

How to Heal a Broken Relationship

- All right, hey, it's an honor to have you. Thanks for joining us live or online. We're in Song of Songs, an Old Testament book of the Bible, chapter six. And this week's topic is, how to heal a broken relationship? And so if you're married, this applies to you, but if you're breathing, it also applies to you. We've all got relationships and at some point those relationships get strained, they get broken, they get burdened. Is there any hope for them? There is. And so we'll apply it today to marriage, but it really applies to every marriage. So here's the situation that we're going to address in Song of Songs 6. There's this couple, they were getting along, everything was going great and then one day they kind of got on each other's nerves and she felt a little rejected and dejected, we looked at this last week, he stayed too late at work, she was home. Let's just fill in some of the blanks with their own imagination, she had dinner on the table, "Where's my husband? "He didn't tell me he was gonna be late. "I don't know what's going on." And then all of a sudden it's getting toward bedtime and he's still not home, he's still late at work, so she gets a little frustrated. So she goes to bed without him and locks the door to punish him. I know you've never done this ladies, but if you can believe it, that's what she did to her husband. And so what happens then, he comes home late at night, he's been working too long and she feels rejected by him, so she responds by rejecting him. He's knocking on the door of their bedroom and she won't let him in, he's trying to pick the lock. No luck. Eventually he just leaves. He bails, he walks away, he disappears, he goes somewhere else. And she now realizes maybe he has a good reason he was at work, "Maybe I should have at least attempted to work this "situation out rather than rejecting him." So she goes and pursues him. And this is that point in the relationship where we're not in a good place. We disagree, we argue, we have some conflict, some hurt, some disappointment, whether real or imagined, but they're gonna come face-to-face and they're gonna have a conversation to try and overcome this problem. So here's what we see. First off, someone needs to go first. And in this occasion it's gonna be the wife. She rejected him, so she pursues him. Song of Songs 6:2 and 3. So she says, and if you're new, it's a series of conversations and love songs between a man and a woman. She says, "My beloved has gone down to his garden, "to the beds of spices, "to browse in the gardens and gather lilies". And she says, "You know what? "I am my beloved's and he is mine. "we've got to figure this out, "we've got to get through it." "He browses among the lilies". So what she knows is he's gone to the place that he tends to go when he wants to be alone. How many of you ladies are married and your husband has a place that he just goes to when he wants to be alone? Man cave, golf course, chicken wings distribution center, in this occasion, what it is for him, he's got this nice garden and it's beautiful place to be, it's quiet and he can collect his thoughts and sort of process. She says, "I know where he is. "He feels hurt, he feels rejected, he feels neglected, "and as a result I need to pursue him." In every relationship, we're always gonna have a point where we're not in a good spot. This can be in your marriage, this can be with your kid, or your parents, or your friends, or your coworkers, your extended family, whatever the case may be. But when there is a conflict, somebody's got to go first. And in this occasion, she pursues him because she rejected him. It doesn't always work this way: one person's got to start. But if it's the person who feels like maybe the majority of the responsibility for this painful moment is my responsibility, if they go first that's usually the best course of action. And what they're gonna do now, they're gonna get together, they're gonna get

face-to-face and they're gonna talk it out. So here's what we see. ""Good endings make for new beginnings." They're gonna end their fight and then they're gonna begin their flirt. That's where we find it in Song of Song 6:4-10. And he says, "You are as beautiful," we like that, right, ladies, "as Tirzah, my darling, as lovely as Jerusalem, "as majestic as troops with banners." And now they're looking at each other in the eyes. Now how many of you, you're married, you're dating, you're fighting, and as soon as they look at you and they give you that look, you're like, "Dang it, I can't fight anymore. "You're winning, you have the superpower "where you make me like you." Okay, that's where they are. "Turn your eyes from me; they overwhelm me. "Your hair," he says, "is like a flock of goats "descending from Gilead." And I know it's weird he's like, "You remind me of an animal. What it is is, it would be like if there were a bunch of goats coming down the mountain, and as a result the sheen of their coats was like her black long, dark hair. "Your teeth are like a flock of sheep "coming up from its washing." She's got great dental work, each has its twin, she's not playing hockey in Canada, she's not British, she's got good dental work, all her teeth are in place, not one of them is missing. "Your temples," probably cheeks, "behind your veil "are like the halves of the pomegranate." She's got rosy red cheeks. "60 queens there may be, and 80 concubines, "and virgin beyond number; "but my dove, my perfect one, is unique, "the only daughter of her mother, "the favorite of the one who bore her. "The young woman saw her and called her blessed; "the queens and concubines praise her saying, ""Honey, you're one in a million, you're the best, "there's nobody like you. "I can't stand mad at you, you're too cute." And then the wise council jumps in. "Who is this that appears like the dawn, "fair as the moon, bright as the sun, "majestic as the stars in procession." And so when they come together face-to-face, this is really a significant moment, how many of you have tried to reconcile a conflict via text? How did it go?

