

Navigating Difficult Relationships In Christ

A vintage brass compass with a detailed face and a needle pointing towards the bottom-left. The compass is resting on an old, weathered map. Several red lines are drawn across the map, and three red pushpins are visible, marking specific locations. The overall tone is warm and historical.

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The Layout of This Study

Thank you for choosing to study *Navigating Difficult Relationships In Christ*. Throughout each chapter there will be **Questions**, **Scriptures for Meditation**, and an **Engaging God** section. Below is the explanation for each of these.

Questions

There are questions throughout the lesson. They are primarily designed for you individually and for you to share with the group.

Meditation of Scripture

Throughout the study there will be several places where you will be asked to meditate on scriptures. If the idea of meditation is new to you, it means to engage the Spirit of God to give you personal revelation of a scripture(s). It involves being quiet before the Lord and allowing Him to insert whatever thoughts He wants to share. Meditation is a crucial part of the transformation process.

Engaging God

This section is designed for you to ask the Holy Spirit to give you personal revelation, understanding, and application of what you have just read. This is especially crucial when you come to truths that contradict what you believe. (If we don't seek God to reveal His truth, then we will never move beyond the false beliefs that we may be believing.) Therefore, be sure and take the time to engage God as you go through the study.

Information - Revelation - Application - Transformation

God provided His word primarily for four reasons.

- **Information** – for you to know intellectually what God's word says.
- **Revelation** – for God to give you personal revelation of His word.
- **Application** – depending on God to apply His truth into your life.
- **Transformation** – into Christ-likeness will be the result of information, revelation, and application.

Revelation

Since I will be using the word "revelation" throughout the study, I want to define what I mean when I use this word. "Revelation" simply means that God **supernaturally** takes His truth and makes it personal to you and to your life situations. Revelation takes you from intellectual understanding to spiritual understanding of God's truth.

CHAPTER ONE

What Makes Relationships Difficult?

“Navigate”

The word “navigate” means “to move on, move over, or move through.” This definition is very applicable to the Christian life because we are continuing to learn how to navigate life. One of the harder struggles can be how to navigate difficult relationships. We all have had, are having, or will have difficult relationships. Whether it be our spouse, kids, extended family, co-workers, church friends, close friends, etc., we all have relationships where we struggle with loving them, liking them, or even being around them. An even bigger problem is that we live in fallen bodies, in a fallen world, surrounded by fallen people. Therefore, let me lay the groundwork for this study by defining “difficult relationships.”

Difficult relationships cause you to REACT or RESPOND in your FLESH, on some level they ROB you of your LIFE in Christ, or they create relational OBSTACLES that you don’t believe you can overcome.

Would you say this statement, in part, describes the results from your difficult relationships? Would you add anything to this statement that is true of your relationships?

Do any of these categories describe any of your difficult relationships?

- Those who have, in the past, wounded you or are engaged in wounding you now
- Those who continue to reject or malign you
- Those who try to control and/or manipulate you
- Those who are self-focused and me-centered
- Those family members who have no interest whatsoever in your life
- Those who are always needy and come to you repeatedly to meet those needs

What other categories of relationships would you add? In what specific ways, are these relationships difficult for you?

As a result of these three outcomes, my objective is to share some of the baggage we face in difficult relationships, how to navigate these relationships through Christ with the result we are set free to love them with the love of Christ. Let’s begin by looking at why we have difficult relationships.

We All Bring BAGGAGE Into Relationships

Relationships, as we well know, can be complex. Because of this complexity, it is easy to understand why we struggle with certain people. What makes them difficult? First and foremost, we all bring “baggage” into our relationships. For the rest of the lesson we are going to look at four types of baggage:

- **We inherited Adam’s DNA**
- **Our parenting**
- **Being born “takers”**
- **Unmet desires and expectations**

We INHERITED Adam’s DNA

At birth, we inherited Adam’s DNA as we see in Romans 5.12.

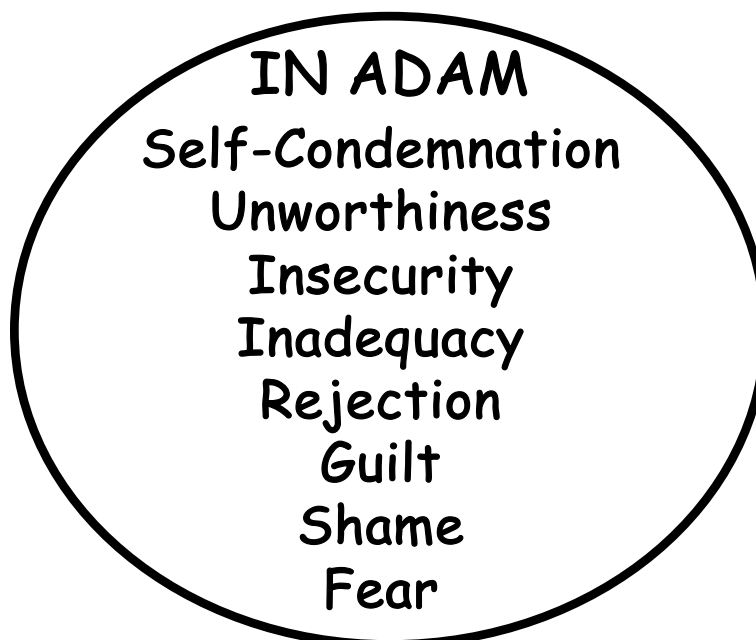
“Therefore, just as through one man sin (Adam’s DNA) entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death (through Adam’s DNA) spread to all men, because all sinned.”

What is meant by Adam’s DNA?

It is the FLESHLY beliefs and behaviors that flow through Adam to man.

The following diagram illustrates some of these fleshly beliefs and behaviors of Adam’s DNA.

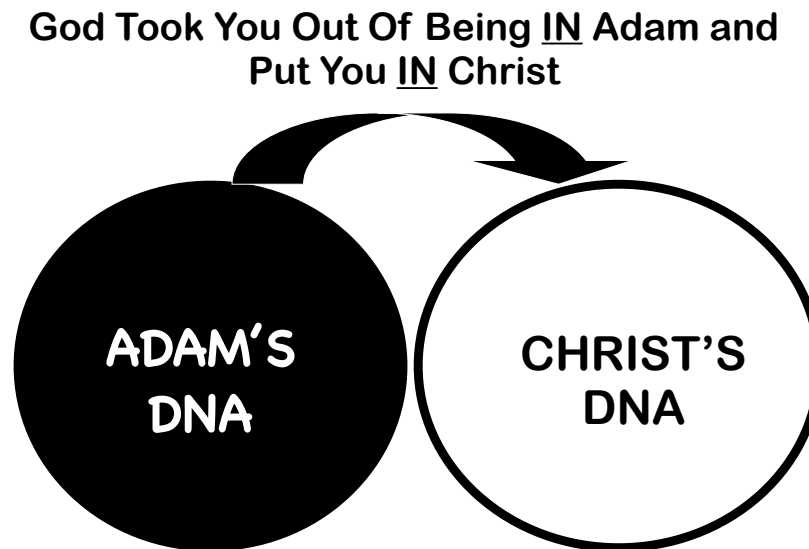
Our DNA IN Adam



This Adamic DNA was passed down from generation to generation. Therefore, at the moment we uttered our first cry at birth, we were in trouble spiritually because of our Adamic inheritance.

(If you are not familiar with the term “flesh,” it is man’s attempt live life, get his/her needs met, and to find joy, success, and fulfillment in life independent from God. Out of our flesh flow fleshly behaviors.)

If you are a Christian, the good news is that at salvation, God took you out of being IN Adam and put you IN Christ as the following diagram illustrates.



As a result, you now have Christ’s DNA. (We will explore in greater depth the meaning of Christ’s DNA but an example would be the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23: love, joy, peace, patience, etc.) Here is a key truth to remember:

***If the person you struggle with is a Christian,
remember they have CHRIST’S DNA too.***

However, if your difficult person is a non-Christian, remember he/she has no choice but to live out of their Adamic DNA (i.e., the flesh) which leaves them self-focused and self-centered.

No Perfect Parents

In addition, our parents were either mostly good or mostly bad role models for how we relate to others. Since there are no perfect parents, were any of the following true of your experience being brought up in your home?

- Abuse (sexual, emotional, verbal, physical)
- Physical or emotional abandonment
- Conditional rather than unconditional love

- You felt to be loved you had to win the approval of your parents
- Loving home but _____

If none of these apply to you, write down what you experienced from your parents?

Did your upbringing leave you with any of the following negative feelings or beliefs?

Unloved	Frustrated	Angry	Rejected
Lonely	Unworthy	Wounded	Neglected
Inadequacy	Entitled	Fearful	Being spoiled
Bitter	Self-protective	Judgmental	Critical

Write down any of these that apply to you or add any negative feelings or beliefs not listed above?

If you know the person you struggle with well, write down how would you characterize their home life and what feelings or beliefs they might be experiencing as a result?

We Are Born TAKERS (Trying To Get Our Needs Met From Others)

As a result of being born with Adam's DNA, we were all born self-focused and self-absorbed "takers." Part of being a "taker" means that we look to others or things to get our needs met. For example, we were all born with God-given needs such as unconditional love and acceptance, value/worth, security, and respect. Since these needs are hard-wired into each of us, we have no choice but to seek to get these needs met. Therefore, from the time we were born until we started being transformed by the Holy Spirit, we were "takers."

What is the truth? These God-given needs can only be met in Christ according to Philippians 4:19.

*"And this same **God** who takes care of me **will supply ALL your needs** from his glorious riches, which have been given to us **in Christ Jesus.**"*

The result of trying to get our needs met from others is conflict because no person can meet those needs other than Christ. This is especially true in marriage. For example, we all have the need to be unconditionally loved but our spouses can't provide that because it is a need that only Jesus can meet. When our spouse is not meeting that need, it can create conflict.

What might be some negative results if you have two “takers” in a relationship?

Unmet DESIRES Or EXPECTATIONS

In addition to unmet needs, I believe one of the key reasons we struggle in relationships is due to unmet desires or expectations. Let's begin by looking at desires.

DESIRES

This is how I define “desire.”

Something you LONG FOR or something you HOPE will happen.

Let's look at some examples of realistic desires in different areas of our lives.

Examples of Desires Concerning MARRIAGE

For the following examples, let's assume both spouses are Christians. What might be some realistic desires for a Christian couple?

- We will be seekers of God's truth.
- We will go to church together.
- We will pray together.
- We will share our deepest struggles with one another.
- _____

Even those most people would say these are realistic desires, conflict can arise when desires are not met.

If you are married, what are your desires about your marriage and what are the result, when your desires are not met?

Examples of Desires For Our CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS

The following are some examples of realistic desires we might have for close friends:

- We will not betray one another's trust.
- We will be sensitive to one another's needs and desires.

- We will be available to hear and pray for another's burdens.

- _____

What are your desires concerning your close friends and how do you respond when your desires are not met?

Examples of Desires For Our KIDS

If you have kids, do any of these following desires for them apply to you?

- Be saved before they leave home
- Love me
- Want to be around other Christian friends
- Listen and respond to my wisdom

- _____

What are your desires concerning your kids and what is your response when your desires are not met?

EXPECTATIONS

However, desires can become expectations. What do I mean?

Desires become EXPECTATIONS when we go from HOPING for something to happen to EXPECTING something to happen.

Let's look at some examples of expectations concerning our various relationships.

Expectations Concerning Our SPOUSES

My spouse **WILL**:

- Make me fulfilled and happy
- Love me and accept me unconditionally
- Meet my standards for taking care of the finances

- Conform to my beliefs about raising the children

- _____

Do you have any expectations like these concerning your spouse? What is your response when your expectations are not met?

Expectations Concerning Our KIDS

My kids **WILL**:

- Love me no matter what
- Change their fleshly behavior
- Do what I say, not what I do

- _____

Do you have any expectations like these concerning your kids? What is your response when your expectations are not met?

Expectations Concerning Our CLOSE FRIENDS

My close friends **WILL**:

- Never betray my trust
- Always love me in spite of my fleshly behaviors
- Always agree with what I believe

Do you have any expectations like these concerning your close friends? What is your response when your expectations are not met?

Expectations Concerning Our DIFFICULT RELATIONSHIPS

We might even have expectations concerning those we struggle with.

For example, they WILL change if:

- I love them enough.
- I share with them biblical truth.

- I become a people-pleaser.
- I serve them in every way I can.
- I speak the truth in love.

Do you have any expectations like these concerning people you struggle with? What is your response when your expectations are not met?

Where Can UNMET Desires and Expectations Take Us?

***UNMET desires or expectations
lead us to either RESPOND in the Spirit or REACT in the FLESH.***

By the very definition of a desire, we should respond in the Spirit when that desire is not met. With expectations, it is easy to see if we set “bars” of expectations for others to jump over and they don’t, our tendency is to go to the flesh with the result that we could judge, reject, condemn, or even write them off. The problem is that even with unmet desires we can choose to go to the flesh as opposed to going to the Spirit.

Here are some examples of fleshly behaviors that can result from unmet expectations or desires.

Frustrated	Angry	Controlling	Rejecting
Unloving	Critical	Guilt	Shaming
Manipulative	Unforgiving	Condescending	Judging
Uncaring	Insensitive	Vindictive	Jealous
People-pleasing	Self-righteous	Selfish	Abusive
Envious	Deceitful	Bitter	Blaming
Condemning	Resisting	Demanding	Retaliating
Self-protective	Boasting	Uncompassionate	Offended

When you look at all your relationships, especially the ones you struggle with, what are some of the fleshly behaviors above you tend to go to when your expectations and/or desires are not met?

Here is a key truth concerning desires and expectations.

***We are CONSCIOUSLY AWARE of most of our desires and expectations
but for others we are UNAWARE or they are HIDDEN.***

This is important because when we are consciously aware of our desires and expectations, we can connect our fleshly behaviors to our unmet desires and expectations. However, when we are unaware of them or they are hidden, we may not realize what is causing us to go to the flesh. This is why we engage the Holy Spirit to reveal or expose them in order to engage Him to set us free from them. Unless we seek the Holy Spirit to reveal them, we can continue to be blinded to them and how they are negatively impacting others.

Meditate on this question: If you have two people struggling with their unmet needs, (i.e., takers), unmet desires or expectations, with the result they are living from the flesh, is it any wonder there is a struggle in that relationship?

Engaging God: Seek the Holy Spirit to reveal or expose how living from your Adamic DNA, how you were parented, experiencing unmet needs, desires, or expectations might create obstacles in your difficult relationships. Also, ask the Spirit how these same things concerning the person you struggle with might be part of the reason why he or she is hard, if not impossible, to deal with.

Conclusion

I think we can all agree whether it is Adam's DNA, our parenting, our desires and expectations, or being a taker, we all bring baggage into our relationships and that baggage can negatively impact others by our baggage. However, the key thing to remember is this.

***The person(s) you STRUGGLE with are bringing the
SAME baggage into the relationship.***

As easy as it is for our flesh to point fingers at others as being the problem, we have to look at our own baggage as well. Let's look at some additional baggage we and they carry in the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

What Makes Relationships Difficult? - Part 2

Let's explore some of the other baggage that can make relationships difficult.

Our STANDARDS For Others

Part of our baggage are the biblical, moral and behavioral standards we set for others.

1. BIBLICAL Standards

Based on what we have learned from scripture, one Christian can set up standards which can lead to having unrealistic expectations for another Christian. Here are some examples:

Verse: James 4:17 - *'Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.'*

Expectation: Since you know the right thing to do, I expect you to love me regardless of what I have done to you."

Verse: John 8:32 - *'You will know the truth and the truth will set you free.'*

Expectation: Since I know you know this verse, why are you still in bondage to your anger and bitterness towards me?"

Verse: John 13:35 - *"By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."*

Expectation: "Since you call yourself a Christian, why can't you love me like Jesus does?"

When we are not meeting other people's biblical standards and resultant expectations (or they are not meeting ours) what might be some of the fleshly behaviors that result? (Refer to the list on page 12.)

Are there any biblical standards you may have set for others that have resulted in unrealistic expectations? If so, what are they? How does it make you feel when they don't you're your standards?

Are there any unmet biblical standards and unrealistic expectations that others have set for you? As a result, what are some of their fleshly behaviors

Engaging God: Seek the Holy Spirit to reveal or expose any hidden standards and expectations you might be having for others and the resultant fleshly behaviors that you may be exhibiting that you are not aware of.

2. MORAL Standards

Moral standards that line up with the Bible are standards we seek to live from. However, other moral standards may just be the result of how we were raised. Either way, moral standards themselves can result in unrealistic expectations of others.

Example: “I was raised to believe we need to be totally honest with each other, but you are not being totally honest with me.”

Example: “I was taught growing up that we need to put all our problems on the table so we can deal with them. Why can’t you do that?”

If people don’t measure up to our moral standards or you can’t measure up to theirs, it can result in fleshly behaviors.

What fleshly behaviors might result if we expect others to keep our moral standards or they expect us to keep theirs? (Refer to the list on page 12.)

Engaging God: Seek the Lord to expose or reveal any moral standards that create expectations of others.

3. Standards of BEHAVIOR

Like moral standards, we were all raised with certain standards of behavior that we can superimpose on others or vice versa.

Example: “After all I have done for you over the years, this is the way you treat me?”

Example: “Why are you treating me this way? I would never say (or do) that to you.”

Example: “I have lost count of all the times I have _____ for you and this what I get for it.”

What fleshly behaviors might result if we expect others to keep our behavioral standards or they expect us to keep theirs? (Refer to the list on page 12.)

Engaging God: Seek the Lord to expose or reveal any behavioral standards you may be experiencing that create unrealistic expectations of others.

EMOTIONAL Baggage As A Result of Our Woundedness

In addition to the standards we set for others, we all bring emotional baggage into our relationships. Unfortunately, no one escapes being wounded. Whether from our parents, spouses, friends, co-workers, or adult children, we have all been wounded. It could be the result of abuse from our parents, a divorce, or the loss of a child. Because we do live in fallen bodies surrounded by fallen people, woundedness is inescapable. The problem with our relationships as a result of our unhealed woundedness is this:

WOUNDED people wound OTHERS.

Woundedness is like any infectious disease. It will not only be toxic to you, but to others around you as well. This is true of those you struggle with as well. The problem is that if the wounding event happened long ago, we tend to suppress it or deny that it even took place. We may believe since it was in the past that we are no longer impacted or controlled by it today. Whether we are conscious of our woundedness, or it is hidden, it can negatively impact relationships. Here is the key concerning woundedness and relationships.

***The DEPTH of a person's woundedness will determine
how DEEPLY it will NEGATIVELY impact his or her relationships.***

As a result of the deep wounding by my father, I was very toxic to my wife, my employees, and my friends. I lived in overt and covert anger, bitterness, and unforgiveness. Only as I look back on my life before receiving revelation of Christ as my Life, do I realize how my woundedness poisoned my relationships.

As painful as our wounding events may have been, the real problem is the false beliefs, wounded feelings, and fleshly behaviors that flow from these beliefs and feelings. Let's take a deeper look at false beliefs that can result from our woundedness.

1. False Beliefs About Ourselves – Out of our woundedness come false beliefs about ourselves. Let's look at some examples of false beliefs.

As a result of my woundedness, I believe I am:

Unworthy
Unacceptable
Rejected
A failure
Anxious
Inadequate
Weak
Defeated
Insecure
Fearful

Write down any of these false beliefs that might, in part, be true of you. What false beliefs might your difficult person be living under?

