

Exchanging Bitterness & Anger for Freedom & Peace

Good morning Pleasant Hill! How was your week? We had an AMAZING week here at Pleasant Hill. Diana did a wonderful job of organizing and energizing everyone as we had the opportunity to share the love of God with the children who joined us for VBS. We had 17 children who came to talk to Moses, hear from the Word of God how God provides, stays and offers forgiveness and salvation. The seeds of the gospel were sown into the hearts of every single child and renewed in all of us who were there serving them. Thank you Diana for your faithful service to Jesus. You did an amazing job leading us!

Last week, as you know, all of your pastors went to a pastors retreat. I worshipped online with you as Jordan and Ben led us in singing praises to God and closed out our series on what we believe. I hope you feel more confident in being able to give an answer of the hope that is in you now that we spent time going through the Apostles' Creed together.

At our retreat we spent a lot of time praying, planning and seeking God's direction for our church. I want to share a little about it and give you an opportunity to come together next week during the Sunday School hour to be trained and ask questions.

The first thing I want to share with you is we'll be starting our new evangelism strategy beginning in September. Now before I go any further, I need to explain and define what evangelism is. **Evangelism is sharing the gospel, the good news that God loves us and we can be forgiven of our sins, with those who haven't repented and believed.** I'll share with you what that can look like in a few minutes.

We decided that we'll be using the GROW evangelism strategy. Grow stands for God rewards our work. It's really an acronym that allows for four weeks of outreach every month.

Take a look at the calendar on the screens. As you can see there are three full weeks of September; the 5th through the 11th, the 12th through the 18th, and 19th through the 25th. Then you'll see that September ends the following week on Thursday the 30th. Anytime this happens we'll include the full week so the week will go through October 2nd.

I'll ask you to choose a week and try to stick to it as much as possible because it will help you remember when you're supposed to serve on the evangelism team. For example, if I want to serve the first week of every month then I'll be on the "G" team. Our team leader will contact me and everyone on our team and remind us that it's our turn to serve and confirm that we can participate. **What we're asking is that you agree to share the gospel once per month for 60-90 minutes.**

I realize that many think of evangelism as knocking on doors and sharing the gospel. I agree that's one aspect of it but there are so many other ways to share the gospel. I'm not talking about getting a bullhorn and shouting at those passing by at intersections with big signs. I honestly believe that does much more harm than good to the Kingdom of heaven.

You can agree to pray for the lost in our community and those in our church once per week for 60-90 minutes. You can write personalized cards for cashiers at Wal-Mart, Target, Kroger, Meijer or wherever you see them. In the card, tell them that you appreciate all that they do everyday. You realize that their job is hard and they put up with so much to make sure everyone is able to feed their family. Tell them that you pray for them and ask them if there is anything specific that you can pray for them about. It can be as short as that. Then those of us who are going into the field to share the gospel can deliver them. Evangelism can be taking cases of cold water to parks and handing them out to those passing by telling them that God loves them and asking them if they need someone to pray for them.

All we're asking is that once per month for 60-90 minutes every single person in our church is active doing something to share the gospel. This evangelism strategy

simply gives organization and opportunity for everyone, so that everyone is without excuse whether you're worshipping in person or at home. **I invite you to come next Sunday at 9:45 so I can tell you more about it and answer any questions you have.** I'll also need to get 4 team leaders. If you think you might like to be a team leader let me know!

Alright, even though there's so much that I want to share with you, I think we should spend some time digging into God's Word. If you have your Bible with you, and I hope you do, open it to **Matthew chapter 18**. We'll be reading **verses 15 to 35** together. So it's **Matthew 18:15-35**.

We're starting a new 5 week series titled, "Summer Baggage - Weighed Down By The Baggage We Carry". I really want to share with you what God's Word says about the things we carry around with us that we really need to leave at the foot of the cross.

