

“Speaking from the Heart”

Lesson Six: Speaking Forgiveness & Rock Collecting

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☞ *“Be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”*
(Ephesians 4:32)

Dr. Carney Looney, a Christian counselor, has said that ☞ most of us carry around what amounts to a sack full of rocks (*JESUS Our Mentor and Our Model*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987, 100). Each rock represents a bitter resentment, an unforgiven grudge, an unresolved conflict with people. We save these, polished and ready, for just the right moment. Here is how they work...

- A husband and wife come home from a party— “How could YOU say such a STUPID thing?! I was mortified!” (She just lobbed a rock at him).
- “O yeah! What about that AIR-HEAD remark you made at church?” (Now he has just reached inside his sack and tossed a retaliatory rock.).
- Not to be outdone he reaches and pulls out the prize rock, “Okay, YOU asked for it! What about that time 15 YEARS AGO that you ...”
- And so, it goes on until the battle is over and they are emotionally exhausted and beaten. But they still have enough energy left to go around and pick up the thrown rocks and put them back into their sacks (and now they have a few extra to add!) Ready for the next round.
- How do you think they feel? Carrying around a sack full of rocks, all day, every day? Miserable, I am sure. Bitter, I am positive. The burden of unresolved conflict, of unforgiving spirits weighs them down!

☞ Too many will not let go of their “trophy hurts”!!

☞ Matthew 11:28,29, “Come to Me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls”

Jesus offers us “rest.” But ☞ without forgiveness our lives are exhausted, and a fatiguing succession of battles will never be won! ☞ By surrendering to the Lord’s care and trusting in His will, we will enjoy the blessings that Proverbs 3 lists among which is “When you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet” (Proverbs 3:24).

Those who will not “let go” of resentments will be constantly thinking about the historic and memorable hurtful incidents and planning how to “get back.” They have a “trophy case” of historic resentments.

- These have no rest; only turmoil.
- ☞ Instead of that “sweet sleep,” “He plans wickedness on his bed; He sets himself on a path that is not good; He does not reject evil” (Psalm 36:4)

☞ One of the greatest disappointments in the Lord’s Church is the inevitable conflict that is present. ☞ Some conflict is good—it helps us grow and change (1 Corinthians 11:19, “For there also have to be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you”).

However, ☞ most conflicts have the deadly potential of breeding bitterness and nursing hurts and fostering an unforgiving spirit.

Our ☞ failure to resolve conflict will cause us to have a bitter and unforgiving personality. This is wrong and will send anyone to Hell regardless of how justified they may feel.

“Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints? ... Is it so, that there is not among you anyone wise who will be able to decide between his brothers and sisters ... it is already a defeat for you ... ☞ Why not rather suffer the wrong? ... you yourselves do wrong and defraud” (1 Corinthians 6:1-8).

☞ **The forgiveness principle stated (Matthew 18)**

Jesus teaches that there is a two-way "forgiveness principle" directing our lives.

- We are forgiven by God for horrible sins we have committed; then we extend forgiveness to others.
- "Then Peter came up and said to Him, 'Lord, how many times shall my brother sin against me and I still forgive him? Up to seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy-seven times'" (Matthew 18:21-22)
- Peter's question to Jesus brought this principle into clear focus. The religious standard of the day was to forgive three times and then no more. Mr. Nice Guy! But Jesus says we are to forgive again and again and again!

Jesus told a parable to illustrate the two-way forgiveness principle AND the language involved in this forgiveness principle.

- One man owed the equivalent of the tax revenue of all Palestine for 20 years! (Like our national debt). There was no way the debt could be paid. The debtor begged for more time.
- Incredibly the King forgave! Not only the interest but the principle borrowed—a total erasure! Imagine the man's feelings—liberated; unburdened; set free! Like making the last payment on an auto, home, or big debt!
- The incredible twist comes as the man is leaving the King's palace. Relieved of his huge debt he sees one who owed him a few cents. He demanded immediate payment.
- When the King heard of the servant's action he became furious. What really burned the King was the servant's failure to show mercy.

