



Scott Turansky, Senior Pastor
March 13, 2016

ROMANS 12:14

Romans Series: How God Changes People

[PRAYER] Lord, so many things happen in our hearts on Sunday morning. There's that solemn time that we have as we open our hearts during communion before you and ask you to speak to us. There are times that are kind of friendly times when we're light-hearted as we interact with each other and learn about what's going on in each other's lives. And then there are those times when we're exercising our mind and trying to understand your word and what you're saying to us as we listen to teaching. And we have a ministry time, Lord, where we can get prayer and we can enjoy just having others pray for us. Lord, all of those things fit together in this hour, hour and a half, where we're together. So I just pray that you would have your way in each of our hearts today. You know which parts of that morning are needed most by each person here. We ask that you would touch us deep within our hearts, you'd help us to be the people you want us to be. We ask, Lord, that you'd do a great work in us. And now as we open your word we do so with anticipation and ask that you would speak to us through this one verse from your word. In Jesus' name, amen.

We're going through Romans 12 and we're looking at twenty different things that characterize a Christian. Those twenty things are pretty significant. So I don't want to easily jump over them because they're so important. I think that if you listen to the things that I'm saying and you read the word in this passage and you meditate on each one of these phrases, God will do some interesting things inside of you. He'll prepare you for the challenges that you're facing every day.

Sometimes God asks us to do things that I think are just impossible without His grace. They are just so hard. They're just so hard to understand. In fact I would suggest that many people don't even understand Christianity when it comes to some of these kinds of things. But we do what God says, not because we understand it, but because we believe in it, and so it becomes this walk of faith. That even though we don't understand it, we take a step forward and we say, "Okay, God. Even though it doesn't make sense, I'm going to do this thing that you've called me to do."

Those things are hard things to do. They're counterintuitive. They don't make sense sometimes, but we do them because it's a walk of faith and we're moving forward. I like to call this upside-down nature of the Christian faith. God has called us to much more than we're experiencing. It's radically different.

So when Jesus wanted to teach His disciples about becoming great and going up the ladder of success, He talked to them about becoming a servant. Something that's so counterintuitive. Jesus would spend time at the home of tax collectors and sinners. The people around, the religious

leaders of the day would say, “What is He doing? Why is He doing that?” Because it was so counterintuitive.

Jesus was radically different and He calls us to a radically different lifestyle. He became the king of the world, the King of the Jews. And how did He do that? A lowly baby born in a manger, not in a palace, and died on the cross to save the world. It’s so counterintuitive, but God knows what He’s doing. He does amazing things.

When you start thinking about it in terms of the Christian faith, it starts to make sense that God has called us to something different. But if you’re outside of that and you’re in the world it doesn’t make sense at all. So your friends are going, “You’re going to church again and it’s Tuesday? You already go to church on Sunday. Now you’re going to church on Tuesday? What’s wrong with you? There are so many things to do. Why would you waste your time on Tuesday and do that when you’re already going to church on Sunday?” It’s counterintuitive for people.

I think when we respond to each other and respond to the challenges of life, when we’re following Christ it just is different. One spouse doesn’t bring up the faults of the other spouse. Why? Because we’re trying to live life according to Christ’s guidelines and honor each other. A child forgives a parent for the problems that that parent has. Or someone has made a mess of their lives and it’s their fault, yet we still look for ways to support and encourage them. All of that is counterintuitive, but it is what God has called us to do.

Today I want to look at one verse that is so counterintuitive I had to illustrate it all with what I’ve already said. Because if you look at these next words we’re going to read there, so bizarre of what Christ has asked us to do. It’s just uncanny.

Look at Romans 12:14. I’m going to read this verse to you. I’ll put it up for you to see as well. The word is this: *Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.*

Bless those who persecute you. You know the word *bless* comes from *eulogeo* which is where we get the word eulogy. Which means to say something nice about someone. So that makes it very practical that when someone is persecuting you (and the word *persecute* there doesn’t necessarily mean persecuting you for your faith), the word means to harass.