Out of people's false beliefs about themselves come fleshly behaviors. Here are some examples of some fleshly behaviors that flow from our false beliefs.

1. **Unworthy** – overly introspective, self-condemning, being critical of others to build yourself up, controlling
2. **Unacceptable** – jealousy, envy, being a people-pleaser
3. **Rejected** – angry, become defensive, reject others, controlling
4. **A failure** – fear of making mistakes, become introspective, being envious of others' successes, become a loner
5. **Inadequate** – critical and judgmental of others, denial, people-pleaser, escape through such things as your job, hobbies, alcohol, pornography, etc.
6. **Fearful** – isolate yourself, self-protection, avoid failure at all costs
7. **Insecure** – depression, stay in control, obsessed with accomplishments
8. **Defeated** – self-pity, pessimistic, depressed

Out of my woundedness, I believed I was unworthy, rejected, and inadequate. As a result, I did whatever I could to get people to like me, accept me, or approve of me. When they didn't, I got angry, defensive, and judgmental.

Write down any fleshly behaviors that may apply to you concerning your false beliefs or fleshly behaviors directed to you by the person(s) you struggle with. (Refer to the list on page 12.)

2. Wounded Feelings – Another result of our wounding events is wounded feelings that result from unhealed woundedness. Let's look at some examples.

Discouraged	Hopeless	Dejected	Unloved	Helpless
Worthless	Rejected	Miserable	Inadequate	Burdened
Frustrated	Condemned	Worried	Critical	Judgmental
Unhappy	Regretful	Angry	Exploited	Vindictive
Confused	Paralyzed	Troubled	Guarded	Unworthy
Sorrowful	Empty	Melancholy	Anxious	Fearful
Resentful	Neglected	Deceived	Lonely	Guilty
Powerless	Defeated	Insignificant	Judged	Ashamed
Insecure	Incapable	Vulnerable	Deceived	Misunderstood
Overwhelmed	Unimportant	Depressed	Self-pity	Self-protective

Which of these wounded feelings apply to you and what feelings listed apply to the person you are struggling with?

Out of my woundedness, for years I carried wounded feelings of being unworthy, unloved, and rejected.

Engaging God: Seek the Lord to reveal or expose any wounded feelings you might have towards someone that may be hidden.

I hope this section on emotional baggage has been helpful in understanding what may be behind your struggle with a person or their struggle with you. In addition to emotional baggage is spiritual baggage.

SPIRITUAL Baggage

We talked earlier about our standards which can create expectations which, if met, can lead us to fleshly behaviors. In addition, as Christians we can bring our "spiritual" baggage into relationships. Let me define what I mean by "spiritual baggage."

SPIRITUAL baggage is the result of primarily four things: not KNOWING, not BELIEVING not WALKING in God's truth or being FALSELY TAUGHT God's truth.

Let's take a closer look at these four areas.

1. Not KNOWING The Truth

What do you think might be some of the results of a Christian not knowing the truth? Let me share what I believe are two foundational truths that are important to know to live the Christian life.

Truth #1: Knowing the difference between LIVING "A" Christian life versus living "THE" Christian life

There are many key biblical truths that people don't know which adversely impact their relationships. But I feel that if we don't know the difference between "A" Christian life and "THE" Christian Life, this can create serious, ongoing relational problems. Therefore, let's look at the difference between the two.

"A" Christian Life is a Christian life where you are the source, using your intellect, self-discipline, and will power with God's help to keep God's commands, do what the word of God says, fulfill God's promises to be pleasing to God.

Consequences of Living "A" Life You will live in constant defeat by your flesh and Satan; you will never be free from the bondage to your fleshly behaviors; there will no healing of your woundedness and no spiritual transformation. Since nothing really changes, over time you will harden your heart towards God and may eventually walk away from God. Nothing ever changes and things will get worse. Why? Because God never intended for you to be the source to live the Christian life. Let's look at the meaning THE Christian life.

"THE" Christian Life is a life lived in total dependence on God as your Source for Him to fulfill His promises and transform your life. The key truth with THE Life is that it is not a set of rules to keep, checklists or rules to follow. THE Christian life is a Person. It is Christ Himself. We see this in the first part of John 14:6.

*Jesus said to Him, "I am THE way, THE truth, and
THE LIFE"*

A second key truth is that there is only one Source from who to live THE Christian life and that is Jesus. Look at 1 Corinthians 1:30

***"He (God) is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God,
and righteousness and sanctification and redemption."
1 Corinthians 1:30 (NRSV)***

Consequences of Living “THE” Life You will experience sustained victory (1 Corinthians 15:57), freedom (Galatians 5:1), healing of your woundedness (Psalm 147:3), and be transformed to become like Christ (Ephesians 4:15; 2 Corinthians 3:18).

When Jesus says in the last part of John 15:5b, “Apart from Me you can do NOTHING,” the word “nothing” means that apart from God being the Source, you will never experience the promises above.

If you were taught that “A” Christian life is how you live the Christian life, how is it impacting your life since you are not experiencing God’s promises of victory, freedom, healing of your woundedness, and spiritual transformation? Without the fulfillment of these promises, how will you ever be able to deal with your fleshly behaviors that are negatively impacting your relationships?

What if the person you struggle with is living “A” Christian life versus “THE” Christian Life? Aren’t they stuck in bondage to their fleshly behaviors?

In what ways might knowing they are living “A” Christian life change how you see or feel the difficult person(s) in your life?

For me, living “A” Christian life resulted in being locked into the bondage of my anger, controlling, manipulation and judgment of others. Can you imagine how detrimental these fleshly behaviors were to my relationships? It was not pretty!

(Note: If you want to know more about living “A” Christian life versus THE Christian Life, please look for the booklet titled *“A” Life? Or “THE” Life?* under Discipleship Booklets on our website.)

c. Knowing Your TRUE IDENTITY In Christ

The second foundational truth for living “THE” Christian Life is knowing our true identity in Christ.

*“Therefore, if anyone is **in Christ**, he is a new creation (new identity); the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come.” 2 Corinthians 5:17.*

This verse means that if you have trusted Christ for salvation, you have a new identity. How did that take place?

1. At Salvation, God first removed (CRUCIFIED) your OLD identity.

For God to give us a new identity, He had to crucify your old identity. Before we go on, let’s define what is meant by your “old identity.” Your old identity is made up of any belief you had about yourself that does not line up with God’s truth.

For example, if you believe that you are rejected and the truth is that in your new identity you are unconditionally accepted (Romans 15:7), your belief is a false belief. (Refer to the false beliefs on page 16.) If you believe that any of those beliefs are true of you, they are false beliefs.

Now that you understand the meaning of your old identity, we see from Romans 6:6 that God crucified your old identity.

*"... knowing this, that our **old self (old identity) was crucified with Him**, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin."*

Romans 6:6

This is what Paul meant when he said in 2 Corinthians 5:17 above that *"the old things (your old identity) have passed away (was crucified)."*

2. Secondly, God EXCHANGED Your Old Identity For A NEW One

The good news is that God didn't just crucify the old identity. Rather, God removed your old identity and exchanged it for a new identity. That is what Paul means when he says, *"new things (your new identity) have come"* in 2 Corinthians 5:17.

Therefore, you no longer have an old identity with your false beliefs. Now you are a new creation with a new identity. Let's look at a few of the characteristics of your new identity.

In your new identity:

Romans 8:35, 38, 39	You are unconditionally loved.
Ephesians 4:24	You are righteous and holy.
Romans 15:7	You are accepted and acceptable.
Colossians 3:13	You are a forgiving person.
Psalms 139:14	You are worthy.
2 Corinthians 3:5	You are adequate.
Psalms 56:4	You are fearless.
Galatians 5:1	You are free.
Psalms 139:5	You are secure.
1 Corinthians 15:57	You are victorious.
Romans 8:37	You are a conqueror.
John 15:13	You are sacrificial.
Psalms 71:5	You are selfless.

This is good news but if you did not know this truth until now, how might that negatively impact your relationships since living out of your false beliefs results in living from your fleshly behaviors?

I was never taught for 30 years as a Christian that I have a new identity. As a result, I continued to live out of my false beliefs of inadequacy, rejection, and unworthiness which produced fleshly behaviors such as anger, controlling, rejecting others, and self-pity.

What if the people you struggle with don't know their true identity? In what ways might that change how you think or feel about them?

I believe these two key spiritual truths are crucial to understand not only for our own Christian walk but in understanding what is behind the fleshly behaviors of the difficult people in our life. However, knowing God's truth is just the beginning.

(Note: If you want to know more about your new identity in Christ, please look for the booklet titled *IDENTITY* under Discipleship Booklets on our website.)

2. Not BELIEVING The Truth

We can know the truth but believing and knowing are two different things. I define "knowing" as a cognitive or intellectual understanding of God's truth. On the other hand, "believing" is a result of the Holy Spirit giving you revelation of God's truth with the result that you believe it is true. This truth is found in John 14:26.

*"But the Helper, the **Holy Spirit**, whom the Father will send in My name, **He will teach you all things (give you revelation)**, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you."*

Having said that, we need to understand unbelief is another part of our spiritual baggage. Why?

Because you will not LIVE beyond what you BELIEVE.

To the EXTENT you don't BELIEVE God's truth will be the extent you will NOT LIVE from it.

Unbelief about God, His word, and how we are to live THE Christian Life will result in unchanged fleshly behaviors. There will be no freedom, victory, healing of woundedness, or spiritual transformation which can lead to ongoing conflict in our relationships. This is why we engage God to give us revelation and move us from unbelief to belief.

What if you or the person you struggle with struggles believing key biblical truths. In what ways might that change how you think or feel about them if you realize they don't believe key truths from the Bible that you do?

3. Not WALKING In The Truth

*“Are you so foolish? Having **begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?**”
Galatians 3:3*

We can know, believe, and even have revelation of God’s truth, but if we don’t choose to walk in it, what good does it do us? This is what Paul meant in Galatians 3:3. He was chastising the Galatians because they knew the truth but were not walking in it.

Let me give you a personal example. I know and teach that I have all the unconditional love of Christ in me. However, I had a hidden belief that Christ’s unconditional love did not extend to my brother because of his hatred for me and my strong dislike for him.

One day the Holy Spirit came to me and exposed my unloving attitude towards my brother. The conversation went something like this: “Bill, you have been teaching about My love and loving others except for your brother.” The Spirit was exposing me because I knew and believed the truth, but I was not choosing to apply (walk in) that truth to my brother. What do you think was the result of knowing and believing but not choosing to walk in the truth? You guessed it ... ongoing, and in this case, escalating conflict.

What if you or the person you struggle knows certain biblical truths but is not walking in them. Knowing this, how might it change your perspective of them or their fleshly attitude towards you?

4. Being Falsely Taught God’s Truth

The only thing worse than not knowing, not believing, or not walking in the truth is being falsely taught God’s truth. False truth can lead to false expectations which result in fleshly behaviors. Let’s look at a few examples.

Salvation

If the person you have difficulties with isn’t saved because he/she believes in a work’s-based salvation, what chance does that person have of being transformed? What can you expect from unsaved people who do not have God living in them to transform them? If you do expect them to change apart from the power of the Spirit, how might you be tempted to respond in the flesh when they don’t?

The Fruit of The Spirit

What if you were falsely taught it is up to you to produce the fruit of the Spirit? How might that negatively impact your relationships? The truth is that Christ is the fruit of the Spirit (John 14:6) and our part is to draw on Christ by faith (John 15:5) for Him to produce the fruit of the Spirit experientially rather than trying to produce it ourselves.

If this is what you believe, then you would be trying in your own strength to produce the fruit. Would you expect other Christians to do the same? Especially those who you had problems with. You might be thinking, “They claim to be Christians, but I don’t see the fruit of the Spirit in their lives. We could have a better relationship if they would just try harder to produce spiritual fruit. No wonder we can’t get along.”

Legalism

What if the person you have difficulties with was falsely taught the Christian life is about about keeping certain rules and is about spiritual checklists to accomplish in order to grow spiritually (i.e. legalism)? If they have expectations that you should keep the same rules and checklists and you don’t, then they might be tempted to judge or condemn you. If you took ownership of their judgement towards you, how might you respond in the flesh?

What is the net result of false teaching?

***False teaching can result in EITHER party
fanning the flames of DISCORD and CONFLICT.***

If you are tempted to judge or be critical of another person’s walk, might that very judgement be exposing your self-righteousness? When we judge another person’s Christian walk, aren’t we looking at that person through the lens of self-righteousness? Or trying to elevate ourselves?

If a person is believing false beliefs about God’s truth, then why are we surprised at their fleshly behavior? In what ways should that impact how we think or behave towards that person?

Engaging God: Seek the Holy Spirit to continually set you free from the self-righteous judgements that flow from your difficult person who may not know the truth, are not believing the truth, are not walking in the truth and are living from false teaching.

Satan Will Use YOURS and THEIR Baggage Against You

*“The thief comes to **steal, kill and destroy...**”*

Satan wants to steal, kill and destroy relationships by:

- Using our emotional and spiritual baggage to justify our fleshly behaviors towards our offender and keep us in bondage to that fleshly behavior.

- Use our offender's emotional and spiritual baggage to reinforce their fleshly behavior towards us and keep them in bondage to those fleshly behaviors.

Satan loves conflict and divisiveness. He will do anything to fan the flames of both. He will tempt us to be justified in our fleshly attitudes towards our offender and keep presenting us with the thought, "I have the right to feel the way I do towards _____."

Satan has many tricks in his bag to keep you and your offender in bondage to self-righteous justification of your flesh. If he is successful, you or they will never be set free.

Conclusion

The main point of these first two chapters is that we all struggle in relationships because of the baggage we and the other person bring into those relationships. If we don't recognize our own baggage, it is easy to point fingers at your difficult person and conclude he/she is the problem and therefore must change to reconcile the relationship. If we bring our "baggage" into the relationship, we can be just as much a part of the problem as they are."

We can deal with these relationships in one of two ways: independent of Christ or through Christ. In the next lesson, we will look at how we try to deal with difficult relationships apart from Christ.

CHAPTER THREE

Dealing With Difficult People Apart From Christ

Introduction

We have two choices when it comes to relationships. We can either engage God to transform us and work through us or as we will see in this chapter, the ways we can try to deal with difficult relationships apart from Christ. As you read through the chapter, the human tendency might be to think that this is not what you struggle with. That is why I encourage you to engage the Holy Spirit concerning what you read in order for Him to reveal or expose any issues you may be dealing with that may be hidden or suppressed.

How Do We Deal With Difficult Relationships Apart From Christ?

If we are not seeking the Spirit to transform us and work through us, our only option to “cope.” Therefore, let’s first look at the definition of coping.

COPING:

***METHODS or TECHNIQUES we use to NAVIGATE
difficult people APART from God.***

I divide coping into two different categories: defensive and offensive. Let’s start by looking at ways we cope defensively.

DEFENSIVE COPING

1. AVOIDANCE

I believe the number one defensive coping mechanism is just to avoid those who have and are creating pain and heartache in our lives. The thought is: Out of sight, out of mind. However, does “out of sight” truly result in those people being “out of mind”? Does this apply to any of your relationships?

As Christ-centered believers are we to avoid or engage? What might be the results of either choice?

2. COMPARTMENTALIZE

Another way we cope with difficult relationships is to compartmentalize. We try to put difficult relationships in a locked box and put them away just like putting a box away in a closet. We then throw away the key so we don't have to think about them or deal with them anymore.

If this is true of you, how successful are you in compartmentalizing certain people? Especially when you have recurring thoughts about how they have hurt or rejected you? I tried to do this with my brother that I was referring to earlier, but it didn't work because compartmentalization is an illusion. Every time I thought about my brother, it was like he kept getting out of the box. It was like a lion escaping from his cage.

As Christ-centered believers are we to compartmentalize or seek the Spirit to transform our hearts towards that person? What might be the results of each of these two choices?

Engaging God: Since we use compartmentalization as a way to suppress our thinking about our difficult person, ask the Holy Spirit to bring to light anyone you may be trying to compartmentalize.

3. Put On MASKS

When we are forced to be around the unsavory people in our lives, we can put on masks in order to appear as if we don't have a problem with them. As Christians, we can perfect the art of mask wearing by putting on the spiritual or the "I am a Christian" mask. Just imagine for a moment that Jesus dropped by your house unannounced, and you were fighting with your spouse. Wouldn't you quickly put on the "Jesus is here so I better put on my 'I am a Christian' mask"?

Another mask we tend to put on to keep our difficult people from being difficult is the "people pleasing" mask. We will do everything we can to prevent them from reacting in the flesh. We might even put on that mask thinking that if we please them enough, they will actually like us or, at the very least, will not reject, condemn, or get mad at us.

For me, I would be controlling and manipulative to my employees and get very angry when they didn't meet my standards, but on Sunday when I went to church, I put on my "I am a godly, spiritual man" mask. (This is why I made sure no one who worked for me went to my church.) Masks are like the fig leaves used by Adam and Eve to cover their shame. We use our masks to cover our true fleshly feelings that we have towards people we struggle with.

Another problem about masking is that we may have done it for so long, we don't even consciously realize we are doing it. Without even thinking about we pull out the appropriate mask for whatever person we have to be around.

What key biblical truths are we missing if our default is to put on masks? If we know, believe and are living from our true identity in Christ, is there any reason why we even have to put on masks?

As Christ-centered believers how will it impact our view of the person we struggle with if we see them through the lens of our true identity verses our masks?

Engaging God: Ask the Holy Spirit what masks you might be wearing and are not aware of when you are around troubled relationships.

4. DENIAL That You May Be Part of The Problem

One of the ways we try to cope with our difficult relationships is by denying that we may be part of the problem. We tend to justify our denial in different ways. The following are some examples.

I can't be part of the problem because:

- My behavior isn't anywhere near as bad as his or hers.
- He/she is the one who keeps offending me.
- He/she won't stop trying to guilt, shame, or condemn me.
- He/she is the only one who keeps bringing up the past.
- He/she never wants to hear my side of the problem.

If a person stays in denial that the other person is the problem, where might that lead?

Engaging God: Ask the Holy Spirit to expose any justifications your flesh might have to live in denial that you are part of the problem.

5. STUFF Your Emotions

Another defensive coping mechanism we try is to stuff the negative emotions that result from our offender's flesh. They may be emotions associated with how people have wounded us or the fleshly feelings people bring out in us when we are around them. We can stuff our emotions thinking we are locking them away in a bank vault only to realize that we are trying to stuff them in a colander where they eventually flow or "ooze" out. Especially when we are around those whom we struggle with. Stuffing emotions, as the old joke goes, is like putting a screen door on a submarine.

Why do we choose this coping strategy? Because to feel these negative emotions is too painful. We will do anything to not to feel wounded, so we have to stuff these emotions so those painful feelings will not consume us.

The question is: Can our damaged or fleshly emotions really be stuffed or buried, or are they in reality buried but still very much alive?

What do you think might be the consequences of continuing to try to stuff your emotions?

Engaging God: Ask the Lord to reveal if you are trying to stuff your fleshly feelings toward anyone who has hurt or wounded you.

6. ESCAPE Or ANESTHETIZE The Pain

If we can't compartmentalize people or the stuff the painful emotions they cause us, we look for ways to escape or anesthetize the pain associated with the people who caused the pain, especially those who are closest to us.