Matthew 18 reveals that this is how God responds to our sins. This is how God responds to our small-hearts when we refuse to give forgiveness. 🙏 God's forgiveness has conditions that most ignore...

- God fully forgives all wrongs (Hebrews 8:12, "I will be merciful toward their wrongdoings, and their sins I will no longer remember.").
- God expects us to extend the same mercy.

Matthew 5:7, "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy."

Matthew 6:14-15, "(I)f you forgive other people for their offenses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive other people, then your Father will not forgive your offenses."

James 2:13, "(J)udgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment."

There are two strong reasons why we should 🙏 give up our "rock collections" after studying Matthew 18. When we follow these biblical guidelines, we will speak from our hearts the language of forgiveness; we will find rest; we will relish God's forgiveness in our lives.

- The grateful heart causes us to offer forgiveness just as Jesus extended it to others.
- 🙏 The fear of God's wrath—because of His mercy I am saved from wrath (Romans 5:9), but He will not show mercy to the merciless. I do not want to be found outside of God's mercy (Hebrews 10:31, "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God").

🙏 Letting go of your Trophy Hurts

So, we will not continue to collect "rocks" and fuel the language of the unforgiving spirit that will condemn our souls, let me propose four resolutions.

First, resolve to be peaceable, not quarrelsome.

The wisdom of Proverbs has nothing but scorn for the person who is easily provoked and because of hurt feelings, constantly quarrels with others. This is wholly focused upon selfishness. These always carry a "chip on their shoulder" just waiting to jump on any unsuspecting person who does not do things the "right way."

Proverbs 17:19, "One who loves wrongdoing loves strife."

Proverbs 20:3, "Avoiding strife is an honor for a person, but any fool will quarrel."

Proverbs 26:21, "Like charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire, so is a contentious person to kindle strife."

Quarreling never opts for forgiveness – it always chews on the wrongs, slights, and grievances; it cherishes those "trophy hurts" from which we find justification for our obnoxious attitudes, sour facial expressions, curt rejoinders and forever frowns. Have you ever noticed that such a person never admit they are wrong and always expects YOU to admit you were wrong! And amazingly, these NEVER see themselves as a quarrelsome person! Even though they have issues with everyone they associate, they are NEVER the one in the wrong.

Some are genetically predisposed to embrace their "trophy hurts." They do NOT have to coddle such, but their family tree makes it too easy and they do not choose to be different. There are some who truly enjoy each misery in their life! Interesting, some families have children that are very different—one is exactly like one of the parents who is sour in speech and insensitive in their interpersonal actions but another is totally different! How can such a dramatic difference exist? It is all in the personal choice!

Quarrelling's chief culprit—PRIDE (Proverbs 13:10, "Through overconfidence comes nothing but strife, but wisdom is with those who receive counsel").

Some think the world, the church, etc., all revolves around them. They think everyone should be exactly as they are, like what they like, dress according to their opinion, etc. And, they get their feelings hurt when their way is not pampered. Consequently, they become bitter and unforgiving.

"No doubt you have had your share of words that wound. You have felt the sting of well-aimed gibe. Maybe you are still feeling it. Someone you love or respect slams you to the floor with a slur or slip of the tongue. And there you lie, wounded and bleeding. Perhaps the words were intended to hurt you, perhaps not; but that does not matter. The wound is deep. The injuries are internal. Broken heart, wounded pride, bruised feelings. Maybe your wound is old. Though the arrow was extracted long ago, the arrowhead is still lodged...hidden under your skin. The old pain flares unpredictably ... reminding you of harsh words yet unforgiven" (*No Wonder They Call Him the Savior*, 24-25).

🔑 Second, resolve to accept your responsibility in the conflict.

It is hard to admit wrong. Some do it in a way that prevents them from admitting personal responsibility, "I MAY have done some things wrong, BUT HE should have overlooked those mistakes."