Now that should be very practical. I’m sure there are people that are harassing you. When people harass us the word comes from to run away. They persecute you so you’re trying to get away from them. They’re being mean to you. That happens at work. That happens in the neighborhood. That happens when we’re driving. That happens in our homes. That harassment takes place.

So we’re saying what are we to do in that situation. We are to bless people. The obedient Christian doesn’t just put up with it. The obedient Christian doesn’t just tolerate it. But the obedient Christian goes even further to bless them.

I think this is not only difficult, I think it's impossible to do without God's grace. But just think about what God's grace is for a moment. Remember God's grace is this thing we receive unmerited favor. We do not deserve this grace that He gives us. Because we are sinners, we violated God's commands, yet He lovingly has given us something we don't deserve. So we experience that and so He forgives us in spite of our sin.

We are to take that same idea and turn it around and we bless or we give to someone good words, even when we're being harassed. That is hard. I guess it's the difference between mature Christians and those who are not mature is the ability to understand this idea of returning good to someone who is giving us bad.

I'm not just talking about in court, although sometimes that's the case. I'm talking about even in our own homes. If someone mistreats you and you quickly come after them with some kind of a comment, that's what we're talking about here. If someone is harassing you in some negative way or saying something negative to you and you want to run away, but instead you fight, that's the wrong response here. This is unnatural.

Sometimes when I'm working with parents and trying to help parents, a parent will come up to me with a question and say, "My child's doing this thing. Is this normal?" That's their question. Is this normal?

I always have to stop there and I have to say, "I don't think you want normal. There's a lot of normal things going on in this world."

"Well, is it natural?"

"I don't even think you want natural. I think you want spiritual."

So we set a standard for our kids that's different than what other parents have for their kids because we want our kids to move a particular direction. We want spiritual, we don't just want natural.

God wants to do a work in us. But I think inside of us, in our hearts, we want to balance the scales. That's what the world says. I'm going to balance the scales. Tit for tat, eye for eye. You give me something; I'm going to give it back to you. So we exchange these verbal jabs or get revenge on someone.

I like the story of the military officers who were renting a house. They had a Korean boy that came with the house to do the housekeeping and do some cooking for them. He is such a good-natured young guy and so they started playing practical jokes on him. They nailed his shoes to the floor. Another time they put a bucket of water over the door, so when he opened the door the water fell all over him.

But he was always so upbeat and cheerful, always so friendly, and it didn't seem to faze him a bit. So the officers started feeling guilty about how they were treating him. So they decided to stop playing the practical jokes on him. They decided they weren't going to do that anymore.

They sat him down and they said, “Look, we’re sorry for the way we’ve treated you. We’re not going to do any of these practical jokes on you anymore because we feel like they’re being mean to you. So we’ve decided to stop doing that.”

The boy looks up and he says, “No more nail shoes to floor?”

“Yeah no. We’re not going to nail any more shoes to floor.”

“Oh! And no more water over door?”

“Nope. No more water over door.”

“Okay. No more spit in soup.”

That story illustrates, I think, what’s common in our own hearts. We may not do it outwardly, get revenge, but in some subtle ways we find ourselves getting revenge on other people. I think that that’s what happens in many of our lives. It’s the normal reaction to start attacking or doing something in some way to hurt someone else when we’ve been hurt.

Now some people think that this command that we’re talking about is so that we can witness to other people. So that the other people will see God’s grace working out. It is true that although this is very difficult to do, it is possible that in some cases someone might experience God’s grace in the midst of that.

We’ve heard stories about violence taking place – a shooter coming in and shooting people, and then finding out later in the press or even in court that someone says, “I forgive this person.” It’s only by God’s grace that they can do that. Sometimes the affect that that has is not on the person who was the shooter or the person who was the perpetrator, but it’s those people that are watching who say, “Yes. Wow. Something’s going on in this person that I’m interested in.” So there is a witness factor that takes place when we practice this particular verse in scripture.