- [Congregation] Does not work.

- It does not work. How about an email? You're like, "We're fighting like crazy, "I'll just send an email. "That'll fix it." No, it doesn't. It just doesn't. And ultimately what you've got to do, you've got to get some time, you've got to get together, and you've got to get face-to-face. When you need to have a difficult conversation with anybody, you need to carve the time to sit down and be in one another's presence. Part of this is, so much of our communication is non-verbal, right. Looking into someone's eyes, are they sad? Are they angry? Are they hurt? Do they love me? Is their heart hard? Really, sometimes the eyes are the gateway into the soul, and the facial expressions tell you a lot. And so they get together and they are face-to-face, and immediately as soon as he sees her he starts speaking to her, and it's quite lovely. So at this point, they've calmed down, they had a bit of an argument, but they've calmed down, he says, "You remind me of Tirzah and Jerusalem. These are two beautiful cities in the Bible, maybe two of their favorites. Think about where you have been, your favorite places to go. Just think of the places you've made the most significant memories. He may be referring back to their dates, or their honeymoon, or to their times away. "Remember when we went here, remember we went there, "we made all those good memories. "I don't like where we are, "but I like where we were and I wanna go forward "into a better place." And he says that she is quote, "beautiful, "lovely, majestic, perfect, unique, his favorite, blessed, "and to be praised." And just to make sure he

covers all the bases, he talks about her eyes, her hair, her teeth, and her face. And what he's telling here is this, "I feel hurt. "I feel rejected. "Last night did not go well, "we're in a bad place, "but my heart for you has not changed." I still feel the same way about you that I always have. And what he's doing here, he's repeating a lot of the compliments that he gave her early in the relationship. And so very early on, he's putting her on safe and secure footing. What he's saying is, "I still love you. "I care about you. "Yes, we're in a bad place, "but I wanna get through it 'cause I wanna be with you. And so what we see here as well is something that counselors will call attachment theory. Grace has done a lot of work in this area, and I'm studying in it a bit as well. Attachment theory is, I can't be attached to you unless I feel safe with you. It's hard to be close to someone if you find them to be unsafe or dangerous. By him complimenting her, by him looking her in the eye, by him responding to her pursuit, he's proving that he's safe and that he wants to be attached to her. And what we see as well is that they have now calmed down. We've just looked at where did he go to? Well, he got kicked out of his bedroom. And that had to be embarrassing, when you're the king. You rule the nation, you get home late, all the employees are, "Welcome home sir commandant." And you go up to your bedroom and the door is locked, and they can hear you like, "Hey, let me, let me in." The dude rules over Israel, but not his own bedroom. That's kind of embarrassing if you're a man. And then he's walking downstairs, they're like, "What's going on sir?" He is like, "I don't wanna talk about it." They're like, "Okay, wife one, husband zero." That's the score. Little bit humiliating for him. He's a little bit embarrassed. But ultimately what we see here is he's calmed down. And when it says that he's gone to the garden, he's not run off, he's not rebelling, he's not in a dangerous place, but he's calming down and processing. Now the brain science today is really curious, you give science enough time eventually it catches up with the Bible, and the brain science tells us that we basically have two portions, two halves to our brain. One is, I'll call it the junior high brain, the other is the adult brain, okay. Do you know the difference? Have you ever seen a junior high kid? True or false? They could be a little more emotional, a little less rational. Something in the moment is the biggest thing in the world, and everything is urgent and everything is important. There's a part of your brain that is a little more emotional, a little more responsive, a little more immature, and a little more prone toward exaggeration. And you'll know that you're in this part of your brain when you feel highly emotional, when you're very anxious, when you're fearful, when you feel hurt or unsafe. And this part of your brain is very reactive, so it can be very over reactive. Now, without naming your spouse, how many of you, you can look at him when you're having a fight and you know they're in that part of their brain. You just know. How many of you when you're in a conflict with someone, you can just tell by looking at them like, "We're in that part of the brain." Is it hard to make progress when you're processing in that heart of the brain, that part of the brain? It's not hard, it's impossible. How many of you have seen a little kid that's in that part of the brain, and you're trying to reason with him and that's not going to accomplish anything. Ultimately, we need to then move to the other part of the brain. It's a little more reflective, it's a little more rational, it's a little less emotional, it's a little more objective. And it allows us to process things without immediately reacting and or overreacting. This is a clearer part of the brain. Now, one part of the brain that makes a lot of sense. If you're in danger, you need to react, right. If something requires immediate response, you need to react. But when we live in that part of our brain, especially in our relationships, we just dial everything up to 10, we