Realize that some will never admit their wrong, never apologize for their part of the problem and always demand that you own the entire issue. Such a person is "vexing." All problems are owned by the parties involved. Whatever percentage of the problem is yours, you can only deal with that part. If the problem is 80% his and 20% yours, you can only deal with the 20%! What do you choose to do?

Inspiration counsels, "Why not rather suffer the wrong?" (1 Corinthians 6:7).

Some are so controlled by selfish pride they cannot acknowledge any personal blame. You do what you can do; you say what you can say and leave it to the Judgment Day where all will give an account for the words they have spoken!

Admitting personal blame is essential to resolving conflict.

- 1 Corinthians 6:7, "Why not rather suffer the wrong?"
- James 5:16, "Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. A prayer of a righteous person ... can accomplish much."

🔑 Third, resolve to accept each other "as is."

Accepting another's quirks and silliness is frustrating to some people.

- They exclaim, "I just don't understand why so-n-so acts like that!"
- Here is a fact of life—you do not have to understand every detail about situations—some are beyond understanding. You can become angry because analysis of that irritating action does not explain. You

do not need to become OCD in demanding "WHY?" some do certain things. Their vulnerabilities are different from your faults and you will never understand "WHY?" they do what they do.

- Do not become angry about "not understanding" someone!
- If they have sinned, then the "Why?" is that Satan found their weakness and exploited it, just as he does with you!

If you think that your weaknesses are not exploited and you daily sin, then read again:

- Luke 18:11, "The Pharisee stood and began praying this in regard to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, crooked, adulterers, or even like this tax collector'."
- Romans 15:7—We are bound to extend the same grace to others that God gave to us. "(A)cccept one another, just as Christ also accepted us, for the glory of God."

When you expect others to fit exactly your idea of how they ought to be, unforgiveness will occur!

🔑 Fourth, resolve to be generous in forgiveness.

Consider God's mercy toward you. Consider God's attitudes toward the unforgiving person. "Be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32).

A forgiving attitude means that you will allow others to make mistakes that really hurt you or that are inexplicable to you or that you yourself "would never do that!" This attitude will open doors to resolving conflicts.

🔑 Jesus is clear. Forgiveness is NOT an optional extra—it is essential!

Matthew 5:23-25, "Therefore, if you are presenting your offering ... and ... remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering ... and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. Come to good terms with your accuser quickly'."

Remember 🔑 —if you want generous forgiveness from God, you had better be generous in forgiving others!

Purging the Rock Collection

🔑 In the late 18th Century, a Delaware Indian chief named Tedynscung was told of Christ's "Golden Rule." He found it hard to accept. "It's impossible. It cannot be done," he said. Then he added, 🔑 "If the Great Spirit that made man would give him a new heart, he could do as you say, but not (otherwise)."

🔑 Conflict is inevitable but with God working within each of us, inwardly renewing us (2 Corinthians 4:16, "Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer person is decaying, yet our inner person is being renewed day by day"), we can have new heart power—power to love, accept, and forgive; power to work past "MY WAY" of selfishness to "OUR WAY" of resolutions and peace (Ephesians 4:32, "Be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you").

Colossians 3:8-10, "(Y)ou ... rid yourselves of all of them: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. ... since you ... have put on the new self, which is being renewed ... according to the image of the One who created it."

"One cold wintery day I came upon a woman trying to get her car off an icy spot in a drugstore parking lot. Her rear tires were just spinning in place. One fellow was already behind her car and pushing. I joined him and we pushed, but the car went nowhere. Within minutes six of us were pushing and still nothing was happening. Finally, someone thought to ask, 'Lady is your emergency brake on?' Sheepishly she released her brake and drove off. Finding yourself locked in a repeating conflict cycle is like 🔑 trying to move forward with the emergency brake on—lots of commotion but no motion. Others can advise, encourage, or push but until we release the brakes we will get nowhere. 🔑 The brakes may be our pride or fear or anger or just poor habits of resolving conflict" (K. Durham, *Speaking From The Heart*).

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