

**KILLING GIANTS SERIES**  
“Killing the Giant of Bitterness”  
Lent 1, Wednesday, March 4, 2020

“In his book *Guiding Your Family in a Misguided World*, Dr. Tony Evans tells of two monks walking through the countryside toward another village. As they came to the edge of a river, they saw an old woman sitting there, upset because there was no bridge. The first monk offered to carry her across, to the woman’s great relief. So the two monks joined hands, lifted her between them and carried her across the river. When they got to the other side, they set her down, and she went on her way.

“After they had walked another mile or so, the second monk began to complain. ‘Look at my clothes,’ he said. ‘They are filthy from carrying that woman across the river. And my back still hurts from lifting her. I can feel it getting stiff.’ The first monk just smiled and nodded his head.

“A few miles later, the second monk griped again, ‘My back is hurting me so badly, and it is all because we had to carry that silly woman across the river! I cannot go any further because of the pain. Why is it you’re not complaining about it, too? Doesn’t your back hurt?’

“Of course not,’ the first monk replied. ‘You’re still carrying the woman, but I set her down five miles ago.’

“We are often like that second monk who cannot let go of the pain of the past, and we still carry the burdens of things done years ago.”<sup>1</sup> Welcome to the giant of bitterness!

There are many giants in our lives that distort and seek to destroy our lives. Bitterness is one of those giants. Why is bitterness such a giant in our lives? And what does bitterness lead us to?

I did a quick word study and I found that unresolved anger or hurt leads to bitterness. The word *bitter* means severe, painful, calamitous, distressing. The word *calamitous* means miserable, afflictive. The word *afflictive* means to distress, to grieve, to harass. The word *miserable* means very unhappy, wretched, worthless, despicable. The word *wretched* means very miserable, distressing, worthless, despicable. *Despicable* means contemptible, vile, base, mean. *Contempt* is the act of contemning,

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<sup>1</sup> (Robert J. Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations, & Quotes*, [Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000] pg. 72-73)

scorn, disregard, disobedience to the rules. To *contemn* is to despise, scorn. *Despise* means to hold in contempt, to scorn, to disdain. And *distain* means to think unworthy, to deem worthless, to scorn, to contemn (contempt), scorn, haughtiness, pride. Do you see a progression here? Once we become bitter, there is nothing good that comes out of it. It only brings pain, unhappiness, contempt, scorn, and disdain to our lives and we begin to treat others as unworthy and worthless, showing scorn and meanness to them. In fact as bitterness gets a hold of our souls, we begin to see others as trash rather than people with purpose and meaning.

“In their book *How to Beat Burnout*, Frank Minirth, Don Hawkins, Paul Meier, and Richard Flournoy suggest that bitterness is ‘a hidden root of burnout,’ and they isolate five reasons why people tend to grow bitter.

“The first is *Wrong motives or jealousy*. In counseling Christians, they frequently saw bitterness associated with jealousy. The examples include successful attorneys who envy the abilities of their colleagues, Bible college and seminary students consumed with jealousy toward fellow students...pastors or missionaries envious of others who have seen more outward evidences of success.” Jealousy turns to bitterness when we compare ourselves with others. But we each have different talents and gifts given to us to use for the betterment of the whole church. If we are all seeking to be like others, then our own gifts and skills are lost. Rather, we are to rejoice with those who do well, and congratulate those who succeed, for God delights when we lift up one another.

The second reason why people tend to grow bitter is “*Wrong responses to irritations leading to conditional love*. The authors observed in Colossians 3:19 Paul instructs husbands to ‘*love your wives and do not be bitter toward them.*’ The Greek word *pikroi* used here (for the word *bitter*) demonstrates ‘resentment or an incensed and angry attitude of mind.’ Conditional love produces harshness and bitterness both in husbands and wives, frequently leading to marital burnout.”

In the Gospel lesson tonight, Jesus instructs Peter not to just forgive a person 7 times, but 70 X 7 = 490 times for the same thing EACH DAY. In this way we are to show UNCONDITIONAL love for

others. In this way the anger that often drives us toward bitterness is dealt with way before it turns to bitterness. It is better to accept the person as who they are, warts and all, and love them every day, forgiving them daily for those things that bring irritation or discontent. Love and forgiveness defeat bitterness.

