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Resentment: Prison wall number two in withholding forgiveness

Wisdom Worksheet

Jesus likened withholding forgiveness to a prison (Matthew 18:21-35). The irony is that the person who will not forgive is the one locked inside the four walls. *Forgive* means “to let go.” In order to forgive someone who has wounded us, we must *let go* of four prison walls that incarcerate us in the prison of un-forgiveness. The first prison wall is *revenge*. The second prison wall is *resentment*.

Remember that in Jesus’ parable of the unforgiving debtor, He described three scenes illustrating the three applications of the story. Scene one portrays the largest debt ever incurred (150,000 years’ wages) being forgiven, or *let go*, vertically from the king to his servant. Scene two paints a similar scenario; however, the debt incurred horizontally between the forgiven servant and his fellow servant is comparatively quite small (a hundred days’ wages). The servant who had been forgiven the largest debt ever incurred will not *let go* of the small horizontal debt with his fellow servant. He wants to *hold on*. Scene three casts a dark reality. Word of the forgiven servant’s behavior reaches the king who responds by throwing the unforgiving servant into prison. Jesus concluded the parable with quite possibly the most sobering words in Scripture, “*This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart*” (Matt. 18:35).

As we see in Jesus’ concluding statement, forgiveness flows from the heart. The Bible teaches us that two heart conditions exist: *proud* and *humble*. A proud heart is hard



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and unforgiving. A humble heart is soft and forgiving. A proud heart holds on. A humble heart lets go. When someone harms us, we either *hold on* or we *let go*. Grace received vertically from God warrants grace issued horizontally to others. Forgiveness is the vehicle that transports grace.

What is resentment?

Resentment means literally *to feel again*. It is bitterness, or a poison of the heart. Jesus said that we should forgive from the heart. The heart is one's mind, will, emotions, and spirit. Whereas revenge emphasizes the will, resentment emphasizes the emotions.

How does resentment affect our vertical relationship with God?

It hardens our heart to His. Job's friend said that the godless in heart harbor resentment (Job 36:13). When we hold on to resentment, we shut out the Spirit of God in our lives. Some even resent God's rebuke, or correction, in their lives (Prov. 3:11).

We drink bitterness—the poison of the heart—that turns us away from God (Deut. 29:18; cf. Deut. 32:32; Heb. 12:15). *God said, "Consider then and realize how evil and bitter it is for you when you forsake the Lord your God and have no awe of me"* (Jer. 2:19, italics mine). We tend to do this in one of two ways: (1) *condemnation* or (2) *license*.

Condemnation is justice without mercy. The prophet Amos wrote that justice turns into bitterness when rejecting God (Amos 5:7). He went on to say that bitterness is poison (Amos 6:12).



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License is mercy without justice. Often times when we harbor resentment, we focus on God's mercy at the expense of His justice. We are so hurt from the offender's sin against us, only to discover that we merely issue license to be hurt again and again.

Forgiveness welds together justice and mercy. This is displayed in its ultimate clarity at the cross of Christ where God's justice and His mercy intersect in the sweet spot of His grace. Forgiveness is the vehicle that transports that grace.

How does resentment affect our horizontal relationship with others?

It hardens our heart to the offender and often to others because we protect our pride. The Bible describes this hardening as foolish. Solomon said that a mocker resents correction; he will not even consult the wise (Prov. 15:12).

This horizontal hardening of the heart occurs in the same two ways as the vertical: *condemnation* or *license*. When we condemn the offender horizontally, we *curse* them (Judges 5:23). The apostle Paul said that the lips of those with hearts hardened to God drip with poison (Rom. 3:13; cf. Ps. 140:3). He went on to say that their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness (Rom. 3:14; cf. Ps. 10:7).

When we issue license to the offender, we *weep* from feeling the pain over and over again (Judges 21:12). This is due to the fact that we issue mercy without any form of justice, or boundaries. Whether, we curse with a heart of condemnation or weep with a heart of license, we continue to feel the offense over and over again. The result is a heart full of resentment and its poison of bitterness. Hubert Humphrey said, "*Bitterness, or resentment, is like drinking poison and expecting your enemy to die.*"



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How do I let go of resentment?

The key that unlocks the prison cell of withholding forgiveness is cross-shaped. In order to let go of resentment, I must humble my heart: (1) vertically with God (receiving His forgiveness of the debt He let go of me in Christ) and (2) horizontally in relationships (letting go of my resentment toward the offender). In order to do this, I must *pour out the bitter* and *drink in the sweet* (Eph. 4:31-32)

How do I let go of resentment vertically with God? (Parable Movement One)

I *pour out the bitter* (resentment) and *drink in the sweet antidote*: God's restoration of forgiveness, kindness, and compassion in Christ (Eph. 4:31-32).