If you're like me, there are things that I have a hard time letting go of. There are things in my past that still haunt me and cause me to stumble. Looking back over my life I have a long list of people who've wronged me. There's a long list of people who didn't keep their word or who didn't stand by me when I've done all that I can to stand beside them and love them.

Does anyone else have a list of names or is it just me? Let's be honest, I may be on that list for some of you. No need to amen that one, let's just let that one rest. In any case, if it were not for some loving, very direct men who loved the Lord dearly pushing me to confess what I was harboring in my heart, I'd still be a slave to the anger and bitterness that lived deeply within my heart. That's why this week's sermon is titled, "Exchanging Bitterness & Anger for Freedom & Peace".

Let's read our passage in **Matthew 18:15-35** together. Jesus was talking and said, **"15 "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he does not**

listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. 18 Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 19 Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."

21 Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" 22 Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times."

23 "Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. 24 When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. 25 And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. 26 So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' 27 And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. 28 But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.' 29 So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' 30 He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. 31 When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. 32 Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33 And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' 34 And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. 35 So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.'"

May God bless the reading of His Holy Word. Will you pray with me? Amen.

How many of you have ever read, studied or heard this passage of scripture before? That's about the response I thought that I'd get. Now, no need to raise your hand on this one, but I have to ask you, how many of you really struggle applying the truth that Jesus taught in this passage in your own life?

You and I know that we're supposed to freely forgive those who hurt us, those who sin against us, because we've been freely forgiven by Jesus. But we hold on to it, burying it deep within our hearts. We do it because it's personal to us. We do it because they should have known better. We do it because our pride was hurt. We do it because our hearts were broken. We do it because we were in the right and they were in the wrong! They were careless, and trampled on us when we trusted them!

It's really important to think about anyone and everyone who you're still harboring hurt feelings, anger and bitterness against as we dig into this passage. It's important to dig up the memories and names of the people who've hurt us before we dig into the passage because sometimes those memories and feelings have been buried so deeply in our hearts that we've gotten really good at hiding our hurt, bitterness and pain. In fact, we even lie to ourselves telling ourselves that it doesn't matter anymore. We tell ourselves that we're over it and the roots and pain of that unforgiveness bore deeper and deeper into our hearts killing the love that God placed within you.

So really, take a moment. Let yourself feel the heartache and pain again. Say their name or names to yourself. Pull up the roots of it so when the Word of God is read and taught, the Holy Spirit is able to kill it off once and for all. I want you to close your eyes and think about who and what you're burying inside of you.

Okay, now that you have it fresh in your minds, let's let the Word of God speak to it and cleanse your hearts. In **Matthew 18 verses 15 through 20** Jesus said, "**15** *If your brother sins against you,*" Let's pause for one second before we read on. Jesus

is specifically talking about believers' interactions with other believers in this part of the passage. He says, *"If your brother sins against you,"*. Who is your brother? Anyone who is part of the family of God. Then who is part of the family of God? Anyone who has repented and believed in Jesus and trusts Him alone as their only hope of heaven is a child of God. So the instructions that Jesus is giving is to those who have received the grace of God and are a part of the Family of God.

Let's keep reading, *"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. 18 Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 19 Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."*

This is the model for church discipline. Jesus just laid out his expectations for how his children should interact together. Because we've all received and enjoy the grace of God there really shouldn't be a step two should there?

I mean Jesus should have been able to simply say, *"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. **WHEN** he listens to you, you have gained your brother."*. Right? I mean there shouldn't have to be the words "IF" or "BUT" in this passage at all should there?

But, Jesus knows me. He knows me intimately. He made me, He called me and He saved me from myself and my brokenness. Jesus knows us all. He knows our pride. He knows our anger. He knows our bitterness and He knows that even though we've experienced the grace of God through His blood, He knows that sometimes our

sinful flesh takes over our forgiven hearts so he gives more grace to us by saying, "but".

Look with me beginning at **verse 16**. Jesus continues by saying, "**16 But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.**".