But I want to talk to you about another benefit that’s not just for those outside or those other people. I want to talk about the benefit that happens in the human heart to the person who is the victim, the person who is being hurt. It’s very important for us to understand this benefit, so I want to point it out this way. I’m going to put several phrases up here that I think are key points that I think will help us understand the value of taking this principle that we’re to *bless those who persecute us; bless and do not curse* personally in our own hearts.

God didn’t design the human heart to be able to carry around the responsibility for personal injustice. Our heart is too small for that. So when you take your heart and try to then take on personal injustice and try to balance the scales, bad things happen inside of the heart. It starts damaging what happens to us.

See, the alternative to blessing those who persecute us is to harbor anger in our hearts. It starts to eat away at us. It starts to do damage inside of us because the heart is where those emotions take place. God did not create us to be able to do that. He hasn’t done that.

Does that mean you can never take a stand for righteousness? When someone’s doing the wrong thing and point that out and say, “No, you need to stop,” or that we can stop people from doing... No, that’s not what that means.

We see times in the scriptures where Jesus was harsh with people, He was firm with them, or where He took action because they were doing the wrong thing. We see the disciples making a statement that says we are not going to obey the human authorities; we're going to obey God. But that's the key. We're not doing it for personal revenge. We're doing it because we're obeying God. So there's plenty of room for us to take a stand for righteousness. That's very important for us to do.

It's very important for us to realize what happens to us in our human hearts. As soon as you start moving toward revenge, it starts increasing your ugliness factor. I'm not talking about your face, but it is true that a lot of people who are bitter become ugly on the outside. This ugliness works itself out from the inside out to people who have habits of being so ugly on the inside.

I'm talking about being ugly and ugly in the sense that other people can see this ugliness from this bitterness that's developing in you, but also you start to see it yourself. You become uncomfortable with it. You don't even start to like yourself. It becomes the hardest person to live with is yourself and so it's very dangerous for us to harbor these kinds of things in our lives.

So we have a choice. We're going to bless those who persecute us and embrace that whole line of thinking that we're going to learn more about today, or we're going to get revenge and become ugly. Those are the two options that we have.

I want to show you what this looks like inside of the human heart because God has designed the emotions to take place inside of the heart, so I want to show you what this is going to look like in some practical terms.

Let's start with the word hurt because there's a lot of different hurt that people can experience. You can fall and skin your knee. That's one kind of hurt. Or you could have some kind of an accident and get hurt. Although the same truths apply to that kind of hurt that I'm going to talk about now, that's not the kind of hurt talked about in this passage.

The hurt talked about in this passage is when there's somebody, a person inflicting some kind of pain on you. They're harassing you. So this is very much a personal dilemma. That's the kind of hurt we're looking at.

I want you to understand that sometimes the hurt is real hurt. Where a bully comes up to you as a young person and punches you. That's a real hurt that you've got to deal with somehow. But sometimes it's a perceived hurt. That you as a young person go to your mom and dad and say, "Can I go to that party on Friday night?" Your mom says, "No way. You're not going to that party," and you go, "I can't believe I live in the strictest family in the world." So you start perceiving it as hurt. Whether it's real or perceived, it still passes through the heart and you have to know how to deal with it.

So many people when they experience hurt in their lives respond to that hurt with anger. The reason they do that is because the anger is a response to some injustice. They say inside of their

hearts, “That’s not fair.” When they’re being persecuted or harassed or hurt in some way, they say, “That’s not fair and I’m mad about it.” They have this anger that’s a response to injustice.

What happens though in their response is that that bitterness starts to grow from revenge. So the revenge comes and then comes the bitterness. So the revenge is that response. “I’m going to get back at this person.” Sometimes in a home that’s the silent treatment or that’s the leaving the mess out for the other person to clean up. To somehow get back at them with some revenge.