First, I must *pour out* my bitter soul to God (Mark 11:25). In her bitterness of soul, Hannah wept and prayed (1 Sam. 1:10-11). She *poured out* her soul to God (1 Sam. 1:15). David said, "*Pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge*" (Ps. 62:8). Jeremiah said, "*Pour out your heart like water in the presence of the Lord*" (Lam. 2:19).

I pray, or *pour out* my bitterness, confessing my resentment (condemnation or license) to God. I must let go of resentment and its bitter poison. Here is an example: "*God, I am harboring resentment against _____ for _____. I want to let go of the offender's horizontal debt that pales in comparison to the largest debt ever recorded, my sin against you, which you let go of me in Christ. Free me from this imprisonment of holding on to resentment.*"

Second, I must *drink in* God's sweet antidote of restoration in Christ (Ps. 116:12-13). God restored sweetness to Hannah's bitter soul (1 Sam. 1:20). The psalmist said



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that God restores sweetness to bitter souls (Ps. 71:20; cf. Isaiah 5:20). God *pours out* His Spirit of love into our hearts (Rom. 5:5; 1 Tim. 1:14). Christ *poured out* His blood for the forgiveness of sins (Matt. 26:28; Lev. 4:7; 17:11).

I read, or *drink in*, a restorative passage in Scripture each day for a month (for example, Philippians because its theme is *joy*). Peter told Simon the Sorcerer that the word of God delivers us from bitterness (Acts. 8:25).

Pause and let *Wisdom Work*:

Pour out the bitter

Pray the following prayer of confession, repentance, and freedom each day during the next month until you feel the poison of bitterness removed from your heart:

“God, I am harboring resentment against _____ for _____. I want to let go of the offender’s horizontal debt that pales in comparison to the largest debt ever recorded, my sin against you, which you let go of me in Christ. Free me from this imprisonment of holding on to resentment.”

Drink in the sweet

To support your prayer, read through each of the four chapters in Philippians every day for thirty days. Perhaps, read two chapters in the morning and two in the evening. Drink in God’s sweet restoration of joy described by David (Ps. 51:10-12).

How do I let go of resentment horizontally in relationships? (*Parable Movement Two*)



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First, I must *pour out the* bitter poison of resentment and *let go* of all condemnation (cursing) or license (weeping) toward the offender (Eph. 4:31; Prov. 24:17-18).

Second, I *drink in* the sweet antidote of God's restoration in Christ. I recall how the offender has honored me in his heart (see Gideon and the Ephraimites in Judges 8:3). This frees me from seeing the offender as malicious 100 percent of the time. Then, I exhibit *mercy*, being sweet, (kind and compassionate in my heart) to the offender, implementing wise boundaries including *justice* (Eph. 4:32; cf. 2 Tim. 2:23-24).

Pause and let *Wisdom Work*:

Pour out the bitter

Pray daily for the next month that God's Spirit will empower you to pour out all cursing or weeping toward the offender.

"God, through the power of your Holy Spirit, please help me let go of all cursing (condemnation) or weeping (license) toward _____ for _____. I can't do it on my own, but through Christ in me, You can. Give me wisdom to establish boundaries that might be necessary for freedom."

Drink in the sweet

Can you recall a time when the offender honored you?

Write Ephesians 4:31-32 on a note card that you can carry with you, place on your desk, or display in your vehicle. Read those verses aloud each day, allowing the words to penetrate your heart in an effort to memorize them. Then pray the verses to God, asking



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for His Spirit to empower you to be kind and compassionate toward the offender with whom you have held on to resentment. Next, do it—actually forgive horizontally, and be kind and compassionate toward the offender. Wisdom works best when you memorize these freeing verses and meditate on them.

How do I experience freedom? (*Parable Movement Three*)

I keep practicing the *instant forgiveness experiment* in Christ (Eph. 4:31-32). In my heart I not only instantly let go of the first prison wall of *revenge*, I also instantly let go of the second prison wall of *resentment*. To accomplish this, I (1) *pour out the bitter* and (2) *drink in the sweet*.

Pause and let *Wisdom Work*:

Pour out the bitter

Instantly let go of *revenge* and *resentment* when wounded by another. As the offense occurs, immediately give it to Christ. Pray the above prayers, or simply say to Him silently, “*I can’t let go. You can.*”

Drink in the sweet

Instantly receive God’s restoration and forgiveness and release those to the offender through kindness and compassion.