



Saying NO to Bitterness

LifeCare Memos[®] Messages of Compassion

Life Is Fragile

While watching the Olympics on vacation at my wife's parents residence in Arkansas, my attention was drawn to a scrolling message at the bottom of the screen. It read something like this: "Family member of men's volleyball coach stabbed to death while touring historic site."

My heart began to beat a little faster, and for good reason. The son of one of our Residents was in my office the previous July sharing with me his excitement about traveling to Beijing for the Olympics. His daughter, a member of the women's volleyball team in the 2004 Olympics in Athens, was married to the men's volleyball coach. During the course of the conversation, he told me that for security reasons he planned not to wear clothing that would identify himself as an American.

When the reports began to surface that the man stabbed was wearing clothing that would not identify him as an American, my heart beat even faster. I went to the computer and discovered, to my shock and horror, that it was Todd Bachman who had been stabbed to death in a tragic and random act of violence. My heart went from beating faster to feeling broken – broken for Todd's family and for his 88-year-old father, my friend.

What a sobering reminder to all of us that life is fragile... very fragile. Our world can literally and tragically be turned upside down in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.

Response to Tragedy

When I returned to Park View a few days later, I shall never forget the words of Todd's father. He has given me permission to share. He said, "My first response was one of bitterness. But then I realized that **bitterness and my Christian faith were not compatible!**"

The author of the book of Hebrews obviously also believed that concept to be true as he wrote these words:

"Try to live in peace with everyone....Watch out that no bitter root rises up among you, for whenever it springs up, many are corrupted by its poison!"
(Hebrews 12:14-15)

What a vivid analogy the author uses in this text. The picture he paints for us is one of a tenacious root, stubbornly growing unchecked in the soil of a person's life. When bitterness burrows underneath the surface of a person's life, it slowly develops an intricate network of roots that anchors it to the soil. Once bitterness sprouts to the surface, it quickly bears its poisonous fruit.

The clear warning of the author of Hebrews is that when we first sense that a bitter root is rising about the surface of our soil, we should immediately unearth the soil around it and dig it up. If we are not diligent about this process, it will be just a matter of time before *"many are corrupted by its poison."*

A Lesson from Plants

My friend, and Todd's father, obviously knows a lot about growing plants: in fact, it has been the family's business for over 80 years. Once I asked my friend, "What's been your secret to growing plants?" With a gleam in his eye, he simply said, "Sterilize the pots!"

That's not only a good tip for growing healthy plants, it's a good tip for living our Christian faith. If we don't sterilize our lives and remove the root of bitterness, our lives will be poisoned.

Watching out for bitter roots means we must consistently and continually remind ourselves:

- How bitter roots grow. Bitter roots start with an offense, and then proceed through the stages of resentment, hatred, grudge-keeping and even revenge!
- If forgiveness is not given at each sign of growth, the next bitter stage will be unavoidable.
- If there isn't forgiveness immediately after an offense, then resentment will begin to grow – it's unavoidable.
- If there isn't forgiveness during the resentment stage of the growth of a bitter root, then hatred will push its way above the soil – it's unavoidable.
- If there isn't forgiveness during the hatred stage, then a grudge will begin to appear like a green shoot on a plant.
- If there isn't forgiveness during the grudge stage, then the flower of revenge will ultimately bloom with its poisoned aroma.

Forgiveness has been defined as "the fragrance the violet sheds on the heel that has crushed it."

Ultimately it is GOD's place to deal with the offenses of others, not ours. The tendency for all of us to look for opportunities to personally deal with, and pay back, the offense of others caused the Apostle Paul to write these clear words of exhortation to the believers at Rome and in turn to each one of us:

*“Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Do things in such a way that everyone can see that you are honorable. Do your part to live in peace with everyone, as much as possible. Dear friends, never avenge yourselves. Leave that to **GOD**. For it is written, ‘I will take vengeance; I will repay those who deserve it.’ says the **LORD**”* (Romans 12:17-19).

What We Can Do

If we were completely honest with **GOD**, we would all have to confess that there are currently some bitter roots at various stages of growth in the soil of each of our lives. The clear warning of **GOD**'s Spirit is that if we allow those bitter roots to keep growing unchecked because of our unwillingness to extend complete forgiveness, many will be corrupted by their poison.

- Some of us need to forgive the recent offense of a sibling, parent, child, spouse or friend before that offense grows to resentment.
- Some of us need to forgive the offense of a sibling, parent, child, spouse or friend that occurred a few weeks ago before our resentment grows to hatred.
- Some of us need to forgive the offense of a sibling, parent, child, spouse or friend that occurred a few months ago before our hatred grows to a grudge.
- Some of us need to forgive the offense of a sibling, parent, child, spouse or friend that occurred a few—or even several— years ago, before that grudge grows to revenge.

All of us need to make the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi our prayer:

*“**LORD**, make me an instrument of thy peace....where there is hatred, let me sow love....for it is in pardoning that we are pardoned.”*

Highland Goodman, 190109

LifeCare Memos[®]

When experiencing the stresses of life, people need support. The Psalmist needed that support and found it when he turned to **GOD**. He said, *“**Look to my right and see; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one cares for my life. I cry to you, O **LORD**; I say, ‘You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living’”*** (Psalm 142:4-5).

LifeCare Memos are designed as messages of compassion that integrate biblical guidelines for emotional and spiritual well-being. Topics focus on various life-care issues and address them from the perspective of Scripture.