What's the purpose in confronting someone over their sin? Husbands and wives pay attention here because I think we can all learn a little something from scripture here. The purpose of confronting someone is not to prove yourself right or righteous. According to the Word of God the purpose in confronting ANYONE is to gain a brother or sister. **The purpose for confronting someone on sin is to draw them back into fellowship with the Lord.** It's to keep them from wandering in sin. It's not to show you're right and they're wrong. **It should have NOTHING to do with YOU. It's all about them and Jesus.**

When you repent and believe, you do so because the Holy Spirit opened your eyes to your sinfulness and God's holiness. Were it not for the Holy Spirit convicting our hearts we wouldn't repent or receive forgiveness for our sins. Once we repent and receive forgiveness the Holy Spirit resides in us, sealing for all eternity as a child of God.

When the children of God, who the Holy Spirit resides in, are confronted by the truth of God then the Holy Spirit will convict them of their sin and drive them back into fellowship with the Lord. That's the hope behind what Jesus is saying in this part of the passage. There's the hope that if God's children are confronted by His other children about their sin they'll repent and embrace forgiveness.

However, if the church confronts them and they still refuse to repent they should be sent off from the fellowship of the church as those who are unbelievers, or as Jesus put it, "a *Gentile and a tax collector*".

Jesus' church is holy because HE is holy. He sanctified and cleansed us. It should be filled with grace filled, forgiven saints of God who feel the movement of the Holy Spirit in their hearts and repent when convicted. **A sure sign of someone who is unregenerate is an unrepentant heart.** I didn't say that, Jesus did. But I agree for what it's worth.

After Jesus shares with His disciples about his expectations of forgiveness and church discipline, Peter asks a clarifying question. Look with me at **verses 21 and 22**. *"21 Then Peter came up and said to him, 'Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?' 22 Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.'"*

Again, Peter is asking about his brother, not the lost. After hearing Jesus talk about seeking to restore their brother who is in sin Peter asks Jesus how many times they should do that, throwing out the number seven as a big number. I mean you have to think, if someone has wronged you 7 times, and they do it again, enough is enough right? And Jesus replies not 7 Peter, but 70 times 7.

I realize some of you are good at math in your head and you realize that 70 times 7 is 490 times and you're now thinking about and counting all of the wrongs that someone has against you to see if you've fulfilled the 490 times Jesus mentions. Let me stop you. 70 times 7 is hyperbole. It's not a literal number but it's letting Peter know that we should seek reconciliation with our brothers and sisters in Christ as many times as it takes to gain them. **There is no limit on the grace of God so any attempt we make at limiting it towards someone else is sinful.**

Jesus goes on to share a parable with them about two men and their master. Let's begin reading in **verse 23** and reading through the end of our passage in **verse**

35. Jesus said, "**23** *Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. 24 When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. 25 And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. 26 So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.'* **27** *And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. 28 But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.'* **29** *So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.'* **30** *He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. 31 When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. 32 Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33 And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' 34 And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. 35 So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.'"*

You know, when I read this passage I feel like King David listening to the prophet Nathan. Nathan came to David with a story about two men. One had a great number of sheep and cattle and the other had only one female lamb. If you know the story, the rich man took the poor man's only lamb and slaughtered it for a stranger. David's anger burned inside of him and he declared to Nathan if this is a true story, tell me who did this because they deserve to die! And Nathan told him, "You are the man!".

David had taken Bathsheba from Uriah and committed adultery resulting in a pregnancy. Seeking to hide his sin he called Uriah from the battlefield giving him an opportunity to be with his wife but he refused because his men were still on the battlefield. So David placed Uriah on the battlefield and called everyone else to step

back so that Uriah was killed in battle. David thought his sin was hidden, but God sees everything and now He's calling on Nathan to confront him of his sin. To which David pronounced the judgment he deserved on his own head. He deserved to die for his sin. Nathan confronted David for his sin and David heard him, repented and Nathan gained a brother.

When I read Jesus telling the parable we just read, I think I feel just like David must have felt when Nathan confronted him of his sin. **I am that man!** I am the man who has been forgiven lavishly by the holy, sinless, lamb of God as he covers me in the blood that He spilled for me on Calvary! I am that man!