Here are some examples of ways we try to escape or anesthetize the pain:

Workaholism	Shopaholic	Television	Pornography
Medication	Hobbies	Sex Addiction	Overeating
Movies	Computer	Anorexia/Bulimia	Working for God
Drug Abuse	Alcoholism	Cell Phone	Social Media
Video Games	Exercise	Texting	Fantasizing

Here is a key truth concerning these escape options:

***Using these methods of ESCAPE will only bring TEMPORARY relief
from the pain but will NEVER produce healing or freedom.***

Most of these are self-explanatory, but you may be a little puzzled why I put "working for God" as a way of escape. I know of pastors and lay people who use God's "work" to cover over their relational pain.

What ways are you using to escape or anesthetize the pain caused by your difficult person? Are they working?

Engaging God: Seek the Holy Spirit to reveal any ways you may be using to escape or anesthetize your relational pain.

7. Continuing To See Yourself As The VICTIM

Another way of dealing with the pain that someone has caused you is to conclude that you are and will always be the victim. I hear these comments often: “Can’t you see what this person did to me?” “Don’t you understand how deeply they wounded me?” “If you could understand the extent of my woundedness, you would see I am justified in my anger.” These are all comments of “victims.” I am not minimizing the fact you may have been victimized. However, the question is, “Do you have to continue living as a victim?”

Continuing to see yourself as the victim can create feelings of hopelessness. You can also play the “victim” card by trying to get attention, sympathy, and validation from others. It becomes a manipulation tool we use to try to get our validation needs met by others while we remain unhealthy.

If you are continuing to see yourself as a victim, what negative of fleshly thoughts, feelings or emotions result?

Engaging God: Ask the Lord to reveal if you still are, in any way, seeing yourself as the victim.

8. SELF-PROTECTION

Let me begin by defining “self-protection.”

***SELF-PROTECTION means constructing walls in our hearts to try to
PREVENT others from HURTING or REJECTING us (again).***

Unfortunately, no one escapes being a “self-protector” because it is one of the results of the Fall of Adam. Since we were all born in Adam, we were all born as self-protectors. It was part of Adam’s DNA that we inherited. Much like Adam and Eve put on fig leaves after the Fall to try to hide their shame, we build walls of self-protection to keep others (or sometimes God) from getting too close. Why do we protect ourselves?

I believe the key driver in self-protection is **fear**. Fear and self-protection are like two sides of the same coin. There are two primary fears that drive us to self-protect in regards to difficult relationships:

- Fear of rejection
- Fear of being hurt (again)

If you have been rejected or hurt deeply, would you agree that you tend to protect yourself so that you won't be rejected or hurt again by that person who created the pain in the first place?

Think about all the coping strategies you have read so far. Can't each one of them be used to for self-protection: avoidance, denial, compartmentalization, masking, stuffing, escape, or remaining a victim. Ultimately, when it comes to defensive coping, the driving force with all the ways we cope are self-protection.

As a strategy to avoid being hurt, we think we must build walls of self-protection. The very walls we think will protect us, in fact, imprison us. Why?

***These walls IMPRISON us because they HINDER the Holy Spirit from
TRANSFORMING our hearts and setting us FREE.***

Engaging God: Ask the Lord in what ways you are self-protecting and seek Him to begin tearing down your self-protective walls.

OFFENSIVE COPING

What do I mean by "offensive" coping?

***OFFENSIVE coping is a result of believing you have FLESHLY RIGHTS
towards those WHO HAVE and CONTINUE to hurt or offend you.***

What are "fleshly" rights? They are self-centered sinful demands towards others that are designed to justify our fleshly behaviors towards people who continue to hurt us. Here are some examples of offensive coping.

1. Right To Be ANGRY

When I look back over 48 years at how my father abused me, I believed I had the fleshly right to be angry for the woundedness he created. The problem is that over time my anger grew into bitterness and a hardening heart towards him, others, and God.

If you struggle with being angry (frustrated) with someone who has or is creating conflict in your life, what fleshly attitudes or behaviors might that be creating in your heart?

Engaging God: Seek the Lord to expose what your anger is creating in your own heart and how it is negatively impacting your relationships with others and with God.

2. Right To Be In CONTROL

Another offensive coping mechanism is the fleshly right to control others. In other words, we go on the offensive by trying to control them to try and prevent them from controlling us or from continuing to hurt us. The truth is that wanting to be in control is a foundational struggle with every human being. It is part of the Adamic hangover. We all, in our flesh, want to be in control. Therefore, controlling others is a natural outflow of our flesh and is strategy that we all tend to use in dealing with difficult people or with people we don't want to get to close.

Engaging God: Ask the Holy Spirit to expose the ways you may be trying to control those who you have ongoing struggles with.

3. Right To MANIPULATE

The cousin to controlling is manipulation because one of the key ways we try to control others is through manipulation. Manipulation is any attempt to sway a person's emotions to get them to act or feel a specific way. Manipulation comes in many forms such as guilt, shaming, silence, flattery, or even people-pleasing.

Engaging God: Seek the Lord to reveal how you may be trying to manipulate those who you are in ongoing conflict with that you are not aware of.

Please write down the ways the Spirit reveals? Is your manipulation working?

4. Right To Be CRITICAL and JUDGMENTAL

You have heard the expression that the best defense is a good offense. One of my favorite offensive coping strategies (and it was literally "offensive") was to be critical and judgmental of others, especially those who wounded me. I would find ways in my mind to be critical of them to build myself up or to assure myself that I was okay. If I could convince myself that the person who wounded me was "less than" I was, then I could deceive myself into believing that person was no longer a threat.

My being critical of others was also a way I used to drive that person away before they could hurt or reject me. It was a form of “doing it unto others before they could do it unto me.”

Engaging God: Ask God to expose how you may be critical or judgmental of others. Especially those whom you struggle with.

5. Right To Try To FIX Someone

This is especially true in marriage. When I disciple hurting married couples, they come to me believing that if I can fix their spouse, they will be okay. I believe this is true of all of us married or not. There is something within us that says, “This person makes me feel _____ (frustrated, guilty, angry, etc.). If I could just get them fixed, then I would no longer have to feel those things.”

What’s the problem? You guessed it. We can’t fix ourselves much less anyone else. It is a fruitless effort, but I never cease to be amazed at how long we can be deceived into believing we can fix someone else. I was for 48 years! The bigger problem is this. Even if you had the power to fix someone, it would not fix you.

Engaging God: Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal if and in what ways you may be trying to fix your challenging person.

6. Right To CANCEL or WRITE Them OFF

When none of the above work, we just try to cancel or erase those who hurt us from our lives. As I write this, part of our culture wars in this country centers around “canceling” or “writing off” people we don’t like or that don’t agree with us. We can do the same with those we are in conflict with. Aren’t you glad God has not written you off?

Engaging God: If you are tempted to write someone off, think about the truth that God will never write you off in spite of the ways you offend Him and sin against Him.

Conclusion

What are some other defensive or offensive coping mechanisms you might be using to deal with the offensive people in your life?

There are several other defensive and offensive coping strategies we could cover but the point is that apart from Christ we will use whatever ways we can to try and prevent or protect ourselves from further pain. The question we need to ask is, “What will be the consequences of these coping strategies?” We will spend the rest of this chapter answering that question.

What Can We Expect From Our Coping Strategies?

1. Stay SELF-ABSORBED and SELF-FOCUSED

As long as we are coping with those people who create pain in our lives, we will stay focused on our pain, our struggle, or our heartache. We become self-absorbed and cannot focus on anyone but ourselves. In other words, “It is all about me and my hurt.”

2. We open ourselves to FURTHER PAIN and WOUNDEDNESS

If we stay self-absorbed with our pain, the result is that we are opening ourselves up for more hurt and pain. Even with all the coping strategies we may try to employ, they never truly protect us from further pain.

3. Stay or become REJECTABLE and OFFENDABLE

As long as we continue to cope with others, we will either stay or become rejectable and offendable. This means we open ourselves to taking ownership of more rejection and offense.

4. REINFORCES our fleshly behaviors

The longer we focus on coping strategies, the more we reinforce our fleshly behaviors towards those who offend and reject us. Like layers of an onion, we continue to add layers of our fleshly behaviors which keep us in bondage and continue to justify our fleshly rights.

5. Never grow up SPIRITUALLY

One of the keys as we will see in the next chapter to experience freedom and transformation is to grow up spiritually. However, without seeking and drawing on the power of the Holy Spirit, we will remain self-focused and self-absorbed spiritual children.

6. You will stay locked into EMOTIONAL IMMATURITY

There is a direct correlation between spiritual maturity and emotional maturity. You can't have one without the other. Continuing to live from your hurt or pain not only retards your spiritual growth but it restricts your emotional maturity as well. If we don't experience healing, we never grow up, and will continue to revert to childish things (i.e., fleshly behaviors such as anger, controlling, manipulation, selfishness, etc.).

Let me give you an example to illustrate. I know of a man who was emotionally and verbally abused by his dad as a boy. This abuse left him feeling unloved and rejected. His unmet needs for love and acceptance blocked him from growing emotionally. Even though he is now an adult, he has the emotional maturity of a teenager. Unhealed woundedness leaves us stuck emotionally and will prevent the “growing up” process.

7. HARDENING of Our Hearts Towards People and God

All the things listed above will eventually lead us to what I call the “hardening” of our hearts towards people and even towards God. I define the “hardening of the heart” as:

***The DEATH that occurs in our hearts from CONTINUING to live from
our woundedness and from RESISTING God's work in our lives.***

Hardening of the heart is like compounding interest on a certificate of deposit (when they actually made real interest). We know interest on a CD compounds the longer we keep the CD. It is the same way with our woundedness. Over time this “compounding” or hardening of the heart causes you to move further and further away from seeking God as the solution. Eventually you can turn away from God completely and will no longer seek Him as the Source to heal you and set you free. Let me share a story to illustrate.

I was discipling a man who shared with me that his fiancé was run over by a drunk driver the day of their rehearsal dinner. This event happened 15 years prior to our meeting. Nonetheless, he told (and felt) the story as if it had just happened. He said with deep anger: “God killed the only person in the world who ever really loved me.” It was obvious that over the past 15 years he was resisting God and His healing power which resulted in this man’s heart being hardened with the result he was extremely bitter against God.

Engaging God: Ask the Holy Spirit if you are hardening your heart towards God because of your fleshly behavior or attitudes towards those who have and are hurting you.

Conclusion

There are many other consequences that result from not realizing that we may be part of the problem in strained relationships. However, I hope the Holy Spirit has opened your eyes in new ways concerning how we may be contributing to our struggling relationships. Now let’s turn the corner and see how to become part of the solution.

CHAPTER FOUR

Becoming Part Of The Solution

Introduction

*“When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child. But when I **grew up [spiritually]**, I put away childish things.” 1 Corinthians 13:11*

This verse very much applied to me for 30 years as a Christian with the result I was still a spiritual two year old. The overflow for me, was that I was the cause of the problem in my relationships or I was part of the problem. If you feel this is where you are on some level, then we will turn the corner in this chapter and see how we can become part of the solution.

Until this chapter, what I have talked about can apply to you or the person you are struggling with. However, the next two chapters will only apply to you. Why? Because you have no control over what the difficult people in your life will do or not do. The question for you in these chapters is, “What will you do with the truths you are about to read?”

Being Part of The SOLUTION By Growing UP Spiritually

Paul exhorts us to grow up and become spiritually mature according to Hebrews 6:1.

*“Therefore, leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, **let us press on to maturity.**”*

This is true because he tells us the consequences of not growing up in Ephesians 4:14.

*¹⁴ Then **we will no longer be immature like children.** We won’t be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth.”*

The question: What does it mean to press on to maturity and grow spiritually? Paul gives us the answer in the next verse.

*“Instead, we will speak the truth in love, **growing in every way more and more like Christ,** who is the head of his body, the church.” Ephesians 4:15*

Therefore, “growing up spiritually” means:

“growing in every way more and more like Christ.”

Think about this: How did Jesus deal with His difficult relationships? How how did He, respond to their ridicule, judgment, criticism, anger, arrogance, rejection, etc.? We see that in every instance, He responded in the Spirit. Having said that, you might be thinking, “Yes, but He is the Son of God, therefore He cannot sin.” While this is true, He had to make the choice just like you and I do because while on earth, He was fully human (Philippians 2:7).

Because He laid aside His privileges of deity, He totally depended on the Father and the Holy Spirit's power to choose not to sin. What does it mean to grow more and more like Christ?

***Growing more like Christ means living from CHRIST-LIKENESS
and living from our NEW IDENTITY in Christ.***

With this truth in mind, let's look at the results of growing into Christ-likeness and growing into our new true identity and how this will positively impact our relationships.

Meditate: on the verses above and ask the Holy Spirit if the verses above are true of you today.

CHRIST-LIKENESS

Why do I say all this? Because we can be transformed into the likeness of Christ-according to 2 Corinthians 3:18.

*"And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, **are being transformed into His (Christ) likeness** with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." 2 Corinthians 3:18*

What will be the result when it comes to relationships?

***The more we are TRANSFORMED to become like CHRIST, the more we
will be able to respond to struggling relationships LIKE Christ with the
result that we become part of the SOLUTION rather than part of the problem.***

Does this sound plausible to you? The more you become like Christ, the more you will be able to deal with hard relationships like Jesus did. To better understand this truth, let's begin by understanding the definition of Christ-likeness.

1. Defining CHRIST-LIKENESS

I define Christ-likeness like this:

***Christ-likeness is living FROM and EXPERIENCING the
SUPERNATURAL characteristics of Christ.***

Let's look at some examples of Christ-like characteristics.

2. Characteristics of Christ-Likeness

Below is a list of some of the characteristics of Christ.

Unconditional Love	Victory	Worth	Acceptance	Freedom
Patience	Strength	Peace	Forgiveness	Understanding
Security	Kindness	Wisdom	Discernment	Compassion
Christ-confidence	Adequacy	Humility	Boldness	Righteousness
Selflessness	Rest	Courage	Hope	Gentleness
Christ-control	Unrejectable	Power	Sacrificial	Unoffendable

Let's now look at some scriptures that confirm these Christ-like characteristics. The fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22, 23a and Colossians 3:12-15 are great examples of Christ-likeness.

*"But the fruit of the Spirit is [Christ's] **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control....**"*
Galatians 5:22, 23a

*"So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of **compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another [selflessness], and forgiving** each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on **love**, which is the perfect bond of unity. Let the **peace** of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful." Colossians 3:12-15*

Let's tie those verses with Galatians 5:16 which says;

*"But I say, **walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.**"*

Meditate: on the verses in this section. Would you say the characteristics from the list or the verses true of you?

How do the above verses relate to each other?

If we are LIVING from the LIKENESS of Christ, we will be walking in the Spirit with the RESULT we will NOT REACT in the flesh.

Would you agree? Here are some examples of what that looks like:

It is impossible to walk in:

- Christ's forgiveness and be unforgiving
- Christ's selflessness and be selfish
- Christ's love and be angry/frustrated
- Christ's acceptance and be rejecting.

This brings us to another key truth:

***The more we GROW to become like Christ (i.e. living from Christ-likeness)
the more we will RESPOND to difficult people like Christ would.***

Spiritual growth into Christ-likeness is essential to moving us to that place that we less time reacting in the flesh and more time exhibiting Christ's forgiveness, compassion, patience, etc. towards those who are hurting or offending us.

A final key truth is that since we contain the fullness of Christ according to Colossians 2:9,10 then we contain all the Christ-like characteristics in full.

***"For in Him all the fullness of Deity (Christ-likeness) dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete (you contain all of Christ-like characteristics),
and He is the head over all rule and authority."***

As a result, we no longer have to try and produce Christ-likeness. Our part is to draw on Christ to BE our love, patience, humility, etc. We will talk more about this process in Chapter Six.

The LINE Illustration

To illustrate this truth, let's look at the "line" analogy. In the illustration below, above the line is living from Christ-likeness/walking in the Spirit and below the line is living from our fleshly behaviors/walking in the flesh.

Unconditional Love	Victory	Worth	Acceptance
Freedom	Patience	Strength	Forgiveness
Understanding	Peace	Security	Kindness
Discernment	Wisdom	Humility	Compassion
Christ-confidence	Adequacy	Boldness	Gentleness
Righteousness	Rest	Courage	Selflessness
Christ-control	Hope	Power	Goodness
Other's Focused	Unrejectable	Sacrificial	Unoffendable

Christ-Likeness = Walking In The Spirit

Fleshly Behaviors = Walking In The Flesh

**Anxious, angry, unworthy, self-righteous, impatient,
demanding, unforgiving, unloving, defensive,
inadequate, critical, judgmental, ashamed, controlling,
arrogant, manipulative, guilty, rejecting, insecure ,**

Let me ask you two questions concerning the line illustration.

When it comes to your difficult relationships, where does God want you to live?
ABOVE or BELOW The Line?

God knows that unless you seek Him to transform you into Christ-likeness above the line, you will be stuck below the line in your fleshly behaviors with the result that nothing will change with the challenging people in your life. In fact, things will probably get worse.

You can see how living from Christ-likeness might change how you see and respond to relationships. Let's look at the list again and look at the Christ-like characteristics I have marked in **bold**.

Unconditional Love	Victory	Worth	Acceptance	Freedom
Patience	Strength	Peace	Forgiveness	Understanding
Security	Kindness	Wisdom	Discernment	Compassion
Christ-confidence	Adequacy	Humility	Boldness	Righteousness
Selflessness	Perseverance	Courage	Hope	Gentleness
Christ-control	Unrejectable	Power	Sacrificial	Unoffendable

Just imagine for the moment living from these characteristics of Christ:

- Unconditional love
- Acceptance
- Freedom
- Patience
- Humility
- Forgiveness
- Selflessness
- Wisdom
- Discernment
- Unrejectable
- Unoffendable.

Think about the difficult relationships you are experiencing. Please reread the list slowly and think about the ways living from these Christ-like characteristics might change your attitude towards your difficult relationships.

Let's put these specific Christ-like characteristics above the line versus some examples of fleshly behaviors your difficult people may exhibit towards you below the line.

Unconditional love	Patience	Acceptance
Selflessness	Humility	Wisdom
Discernment	Forgiveness	Unrejectable
Unoffendable	Freedom	Wisdom

Christ-Likeness

Fleshly Behaviors

Frustrated	Angry	Self-righteous	Impatient,
Unforgiving	Unloving	Defensive	Critical
Judgmental	Controlling	Manipulative	Rejecting

In the transformation process, God is moving you above the line to live from His unconditional love, forgiveness, acceptance, etc. As we said before, being transformed into Christ-likeness is the key to spiritual growth.

SPIRITUAL growth is being TRANSFORMED to live MORE from Christ-likeness and living LESS out of your FLESHLY behaviors and being IMPACTED LESS by someone else's fleshly behaviors.

How Does Living From Christ-Likeness Transform Your Relationships?

Using the twelve characteristics listed above the line, let's look at some outcomes from living from Christ-likeness.

Acceptance and Unrejectable – If you are being transformed to live from Christ's acceptance, then does it not follow that you would become more unrejectable?

Patience and Perseverance – If you are living from Christ's patience and perseverance, then no matter what fleshly behaviors your difficult person expresses towards you, he/she will not deter you from being patient and persevering in the relationship.

Forgiveness and Unoffendable – If you could live from Christ's forgiveness, not only would you be willing to more readily forgive, but living from Christ's forgiveness moves you to the place where you don't take ownership of someone's offenses towards you. That moves you to a place of becoming unoffendable.

