

DEVELOPING A FORGIVING SPIRIT

(PART 1 of 2)

March 2, 2020

COLOSSIANS 3:12-13 NKJV - (12) Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; **(13)** bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.

Once we understand some of the Bible's instruction regarding spiritual humility, this clear series of commands becomes important. They must be commanded because these actions are not natural to human nature and because the pride dwelling within us is so strong and influential.

Such ill will and rage hardly promotes kindness, compassion, and acting in grace toward each other. "Acting in grace" is an acceptable translation of the Greek word, *charizomai*, rendered "forgiving" in **Ephesians 4:32**. Acting in grace catches the essence of how God has acted toward us and our sin against Him. And because He has forgiven us, we are commanded to forgive each other (**Colossians 3:13**).

When you've been wronged, becoming bitter toward your offender feels like a way to get revenge. However, this response actually harms you more than it harms your offender, because **to be bitter is to be in bondage** to hatred and wrath. You will experience the destructive consequences of bitterness until you choose to walk in the freedom of forgiveness. It is not easy to forgive, but God makes it possible through the gift of His grace. An understanding of the following foundational truths can help you respond to an offense with a forgiving heart.

Consider how much God has forgiven you: Jesus spoke of a servant who owed a great deal of money to his master. The servant had no hope of repaying the debt, and his master mercifully released him from it. Later that very servant refused to be merciful to someone who owed him a small amount of money. Because of the servant's choice to not forgive the one who owed him a small debt, the master reinstated the servant's original debt and punished him severely. (**Matthew 18:21-35**)

Men and women tend to act like the unforgiving servant. We hold onto grudges against one another and ignore, downplay, or excuse the magnitude of our debt of sin against God. Receiving God's mercy should motivate you to forgive others. (**Luke 7:40-50**) Truly, any wrong that is done to you falls short of the punishment you deserve because of how deeply your sin has offended God. Forgiveness extends to others the same mercy that God showed you when He forgave the debt of sin you could not pay.

Realize that God is working through the actions of your offender: Many individuals in Scripture recognized that their offenders were instruments in God's hand as God worked to accomplish His purposes in their lives. This understanding helped them forgive their enemies and seek God's redemption in painful situations. (**Genesis 50:20, Job 1:21, and II Samuel 16:5-13**)

If you focus on your offender and the offense, you will have a hard time avoiding bitterness. However, when you view the offense as something God can use for good in your life (to develop your personal character, to open new opportunities, etc.), the significance of both the offender and the offense is greatly diminished, and your response to the offense becomes the major concern. When we are offended, we should respond in faith, thanking God for the good purposes He will accomplish through the experience. "In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (**I Thessalonians 5:18**).

Next week, we will look at some more foundational truths that will help you to respond to an offense with a forgiving heart.

SCRIPTURE READING: 2 CHRONICLES 30:9b

THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: It takes a strong person to say they're sorry and a stronger person to say I forgive.

"A JOURNEY OF THE HEART"