Jesus compares unforgiving believers to a man who owes an unpayable debt to the King. His servant owed ten thousand talents or roughly what could be earned in about 60 million days of work. In other words his debt was so large that it could never be paid back in this lifetime or thousands of lifetimes. When the man begged for mercy and time, the King forgave His debt because He knew it could never be paid back.

What does the forgiven man do? He thinks about everyone who owed him money that he could have used to repay the king and seeks out someone who owed him a hundred denarii, **or about a day's wages** and demanded payment in full. The man was poorer than he was and begged for forgiveness and time to repay him what he owed and the man who had been forgiven an unpayable debt refuses to hear him and has him thrown into prison.

Can I share something with you? When your self-righteous anger burns against someone because they've sinned against you, I want you to remember that you are a sinner too. I want you to remember that you aren't holy. You aren't righteous. You aren't perfect, but you have been forgiven by the One who is holy, righteous and perfect. **You were forgiven, not because you deserved to be, but because He loved you enough to forgive you.**

By refusing forgiveness and holding on to your bitterness and anger, what you're really doing is declaring sins against you as a greater crime than sins against the holy, perfect, sinless God who delivered you from His wrath to His love by His grace alone.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus trying to remind the **Ephesians** of the same thing. In **Ephesians 2:1-10** Paul writes, "**1** *And you were dead in the trespasses and sins* **2** *in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—* **3** *among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.* **4** **But God,** *being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us,* **5** *even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—* **6** *and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,* **7** *so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.* **8** **For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,** **9** **not a result of works, so that no one may boast.** **10** *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*"

You didn't work your way into forgiveness to God for your sins. You could **NEVER** work your way into forgiveness to God for your sins. Not even if you had 10,000 lifetimes to try, our sin debt is so great we could never be forgiven were it not for the immeasurable riches of Grace that were poured out on us from God alone, lest any man should boast. And believe me, if anyone ever worked their way into forgiveness, they'd boast!

If you're a believer and you're harboring unforgiveness towards someone, there's a reason you feel awful. There's a reason why you feel like your heart is heavy.

There's a reason why you can't seem to get close to God. You weren't meant to carry the baggage of your hurts.

I want to invite you to lay down your burdens, lay down your pain! Leave them at the foot of the cross. Forgive them in your heart, seek them out and confess your sin of unforgiveness and be set free.

Stop carrying this baggage. Let God heal your heart. It's okay. He's got this. You can trust Him. He's righteous. He is able! After writing reminding the church at Ephesus about God's immeasurable riches in Christ, Paul instructed the church in **Ephesians 4:31-32** by saying, "**31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.**".

So that's where we'll begin a time of response today. I'm going to ask Jordan to come and lead us in a time of reflection, meditation and response. Search your hearts for pain, hurt and heartache that you're still withholding forgiveness for. Spend time in prayer confessing to God about your heartache and pain. Let Him know how you feel and then let it go.

I know it's going to be hard. For some of us the pain and hurt go so deeply that they've been buried for decades. Let it go. It's killing you. Leave your baggage at the altar today as you pray. Mourn over it and let it go.

If you're here and you've never received forgiveness from the Father, there's a reason you're here today or watching online. God loves you. I want to ask you to come to me or one of our other pastors after I pray in a few moments. I would love to share with you and pray with you so you too can experience new life in Christ. There is truly nothing you can do or have done that the grace of God isn't enough to cover you.

After you've spent time in prayer, meditation and praise I want to invite you and your family to participate in the Lord's Supper with us. It doesn't matter if you're a member of Pleasant Hill or a member of another church, if you've repented of your sins and publicly embraced Jesus through believers baptism, you're welcome to participate in communion with us today.

We do this in family and small groups as a way to share what God's saying to us and to pray for one another. Will you stand as I pray for you and pray for God's blessing on the elements today. Amen.