Wisdom and Discernment – Two of the key characteristics of Christ-likeness that are evident if you are growing spiritually are wisdom and discernment. Wouldn't you agree that living from Christ's wisdom and discernment would be very helpful in navigating difficult people?

Humility and Selflessness – As you grow into greater humility, you will become more selfless. One follows the other. As you do, you become more spiritually attractive because even people you struggle with will eventually experience Christ's humility and selfless attitude through you. This doesn't necessarily mean they will respond to it but regardless, it will be evident.

Freedom and Unconditional Love – As you grow into Christ-likeness, the more you will be free from your fleshly behaviors which will free you to love the unlovable people in your life. We will talk more about this at the end of this chapter.

Which of these Christ-like characteristics do you most want to experience concerning your difficult relationships? In what ways would living from them change your attitude towards those people?

Meditate: On how it would affect how you see and behave towards your offensive relationships if you could experience these characteristics above.

Engaging God: If any of these characteristics are missing in you, seek the Holy Spirit to transform you to live from these Christ-like characteristics.

Being Part Of The Solution Through Your New Identity In Christ

In Chapter Two, we discussed the truth of our new identity in Christ and some of the characteristics of our true identity. Let's look at that same list again.

In your new identity:

Romans 8:35, 38, 39	You are an unconditional lover.
Ephesians 4:24	You are righteous and holy.
Romans 15:7	You are accepted and acceptable.
Colossians 3:13	You are a forgiving person.
Psalms 139:14	You are worthy.
2 Corinthians 3:5	You are adequate.
Galatians 5:1	You are free.
Psalms 139:5	You are secure.
1 Corinthians 15:57	You are victorious.
Romans 8:37	You are a conqueror.
John 15:13	You are sacrificial.
Psalms 71:5	You are selfless.

As we grow spiritually, our minds will be renewed to the truth of our true identity with the result that we will be living from it similar to Christ-likeness. Let's look at how living from our true identity will set us free from the ways we cope and the negative results of our coping as we discussed in Chapter Two.

In Your New Identity:

You are RIGHTEOUS – Living from Christ's righteousness means you no longer have to react in frustration or anger when you are provoked by someone. Or be self-righteous if they are not meeting your biblical standards of behavior.

You are FREE – Living from Christ's freedom means you no longer have to try and control, manipulate, or fix someone.

You are an UNCONDITIONAL LOVER – This means that you will love the people you struggle with rather than being critical or judgmental. And you won't be cancelling them or writing them off.

You are SELFLESS – This means you no longer have to be self-absorbed and self-focused.

You are VICTORIOUS – This means you no longer have to live from the bondage of your fleshly behaviors that you react with concerning those people you are in conflict with.

You are ACCEPTED – This will free you from being rejectable and offendable. We will talk more about this in the next section.

I hope these examples underscore why living from Christ-likeness and our true identity produce spiritual growth with the result we will be responding to difficult people like Jesus.

Which of these characteristics of your true identity do you most want to experience concerning your difficult relationships? In what ways would living from them change your attitude towards those people?

Three Results That Living From Christ-Likeness and Our New Identity Take Us

There are three key results of living from Christ-likeness and our true identity that will transform how we deal with our challenging relationships.

Result #1. Your SPIRITUAL Armor Will THICKEN

When I refer to spiritual armor, I will not be referring to the spiritual armor in Ephesians 6. Rather, I define spiritual armor as made up of our Christ-likeness and our new identity in Christ.

Here is my analogy based on my definition of spiritual armor. When I learned that I contain all of the Christ-like characteristics and all the characteristics of my true identity, my main struggle was believing it was true. The problem was that due to my unbelief, my armor was as thick as cellophane. Imagine my false beliefs being darts. Because my armor was so thin, the messages (darts) of my false beliefs could easily penetrate my armor with the result I would go to the flesh.

However, as the Holy Spirit began renewing my mind to the truth, my armor thickened to a point where I became more impenetrable, more unoffendable, and more unrejectable.

a. Become IMPENETRABLE

Let me share a personal example. In my true identity, I am adequate, but my false belief was that I am inadequate. Early on, I would seek the Holy Spirit to renew my mind to the truth but because my false belief was so strong, the messages (darts) that reinforced my false belief easily penetrated my spiritual armor with the result I would react with my default fleshly behaviors such as people-pleasing, self-pity, and manipulation.

However, as I continued my walk of faith, the Spirit was transforming me to move from my unbelief to the truth. With each step of faith my belief deepened and my armor thickened. Over time I started believing I am adequate in Christ with the result that the darts were not penetrating as deeply or as long with the result I went to my fleshly behaviors less and less. As the Holy Spirit moved me from unbelief to belief, I was being set free from my fleshly behaviors.

b. Become UNOFFENDABLE

Webster's dictionary defines the word "offended" as "anything or anyone who causes (a person or group) to feel hurt, anger, or upset by something said or done." This definition described me because I was so hypersensitive that I was continually taking ownership of other people's offenses towards me. I was in a constant state of "offendedness."

In the book titled "Unoffendable" by Brant Hansen, he says we tend to thrive on being offended with the result that we play the "victim" card which provides us with additional excuses to be offended. (I highly recommend this book.) This also defined me because I seemed to be surrounded by people whose only intent was to "victimize" me.

As I began to grow in my understanding of Christ-likeness and my true identity, I found myself taking less and less ownership of other's offenses with the result I was becoming more unoffendable. Using our spiritual armor analogy as the truth that I don't have to take ownership of someone else's offense, my armor became thicker with the result it became harder and harder to offend me. It was true freedom for me because the more I became free from my "offendedness" the less offensive I was to others.

c. Become UNREJECTABLE

It has been said that there are two kinds of people: Those who have been rejected and those who have been rejected more. Rejection hits the very core of our humanness because no one likes to be rejected. The good news is that as we grow in our belief that we are accepted and acceptable in Christ, we do not have to take ownership of someone else's

rejection because our spiritual armor thickens and we progressively become more unrejectable.

Conclusion

Now that you have finished reading through this section, when it comes to your difficult relationships, how thick is your spiritual armor? If it is like mine was early on, then you might find yourself taking ownership of others' offenses towards you and their rejection. If that is the case, can you imagine what it would be like to be impenetrable, unoffendable, and unrejectable?

In regards to the people who you struggle with, in what ways do they offend you or reject you? How would it make you feel if your spiritual armor was thickening with the result that you were taking less and less ownership of their offenses and rejection? What might that free you to do in regards to their sinful behavior towards you?

Result #2. You Will See The Hearts Others Through The EYES of CHRIST

As we grow spiritually, another important result will be that we will be able to see people through the eyes of Christ. Even though "seeing" has a human connotation, the kind of "seeing" we are talking about is a supernatural, spiritual seeing. Let's look at an example of this in 2 Kings 6:17. The prelude to Elisha's prayer is that his servant could not see the chariots of fire around the mountains.

*"Then Elisha prayed and said, 'O LORD, I pray, **open his eyes that he may see.**' And the LORD **opened the servant's eyes and he saw;** and behold, the mountain was full of horses and **chariots of fire** all around Elisha."*

Only until the Lord opened Elisha's servant's eyes could he see the chariots of fire on the mountains. In like manner, as we grow spiritually, the Holy Spirit gives us supernatural eyes to see past the externals of a person and see people through the eyes of Jesus. If we are able to see with the eyes of Jesus, the next question we should be asking is, "What did Jesus see?" We find the answer in 1 Samuel 16:7.

*"...The Lord doesn't see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but **the Lord looks at the heart.**" 1 Samuel 16:7*

Jesus never focused on the outward appearance but always looked past that to see a person's heart. Before we go on, I define the "heart" as our soul which is made up of our mind, emotions, and will. What are some examples of seeing a person's heart?

1. See Their Baggage

As you are being set free, you will be able to look beyond your own baggage, and spiritually see those you struggle with have baggage as well. The more you see others through the eyes of Christ, you be able to see more clearly their:

- Beliefs
- Expectations
- Needs
- Woundedness/Pain
- Fears
- Motivation for how they behave

Looking at someone baggage through the eyes of Christ results in:

- Giving grace by understanding that false beliefs are in part driving their fleshly behavior.
- Understanding their fleshly behaviors when their expectations and needs are not met
- Having empathy and compassion for their past woundedness and pain
- Discernment to understand why they manifest their fleshly behaviors

Let's end this section with this key truth:

As we are being HEALED and SET FREE from our baggage, we will see more CLEARLY their baggage and will better understand how to NAVIGATE their fleshly behaviors through Christ.

Engaging God: Seek the Spirit to give you eyes to see your difficult person's emotional and spiritual baggage with the result that you will have empathy and compassion for what they have experienced.

2. See Their SPIRITUAL AGE

As you grow spiritually and become free from your baggage, your discernment will grow which will result in being able to discern a person's spiritual growth. This is crucial, especially in people you struggle with. If they are saved and are living "A" life instead of "THE" Life, why would you expect them to act as spiritual grownups? If they are not growing into Christ-likeness or their new identity, then why would you treat them as spiritual adults?

As we grow and the Spirit gives us His eyes to see someone's spiritual growth or the lack thereof, it frees us to give those people grace by not setting expectations for them they can't possibly meet, understanding what is behind their fleshly reactions and realizing they may be free down the road but are not living in freedom now.

Engaging God: Seek the Lord to give you eyes to see the spiritual age of your offender with the result that you give them grace.

3. See Their SPIRITUAL POTENTIAL

I define “spiritual” potential as:

Where others could be SPIRITUALLY if they became saved and understood, believed, and were growing to become LIKE Christ and were living from their TRUE identity.

It is easy for me to see a person’s potential if he/she is seeking and hungry for the truth. Where I struggle seeing it is with those who are living out of their flesh and resisting God’s working in their lives.

Unlike me with my limited vision, God not only sees the here and now, but He also sees the spiritual potential in every person regardless of their pursuit of Him or their resistance to Him. God, because of His omniscience, can see where a person’s life could be if he/she chose to live from Him as his/her Source. He has provided us with many stories about people in His word as examples.

We see this in God’s interactions with the stuttering Moses who felt totally inadequate to lead His people out of Egypt. God saw Abraham’s spiritual potential in the midst of his unbelief when he chose to sleep with Hagar. God even saw it with Gideon in spite of his putting out the fleece and being paralyzed with fear when he faced the Midianites.

I even look back on my life when, as a Christian, I was in total despair and having suicidal thoughts. I saw no hope and no future and yet, what did God see? Potential. He didn't flinch at my doubts or my struggles because He knew that I was at the end of my rope and was about to turn an eternal corner that would change my life forever. Can you look back for a moment and think about a time when you saw little potential for yourself and yet, now you are experiencing a transforming work in your life?

The Lord reminded me of my story as a way of telling me that He wants me (and you) to see the spiritual potential in every person, believer and unbeliever alike. They may not be saved, or they may be saved and are resisting God. They may even be rejecting or turning their backs on you. It makes no difference where a person is spiritually because as long as they are alive, there is potential and hope.

As the earthly father ran towards the prodigal son, so our heavenly Father runs toward us. He is not deterred by our resistance or our rejection of Him. He keeps coming because He sees the potential in each one of us. Aren’t we glad He does?

Engaging God: Seek the Lord to give you eyes to see the spiritual potential in your offender.

4. See People As God's MASTERPIECES

Ephesians 2:10 says:

*"For **we are His workmanship**, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."*

The word "workmanship" in the original Greek means "masterpiece." Therefore, when God sees you, He sees you as His masterpiece. Why? We see the answer in Psalm 139:14.

*"I will give thanks to You, for **I am fearfully and wonderfully made**.
Wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well."*

The word "fearfully" in this verse means "to be astonished or in awe." Could this mean that God sees you and all those He has created as being awesome masterpieces. The answer is, "Yes."

How would it be different if we could look past the curtain of someone's fleshly behaviors and see them as a fearfully and wonderfully made masterpiece. Remember, that if someone is a Christian, they contain all the Christ-like characteristics and a new identity just like you. The problem is that we can't, or don't choose to, see that beyond that person's fleshly behaviors, they are just as much a masterpiece to God as you are.

How might you deal differently with your difficult relationships if you could see your difficult people as God's masterpiece?

Conclusion

This is a powerful chapter because how different would your negative relationships be if you were becoming like Christ and living from your true identity with the result that you become unoffendable, impenetrable and unrejectable? What difference would it make if you could see others with the eyes of Jesus rather than your fleshly, judgmental eyes?

CHAPTER FIVE

The Ultimate Result Of Spiritual Growth

Introduction

*“Jesus said to him, “‘You must **love** the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and most important commandment. ³⁹The second is like it: ‘You must **love your neighbor** as yourself.’” Matthew 22:37-38*

Jesus sums up the objective of the Christian life in these two verses. Therefore, love is the ultimate result of spiritual growth. Because of the importance of this key truth, I felt led to dedicate a whole lesson to the ultimate result of spiritual growth which we see in 1 Corinthians 16:14:

*“Let **all** you do be done in **love**.”*

Let’s take a deeper dive into this verse by first looking at the word “all.” In the original Greek language it means “all.” I share this because this one word removes every excuse for not loving everyone, including the stinkers in your life. The good news is that as you grow into Christ’s love and grow into the truth that you are an unconditional lover in your new identity, you will discover that loving others comes more naturally. Why?

***SPIRITUAL GROWTH = FREEDOM FROM your FLESHLY behaviors,
your EMOTIONAL and SPIRITUAL baggage and your
COPING strategies which sets you FREE TO LOVE.***

I underlined the words “from” and “to” because I believe we must be “free FROM” something in order to be “free TO” something. In this case, in order to love even the most toxic people in our lives, we must grow up because spiritual growth = freedom from our fleshly behaviors, from our spiritual and emotional baggage, and from our coping strategies which frees us to love everyone. However, this is not a man-produced love because all man can produce is a limited, conditional love. Therefore, what kind of love is it?

AGAPE Love

What is “agape” love?

Agape love is the DIVINE love that ONLY comes from God.

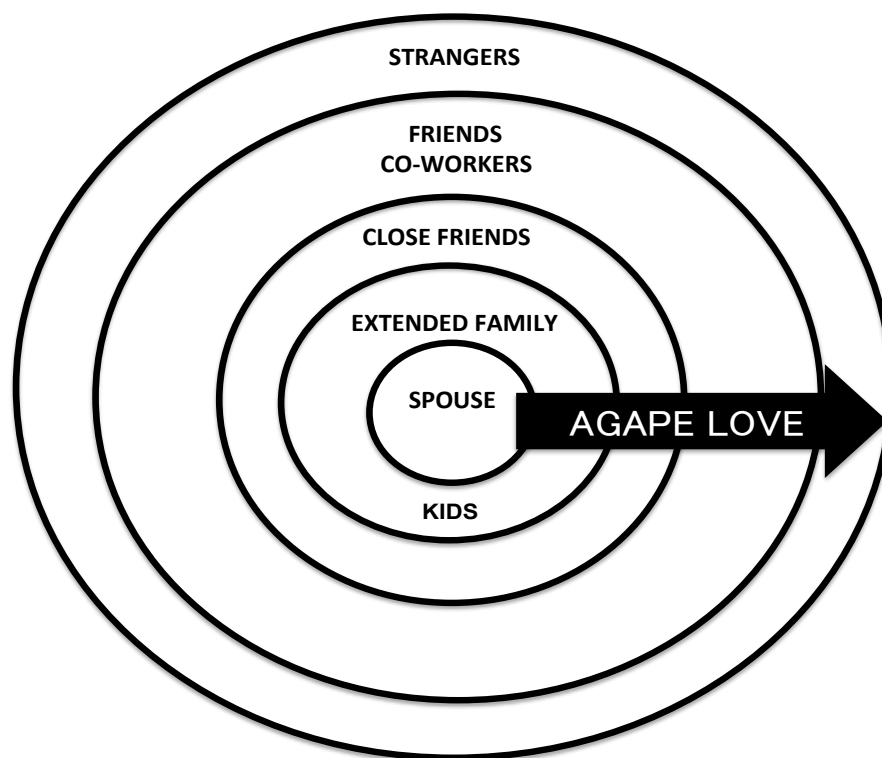
Agape love is PERFECT, UNCONDITIONAL, SACRIFICIAL, and SELFLESS.

When we are loving others with natural human love, we can't help but love conditionally. However, the kind of love we contain, partake of and dispense is Christ's *agape* love. Think about it for a moment. The *agape* love in Christ, who is in you, is perfect, unconditional, sacrificial and selfless.

In addition, there is one more key truth you need to understand when you are loving others with *agape* love.

***Since as a Christian, you contain all of Christ's *agape* love,
you have NO excuse for not loving everyone EQUALLY.***

This is why I call *agape* love the “no excuse” love. We have no excuse not to love everyone equally because we contain all of the love of Jesus. Look at the illustration below which shows the different relationships we experience in life. It goes from the most intimate relationship with our spouse to perfect strangers. With all our relationships, we are to love each person with *agape* love equally.



Think about it. When it came His *agape* love, did Jesus love the disciples and the little children more than he did the self-righteous Pharisees? The answer is “no” because *agape* love is perfect, unconditional, and does not play favorites. Because he loved with *agape* love, Jesus loved the Pharisees, the little children, and His disciples equally. (Even though He displayed His love towards each of them differently.)

In addition, here is one more key truth to loving others with *agape* love.

***Loving others with AGAPE love means you love everyone EQUALLY,
including the people that IRRITATE you the MOST.***

Therefore, let's start by looking at some more of the characteristics of agape love.

Characteristics of Agape Love

Agape love has:

- No conditions
- No expectations
- No fleshly rights
- No limitations
- No selfish motives

In addition, agape love doesn't:

- Judge
- Criticize
- Compare
- Take offense
- Hold grudges
- Hold onto the right not to forgive

Concerning your unlovable person, how would living from these characteristics of agape love change how you treat them?

Agape Love TRUMPS All

I was talking with a man about his relationship with his siblings. He kept repeating that he couldn't truly love them or reconcile with them until they repented of all their wrongdoings towards him. As he was talking, the Spirit brought these three words to my mind: "Love trumps their repentance."

I didn't share this with him but later, as I thought more about this idea, I began making a list of additional things that love trumps even when our flesh is trying to make a case to justify not loving someone.

Agape love trumps:

- **Unforgiveness** – They must ask for forgiveness before I can love them. Or I can't possibly forgive them, much less love them, for what they did.
- **Unmet expectations** – I don't have to love my spouse because he/she didn't meet my expectations of how I want them to love me.
- **Unmet needs** – Growing up, my parents didn't meet my needs for love, acceptance, worth, etc., so I don't have to love them.
- **Woundedness** – I won't love them because of how badly they wounded me.

What other excuses do you have not to love the people you struggle with?

Engaging God: If you discover you have excuses for not loving others, seek the Holy Spirit to set you free from those excuses.

Agape Love = POWER

*“... for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of **power**
and love and self-control.” 2 Timothy 1:7*

I didn't really understand this truth until I went to another city to minister to a number of all black churches. This was a city that had some pretty high racial tensions. Even though those who invited me knew I was a white guy, I was a little concerned about how some of those who didn't know I was white would feel about my coming and teaching at their churches.

Little did I know what the Lord had in store for me. All He told me was to go and let Him love them through me. So, the first night I spoke, that was my continual prayer. “Love these saints through me.” What happened that night and the next three days that I was ministering to them was the most powerful display of God's love I have ever witnessed. As much love as I gave, the love I received in return was a hundred-fold greater. It was so strong that by the time I left, I felt like God had given me a new family.