What that does, when you start engaging in the “that’s not fair so I’m going to get back at you,” it starts to build this bitterness inside the human heart. Bitterness can be defined as hurt plus anger. Bitterness is hurt plus anger together. The problem with all of this cycle is that it ends up with unhappiness. So the person who follows this cycle becomes a very unhappy person. But this, I want you to know, is the primary way that people respond in the world today. This is what they assume is right. This is how they feel like they can balance the scales because they believe that if they balance the scales they can feel better.

It just doesn’t work. That’s the problem. Because then they live in fear that the other person is going to balance the scales again and we’re going to have a problem. It is not the best way to approach this. But this is why people stay in this upper cycle. They become ugly on the inside because they say to themselves and they say to others, “I’m right!” There’s a lot of “right” people today who are ugly on the inside.

One young man said to me, “If you had an annoying brother like me, you’d punch him too.” Well he believes that he’s justified in punching his brother because he’s annoying. “I’m right. I’m justified.”

There are a lot of people today who get stuck up here and they become an ugly person because they’re “right” and they’re doing what they think they should do. And so they’re stuck up there. They’ve got this anger, so they’re lashing out continually and they’re always “right.”

So there’s another important statement that we need to make that I put in a box for you so you can get it. It’s not good enough to be right; you also need to be wise. It is unwise to stay on that upper cycle because it turns you into an ugly person. Paul is trying to address this. We’re going to see how Jesus addresses it also later on in another passage.

Now how are you going to be able to address this? Well I would suggest that God gives us a different plan. I’m going to show you what the other alternative looks like and I’m going to demonstrate it from God’s word in 2 Corinthians. But let’s look at what the plan is first of all.

Imagine two boys, five years old, are running and they both fall down and skin their knees. One five year old boy gets up and he starts hitting Mom. She wasn’t even part of the problem, but that’s his way of handling pain. So he got hurt, he starts lashing out. There are people that are like that. As soon as they get hurt, everybody else knows it because they’re hurting other people. Another boy gets up after skinning his knee. He gets up and he’s comforted by his mom. He’s crying. That’s a whole different response. That’s a response of sorrow that God would have us

have. Because sorrow softens the heart, anger hardens the heart. That's the difference between the two.

Now when you experience sorrow, what do you need? You need comfort. That comfort is very important. We need to know how to receive comfort because comfort is not achieved by eating more food or imbedding yourself in video games. We have to learn how to experience that comfort in a very specific way, and when we do then it does something inside of us. You know when you've been comforted that it does this thing inside of you. It makes you feel...I use the word gentle. But you know that "Ahh. I've been comforted." That's the response.

God has a plan for that. Remember it started with hurt. That plan is that it turns into a ministry and that ministry then is a way for you to help other people. Of course when that takes place then that makes you a happy person.

Now if we take this bottom cycle, I want to show you where I get this from God's word. Because it comes from 2 Corinthians 1:3-4. I'm going to put the verses up so you can see them or you can read them in your own Bible.

This is what they say: *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort (now watch what he does with the God of all comfort part) who comforts us in all our troubles (all of our hurt He comforts us), so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.*

Do you see how it turns into a ministry for us? We can now take the comfort we've received from God and we can turn it around and comfort other people. It's been said that one of the greatest gifts that a parent can give a child is comfort. Because when a person is comforted then they learn something very important inside their hearts. Of course we're emulating what God wants to do deeper inside of their hearts and so we want to help them understand that.

Now in order to take this path, this bottom path that we talked about, in order to take this bottom path, we have to believe and we have to practice. So I want to talk to you about what we believe because the things that we say to ourselves are very important.

I think just reading this passage that says *bless those who persecute you*, you run right over to the next one. Right? Oh yeah, I got that. But I think that hidden within those words (*bless those who persecute you*) is a secret principle for life that God wants. In order to be able to do what He's talking about there, to avoid the bitterness that grows in our hearts, to have that sorrow response, we must think differently and we must act differently.