Third, people tend to grow bitter due to “*Wrong response to adversity*.” In Hebrews 12:15, we discover a warning against ‘any root of bitterness springing up,’ instead of enduring hardship as a discipline.” Life is hard, and we all must endure different stuff. Bitterness comes as we see the stuff in our life and the apparent ease of others, and we begin down that road of unhappiness and distress. In order to combat this slide down the slope of bitterness, we need to focus on the good that is happening in our lives and see what the Lord is doing to bring us beyond the adversity. If we focus on the positive and the good, then we will see the positive and the good in others, too.

The fourth reason why people tend to grow bitter is “*Misplaced strife*.” The authors saw churches that have been crippled in their effectiveness for years because of bitter envying and strife on the part of church leaders.” When one church leader becomes bitter, it often quickly rubs off to those around them, and it spreads like gangrene among the rest of the members. When everyone is bitter, there is nothing good that will come about, and that church will steadily decline and die. Who wants to attend a bitter church? Again, when anger and hurt are forgiven, when love is shown unconditionally, when struggles are faced with positive viewpoints, then strife in the local church declines, and peace begins to abide once more. When you look for strife, you will quickly find it. When you seek peace, you will find it, too. It all depends upon what you are looking for in the lives of others.

The fifth reason people tend to grow bitter is “*An unforgiving spirit*.” Ephesians 4:31-32 draws a clear connection between bitterness and what is perhaps its most basic underlying cause, a refusal to forgive. “*Let all bitterness be put away from you...Be kind to one another...forgiving one another...*”<sup>2</sup>

The gospel lesson for this evening shows this to be true. Here in Matthew 18 we see in Jesus’

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<sup>2</sup> (Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations & Quotes*, pg. 69)

Parable of the Unforgiving Servant, that even though the first servant was forgiven a huge debt by the king, because he begged forgiveness from the king, this man in his bitterness for others around him, could not forgive the small debt owed by a fellow servant. Bitterness at this man not paying his small debt back to him drove the first servant to treat him with indignity and scorn, eventually taking the law into his own hands and having the second servant thrown into jail until he should pay it back. The forgiveness of that huge debt had no meaning to this servant because his life was filled with bitterness with those around him. And that bitterness eventually caught up to him when the king found out that he would not give forgiveness, even as he had been forgiven. But it is Jesus' final statement that brings great warning to us. *"That is how My Father in heaven will treat every one of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart"* (Matt. 18:35).

You see, Jesus doesn't want us to become bitter because we refuse to forgive those around us that have hurt us or made us angry. We have been forgiven SO MUCH ourselves by God. Can't we forgive those who hurt us? Unless we do this, the giant of Bitterness might cause us to end up like the man recently, who after years of serving diligently at his church, working hard at his company for many years, one day snaps and goes in and kills many in the business. He thought he had been unfairly treated, passed up for advancement while others had been promoted above him, even those with less seniority. He had been harboring those hurts and that anger for all those years, and suddenly this "model" citizen goes on a shooting spree getting revenge on all those who got ahead of him. The bitterness inside of him just exploded like a volcano, and the fall-out was tremendous.

Forgiveness is essential in our lives lest we become bitter and then we embitter all those around us, spewing our hurt and anger to those around us and polluting the environments in which we live. Unless we forgive one another we become like an angry mob destroying everything in their sight. Unless we forgive others of the hurts we've received, everyone becomes the enemy and destroy each other.

Forgiveness is not only invited, but mandated by Jesus so that we might kill the giant of

bitterness and experience the mercy and peace that only God can give. Forgiveness is needed in all places in the world today, starting within the home, and ranging to schools, to communities, to political parties, to rival countries, and to the enemies. Forgiveness, reconciliation and peace are the only way to kill this aggressive, abusive and caustic giant of Bitterness. But it starts with repentance to God, and then reaches out to those around us.

Let's begin to destroy bitterness through the love of Jesus Christ lived in us and through us to show love wherever we go. Let's pray.

Father, this world we live in has been wonderfully made by You. Yet, in our own wisdom, we focus on the negative, we relish in the hurts we've received, and we fail to practice forgiveness to those who have hurt us. Yet you demand much more from us, Your people, those who claim Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord. Convict us tonight of the resentment we harbor against one another. Open our eyes and reveal to us the hurt we have caused, AND received, so that we might begin the process of reconciliation with our brothers and sisters in Christ here in this place called Fountain Park UMC. Then, as we leave this place, may that repentance and reconciliation continue as we make our way home, and then to our school and workplace, allowing Your mercy to be shown as we forgive one another. Let it begin right here tonight so that a revival might begin, touching the lives of millions of people more. Let Your Holy Spirit move among us right now so that we may receive Your blessing of forgiveness and love. This we pray in Jesus' precious Name. AMEN.