This time with these wonderful believers was not only very powerful, but I learned a potent new truth: love is color blind. Love breaks down the walls we tend to build around racial and cultural differences. The key truth the Lord taught me while I was there was this:

Through you, the POWER of God's love can MOVE others to love you.

In addition, when you let the Spirit speak His words of love through you to another, God will release His power to accomplish His purposes in that person's life (and in yours). We see this in Isaiah 55:11:

*"So, will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; **It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.**"*

Have you ever thought about love working through the Spirit's power?

Look at some examples of what agape love through His power can accomplish.

- It can disarm others and make them open and transparent.
- It can bring a person to brokenness.
- It can draw an unbeliever to salvation.
- It can move people to love you.

In addition, God's agape love through you can:

- **Penetrate** someone's heart
- **Soften** someone's heart
- **Heal** someone's heart
- **Transform** someone's heart

Have you ever thought about how God's love and power are bound together? In what ways might it change your willingness to love your toxic relationships if you believed God's immense power to accomplish what He desires is behind it?

Engaging God: Seek the Holy Spirit to give you deeper revelation of His power in you.

Agape Love Sees People In 3D

When you think about the people you know—especially your friends, people you attend church with or co-workers—ask yourself, "How much do I really know about them?" Our tendency when it comes to looking at others (except for close family members) is to take people at face value. By this I mean we are seeing them in one dimension (and sometimes stereotyping them) versus looking at them in what I call "spiritual 3D?" This is what I mean by spiritual 3D:

***Understanding the BACKGROUND, HISTORY, MOTIVES, and/or
STRUGGLES underlying what someone is thinking,
feeling, believing or how they are behaving.***

Let me give you some examples to explain.

- **Family background** – What kind of family did they come from, e.g., loving, unloving, abusive, etc.?
- **Internal struggles** – What are their internal struggles, including their fears, anxieties, insecurities, etc.?
- **Relationship struggles** – What are the struggles in their marriage, with their kids, friends, or family?
- **Spiritual struggles** – What struggles are they having with their false beliefs, unbelief, or past woundedness?
- **Adverse circumstances** – Do they have a history of trauma such as abandonment as a child, premature death of a parent, their parents' divorce, or their own divorce as an adult?
- **Church affiliation or biblical background** – What kind of experiences and teachings have they had in their church, if any? This information can help you understand why they believe what they do about God or living the Christian life.

What are some of the possible negative results if we don't see people in 3D? Here are some examples of results, including thoughts (in italics) associated with those results:

- **Judging their motives and their actions or their beliefs.** *(They are unfit parents; He is such an idiot as a husband; Why can't she just trust God with her fears and stop being so fearful.)*
- **Being offended by things they say and do.** *(I am offended by what she said about my friend; I resent the fact they left the church over something so petty; I am shocked he/she would say such things.)*
- **Self-righteous comparisons.** *(They wouldn't be in this mess if they knew God's word, like I do; If they could only imitate my walk with the Lord, things would go easier for them; Thank God I am not as messed up as he/she is.)*
- **Condescending and/or critical.** *(Anybody with any sense wouldn't have done what they did; It was their own selfishness that caused their divorce.)*
- **Insensitive/lacking compassion** *(They dug their own graves; This is what they get for making that decision)*

Why is it so crucial for you to know others in 3D?

- It enables you to give grace instead of judging, taking offense, being self-righteous, or condescending/critical.
- It gives you a deeper understanding of how you can encourage them, pray for them, or speak God's truth to them.
- It gives you insight into when to be sensitive and compassionate in areas where they struggle.
- It helps you discern (not judge) why they say what they say and do what they do.
- It allows you to love them with the unconditional love of Jesus in spite of their beliefs, their struggles, their past, or their behavior.

When you think of your relationships, in what ways might you be judging, taking offense, being self-righteous, etc.? (I hate these questions as much as you do but, be assured, the Holy Spirit has also asked them of me.)

[**Note:** I am not suggesting you pry into someone else's personal life uninvited. I realize initially you may not be able to get some people to open up; but, as we talked about earlier, God's love and power may eventually penetrate the hearts of even the most closed down or defensive people. This may, in turn, result in their opening up to you. As you get to know others and build their trust, let the Spirit give you discernment on when and how to ask about the areas of their life we just listed.]

My encouragement to you is to never stop learning about someone because learning will eventually lead you to loving them more deeply. This is a truth I am continuing to practice and experience in my own relationships.

Agape Love Is An UNSTOPPABLE Force

*"For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, **will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**"*

Romans 8:38, 39

Romans 8:38, 39 promises that nothing will separate us from God's love. In addition, Paul tells us that nothing and no one is going to stop God from loving you. Likewise, no one can stop you from loving other people. The person you are loving may say, "No" to your overtures of love, but that will not stop Christ's love from pouring through you into them, because His love is truly an unstoppable force.

I see agape love like a wrecking ball tearing down the walls of your anger, bitterness, unforgiveness, etc., and opening a pathway to love the most unlovable people in your life.

When I think of this truth, it reminds me of one of my board members who calls me periodically and says, "I love you, Bill, and there is nothing you can do about it." Isn't this a great example of the unstoppable love of God?

Engaging God: How would it change your willingness to love those who are difficult to love or who you fear will reject your love when you realize there is nothing they can do to stop Christ's love through you? If you are still unwilling to love them, ask the Holy Spirit to give you the willingness to love them no matter what.

There is so much more that can be said about agape love, but I hope this section has given you eyes to see that since we contain all of Christ's love and we are unconditional lovers in Christ, we have no excuse for not loving everyone.

Agape Love Is the Key to Unlocking a Person's Heart

*"...and hope does not disappoint, because **the love of God has been poured out within our hearts** through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." Romans 5:5*

This principle goes along with the truth that love equals power. I know because I have witnessed the love of God unlock many people's hearts, including mine. Let me share a personal story to make this point.

Because of my anger, bitterness, unforgiveness, and woundedness towards my dad, I had a padlock on the door of my hardened heart. This went on for 46 years until God brought a man into my life in 1996 named David Love (only God could bring a Love to a Loveless).

This was the darkest time in my life. The wheels were falling off and I was spiraling down into depression and despair. David and his wife Denise were missionaries to Colombia at the time. We met because, as head of the mission's committee of my church, I was interviewing David to see if our church would support them financially. I went to pick him up for lunch at a restaurant and on the way there he said very few words. Little did I know what was about to happen.

I started the interview with a question but he didn't give me a response. I thought that was strange but I was soon to realize we weren't there for me to interview him. Rather, we were there for me to experience the love and power of Jesus through him. When David finally opened his mouth, he didn't answer my questions. Rather, he started probing me about my life. Before I knew it, I spent the next 3 hours pouring out 46 years of my pent-up pain and heartache. Christ's love through him was so powerful I couldn't stop weeping in the middle of the restaurant.

I didn't realize at the time that it was not only the love of Christ being poured through him, but also the power that love had to be able to pierce the thick walls of self-protection surrounding my heart.

I ended up inviting David to stay with us that weekend and for the next 48 hours God continued to pour His love through David. Christ's love was like a surgical scalpel digging deeper and deeper and cutting away the hardness of my heart.

Looking back, I recognize it was God's power flowing through His love in David that was beginning to set me free. All I knew at the time was I was being loved by Jesus through David. His love was unconditional and irresistible. (Since then, David and I have become very close friends.) When I look back on that event, I recognize that what I saw and experienced was the irresistibility of agape love that unlocked my heart. This was the beginning of my new journey to live in Christ and from His love.

Does Agape Love Mean I Have To Like, Trust, or Approve of That Person?

Agape Love and LIKING

Does loving someone with agape love mean I have to "like" them? The answer: Not necessarily. According to scripture, we are to agape love everyone including people like Vladimir Putin, the president of Russia, but we don't have to like his sinful, fleshly attitudes and behavior.

Think for a moment how this applies in your relationship with God. God will always love you, but He will never like your fleshly, sinful behavior. Why? Because His essence is love (1 John 4:8). He cannot help but love you. Nonetheless, He can, simultaneously, dislike your sinful behavior.

The good news is that God is capable of not only transforming us but transforming others through us to a place where we can come to like that person. Here is a true story example of what that looks like. There was a man (we will call him David) who did not like a Christian co-worker because he was pretty rough around the edges, boastful, and full of himself.

David was not only convicted to agape love his co-worker, but he also felt led by the Spirit to pursue a relationship with him. As David began to pray for and love his co-worker, this man began telling David more of his personal story including being raised by an unloving and abusive father. David realized that all of this man's unlikable traits resulted from his woundedness from his father.

Over time, the love of Christ through David so disarmed this person that the Lord opened his heart for David to minister to him and help him in his spiritual journey. They eventually became good friends. This is a powerful story that reminds us to always be open to what the Spirit may do in and through us to the unlikeable people in our lives. It also demonstrates the power of love to penetrate another person's heart.

Engaging God: Is it possible that there may be at least one person you do not like but may be the very person the Lord wants you to pursue with His love? If so, ask Him to transform you so that you will become willing to seek him/her out.

Agape Love and TRUSTING

Human love and trust go hand in hand. You can't have one without the other. However, when it comes to agape love, you must have one even if you don't have the other. Why?

There are many LEGITIMATE reasons for NOT trusting someone, but there is NO excuse for not LOVING them with the love of CHRIST.

To explain, let's use an example of a married couple. Trust in marriage can be compromised in different ways. From affairs to finances, trust can be broken. The worst form of broken trust is having an affair. Even in this extreme case, it does not give the offended spouse the right not to agape love his/her spouse who committed the affair. If both parties are willing to rebuild the trust, the key to the rebuilding process is for the offended spouse to agape love his/her spouse rather than reject the spouse. Building on the foundation of agape love will greatly facilitate the trust being rebuilt. It won't be an easy or short process but through it, trust can be rebuilt.

In the same way, if someone you entrusted confidential information to betrayed that trust, that trust is broken. However, similar to the marriage example, loving the person who betrayed your trust will be the foundation for rebuilding it.

What if the other party does not want to work at rebuilding the trust? All you can do then is just continue to love and pray for that person.

Therefore, let's sum up this section this way:

We must love EVERYONE with agape love, but TRUST will have to be EARNED and/or REBUILT.

Engaging God: Is there someone in your life who has broken your trust? If you are unwilling, seek the Lord to give you the willingness to begin to rebuild that trust.

What might be the results in that relationship if the trust was rebuilt because you chose to keep loving that person?

Agape Love and APPROVAL

Similar to loving and not necessarily liking someone, we are to love everyone even though we may not approve of their behavior. I think a good example of this is the LGBTQ movement. We are to agape love all those who call themselves lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, etc., even though we, as Christians, don't approve of their sinful behavior because it is contrary to what God's truth says. However, disapproval does not let us off the hook from loving others.

Here is a powerful true story to explain concerning a homosexual and a Christian couple. The homosexual was very anti-Christian. He participated in gay parades and while there, he would see Christians standing with signs that read "Turn or Burn." As a result, he was deeply

angry and offended because of their unloving attitudes. The result was a deep bitterness and hatred for Christians.

At one point, he became sick with a long-term illness (not HIV) that kept him bedridden for the most part. There was a Christian couple in his apartment complex who found out about his condition and started bringing him meals, running his errands, and taking care of his needs. They did not tell him they were Christians. They just kept performing these loving acts until one day he couldn't help but ask, "Why are you so kind and loving?" They told him it was because of the love of Christ that compelled them. He knew that because of their beliefs, they did not approve of his behavior but were loving him anyway. The good news to this story is that he trusted Christ as a result of their unconditional love towards him.

***We may NOT approve of someone's BEHAVIOR but
that is NO excuse for not loving them.***

Engaging God: If you struggle with not loving someone you don't approve of, seek the Holy Spirit to transform you to agape love that person.

What About Setting Boundaries?

We won't go into any great depth about this issue, but, suffice it to say, there are certain abusive and toxic people that you need to draw healthy boundaries with in order to protect yourself against their flesh, especially those who have physically harmed you or have threatened to do so. While you can learn to love them with agape love, you must separate from them physically because of their potential to emotionally or physically hurt you.

With other toxic people, such as those who constantly ridicule, demean, or criticize you, you also need to set up boundaries to protect yourself from verbal abuse. For them, it may take physical separation, or it may mean being honest with them and telling them they must stop the offensive behavior if they want to continue having a relationship with you.

However, just like with love and liking, trusting, and approving, your setting up healthy boundaries is not an excuse for not loving those unhealthy and toxic people. Another key point is this:

***As you spiritually grow up, your spiritual armor may THICKEN
to a point where you may NO longer need to set BOUNDARIES.***

We have talked earlier about how, early on, our spiritual armor is the thickness of cellophane. As a result, the darts of rejection, abusive behavior by others, etc., can easily penetrate the cellophane. However, as we grow in Christ, our spiritual armor grows thick enough to repel these sinful and fleshly darts coming at us from others. The result: We may be able to remove some or all boundaries set for a particular person or persons.

The key point here is that you setting up boundaries may not be forever. As you grow spiritually, and your spiritual armor thickens and your confidence in Christ increases, you may not only be removing boundaries but you will find yourself needing fewer and fewer of them. I want to share a personal example concerning agape love and liking, trusting, approving, and setting boundaries.

My Unlovable Person

My brother, Jim (not his real name), was a very toxic person in my life. Jim held on to every past sin I had ever committed against him (50+ years worth). For many years I was able to ignore Jim until we ended up having to work together to sell a piece of land that we inherited. For two years, as we were attempting to sell the land, Jim made it a point of trying to make me feel worthless at every turn. Every one of his phone calls, texts, and emails was intended to minimize and reject me.

I wanted to retaliate against him but I restrained myself. Nonetheless, I was very angry in my flesh. My real motive for wanting to sell our jointly-owned land was so I would never again have to see Jim until his funeral. At this point I did not love, like, trust, or approve of Jim so I set boundaries to prevent him from further hurt towards me.

I was living in self-protection with Jim. I didn't want to be around him, hear from him, or even think about him. However, in the midst of my soulful agony towards Jim, the Lord came along one day and said, "What about Jim?" And I responded somewhat sarcastically, "What about Jim?" The Lord said, "I can't let you continue not loving him. You write and teach about love but you are not applying that to Jim." (At times like these I realize why it is so much easier to teach the truth than live it.)

My first response was a fleshly one because I wanted to keep on protecting myself from Jim rather than loving him. However, I knew in my spirit that the Lord was right and it was time to stop self-protecting and start loving. The problem was that I was not willing to love Jim.

So, what do we do with our unwillingness to love?

***Our only option is to SEEK God to transform
our hearts to BECOME willing.***

This is one of the key reasons I had to depend on God because I knew that I was not willing to love Jim. How about you? Before I could ask God to love Jim through me, I had to pursue Him to move me to a place of being willing. This is why I prayed the following prayer concerning Jim.

"Lord, give me the willingness to pursue loving Jim."

Initially this was a very difficult prayer to pray but after I continually prayed it, over time the Holy Spirit changed my unwilling heart to one willing to pursue loving Jim. It took six

months but over that time what I did not see was the power of love penetrating Jim's heart as well as mine.

For six months I prayed the simple prayer asking the Lord to love Jim through me. For those six months I didn't feel or experience any love towards Jim. I was very intentional about that prayer whenever I called or emailed him. During that time, I also didn't sense any change in Jim's rejection, criticism, or anger towards me.

Then one day, I got a call from Jim and he said these words which he had never spoken to me before. "Can you help me?" (He was asking help concerning our business deal.) I knew the Lord had done a work in my heart because I didn't respond with a negative or sarcastic remark. Instead, I said, "How can I help you?" I realized in that moment that God was changing Jim's heart as well as mine.

When we finished the conversation, Jim uttered two other words I had never heard from him, "Thank you." Little did I know that this was the beginning of a new relationship with him because from that time forward, we continue to draw closer to one another. I have gone from loving, liking, trusting, and approving of him. It has been a journey but it has been well worth it.

As far as boundaries are concerned, early on I set boundaries to protect myself from being hurt by him but over time, as our relationship has grown, I have removed the boundaries because of the mutual love we now have for each other.

However, you may be asking, "What if Jim never responded to my love and never changed?" The answer is that God changed my heart towards Jim regardless if his heart did or did not change. I was free to love him with agape love whether he changed or not.

Before we finish this lesson, let me share an analogy, I call your "spiritual" artery.

Agape Love and Your Spiritual Artery

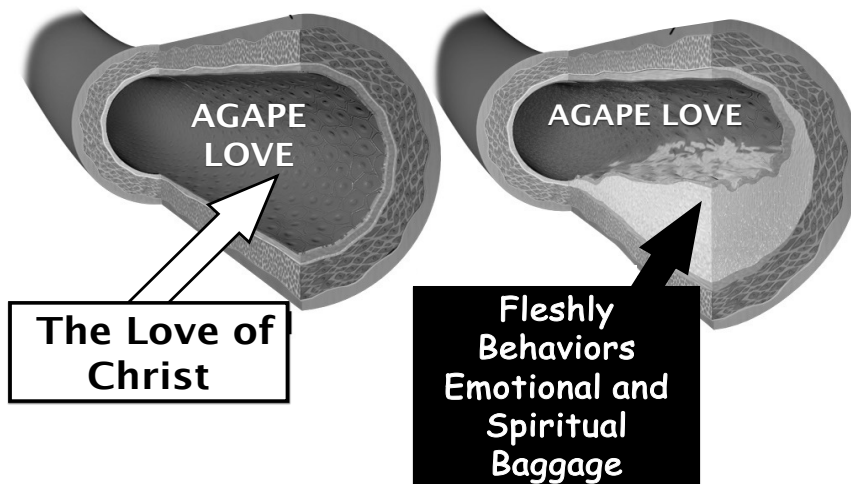
As you know, a physical artery contains all the blood you need to sustain life. What if we applied this analogy to a spiritual artery? In your spiritual artery, you contain all of the agape love of Christ according to Colossians 2:9, 10 you read earlier. However, similar to a physical artery, we can have plaque on our spiritual artery, as well. I call this "fleshly" plaque.

What makes up our "fleshly" plaque?

- **Fleshly Behaviors**
- **Emotional Baggage**
- **Spiritual Baggage**

The diagram on the following page illustrates our spiritual artery and associated plaque.

"Fleshly" Plaque



If the physical plaque builds up in a physical artery, it will restrict blood flow. If not treated, over time it could eventually kill us by a stroke or heart attack. In the same way, if we continue living out of our flesh, it will prevent us from ever loving the toxic people in our lives. However, it gets worse because the consequences of not seeking the Holy Spirit to remove your fleshly plaque slowly creates a hardening of your heart towards others and towards God.

This is why it is essential to seek the Holy Spirit to remove our "fleshly" plaque. Only then will Christ's agape love flow in and through us to love the unlovable people in our lives.

Conclusion

I hope this chapter has driven home the truth that in order to be free to love the unlovable people in our lives, we must grow up spiritually. Why?

SPIRITUAL GROWTH = FREEDOM to AGAPE LOVE EVERYONE

Therefore, in the last chapter we are going to look at how to engage the Holy Spirit to remove our fleshly plaque and set us free to agape love.

CHAPTER SIX

Walking In Freedom

Introduction

*“It was for **FREEDOM** that Christ set us **FREE**; therefore, keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.” Galatians 5:1*

Through spiritual growth comes freedom which is key to what God ultimately desires in every relationship and that is mutual *agape* love. Therefore, let’s revisit the truth from the last chapter.