get louder, more intense, more emotional, more hurt. All of a sudden things become more intense and we don't resolve the conflict. And so what we literally need to do, we need to ask, okay, "What part of the brain am I now processing in? "And if I'm in that part of the brain," that's let's say the junior high part of the brain, "how do I pull back and then start the process "in the more adult portion of the brain?" And the Bible gives us some clues. It says, "To be transformed by the renewing of our mind." What it means is you've got think about this different. Like the way you're thinking about this isn't gonna work, this needs to be changed and transformed. The Bible says too, "To take every thought captive in obedience to Christ." It's like right now my emotions are driving and God isn't. Like, I haven't invited Jesus into this, I'm just sort of feeling and accelerating my way through it. And so what we see here is that this couple is really doing something that is a great model. When he felt rejected, she locked the door, he's embarrassed, he can't go to bed, he can't be with his wife. He's very hurt, he's emotional. We read that he previously tried to pick the lock and tried to break into the room. That's a guy, he's a little frustrated. And here though, what she says is, "He went down to the garden, he sat there, "he prayed, he processed, "and when we came together, we were both in our right mind. "We were calm, we were rational, "we were not overly unhealthily emotional." Have you ever heard this statement? Two people are arguing, have you ever heard this statement? "There needs to be at least one blank in the room?"

- Adult.

- Adult. And usually what happens in a marriage, and you know you're both in the wrong part of the brain when you're arguing like little kids, you're emotional, you're loud, you're irrational, and you're just bickering and going at it. An hour later when you've recalibrated and you're no longer triggered, you're like, "My gosh, we were seven years old for about an hour there." We were seven. It didn't make any sense, but we were just a little crazy. And sometimes in those moments, you pull back to reset so you can reenter and process in the other portion of the brain. And so what they're doing here, they're face-to-face and they're gonna through their issues. And I wanna talk now about forgiveness and repentance. That's what we're gonna talk about. And in any relationship, there can't be a relationship unless the sin, and the issues, and the pains, and the problems are dealt with. Sin divides; problems separate; issues cause separation. And unless they're dealt with, you can't be close, whether this is a friendship, a marriage, a child, or a coworker. So what I wanna do now, I wanna pivot into this theme of the Bible of repentance and forgiveness. And we just saw it as a case study in their marriage. But here's the big idea. "Forgiven people should be forgiving people." Jesus praised this in the Lord's prayer. "Forgive us our sins "for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us." Let me just, here's the big idea. Forgiven people need to be forgiving people." What Jesus praise is, all right, when you pray like this, "Hey Father, please forgive us just like we forgive them." It assumes what? We forgive them. Here's what I find. I don't know about you, me, I get more excited to be forgiven than to be forgiving. If you're like, "Hey, do you wanna be forgiven?" "Totally." "Do you wanna forgive them?" "No, they're nasty, they need to die. "That's what needs to happen." And so forgiven, forgiving this relationship should be the pattern for those relationships. And then Jesus is on the cross, He's dying in our place for our sins, and Jesus

says, "Father," he prays for us what? "Forgive them." So here's the big idea. You can't have a relationship with God unless you're forgiven. You can't have any relationships unless there's forgiveness. If you're here right now, you need to know that not only do you have relational problems with people, but you have a relational problem with God. Just as sin comes between people, sin comes between people and God. And so what God has done for us, he has chosen to deal with our sin so that we can be forgiven and have a relationship. So Jesus comes to the Earth, and I love that Jesus prays for forgiveness and then He dies to answer His own prayer so that we can be forgiven. And so Jesus is the only one who's never sinned. The reason that we have all of our relational problems, and I know that our world is a divided world, it's a conflicted world, it's a nasty world, it's a cruel world, it's a selfish world, there's lots of problems. And under all the problems is one problem: everybody's a sinner. And what sinners do, they hurt one another. And as a result, it's hard as a sinner to have a healthy relationship with another sinner. Two unhealthy people really struggle to have a healthy relationship. And God knew that we would never be the solution because we're the problem. And so God decided that he would send His Son, Jesus Christ, God became a man, and Jesus alone never sinned. That's what He said. He said openly and publicly, "Who can convict me of any sin? He lived a perfect life. And then He goes to the cross and He takes our place: He substitutes himself. And what does He do? He dies so that we could be forgiven. And then He rises to have that reconciled relationship with us. If you're here, let me tell you this, of all of your problems, your biggest problem is that you need Jesus Christ. That's the biggest problem. And once that problem is dealt with, with God, then He helps us deal with all of our other problems. Once this relationship is brought back together, then He can mend all the other relationships. And so Jesus is the way that we are forgiven. And there's no relationship with God, there's no relationship of any sort or kind once, or apart from forgiveness. So then Paul picks up this theme, "Put on then," for those who are Christians, if you're here and you're not a Christian, you need Jesus, you need forgiveness, you need God. "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved," God loves you, "compassionate hearts, kindness, "humility, meekness and patience." We don't feel like that when they've hurt us, when they've rejected us, when they have disappointed us. "Bearing with one another," and if one has a complaint against another, what? "Forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, "so you also must forgive. "And above all these put on love, "which finds everything together in perfect harmony." So here's what he's saying. "God forgave you, now you need to forgive them." So let's just be honest, you guys are kind of quiet tonight, it's like a Librarians for Christ conference. So give a little, what would some of the reasons be, permission to speak freely, why would it be that we would not wanna forgive someone? What would be the things in our mind or in our heart? You say, "I can't forgive them because?"