So I'm going to talk to you about the things we believe here and I'm going to talk about how we practice it. In both cases I want to go to the scriptures because I want the scriptures to speak to you and I want to talk about what Jesus is our example.

The first I want to take is the one in 1 Peter 2. I want you to understand that Peter is writing to Christians in his book 1 Peter and he's telling them how they should operate as Christians. This is how Christians function. You might say, "Well you don't know my situation. If you knew this

person who is mistreating me...” So that’s the kind of statement we make. “If you only knew my situation then you wouldn’t be saying the same things.”

Peter is going to speak to us in that regard. He’s going to take the situation of slaves. That’s what he’s going to talk about. He’s going to talk about slaves. The situation where none of us are slaves, and he’s going to take this idea and communicate a principle to these people who are in this difficult situation as slaves. We can take a principle out of this and apply it to the situations where we are harshly treated because that’s what he’s going to talk about. Slaves that are harshly treated.

Let’s read it. *Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. Also to those who are harsh. Fascinating. For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering (that’s the injustice, the unfair part) because they are conscious of God.*

Now I underlined *conscious of God* because I want you to go back to the Greek, which is translated in the King James Version, because this is what it says. The conscience is facing toward God. That’s what it means there. The New International Version is correct by saying *they are conscious of God*, but it’s even more descriptive by saying my conscience is facing toward God. In other words I’m doing the right thing and my conscience confirms that. If I know I’m doing the right thing, even though I’m being harshly treated, that’s commendable before God and I can feel this sense of satisfaction inside of me, this stamp of approval that I’m doing what’s right, even if I’m being mistreated, because my conscience is facing toward God.

Now some people have a conscience that’s a little bit skewed up and so their conscience says, “In order for me to feel at peace, I need to get even with the other person and then my conscience feels fine.” That’s not the conscience we’re talking about or the way God describes it here. Our conscience needs to be doing what’s right, not getting revenge. If we’re doing what’s right, even though we are being mistreated, then we can feel okay inside because we are approved by God. We don’t have to have our approval or our sense of worth based on whether we measure up to this other person’s standard or whether we can talk back to them or what have you. I am doing the right thing before God and because of that this is commendable.

Now he goes on to elaborate a little bit. *But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? That doesn’t do any good. But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.* So being commendable before God is your reward. So even in this midst of mistreatment you can enjoy the fact that God puts His stamp of approval on you as a person.

To this you were called. That’s a really important statement here. You’ve got to understand God has called you to this. This isn’t an accident. This response of kindness to injustice is part of God’s calling for you. It’s part of what it means to be a Christian, as we’re talking about in this whole series.

To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example (good, we need an example) that you should follow in his steps. Because we say, “How in the world can I do this? My pain is really great.”

He (this is Jesus) committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. When they hurled their insults at him (imagine the family, insults being hurled at you, or workplace), he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead this is the key of what we think about. This is how you’re going to be able to do this. We’re going to follow Christ’s example by following this last statement. Instead, what did he do? He entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

Why do you give this injustice to God? You give it to God because He has a bigger heart than you do. Our hearts are too small to carry on the personal injustice that we have in our lives. So we have to turn this over to God who has the bigger heart and He can carry it. It’s like having a suitcase. He can carry the suitcase. It’s bigger. It’s too big for me to carry. So I give it to the Lord and allow Him to do this. We have to think rightly. We have to entrust ourselves to God if we’re going to be able to do this. He’s bigger. He has a bigger heart than we do. You can’t carry the load of injustice. If you try, you become ugly. Hey, that’s what we’re learning here in this passage.

Now I told you there’s things you have to believe and this is one of the things you have to believe is that God has this big heart and that you can transfer the personal injustice to Him, just like Jesus did as a model, entrusting Himself to the Father. We do the same thing with personal injustice. We give it to the Lord.

But now I want to talk about the practice part of this. We’ve talked about the belief part, now we have to go to the practice part. The practice part is very important too because we have to work it out in our lives. So we’re going to go back to Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. Back to Jesus. He’s the one with the wisdom.