***SPIRITUAL GROWTH = FREEDOM FROM your FLESHLY behaviors,
your EMOTIONAL and SPIRITUAL baggage, and your
COPING strategies with the result you are FREE TO AGAPE LOVE.***

Therefore, in this final chapter, I want to focus on key words that will result in experiencing the freedom from the obstacles to agape love (fleshly behaviors, emotional and spiritual baggage and coping strategies) and to share practical application on how to engage God to experience freedom in order to love those you struggle with.

Key Words To EXPERIENCE Freedom

In this section, we will look at some key words that are essential to experience freedom

1. SPIRITUAL WILLINGNESS

A key component to begin our journey into freedom is our willingness to engage the Holy Spirit to set us free. If we don’t have the “want to” (i.e. willingness) we will never experience freedom. The important truth to remember concerning willingness is that we have two wills. Matthew 26:41 reveals that we have two different wills.

*“...the **spirit** is **willing (spiritual will)** but the **flesh** is **weak (fleshly will)**.”*

A “spiritual” will and a “fleshly” will. Let’s look at the meaning of the two in context of our study.

Spiritual Will is the willingness to walk by faith, depending totally on God as the Source, drawing on His power to heal you, to transform your life, and to set you free to love from your fleshly behaviors, emotional and spiritual baggage, and your coping strategies with the result you will agape love the unlovable people in your life.

Fleshly Will is unwillingness to walk by dependence on God with the result that you live totally from the flesh. The result is that you will stay stuck in your toxic, fleshly behaviors, your baggage and coping towards those you struggle with. The fleshly will also says, “I can fix the relationship without God using my own intellect and willpower.”

We see Paul struggling between his spiritual will and fleshly will in Romans 7:15.

*“For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am **not practicing what I would like to do (spiritual will), but I am doing the very thing I hate (fleshly will).**”*

When Paul says, “I am not practicing what I would like to do but I am doing the very thing I hate,” he is essentially saying his fleshly will is stronger than his spiritual will. Why?

Let me use this analogy to illustrate. If you have a guy with weak muscles arm wrestling a body builder, who is going to win? The body builder of course. Early on in your Christian walk, your spiritual will is more like the weak-muscled guy while your fleshly will is like the body builder. Why? Because up until you start walking by faith, all you have exercised were your fleshly muscles. Your spiritual muscle was small and weak.

However, as you increasingly walk by (exercise your) faith, your spiritual muscle (spiritual will) strengthens and you more consistently, through Christ’s power, overcome your fleshly will.

Early on in my journey to freedom with my brother, my fleshly will, many times, would overwhelm my spiritual will because of the strength of my flesh (i.e. anger and bitterness) that was a result of how deeply hurt and abused I was by my brother. My fleshly will did not want to let go of my bitterness and anger.

However, I realized that the only way for me to be set free was to seek the Holy Spirit to move me from unwillingness to willingness. It was a journey but as I continued exercising my “faith” muscle my spiritual will became stronger than my fleshly will with the result the Lord set me completely free to agape love my brother.

This is why I have asked you numerous times throughout this study, to engage the Holy Spirit to move you from your fleshly unwillingness to spiritual willingness. Why?

Without SPIRITUAL willingness, there will be NO freedom from your BAGGAGE, COPING strategies and the FLESHLY attitudes and behaviors you have towards your offender(s).

Here are a few examples of prayers to engage God to transform your will.

Example prayer: “Lord, I am unwilling to be free from my baggage, my fleshly behaviors and my coping strategies, towards _____. I am seeking You to transform my will to become willing.”

Example prayer: “Lord, I want to be set free but my fleshly will is stronger than my spiritual will. I am trusting in Your power to move me from unwillingness to willingness and set me free.”

Engaging God: If you struggle with your spiritual willingness to be set free from your fleshly behaviors towards your stressful relationships, seek God by faith to transform your will to become willing.

In addition to spiritual willingness, freedom requires “spiritual” determination.

2. SPIRITUAL DETERMINATION

“For I determined (Spirit-produced) to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.” 1 Corinthians 2:2

Paul was determined that nothing was going to get in the way of his knowing Christ. I am convinced that we have to be just as determined to engage God to grow us up, heal us, transform us, and set us free. I added the words “Spirit-produced” to the verse because this was not a man-made, self-produced determination manufactured by Paul. This determination was produced in him by the Holy Spirit. This is the same determination we need to have in order to be set free to agape love our difficult people. Therefore, it is crucial to seek Christ to BE your determination. Especially, when your fleshly will overwhelms your spiritual will. Here are some examples of how to seek the Lord.

Example prayer: “Lord, I can’t produce the spiritual determination I need to be set free. I am drawing on Your determination to transform me and produce Your freedom to love _____.”

Example prayer: “Lord, because my fleshly will is overwhelming me, grow Your determination in me to keep walking by faith.”

Engaging God: Seek Jesus to BE your determination to keep walking by faith in order to be set free.

3. HEALING

“He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.” Psalm 147:3

Since hurtful relationships tend to cause woundedness to some degree, emotional healing will be a necessary part of your freedom. Without this healing, we are left with coping strategies (stuffing, compartmentalizing, avoidance, etc.) The key to being healed is to engage the power of the Holy Spirit to heal you. Therefore, in this section I want to unpack this truth in greater detail by sharing some practical steps on how to engage the Holy Spirit for healing.

As you read through this section, I would encourage you to ask the Holy Spirit to tell you which of these truths applies to you. When it comes to your healing, the Spirit has a specific pathway of healing for you. As you go through these truths, let Him be the One who leads you and guides you on His pathway for your healing.

(Note: Please do not look at these truths as a checklist or a “to do” list. These are simply truths the Lord has given me to help you on your journey to healing.)

1. OPEN the door of your heart and INVITE God in to begin the healing process.

*“Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and **opens the door**, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.” Revelation 3:20*

We tend to look at this verse in the context of salvation. However, this verse has just as much to do with your healing as well. What I mean by this is that the Lord knocks and will keep knocking on the door of your heart until you are willing to let Him in for healing. The question is: “Are you willing to open the door and let Him in to heal?”

As we said earlier, if you are unwilling, ask Him to give you the willingness to let Him in. Keep in mind that our flesh always resists the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The only thing that can break down that resistance is the power of God. Therefore, let’s look at some steps of faith.

Example prayer if you are willing: “I am inviting You in, Lord, to begin the healing process.”

Example prayer if you are not willing: “Lord, I am unwilling to let You in to heal me. I am asking You to transform my will and move me from unwillingness to willingness.”

Engaging God: Take the initial step for healing by opening the door of your heart to the Holy Spirit and let Him begin the healing process.

2. Ask God to SEARCH your heart to expose any buried woundedness or to address some specific wounding event(s).

*“Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; **And see if there be any hurtful way in me**, And lead me in the everlasting way.*
Psalm 139:23, 24

*“Examine me, O LORD, and try me; **Test my mind and my heart.**” Psalm 26:2*

Asking God to search your heart is one of the greatest forms of humility and transparency we can experience. When you ask God to search your heart, you are giving God permission to:

- a. Expose or reveal some area of woundedness that you think that you have **hidden away**.
- b. Reveal to you the ways that you have **tried to cope with** (i.e. deny, escape from, self-protect, or insulate yourself) your pain.
- c. Reveal to you some of the areas in your life where **your woundedness is creating “death”** (e.g., anger, bitterness, unforgiveness) in you and through you to others.

Example prayer: “Lord, I may have buried my woundedness. I am asking you to reveal those

'buried' areas and begin healing them."

Example prayer: "Lord, I am asking You to reveal the ways that I am trying to cope with my pain, and the 'death' that it is causing me and everyone around me."

Engaging God: Ask the Lord to search your heart, and if you are unwilling to do so, ask Him to give you the willingness to do so.

3. If you feel you can't open the door because you fear there may be more pain, seek Christ to be your COURAGE

*"But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, **Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid.**"*
Matthew 14:27

"Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful." John 14:27

You may hear the Lord knocking, but you don't answer the door because you fear re-experiencing the pain of your woundedness or feeling additional pain that you believe may come with the healing process. If this is true of you, seek God to remind you that you have been carrying your pain way too long, and if you continue carrying it, it will only get heavier and more unbearable. Therefore, seek Christ to be your courage and ask Him to exchange your fear for His courage.

Example prayer: "Lord, I fear opening the door because I don't want to feel the pain of my woundedness or feel the pain that may come with healing and freedom. I am asking You to BE my courage and persuade me that I have nothing to fear. Remind me that on the other side of any pain that I may experience during the healing process, there will eventually be divine healing."

Engaging God: Seek the Lord to give you the willingness to open the door to your heart so He can come in and heal.

4. Express to God how you HONESTLY feel about your pain caused by the wounding events in your life.

When you read through the Psalms, you see David over and over crying out to God about how he feels about his pain and even God Himself. Here is an example of that in Psalm 13: 1, 2:

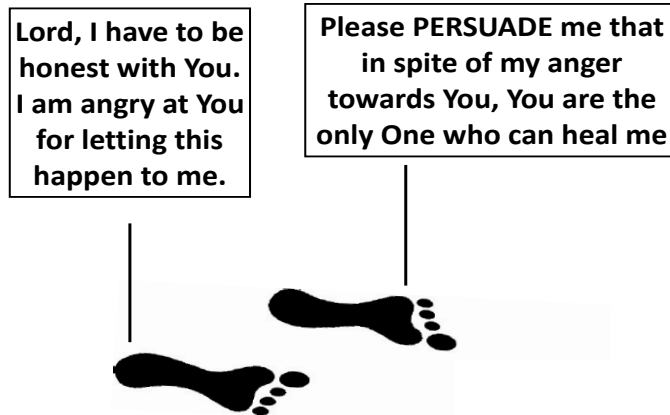
***"How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me?
How long shall I take counsel in my soul, Having sorrow in my heart all the day?
How long will my enemy be exalted over me?"***

It is okay to be honest with God. Sometimes we are hesitant to share with God how we honestly feel because we fear His discipline or punishment. You never have to fear verbalizing your feelings. Why? Because He already knows how you really feel and He loves you regardless of those feelings or what you say to Him.

You can get angry with God, shake your fist at Him, and even ask the “why” questions. He fully understands because He knows and empathizes with the depth of your pain. I think it is important to do some “holy” venting as part of your healing process. David did it, so can you.

Step of faith: “Lord, I have to be honest with You. I am angry at You for letting this happen to me. Thank you for hearing the pain of my wounded heart.”

Below are some steps of faith you can take if you are angry at God.



Engaging God: Take a moment and simply tell God how you feel about your pain, your doubt, your unbelief, etc. Don't hold back. Let Him know what you think and how you feel. Your “holy” venting never changes His love for you. After you do, seek Him to persuade you that He is the only One who can heal you.

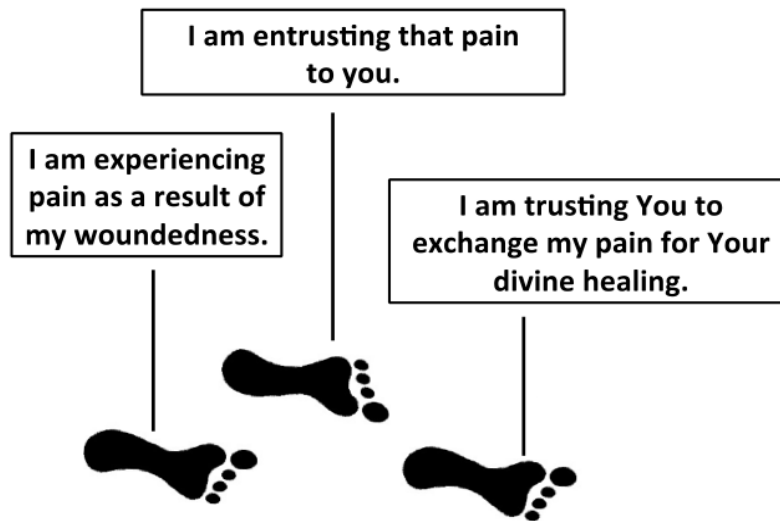
5. Keep ENTRUSTING your pain to God and SEEK Him to EXCHANGE your pain for His divine healing.

*“... and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept **entrusting Himself to Him** who judges righteously.” 1 Peter 2:23*

You were never meant to hold on to your pain caused by your woundedness (or any pain for that matter). God wants you to continuously entrust your pain to Him. “Entrust” in context of healing means:

GIVING OVER to God the pain associated with your woundedness.

If we hold on to the pain or try to compartmentalize, deny, anesthetize, escape, etc., the pain, then it will continue to prevent us from experiencing God's healing hand. Consequently, every time that you feel the pain, give it over to God in that moment. Sometimes the pain will come in waves, and you will have to keep entrusting the pain until it subsides. Let's look some steps of faith concerning entrustment.



Engaging God: Every time the pain comes to the surface begin entrusting that pain over to God and asking Him to exchange it for His divine healing.

You may be experiencing deep-seated woundedness and even trauma that may require professional counseling to guide you through the process of healing. Do not hesitate to seek counseling as long as it is Christ-centered. By Christ-centered, I mean a counselor who is **not** giving you tips and techniques on how to heal yourself. Rather one, who is using biblical truth and is constantly directing you to the Holy Spirit who is the only One who can truly heal you.

Let me end this section with this point.

The DEPTH of your woundedness, will determine the length of TIME it MAY take to experience healing and freedom.

I used the word “may” because even though we know God can heal us completely in a moment, but if we are deeply wounded, it may take time for healing to take place.

(Note: I have written an in-depth study on healing called ***Healing The Wounded Heart*** that you can download for free from our website. It goes into greater depth about the process of being healed.)

Engaging God: Remember that only the Holy Spirit, not man, can and will heal you. Seek Him to heal those wounded parts of your soul and set you free from them.

4. FORGIVENESS

*“Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. **Forgive as the Lord forgave you.**” Colossians 3:13*

Unforgiveness occurs when we take ownership of someone else’s offense towards us which triggers our fleshly right which says, “I don’t have to, or I won’t forgive that person.”

When offended, our flesh reacts through such things as frustration, anger, retaliation, or revenge. In the flesh, we can justify not forgiving someone. Here are some reasons used to justify our unforgiveness.

1. This person hurt me so deeply; I will never be healed.
2. This person who wounded me has scarred me for life.
3. This person has ruined my life.
4. They need to be punished for what they did (said) to me.

The problem with unforgiveness is this:

UNFORGIVENESS creates a prison for YOU, NOT your offender.

I lived in unforgiveness towards my father for 48 years not realizing that I, not he, was in prison. In addition, unforgiveness was like a progressive cancer that was slowly killing me and negatively impacting all my other relationships to one degree or another.

This is why God uses “forgive or forgiveness” over 100 times in the Bible. He knows that unforgiveness will not only be a cancer to our soul but will create, over time, a hardened heart towards people and towards Him.

Therefore, seek the Holy Spirit to give you the spiritual willingness to forgive your offender. If you are unwilling, I understand because I was unwilling to forgive my father. In light of my unwillingness, the Lord gave me this prayer to pray: “Heavenly Father, forgive my father through me.” I prayed this prayer for the last 18 months of my father’s life with the result that the Holy Spirit softened my hardened heart to a place where I became willing to forgive my father.

I can’t begin to put into words the freedom forgiving my father gave me. It not only freed me **from** my internal prison of unforgiveness, but it eventually freed me **to** love my dad with the love of Jesus. That, my friends, was a supernatural miracle because of my hardened heart towards my dad.

Before we leave this topic, remember this key truth.

Forgiveness is a PROCESS. It may take several ACTS of forgiveness before you FULLY forgive your offender.

Engaging God: If you struggle with being willing to forgive the person who wounded you like I did with my dad, ask the Holy Spirit to move you from unwillingness to willingness

(Note: If you struggle with unforgiveness, I have included an in-depth study on forgiveness at the end of this study that I would encourage you to go through.)

5. BROKENNESS

*“For we who live are constantly being **delivered over to death (death to self/brokenness)** for Jesus’ sake, so that the **life of Jesus (Christ-likeness)** also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.” 2 Corinthians 4:11*

Based on this verse I define brokenness this way.

Brokenness is the life-long process of being transformed FROM living from self (flesh) TO living from THE LIFE of Christ.

When we hear the word “brokenness” we tend to associate it with pain. However, brokenness can be both painless and painful. For example, if you are going through this study and the Holy Spirit is convicting you to seek Him to set you free then He can supernaturally do a work of transformation that will not be painful. Painful brokenness comes when we resist the work of the Spirit through our unwillingness.

However, God loves us enough He will allow or cause events in our lives to expose of the death of self/flesh and cause us to die to self and experience Christ-likeness (i.e. love, forgiveness, acceptance, etc.) Eternally more than you want to be free, God wants to set you free because He knows what can happen in and through you as you are being broken.

Engaging God: Seek the Spirit to bring you to deeper brokenness - death to self.

6. HUMILITY

*“with **all humility** and gentleness, with **patience**, showing tolerance for one another in love.” Ephesians 4:2*

*“Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with **humility of mind** regard one another as more important than yourselves.” Philippians 2:3*

*“So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, **put on a heart** of compassion, kindness, **humility**, gentleness and patience.” Colossians 3:12*

The simple definition for humility is absence of pride. Similar to darkness being the absence of light, humility is the antithesis of pride. It is one of the greatest virtues of the Christian life because of how highly God values it. We see this in second part of Luke 1:52.

*“....And (God) has **exalted** those who were **humble**.”*

As we go through the process of being set free from our flesh in order to agape love our offenders, the overflow is humility. Why?

Because humility says to your offender:

- I forgive you and I will continue to forgive you.
- I repent of my fleshly behaviors and attitudes towards you.
- I love you whether or not you love ever love me in return.
- If you are willing, I want to restore a healthy relationship with you.

As you read these statements, you may be saying to yourself, “I can never get to these places of humility because of how deeply this person has hurt or wounded me.” I understand because I never thought it would be possible with my dad or brother because of the depth of my anger and bitterness towards them. It was a journey to experience humility but I can honestly say through the transforming work of the Holy Spirit those statements are true of my of how I feel towards both of them.

Engaging God: Seek the Holy Spirit to transform you from pride (selfish and fleshly behaviors) to experience a heart of humility towards those who have hurt or offended you.

There are other key words we could cover but I hope these will help you in your journey to freedom. Let’s now look at the foundational key to experience freedom.

The FOUNDATIONAL Key To EXPERIENCE Spiritual Freedom

“I am the vine (Source), you are the branches; he who abides (depends on) in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit.....” John 15:5a

This verse is THE key to spiritual freedom for three reasons:

- As the Vine, Christ is the **Source** to produce spiritual freedom.
- As the branches, we are to **abide** in Christ which means we are to **live from, draw from and depend on Christ** as our Source to produce the freedom.
- You **cannot** be set free **apart from Christ** as we see in the last part of this verse.

*“**apart from Me** you can do **NOTHING**.” John 15:5b*

If you look up the word “nothing” in the original Greek language you will see it means “nothing.” In the context of our study, “nothing” means that apart from depending on Christ’s Life and power in you, you will never experience any of my promises to be healed, to be transformed and to be set free.

Therefore, you can try in your own strength and willpower to love difficult people but when it comes to true spiritual healing, transformation and freedom, it will never happen apart from total dependence on the power of God to accomplish these things.

