

THE ART OF FORGIVING, ROM.12:14-21

Art of Neighboring #7

◆**Intro:** When you think of your childhood, do you smile or sigh? When your wife says, "You're just like your mother!" what does your heart do? When nude photography comes up on your computer screen, what is your response? Have you found yourself in a Bible study one night, and getting drunk on another? Do people in authority make you tense? Can your whole extended family get together in one living room and also experience relaxed stomachs and genuine enjoyment of one another?

◆Fact is, everyone of us, to some degree or another has hurts, habits, and hang-ups. Most of our hurts, and habits are related to our damaged emotional lives and this comes mostly from *relationships*. Well, for the last several weeks we've been talking about relating/ how to love your neighbor well, like Jesus loves us. We've considered:

- ◆Loving our neighbor is part of our purpose here on earth.
- ◆Loving our neighbor means being open to interruption and inconvenience, making room in your life.
- ◆Loving our neighbor is as simple as doing fun things you already do, and including them.
- ◆Loving our neighbor works better when we let them love us too.
- ◆Loving our neighbor means going deeper than surface conversation, and knowing their story.
- ◆Loving our neighbor requires good boundaries and not taking responsibilities that are really theirs.

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◆ Today we're going to wrap up our thoughts about neighboring, and relationships in general, by thinking about how to deal with relationship hurts that lead to many of our habits and hang ups. Forgiveness is key! Forgiveness is a huge part of any good neighboring and good relationship. Here's our thesis: Evaluate my relationships for offenses, both mine and other's, forgiving their harm and making amends for mine. Why?

◆ **1. My unresolved pains and hurts keep me from loving others well. I can repair/build many relationships by forgiving those who have hurt me.** Bear in mind here that our ability to love our neighbors is directly affected by our ability to not only forgive *them*, but also to forgive *others* in our past that have already hurt us deeply. In other words, repairing our own insides also helps repair relationships around us.

◆ A. The more I forgive others, the less bitterness anchors my spirit down.

◆ *"See to it that no-one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many."*

Hebrews 12:15, NIV.

◆ I find it interesting that the context, the verse just before it says this...

◆ *"Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no-one will see the Lord."* Hebrews 12:14, NIV.

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◆ Bitterness inside and peace outside are disjunctive! They cannot survive together! Put it another way: If you hate, say, your father, you will never be a really happy person. Nothing drains you emotionally like bitterness and resentment. It's like cancer; you can't see it maybe, but it's eating away at your spirit. It can lead to depression, stress, fatigue. You play the tapes of hurt over and over in your mind, and you hurt about it over and over. You tell yourself to think about better things, that that's all behind you, was a long time ago. But it's not true. We are products of our lives. We carry with us all our experiences. Unfaced pain is unresolved pain. And hurt people hurt people -so something must be done. That something is the freedom that comes in forgiveness.

◆ *"Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." Ephesians 4:31, 32, NIV.*

◆ **B.** You see? Bitterness leads to malice. And we live in a culture ripe with malice, don't we? I have a theory about that. Listen. One of the dads in a prayer group I was in years ago, runs an orphanage in Haiti. He says the people there have nothing. NOTHING! Not clothes to wear, not food. They often go 2-3 days between meals. But he adds, they are far more loving, and peaceful than the people around here. Does that seem strange to you? Here's some more strange factoids:

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- ◆ The average wage in 1901 was 22 cents/hour, and only 8% of homes had a telephone.
- ◆ In 1901 heroin, marijuana, and morphine were all available over the counter at the corner drug store!
- ◆ We don't we allow those drugs to be sold over the counter now and yet we have epidemics of drug abuse! Here's my theory: maybe part of it is because people had less money, and better relationships back then, which led to less emptiness, which led to less addiction. What we have today, is far more wealth, more things, more convenience... but far less relating. Dad's are too busy working to even enjoy being off, playing catch with their boys. Mom's are too busy working to sit and spend the significant amount of time it takes to get a teenager to talk. Kids are given a smart phone or a tablet to keep them quiet and inform them on Bruce Jenners latest antics.
- ◆ Trouble is, wealth and gadgets, and convenience do not improve relationships. There is no recovery from hurt or consequent addictions, without relationships.
- ◆ **C.** Of course, we can continue living in resentment, and while resentment may seem logical, but it is just irrational. It doesn't work. You're the one who can't sleep. You're the one hissing and spewing. You're the one sullen and withdrawn. Guess what? The other person might not even know they hurt you! You are always the sufferer in resentment.

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◆ On June 17, 1966, two black men strode into the Lafayette Grill in Paterson, New Jersey, and shot three people to death. Rubin "Hurricane" Carter, a celebrated black boxer, and an acquaintance were falsely charged and wrongly convicted of the murders in a highly publicized and racially charged trial. The fiercely outspoken boxer maintained his claims of innocence and became his own jailhouse lawyer. After serving nineteen years, Carter was released. As a free man, Carter reflected on how he has responded to injustice in his life.