He says, “But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies.” This is so counterintuitive. But see, Jesus is going to give us the steps. This is what you practice if you want to have the heart that is free from bitterness. If you want to have a heart that’s free from the resentment inside, then this is what you’re going to do. You’re going to love your enemies. You’re going to do good to those who hate you, you’re going to bless those who curse you, you’re going to pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also.

This is so bizarre for any of us to think about. Because it’s okay to think about it here at church. But imagine being hurt in your situation. If you’re home and the damage that’s been done to you by someone else and you start applying this, you go, “This is ridiculous.” This is so counterintuitive, but remember God is doing this for your benefit because of your heart. He wants your heart to be free from the chains that bitterness creates in our lives.

If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you. If you love those who love you, what credit is that? Even sinners love those

who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great.

Sometimes people say, “Oh. I’ll finally get a reward when I get to heaven.” See, the reward isn’t just in heaven. The reward is right now. Because now your heart becomes this free place of peace instead of anger that’s going on inside.

You will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. So God’s mercy goes to people who don’t deserve it, wicked people, damaged people who are sinners. In the same way when we extend mercy, God does something deep in our hearts and that is the reward that we have.

Let’s go back. Do you ever take a stand for righteousness? Yes. Sometimes you take a stand for righteousness. Sometimes you have to go to court. Sometimes there’s abuse going on and you need to stop that. So I’m not suggesting that we don’t take action when that action is necessary. But you have to separate the external action you’re taking from the internal thing that’s going on inside of you. So it’s very important for you to address the internal stuff so that you’re not motivated to take action here based on personal revenge.

If you’re festering that internal revenge that’s going on inside, you become an angry and bitter person. It’s a dangerous place to be. You can get consumed by hate and revenge and retaliation.

Of course a supreme example of this is Jesus Christ who did everything right. So even if you do everything right you can get crucified. Okay? So He’s being crucified and what does He say in the midst of that? He says, “*Father, forgive them because they do not know what they are doing.*” So even in the midst of that He releases this instead of getting retaliation and revenge.

The first martyr, Stephen, when he’s being stoned says, “*Lord, don’t hold this offense against them.*” There’s something really special about taking on this approach to life as opposed to revenge.

See, I think retaliation is wonderful. It’s like smoking a cigarette. I don’t smoke cigarettes, but people who smoke cigarettes do it because they like it. It does something for them. It gives them some benefit (at least temporary because it’s sort of killing them on the inside). So smoking cigarettes is great. Just like revenge, it’s really great. Retaliation. Snorting cocaine is really great. Getting drunk is really great because it does some temporary satisfaction to something. But in the end when those things take place it does deeper damage on the inside. It starts damaging a person’s body in the one sense or their heart in another sense. Retaliation and revenge is what you see.

Hollywood would be broke if people didn’t like revenge. The payback. We like to see the payback take place. The logic of retaliation is this: fight fire with fire. When you fight fire with fire, what do you get? More fire. Things start burning up, including your heart. When you pay

back evil to evil, it starts to damage you inside. And so Jesus comes up with this radical notion. He says you should fight fire with water, that you should fight evil with love.

If you want to know how spiritual you are then you're going to answer this question about when you're faced with some kind of persecution in the sense of hurt, harassment, want to run from it, how do you respond? What happens in the midst of that situation? When things get tense, when you experience disappointment, how do you react? When you have unmet expectations, how do you handle it? When things aren't fair, what are you going to do? You watch what happens in the midst of that and you'll know how you're doing spiritually.

If you take a rag, you may not know what's in the rag until you squeeze it. But when you squeeze that rag you're going to see whether it's clean water or dirty water or if it's milk or poison. We squeeze it and it's going to come out. I would suggest that in our lives when we experience pressure then that stuff comes out. It may come out like a volcano that just erupts all over the place. It may come out like a popped balloon just expending all of the pent-up energy. What happens when you're under pressure?