That is why the Christian life is a **dependent** life because God, as your **Source**, lives **in** you to produce the freedom to love the most toxic relationships you will ever experience.

How do I know this is true? I have not only seen it happen personally in my relationship with my brother and my father, I have seen God accomplish it in many lives over the past several years of ministry. Therefore, the key to the rest of the chapter is this:

Total DEPENDENCE on God is the ONLY way you will be set FREE.

Please keep this truth in mind as you go through the rest of this chapter. We will end this chapter by looking at some key truths in experiencing freedom.

Key Truths About The JOURNEY To Freedom

TRUTH #1: God's Work In You To Set You Free Is SUPERNATURAL

Understanding this truth that God's work is supernatural is crucial to our understanding of God's transforming work in our lives. Before we go on, let's look at the definition of a supernatural work.

***Is a work that God accomplishes in and through us as we walk
by FAITH for which there is NO NATURAL or MAN-MADE explanation.***

I believe most, if not all of us, struggle with the concept of "supernatural." The reason is that we live in the realm of our five senses where we are experiencing life every moment. Supernatural can be a foreign concept because when God works in the spiritual (supernatural) realm as opposed to the natural or physical realm, we may not feel or experience His work in our lives.

Since we are experiential beings, not feeling or experiencing God's work in us is not natural. This is why it is called a "faith" walk. How do walking by faith and the supernatural work of God connect?

Engaging God: If you struggle with the word "supernatural" ask the Lord to persuade you of the meaning of the word.

TRUTH #2: Walking By Faith and God's Supernatural WORK

When we walk by faith depending on God as our Source, it is important to understand that the word "faith" does not necessarily include feelings or experience. To better understand this truth, look at the definition of faith in Hebrews 11:1.

*"Now faith is the **assurance** of things hoped for, the **conviction** of things not seen."*

This verse tells us that the faith walk is a supernatural one of "assurance" and "conviction" of things not seen. The word "seen" refers to feelings and experience. Therefore, the walk of

faith is a supernatural walk that may or may not include feelings and experience. Let's apply this definition to spiritual growth and freedom.

***Faith is BELIEVING God is transforming us SUPERNATURALLY into
Christ-likeness and setting us FREE even if we don't
FEEL or EXPERIENCE Him working in us.***

Believing without feeling or experience can be like telling someone they have to write with their left hand when they are right-handed. It is unnatural. When it comes to our faith walk, we may have to "faith it" before we experience change. Let's take a deeper look into what that means.

Meditate: on the definition of faith in the box above. Ask the Spirit to give you a deeper revelation of the truth that early on in your faith walk you may not feel or experience God working in you.

TRUTH #3: You May Have To "FAITH IT" Before You EXPERIENCE Transformation

Early on as you take steps of faith, you often won't feel or experience God's power working in you. However, after some length of time of walking by faith, you will begin to experience changes in your thinking, beliefs, choices, and behaviors. We will call the walk of faith up until we actually experience the changes "faithing it." What does "faithing it" mean?

"FAITHING IT"
***Means that up until you ACTUALLY experience a change, you
CONTINUE to believe that God is working even though you
are NOT feeling or experiencing His working in you.***

Let's look at a biblical example in Joshua 6:2-5 to explain. This is the story of the fall of Jericho. It begins with God speaking to Joshua.

*"The LORD said to Joshua, 'See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and the valiant warriors. **March around the city** once with all the armed men. Do this for **six days**. Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams' horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets. When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have all the people give a loud shout; then **the wall of the city will collapse** and the people will go up, every man straight in.'"*

Read this passage again and this time put yourself into the story. What if God told you to march around Jericho for seven days, to blow your trumpet on the seventh day, shout, and then the walls would fall down? (FYI – God did not tell the Jews to bring a crane with a wrecking ball!) Well, we know from the passage that is just what they did and, as God

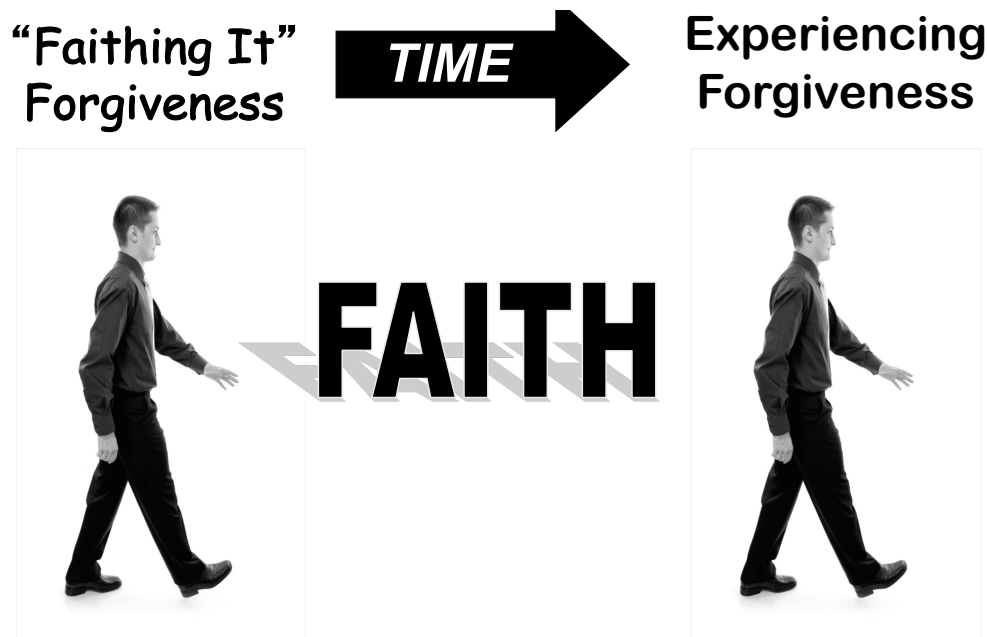
promised, the walls of the city collapsed. The key point to understand is that their part was to do all God commanded by faith and believe God's promise that the walls would fall down. They had to "faith it" for seven days before they "experienced" God's promise. It is no different with our walk of faith.

***In order to EXPERIENCE freedom, we have to continue "FAITHING IT"
until we EXPERIENCE SUPERNATURAL changes in
our thoughts, choices, beliefs, or behaviors.***

Let's look at an example of what this looks like. Let's assume you struggle forgiving the person who wounded or hurt you. As you begin taking steps of faith, early on in this process you may not feel or experience Christ's forgiveness for that person. However, if you are walking by faith, what do we know is true?

The Holy Spirit is working in you (Philippians 1:6) producing a forgiving attitude in order to give you the willingness to eventually forgive that person. Since at this point you are not experiencing Christ's forgiveness, we will call it a "faithing it" forgiveness. However, if you "faith it" long enough, you will eventually come to a place where you will begin to **experience** Christ's forgiveness for this person.

Remember that moving from faith to experience is a supernatural work of the Spirit that for the most part will take time. Below is an illustration of what it looks like to move from "faith" to "experience" concerning forgiving someone.



The Process of Moving From Faith To Experience

One reason that we struggle with “faithing it” is that we live in a microwave culture of “instant” gratification that says, “I want ‘it’ and I want ‘it’ now!” We bring that same mindset into our walk of faith, and we want to experience change and we want to experience it NOW.

When we don’t experience God’s working according to our timetable, we can get impatient and eventually want to give up because nothing seems to be changing. Let’s end this section with this truth:

We will NEVER truly understand how God is working or what He is doing in the moment, but He promises us that He IS working non-stop as we walk by faith.

Concerning the people we struggle with, what might be some of the consequences if we don’t continue “faithing it” until we experience God’s transformation and freedom?

Engaging God: If you have not already started, begin taking steps of faith. Below are some examples.

Examples of Steps of Faith:

“Lord, I am stepping out in faith and asking You to begin setting me free from my baggage that causes me to react in the flesh.”

“Father, I feel like giving up. BE my willingness and determination to continue “faithing it.”

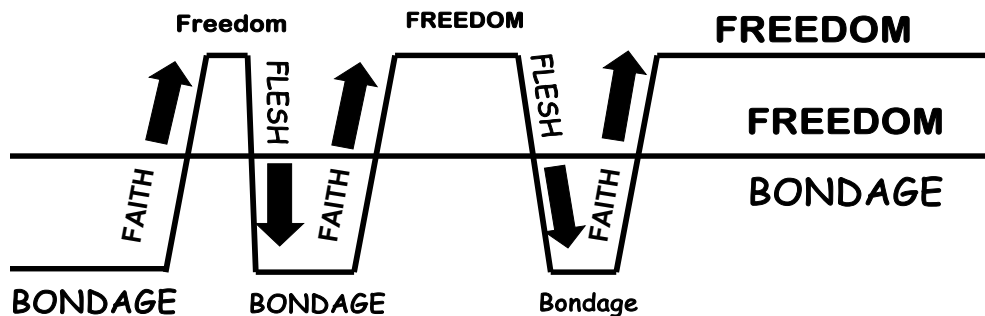
“Holy Spirit, continue to persuade me You are working even though I am not feeling or experiencing your work in me.”

“Thank you for setting me free even though I am not experiencing Your freedom yet.”

TRUTH #4: You Will FALL Below The Line BUT...

Referring to the line diagram in Chapter Four, we see in the diagram below that living below the line is living in **bondage** to your flesh and the flesh of your difficult person, or you can be set **free** from your fleshly behaviors and emotional and spiritual baggage.

As you seek the Holy Spirit to set you free, you take steps of faith that take you above the line but because of the strength of your fleshly will, you give into the flesh and fall back below the line. However, with each step of faith comes more freedom and the strengthening of your spiritual will to stay above the line longer. The truth is that you will fail and fall below the line and when you do, simply repent of your flesh and take another step of faith because over time walking by faith will ultimately lead you to freedom.



Examples of Steps of Faith:

"Lord, I got angry and rejected _____ because of what they said (or did). I repent of my anger and I will continue to walk by faith."

"Holy Spirit, show me the "death" and persuade me to take another step of faith."

TRUTH #5: You Will Be Tempted To GIVE UP But....

*"Now may the **God who gives perseverance and encouragement** grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus." Romans 15:5*

Depending on the depth of pain or woundedness this person has or is creating in your life, you will be tempted several times to give up on ever being set free. I understand because to experience freedom takes "work. This is not self-initiated work. Rather, the work is to seek Jesus, in this case, to BE your perseverance and your encouragement to keep seeking freedom.

***Remember, that you have the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit IN you
CONSTANTLY ENCOURAGING you keep taking steps of faith to be set free.***

If you do give up and stop engaging God to set you free, what will be the consequences? Look at the following diagram which illustrates the answer.



**What If We DON'T Keep Walking By Faith?
WHAT Are We Going Back To?**

If we give up our walk of faith to experience freedom, we will go back to experiencing our fleshly behaviors which will result in more bondage and no healing of the woundedness inflicted on you by this person. This is why giving up is not an option.

Examples of Steps of Faith:

“Lord Jesus, BE my strength to take another step of faith because I want to give up.”

“Holy Spirit, I want to give up but remind me that if I do, I am walking back into more bondage and deeper woundedness.”

I hope this section has helped in a practical way to begin the journey to freedom. Before the end of the study, I want to share a few final thoughts.

(Note: If you want to know in greater depth about the walk of faith, I would encourage you to go through my curriculum titled *Growing To Become Like Christ* on our website.)

FINAL THOUGHTS

RECONCILIATION Is God’s Ultimate Objective

God’s ultimate desire is for reconciliation. Here is my definition of reconciliation.

***When two people in CONFLICT with one another,
CHOOSE to RESTORE a broken relationship.***

Reconciliation involves two people. Since you can’t force anyone to reconcile with you, God is transforming you in order to give you the willingness to reconcile with them. Whether or not the person you struggle with desires to reconcile, God’s desire is for your freedom which will result in a willingness to reconcile. Why? Paul tells us in Colossians 3:14

“Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.”

Spiritual unity is God’s ultimate objective. Whether your offensive party is a Christian or not, God wants to move you to a place where you have a heart to reconcile because that will leave the door open for your offender to choose to reconcile with you whether it is today or sometime in the future.

Engaging God: If you are struggling with your desire to reconcile, seek Him to transform your unwillingness. It may be a long process but God will give you a heart of reconciliation.

These “Thorny” People In Your Life Are NECESSARY. Why?

“... I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to torment me and keep me from becoming proud. Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away.” Colossians 12:7, 8

Have you ever been like Paul when it comes to some relationships? Some of them are just like Paul's thorn that you want the Lord to remove. However, have you ever thought about those "thorny" people being **necessary** in your life? Before you recoil at that remark, think about this.

What if God is using that person to draw you into a deeper dependence on Him or is using that person as a divine scalpel to remove the very fleshly behaviors that are making you part of the problem in your difficult relationships? I know it is not pleasant but I look back and see my "thorny" brother was absolutely necessary in being used of the Lord to soften my heart and transform my heart to love him and other thorny people as well.

What IF They NEVER Change?

Our desire is that if we are being transformed, we want those that we struggle to change as well. However, they may never change depending on where they are spiritually. Here is the key truth to remember.

***Whether or NOT they change, God is transforming YOU and setting
YOU free with the result that YOU will be free TO love them
with the unconditional love of Christ.***

Just remember that as long as you and your difficult people are breathing, there is still hope. Persevere in love and prayer because you never know what the Lord might do. I know because I experienced it with my brother.

God Will Transform You

***"Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we could ask or think,
according to the power that works within us." Ephesians 3:20***

I tell people all the time that you can contradict my theology but you can't contradict my testimony because I am experiencing a supernatural freedom to love that I never thought possible with my father or brother. Because it was so miraculous, I am convinced that Ephesians 3:20 is true. It was a journey but it was worth every step because not only can I forgive and love my father and brother, it has given me a deeper love for everyone I come in contact with. This doesn't mean that I don't have "thorny" people in my life that can trigger my flesh. However, because of the transforming work of the Spirit I can forgive and love more easily.

Therefore, my prayer for you is that you will seek the Holy Spirit to make you aware of your part and the difficult person's part in your relationship, to give you the willingness and determination to engage Him to set you free from any of your baggage, your coping strategies and your fleshly behaviors in order to move you to that spiritual place where you can love unlovable people with the love of Christ regardless of whether or not they ever love you in return. This is why we must heed Paul's words in Hebrews 6:1.

*“Therefore, leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, **let us PRESS ON to maturity**, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God.”*
Hebrews 6:1

Paul exhorts us to “*press on to maturity.*” When it comes to navigating difficult relationships, no truer words were said because spiritual growth and spiritual maturity are the keys to freedom. And that is the most fulfilling and satisfying freedom there can be.

Where Do I Go From Here?

First of all, don’t forget to go through the Forgiveness study which starts on page 82. As I mentioned throughout the study, I have booklets and curriculum on our website: (www.christislifeministries.com) that will take you deeper into the truths in this study. Go to the Curriculum tab on our website and the dropdown will show Discipleship Booklets and Curriculum.

The Discipleship Booklets I recommend:

- **A Life Or The Life**
- **IDENTITY**
- **Eyes To See**
- **Free To Love**
- **Wounded?**
- **Forgive**
- **OTHERS**

The Curriculum I recommend:

- **Growing Into Christ-Likeness**
- **Experiencing Your True Identity**
- **Living Life For Others**
- **Healing The Wounded Heart’**
- **The Battle of The Mind**

I hope you will take advantage of these studies. They are all downloadable and reproduceable for free. May the Holy Spirit use them to heal you, transform you, and set you free.

Blessings in Christ,

Bill Loveless

P.S. If you have any thoughts concerning what you have read that you would like to share or have any questions about what I have written, please email me at the email address below:

Christ Is Life Ministries

Website: www.christislifeministries.com

Email: bill@christislifeministries.com

(5-1-24)

In-Depth Study On Forgiveness

“Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” Colossians 3:13

The issue of forgiveness is paramount to the healing process because most people's woundedness was created by others. This is why I want to spend the rest of this lesson on this subject. Let's begin by looking at three types of forgiveness:

- **Forgiving the person(s) who wounded you.**
- **Forgiving God**
- **Forgiving yourself.**

Before we talk about forgiveness, let's look at unforgiveness and the consequences of continuing to live from it.

UNFORGIVENESS

1. What is UNFORGIVENESS?

Unforgiveness results when you:

- **take ownership of someone else's offense** towards you with the result that
- **you engage your flesh** which says, “I don't have to, or I don't want to, forgive that person.”

Taking ownership of someone else's offense towards you simply means you receive that offense and allow your flesh to act on it.

Some examples of offenses would be:

- Verbal and non-verbal words of rejection, anger, guilt, shame, condemnation, etc.
- Abuse (sexual, physical, emotional, and/or verbal).
- Lack of being valued, loved, and/or accepted in the ways you expected or needed.
- Adultery.
- Abandonment.

Question: Can you think of someone in your life who has offended you and then you have taken ownership of that offense? Write that person's name down and the way(s) he/she offended you.

Question: What feelings come to mind when you think about that person and what he/she did to offend or wound you?

Engaging God: If no one immediately comes to mind, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal if there is anyone you can't bring to mind that you have not forgiven.

2. Unforgiveness Leads to Exercising our FLESHLY Right NOT to Forgive

Concerning unforgiveness, we can move from not wanting to forgive to what I call a "fleshly right" not to forgive. In other words:

***When someone offends you, wounds you, or sins against you in some way,
you BELIEVE you have the RIGHT NOT to forgive them.***

When our flesh has been offended, it often must fight back. It is like a prosecutor who builds a case against the person who has wounded us. As a result, the flesh demands, justifies, and defends its fleshly right not to forgive the offender.

Over the years, my flesh continued building a case against my abusive dad and why, because of that abuse, I had the right not to forgive him. The longer I spent in unforgiveness, the more reinforced my fleshly right became.

Before we go to the next section, I would like to ask you a question.

Question: Do you have the right to **not** forgive your offender? _____

3. REASONS Why We Feel or Believe We Have the Fleshly Right Not to Forgive

The following are some examples of reasons why we feel or believe we have the fleshly right not to forgive.

7. This person does not deserve forgiveness.
8. This person has ruined my life.
9. Forgiving this person makes me look weak.
10. This person has to pay for my woundedness. They need to be punished.
11. If I forgive this person, it would mean I'm overlooking or condoning their offenses towards me.

Questions: Are you holding offenses against anyone? If so, do any of the reasons given above apply to you? Please write those reasons down. Are there any other reasons not listed above that you believe or feel are justifications for not forgiving your offender? Please write those down.

Question: Do you believe that in God's eyes you have the right not to forgive that person for any of the reasons you listed?

4. What Are Some of the RESULTS of Unforgiveness?

Unforgiveness is like living in a toxic waste dump because its toxicity is destructive both to you and every one around you. Below are some of the short and long term results of unforgiveness.

If we choose not to forgive, what will be some of the consequences?

- a. In your mind, you continue to think and rethink about the wounding events and the person(s) who offended you.
- b. Emotionally it can cause stress, anxiety, and even depression.
- c. It can lead to unresolved frustration, anger, and bitterness towards your offender.
- d. You continue to take ownership of offenses from the person(s) offending you.
- e. It opens you up for Satan to gain a foothold and, eventually, a stronghold in your life.
- f. On some level, it will poison every one of your relationships.

Question: Are you experiencing any of the consequences listed above due to your unforgiveness? Please write those down. Write down any other consequences you are experiencing due to your unforgiveness.

