still drew a blank.

She continued, "you asked me what we got, and I told you it was a bird.

Do you remember what you said then?"

At that point he remembered the

conversation as well as his response to the news that her family had acquired a bird. "Yes," he said, "I do remember. I told you birds were messy and asked why didn't you get something more useful like a dog."

He immediately apologized, and his friendship with Alicia was restored.

Unfortunately, months were wasted because she would not deal with her hurt, and he did not know he had done anything.

A great deal of hurt and rejection we face is unintentional. The seeming lack of concern on the part of those who hurt us is often not an attempt on their part to be insensitive.

SOME CHOOSE TO LOSE

From what we've examined in this teaching, I hope you clearly understand this: **A person who harbors unforgiveness always loses.**

Regardless of how wrong the other person may have been, refusing to forgive means reaping corruption in life. And that corruption begins in one relationship including the relationship with God, and works its way into all the rest.

Holding on to hurt is like grabbing a rattlesnake by the tail: you are going to be bitten. As the poison of bitterness works its way through the many facets of your personality, death will occur---death that is more far reaching than your physical death, for it has the potential to destroy those around you as well.

MAKING THE PLUNGE

- 1) Have you been hurt?
- 2) Has somebody, somewhere in your past, rejected you in such a way that you still hurt when you think about it?
- 3) Do you become critical of people in your past the minute their names are mentioned?
- 4) Did you leave home as a child or a college student with great relief that you were leaving, swearing you would never return?
- 5) Have you worked hard all your life not to become like your parents?
- 6) Are there people in your past upon whom you would enjoy taking revenge?
- 7) Have you made a pastime out of scheming about how you could get back at them or embarrass them publicly?
- 8) Were you abused as a child?

9) Maybe even molested?

10) Did you suffer through your parents' divorce as a child?

11) Were your parents taken from you when you were very young?

12) Were you forced by circumstances to pursue a different career from the one you originally wanted to pursue?

13) Were you unable to attend the school of your choice because of financial reasons?

14) Were you pushed out of a job opportunity by a greedy friend?

15) Were you promised things by your employer that never came about?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you may be on the brink of being set free from a bondage that you did not even know was keeping you a victim. You may be about to understand for the first time why you act the way you do in certain circumstances and why you cannot seem to control your temper. You may be on the verge of receiving the God-given insight you need to restore your war-torn home---this time for good.

Whatever your situation, whatever has happened in your past, remember that you are the loser if you do not deal with an unforgiving spirit. And the people around you suffer, too.

I am sharing this so that you may be set free. In the process you may experience some pain. In some instances, it may be pain you have worked for years to avoid. Yet that pain is necessary for healing to take place.

It is my prayer that you will read this teaching carefully and prayerfully. It is my goal to bring old truths to bear on the damaging experiences of your life. And in doing so, I hope to give the Holy Spirit an opportunity to make you whole.

Questions for Personal Growth

- 1) **What does the word forgiveness mean?**
- 2) **What are the three essential elements of forgiveness?**
- 3) **Name for reasons why the person with an unforgiving spirit is the real loser?**
- 4) **What insights have you gained with regard to your past circumstances and your present actions?**





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W.L.A. Living Word Christian Center
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