I think the only way that we can experience what God has for us is if we are totally committed to Him and we allow the Holy Spirit to work in us in a powerful way. To live like Christ is not natural, it's supernatural. Only as we yield to the Holy Spirit can we ever hope to exhibit the life that Christ has called us to live. You will never do anything more Christ-like than respond to harassment or problems or hurt with grace and kindness and a blessing. You'll never do something more important for your heart than to release that bitterness and that hurt that is there.

This is how it works. Let's start at the beginning. Do you have a problem with bitterness? I'll tell you how you can tell. I can measure if you have a problem with bitterness. If your anger comes more often than it should or your anger is greater than the situation warrants. So now you're getting angry more often than you should and you've got a small incident that's erupting in a large amount of anger. That's a sign of accumulated anger that's inside that's just ready to come out. It's called a greater propensity for anger. So if you're experiencing that then you'll know, boy, I've got a bitterness problem. Bitterness is hurt put together with anger.

I want you to know today that you can be free of the anger by releasing it, letting it go through forgiveness (that's God's word), but releasing the anger and letting it go. But I want you to know you'll be left with the hurt. I can't take the hurt away. Only God can take the hurt away and He does it through His comfort. In fact some of that hurt will do something to that heart to make it soft inside so that you can have a ministry to care for other people.

Don't use anger to cover up the pain because you're missing out on the opportunity God would have for you. When you're able to do that, you're able to release that anger to the Lord, give it to Him, then He takes that hurt that you will experience in depth. It is very painful. I know for many people it's just so painful. It's heart wrenching, overwhelming hurt. In those moments you come before the Lord and experience the comfort that God wants for you. God will do something in that heart. I don't know that He ever takes the pain away. Whenever you think about it you'll still experience that pain, but now you think differently about it because now you also, along with the pain, experience the mercy and the grace and the comfort of God.

That is so overwhelming, it is so powerful that now you have a message that you want to share with others so that when you see someone else hurting like you've been hurt, you see that person, that hurt that you experience is not you come out with revenge to attack the person, you want to comfort the person with the comfort you've received. That's the message of 2 Corinthians 1 and, of course, this one phrase that Paul has chosen to include in his list of twenty things, that we are to *bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse*. I think it's one of the secrets to the Christian life. It's one of the gifts that God has given to us.

So if you're not a Christian today here, you've never accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, that's your first step is to receive His mercy and grace and to allow Him to come into your life. He wants to do that and then He wants to operate and change the things on the inside.

But the message today isn't just for non-Christians. It's for all of us who are Christians. We need to be continually cleaning out the heart. We need to be continually asking God to do that deeper work.

That's why we have a ministry time after the teaching time. It's a time of prayer where you can bring even the smallest thing to the Lord and you can say, "Hey, would you just pray for me about this thing that's going on at work or this thing that's going on in my home, this thing that's going on in my heart," and just have other people pray with you that God might do some great things. It's a time of ministry. It's a time of allowing God to do something special inside of your heart.

So as we sing this next song I'm going to invite our prayer counselors to come up here up front. If you'd like prayer this morning for anything in your heart, anything that God reveals to you, I just want to come up and allow us to pray for you during this time. While we're singing the song we'll be a little bit quieter, but you can sing along in the song or you can just pray for yourself or you can pray for other people. Just let God speak to you in the midst of this ministry time together. Alright?

Let's stand together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we come before you right now and we know that this is an area that you have marked out for us to consider. You mention it here in Romans and also in Matthew that you give us an example that's talked about in 1 Peter. There's so many ways that living for you is different from the world. Lord, we want to have that heart that's free from the bondage of revenge and bitterness and retaliation. So I pray that you would speak to each one of us in each area of our lives. So now, Lord, as we have this ministry time, we bring all kinds of requests. Not just this one, but others that are burdening us this week. We come before you and ask that you would do a deeper work in our hearts through prayer. We believe in prayer, Lord. We believe that you allow us to access your power through it. In Jesus' name, amen.