Engaging God: If it is not readily apparent what your unforgiveness is causing to you or through you to others, ask God to reveal that to you. Seek God to show you what your life would be like if you were willing for Him to free you of unforgiveness.

5. Unforgiveness Eventually Builds a "WALL" Between You and the Person You Have Not Forgiven.

When you build a brick wall, you have to do so one brick at a time. Imagine each offense being a brick. When an offense occurs between you and another person and is not dealt with, then brick by brick a wall is being built between you and them. The longer you live in unforgiveness, the higher and thicker the wall becomes.

Engaging God: Seek the Holy Spirit to reveal to you if you have built a wall between you and another person due to past offenses.

6. Your Unforgiveness Leads to Your Being CONTROLLED by Your Offender.

Your unforgiveness means that every time you think of your offender, you have recurring negative fleshly thoughts and emotions associated with your wounding events that keep you in continual bondage to them. In a sense, that person has control over you because of your unforgiving thoughts and emotions towards him/her.

This is like being permanently shackled or chained to your offender. As long as you continue in unforgiveness, you are shackled to this person and dragging him/her around with you wherever you go. You are choosing to keep the wounds and pain fresh when you won't let go of the offender through forgiveness and move on.

7. Unforgiveness Effectively CUTS off the Flow of Christ's Life in You and Through You.

I believe the most damaging consequence of unforgiveness is it effectively cuts off the flow of Christ's life in you with the result you experience the "death" talked about in Romans 8:6:

*"The mind set on the flesh is **DEATH**...." Romans 8:6*

What does the word "death" mean in this passage?

"Death," as it applies to unforgiveness, is the result of the flow of Christ's life being effectively CUT OFF in you and through you.

By way of a reminder, here are some examples of Christ's life that are available to you:

Unconditional love	Victory	Worth	Acceptance	Faith
Freedom	Patience	Strength	Peace	Power
Forgiveness	Understanding	Security	Fearlessness	Wisdom
Discernment	Adequacy	Humility	Christ-confidence	Boldness
Righteousness	Selflessness	Rest	Compassion	Courage
Hope	Gentleness	Control	Faithfulness	Joy

Why is the consequence of unforgiveness the most devastating to your walk in Christ? Because you have effectively cut off the flow of all of the above characteristics of Christ's life in you. In other words, your unforgiveness hinders the flow of Christ's freedom, victory, forgiveness, etc. in you and through you.

Let's look at this truth in light of the branch-vine example used by Jesus in John 15. In this passage, you are the branch and Jesus is the Vine. As long as there is no unforgiveness (or any other persistent sin you are hanging onto in disobedience to Christ) in your heart, then there is an ongoing flow of Christ's life in and through you. However, when you choose not to forgive someone, then you have effectively cut yourself off from the flow of Christ's life.

Let me give you an example to further explain.

The truth is that you have in you, through Christ, all of the Spirit's power. However, if you choose to live in unforgiveness, you effectively cut off the Holy Spirit's power to

overpower your flesh and Satan. Not only that, you have limited the very power that is going to set you free from your unforgiveness, heal your wounded heart, and transform you to live with an attitude of forgiveness towards your offender. Therefore, we must take a long look at this consequence of unforgiveness because of the damage it can do to our spiritual progress and transformation.

Question: Are you able to see how serious unforgiveness is in relationship to Christ's life flowing in you?

Meditate: On the truth that your unforgiveness creates "death" in you because it stops the flow of all of those characteristics listed above.

Engaging God: Ask the Lord to reveal to you in a deeper way the death that is created when you choose to live in unforgiveness.

8. Ultimately, Unforgiveness IMPRISONS You.

When you have an attitude of unforgiveness toward someone, you have placed yourself in your own prison. Since you have effectively limited Christ's life and power flowing in you, the result will be you build a prison made up of walls of anger, bitterness, and unforgiveness. Here is a further problem:

***The LONGER you live in unforgiveness, the more FORTIFIED
and REINFORCED your prison walls become.***

Question: Have you realized before now that the only person imprisoned by unforgiveness is the one who is not forgiving? It is like drinking poison and expecting your offender to die.

Engaging God: Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you if you have any unforgiveness in your heart or if you are holding on to any offenses against anyone. Seek Him to bring to mind anyone you are avoiding or have a grudge against because they hurt or offended you in the past.

9. Finally, Unforgiveness Results In HARDENING YOUR HEART Towards God.

Just like false beliefs about God can harden our hearts towards God, unforgiveness will result in the same thing. If Christ's life is no longer flowing in you and you continue to reinforce your prison walls, then you will move further and further away from God and His healing power.

***Consequently, unforgiveness is not only toxic to you and those around you, it
DISTANCES you from experiencing God and HARDENS your heart towards Him.***

Question: Do you feel your unforgiveness is creating a greater distancing between you and God? If so, in what ways is it creating a distance from Him?

I hope this section on unforgiveness has given you a clearer picture of unforgiveness and the consequences that result. Now, let's look at what God's truth has to say about forgiveness.

B. The TRUTH About Forgiveness

I believe there are four key truths that are crucial in understanding forgiveness. Let's take a look at them.

1. Truth #1 - GOD Will Deal with Your Offender. Your Part is to Forgive.

"Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord." Romans 12:19

The temptation of your flesh is to retaliate or get revenge on your offender. This will not lead to forgiveness. It will only lead to more sin and a greater resistance to the work of the Holy Spirit to heal you. Remember, there are always consequences of sin, so your offender does not get off the hook if he/she is not repentant. There is a price to pay but that price will be determined by God and not by you. Believe me when I say this, God does not condone what happened to you and there will be consequences. Therefore, leave your offender in the hands of God and move towards forgiveness, not revenge.

2. Truth #2 - In the Midst of Your Sin God Forgave You UNCONDITIONALLY

"And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions" Colossians 2:13

God did not wait for you to confess and repent of your sins before you were forgiven. His forgiveness took place over 2000 years ago on the cross, long before you ever had the chance to repent of your sin. Your flesh recoils at this truth because it demands your offender confess and repent before you offer forgiveness. Where would we be today if God dealt with us in the same way? The good news for you and me is that God's forgiveness is unconditional. The same applies to you and forgiving your offender.

<p><i>Your forgiveness is UNCONDITIONAL in that you forgive WHETHER or NOT your offender ever repents of his/her offenses against you.</i></p>

Question: If you are struggling with this truth, is it possible you are believing your forgiveness of your offender is contingent upon his/her repenting to you first?

Meditate: If this truth is a struggle for you, meditate on Colossians 2:13.

Engaging God: Seek the Lord to persuade you your forgiveness towards your offender must be the same unconditional forgiveness the Lord has extended to you. Remember, He will forgive your offender through you if you seek Him to do so.

3. Truth #3 - God's Forgiveness is COMPLETE.

"It is finished." John 19:30

*"...having forgiven us **all** our transgressions" Colossians 2:13*

When Jesus said on the cross "It is finished," He was saying, "I have paid everything in full." This means past, present and future sins have all been paid for. Accordingly, as Christ has totally forgiven you, so should you totally forgive your offender. To confirm this truth, look again at the last part of Colossians 2:13.

Meditate: on John 19:30

Engaging God: Seek the Spirit to transform your heart so you can totally forgive your offender.

Remember: Forgiveness is an act of obedience to Christ and not based on feelings which likely will come later than the act of forgiveness. You may also need to repeat the exercise of forgiveness if there are multiple, deep and/or persistent woundedness caused by your offender. Persevere in forgiving your offender in Christ.

4. Truth #4 - Since God Forgave You, He NO Longer Holds ANY Sin Against You.

"He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west." Psalm 103:12

*"I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and **remembers your sins no more.**" Isaiah 43:25*

*"... **having canceled out the certificate of debt** consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and **He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.**" Colossians 2:14*

When we read the passages above, we can see God has not only removed our sins, but He also no longer remembers them. In other words, He no longer holds the offense against us.

If you were deep in debt to your creditors, how would you feel if you got a call from a friend saying he/she has totally paid off your debt? Joy? Freedom? Relief? We should feel that and even more towards the Lord because He totally canceled our debt of sin. He will never hold your sin against you. How do you think this applies to the debt created by the person who wounded you?

Because God has totally canceled your debt, then you are to CANCEL (forgive) the debt that was created by the person who wounded you.

Meditate: on Psalm 103:12, Isaiah 43:25, and Colossians 2:14, above, and think about the truth that the Lord totally canceled the debt of your sin and how that should affect your attitude towards your offender.

Engaging God: If you are struggling with totally forgiving your offender, ask the Lord to transform your heart and give you the willingness to forgive. Seek God to reveal the truth that God, Himself, will forgive your offender through you if you ask and trust Him to do so.

C. What Are the RESULTS of Forgiveness?

Now that we know some of the key truths about forgiveness, let's explore some of the results when we do forgive.

1. First and foremost it RESTORES Christ's life flowing in and through you.

*"I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, **he bears much fruit**; for apart from Me you can do nothing." John 15:5*

*"He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From **his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.**' " John 7:38*

We said earlier that unforgiveness effectively cuts off the flow of Christ's life in you. Conversely, forgiveness allows the flow of Christ's life, love, acceptance, etc., to continue flowing in and through you.

2. Forgiveness TEARS DOWN the walls of your prison and sets you FREE.

*"... you will know the truth, and the **truth will make you free.**" John 8:32*

*"It was for **freedom that Christ set us free**; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery." Galatians 5:1*

Just as unforgiveness built the walls of your prison, so forgiveness will tear your prison walls down and set you free. Your freedom will come in two categories: What you will be free FROM and what you will be free TO. Let's look at some examples of both.

You are free FROM

- Bondage and death caused by your unforgiveness.
- The frustration, anger, and bitterness towards your offender.
- The pain associated with your woundedness.
- Having to hold the offense(s) against your offender.

You are free TO:

- Love your offender with Christ's love.
- Experience Christ's life in and through you. (i.e., His peace, rest, etc.).
- Have compassion for your offender.
- Be used of the Lord to move your offender to repent of his/her offense.

3. Forgiveness allows you to DIE to your fleshly right not to forgive.

*“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and **dies**, it remains alone; but **if it dies, it bears much fruit.**” John 12:24*

The “death” referred to in this verse, as it relates to forgiveness, is a turning away or realizing the death your fleshly right not to forgive produces. Therefore, as the Lord transforms your heart to forgive your offender, you will die to or move away from wanting to exercise your fleshly right not to forgive.

4. Forgiveness will be part of the HEALING

Forgiveness is an essential key to healing. We said earlier that forgiveness opens the way for you to be able to experience the flow of Christ’s life in you. It also opens the door for the Holy Spirit’s power to flow in you to begin the healing process. Therefore, the longer you stay in unforgiveness, the longer it will take you to heal.

5. Forgiveness sets the stage for RECONCILING the relationship with your offender.

*“If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; **first be reconciled to your brother**, and then come and present your offering.”
Matthew 5:23, 24*

When it comes to reconciliation with your offender, forgiveness is the first step. Reconciliation involves both parties so if your offender is not willing to reconcile, then reconciliation won’t take place. However, if you are walking in Christ’s humility and forgive your offender, God honors that step on your part in restoring the relationship.

If you have forgiven your offender, but you have not reconciled, then I would encourage you to pray for reconciliation. I have personally witnessed a number of circumstances where the person who was wounded prayed for their offender and reconciliation took place. It is nothing short of supernatural but it can happen.

Now that you have a better understanding of forgiveness towards others, let’s look at two other areas of forgiveness: forgiving God and forgiving yourself.

E. Forgiving God

You may be struggling with forgiving God for what He allowed to happen to you. Just to reiterate what I said in the previous chapter on woundedness and our concept of God, the key is that God allows man’s free will to function. Because of the evil nature of mankind and the influence of Satan, terrible things can and do happen. We can try to hold God accountable for those terrible things, but this is what He has allowed. However, you do not have to be held hostage to the woundedness He allowed. You can seek Him to give you the willingness to forgive Him and allow Him to heal your woundedness.

Note: God is not the source of, nor does He initiate, the evil things that happen in this world. But God has the ability to bring good out of the bad things that happen to us, including our woundedness, if we let Him.

Engaging God: If you struggle with forgiving God, seek Him to give you the willingness to do so.

F. Forgiving Yourself

You may be able to forgive the person who wounded you and God but you can't forgive yourself. You may have to forgive yourself because you may be holding yourself responsible for the wounding event. This is especially true when you were too young to understand that what happened was not your fault.

If that is where you are, please go back to the section in this lesson titled: **The Truths About Forgiveness**. Please read and pray through these truths again keeping in mind that since God forgave you, you can forgive yourself.

Engaging God: If you struggle with forgiving yourself, seek the Lord to give you the willingness to do so.

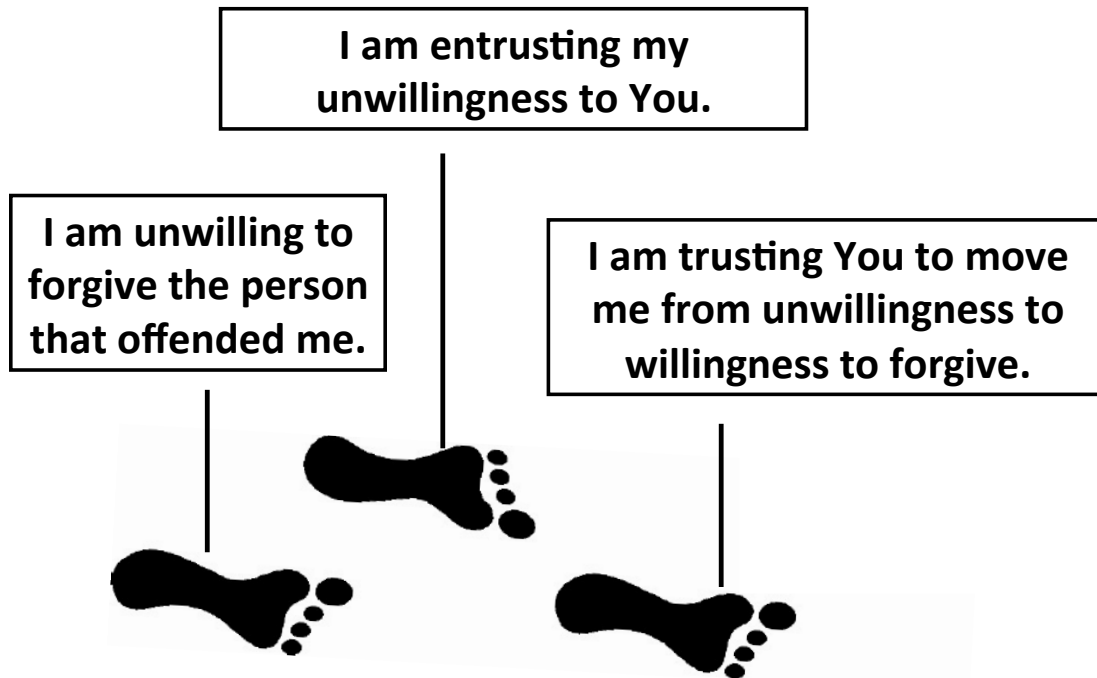
Steps of Faith Concerning The Forgiveness Process

Example #1: Let's assume that you are unwilling to forgive the person who wounded you.

The Truth: God knows you are unwilling and He is the only One who can transform your unwillingness into having a willing heart to forgive your offender.

Steps of faith: "Lord. I can't forgive this person for what they did to me. I know that I have no excuse for not forgiving but I simply am unwilling to do so. I am asking you to transform my heart so that I will be willing to forgive."

The following diagram illustrates other steps you could take if you are unwilling to forgive.



Example #2: Your flesh is persuading you that you have the right not to forgive.

The Truth: God completely forgave you for your past, present and even future offenses towards Him. (i.e., sin). Therefore, since He forgave you unconditionally, then you have no right not to forgive.

Steps of faith: “Lord, continue to remind me that you extended me unconditional forgiveness so I have no right not to forgive. Remind me that you went to the cross for me so that I have no excuse for not forgiving.”

Example #3: You are saying to yourself, “If I forgive this person they may think that I am overlooking or condoning their sin.”

The Truth: God never condones or overlooks sin and neither should you. However, forgiveness does not in any way mean that you are overlooking or condoning their sin. In addition, you do not have to concern yourself with what your offender thinks. Your part is to forgive. Also, remember that God will deal with your offender’s sin. Since there are always consequences to sin, God will repay your offender.

Steps of faith: “I am afraid that if I forgive, I am telling my offender that I am overlooking their sin. Lord, persuade me that is a lie, that my part is to forgive, and that you will deal with my offender’s sin.”

Example #4: You don’t feel like forgiving.

The Truth: Forgiveness is a choice not a feeling. If you are walking in the power of the Holy Spirit, you can choose to forgive whether you feel like it or not.

Steps of faith: “Lord, I don't feel like forgiving _____ for what they did to me. I am asking You to give me the willingness to choose to forgive even though nothing in my emotions agrees with that choice.”

ACTS Versus ATTITUDE of Forgiveness

*“So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a **HEART of forgiving each other**, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.” Colossians 3:12b, 13a*

People have told me they have forgiven their offender. However, that does not mean they have an attitude or a heart of forgiveness **towards** that person. You see, there can be an “act” of forgiveness towards someone in a moment of time for the wounding event they caused. In my case with my dad, there were several “acts” of forgiveness as the Holy Spirit would bring to mind specific events that I had to forgive my dad for.

Depending upon how deep the wound is, obtaining an “attitude” or a heart of forgiveness may be a much longer process. God’s ultimate objective is to transform you so that you will have an attitude of forgiveness. Let me give you an example of what I mean.

A man was sharing how three men in his life rejected him in different ways. He told me that he had forgiven them, but every time that he or I brought them up, it was, for him, like sticking a knife into that wound and feeling the pain all over again. What I concluded was that even though he had extended acts of forgiveness towards them, he did not have an attitude of forgiveness because his woundedness had not yet been healed. This brings us to a key truth concerning an attitude of forgiveness:

An ATTITUDE of forgiveness takes place when the woundedness associated with the wounding event(s) has been HEALED.

Think about this: If your woundedness is not healed, you will have to forgive over and over again every time that person or the offense comes to mind. Therefore, God wants to heal you so that person no longer pushes your buttons of unforgiveness.

This is one of the great freedoms of unforgiveness. Over time I experienced this with my dad. Even though I had forgiven him, it took the Spirit some years to heal me from that woundedness. The result is that I can think of my dad, and I no longer harbor unforgiveness toward him. In fact, it freed me up to eventually love him even though he passed away prior to my healing.

Consequently, even though you may have made acts of forgiveness, an attitude of forgiveness may be a longer process because healing may be an extended process. Another way of looking at a heart of forgiveness is in Matthew 18:21,22:

"Then Peter came and said to Him, 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?' 22 Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.'" Matthew 18:21,22

What is Jesus telling us in this verse? Is He telling us that we are to forgive only up to 490 times? I don't believe so. I believe what the Lord is pointing out is that we are to live from a Christ-like attitude or heart of forgiveness. This attitude will come when the healing is complete.

The illustration on the next page reveals how initially there must be acts of forgiveness which eventually lead to healing of your woundedness resulting in an attitude of forgiveness.



Summary

I pray that this section on forgiveness, at the very least, gives you an understanding of how seriously God takes this issue of unforgiveness and forgiveness. However, even more important than an understanding, I pray that you have taken steps of faith in order to move from acts of forgiveness to the freedom found in an attitude of forgiveness.