◆ The question invariably arises, it has before and it will again: "Rubin, are you bitter?" And in answer to that I will say, "After all that's been said and done—the fact that the most productive years of my life, between the ages of twenty-nine and fifty, have been stolen; the fact that I was deprived of seeing my children grow up—wouldn't you think I would have a right to be bitter? Wouldn't anyone under those circumstances have a right to be bitter? In fact, it would be very easy to be bitter. But that has never been my nature, or my lot, to do things the easy way. If I have learned nothing else in my life, I've learned that bitterness only consumes the vessel that contains it. And for me to permit bitterness to control or to infect my life in any way whatsoever would be to allow those who imprisoned me to take even more than the 22 years they've already taken. Now that would make me an accomplice to their crime.

◆ Forgiving has an added benefit. When I decide to forgive someone, I become free to understand them more, to move

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toward them instead of away. See, hatred pushes people away. Love moves toward people.

◆**D.** How can I help my heart to forgive? Good question. If you need to forgive, it means someone has done something to hurt you. If someone has hurt you, chances are you want to hurt them back. You are in pain. You don't like them much. What do I do when I want to let their injustice go, but can't.

◆**1)** Practice looking out for others. Our text quotes Proverbs on feeding your hungry enemy (v20), but it goes back further to Ex.23

◆*"If you come across your enemy's ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to take it back to him. If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it there; be sure you help him with it." Exodus 23:4, 5, NIV.*

◆**2)** Pray for the one who hurt you. **v14**

◆*"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you," Matthew 5:43, 44, NIV.*

◆**3)** Look for some way to do good to the one who hurt you. **v20, 21**

◆**4)** Thank God frequently and specifically for the things he has forgiven you for! Make it regular part of your prayers.

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◆**2.** Ok, a quick word for when you're the one who needs to be forgiven. **I can help repair relationships by making amends to those I hurt.**

◆**A.** A few preliminary reminders:

◆1) You can't always make amends. (**v18a**) Sometimes it's better to not go to someone to apologize, or offer restitution. (If you were involved in an affair, it's probably best that you have no further contact with the person, just as an alcoholic stays away from a bar.)

◆2) Notice I said "help" repair. You by yourself cannot repair a relationship because a relationship takes two people. And please remember reconciliation with someone is different than forgiveness. You are only responsible for your part. (**v18b**) You cannot force someone to reconcile with you. But that is no license to hate them.

◆3) Making amends is not paying off your wrong. Wrong cannot be paid for. It is still and always wrong and should not have been. Amends are simply real-life demonstrations of the desire to resolve a disrupted relationship.

B. Making amends:

◆1) Make a list of those you've harmed and what you did. It doesn't matter how impossible it might seem to make amends, put the names down anyway. If you can't think of anyone you hurt, ask God to show you. You also might ask things like:

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- ◆ Do you owe anyone a debt?
 - ◆ Is there any promise you've broken?
 - ◆ Is there anyone you manipulate, control, are highly critical of?
 - ◆ Who have you been verbally, emotionally or physically abusive to?
 - ◆ Who have you ignored, avoided, not appreciated, or left out on purpose?
 - ◆ Have you forgotten someone's special event?
 - ◆ Who have you lied to?
- ◆2) Use the Golden Rule as a guide: Think about how you'd like someone to make amends to you. This can govern you well as you do it. -Your object is not to be Jonny Raincloud, so timing is important. You don't bring up a deep offense in the middle of a birthday party.
- ◆3) Apologize privately, humbly, and appropriately. You don't do it in the hall at school. You don't *explain* why you hurt them thus turning the spotlight off yourself onto them. You just say what you did wrong. (*as far as it depends on you.*) You don't expect them to also make up, or to like you, or to become easier to live with. Your amends are about cleaning out *your* closet, so that *your* pains are thrown away, so that *your* addictions lose power over *you*.
- ◆4) Make restitution wherever possible. If you borrowed something, give it back. If you owe money, begin repaying

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it. Ex.22 is all about this. Start a fire? You must work to pay for what got burned up.

◆*“Say to the Israelites: ‘When a man or woman wrongs another in any way and so is unfaithful to the LORD, that person is guilty and must confess the sin he has committed. He must make full restitution for his wrong, add one fifth to it and give it all to the person he has wronged.’” Numbers 5:6, 7, NIV.*

◆**Conclusion:** Relationships are at the root of much of our pain and hurt between neighbors. So if we want good relationships we will have to forgive and be forgiven, and probably often. But listen. As a follower of Jesus, you have, or can have the greatest resource available. God in Christ has forgiven you of every darkness you ever committed. Because of Jesus, they will not be held over your head in the next world! You have been freely granted forgiveness!

◆*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 2 Corinthians 5:17-19*