- [Congregation] They're gonna do it again.

- They're gonna do it again. And you know what?

- [Congregation] They probably are.

- They probably are. There's an honest witness, they probably are. So in our relationship with

God, did He look at us or look at you and say, "I'm gonna forgive you once, but don't ever do it again "because all you get is one chance." How many of us have sinned against God doing the same thing more than once in the last hour? Okay, so other reasons why you're like, "I can't forgive them because?

- [Congregation] They don't deserve it.

- They don't deserve it. And the whole point is? That's what grace is.

- [Congregation] We don't deserve it.

- I don't deserve it. It's not like I can look at God and be like, "Hey, I'm awesome, you're welcome. I don't deserve forgiveness 'cause I didn't do anything to earn it, Jesus did.

- Yep.

- That's right.

- Since He paid the price, it's a gift of grace to me. And so the point is this, like, "Well, I didn't earn it, so they don't have to earn it." If I'm gonna receive it as a free gift, I need to give it as a free gift. What else? I can't forgive them because?

- They hurt me.

- I'm bitter.

- I'm bitter, I can't forgive them. They've hurt me. And sometimes what we think is, ah, okay, this is where we're gonna go into meddling. We transition from teaching to meddling right here. "What they did is so wrong, I just can't forgive them." And I know some of you, all of you have been through terrible things, and some of you have been through far worse things than the rest of us have, including myself. Some of you have had betrayal, abandonment, abuse, trauma, like "I can't forgive them. "What they've done is too evil and too wrong." And what I would say is, "I'm sorry for that. "It's genuine and real." But the most significant victim is God. I mean, just think of everything that we've done to God. And I don't know about you, there are a lot of things in relationships in my life where I'd say I'm at least partly responsible for the conflict. Now, God is always perfect, which means that all of the conflict, and all of the abuse, and all of the rejection that He has endured is completely, unequivocally, totality our fault. And what I would say is, it's hard to imagine, but just think, think of looking at that person who really hurt you, wounded you, betrayed you, and saying, "God forgives me and maybe God will forgive you, "but I can't forgive you." Because in saying that, what we're saying is, "What you've done to me is worse "than what we've done to Him." 'Cause if He can forgive us, but we can't forgive them, they must be worse. And and the truth is, if God can forgive, we can forgive.

- Now I wanna be careful about this. Jesus paid an incredible price to have a relationship with us, to have a relationship with me. And the Bible refers to that relationship kind of like a marriage. So the Bible says that Jesus is the groom and the church is? The bride.

- The bride.

- So this is like marriage. Question. Did Jesus have to get crucified for His marriage? Are you gonna need to get crucified a little bit to be married?

- Do we have to? So it'll be like, "Mm, I don't know, I'll pray about it." No, I'm just telling you, they're gonna be, now I'm not saying that what we're suffering even from our spouse if we're married is equivalent to what Jesus endured. But He got crucified for His quote unquote "marriage," you're gonna get crucified a little bit if you wanna have a marriage. You're gonna have to endure a little bit. There's gonna be a little injustice and a little pain. And when those moments come, there's really only two options. We forgive or we choose bitterness. So let me talk about bitterness. When Grace and I first got married, we went on our honeymoon to the Oregon Coast, and we were 21 between our junior and senior year, we checked into this little bed and breakfast cottage, we got bikes that go down to the beach, and there was a creek going through a property and deer running around, it was really idyllic. And as we went to check in, we didn't know anything about this place. And the gal checking us in apparently was a Christian, we didn't know that. Checking in, she's like, "Oh, you just got married?" "Yeah, we did. We're so excited." And she said, "Well, I'm a Christian "and I feel like I'm supposed to tell you something." I was like, "Okay." She said, "Do you mind if I tell you?" I was like, "No, we're we're Christians, that sounds great." She said, "Okay, hold hands, stand together." I said, "Okay." She said, "You need to know "that you're not one another's enemy, "but you have an enemy, and the enemy "at some point in your marriage is gonna want you to think "that your spouse is your enemy." And it reminded me, Satan did even show up until Adam and Eve were married. And I thought, "Well, that's adorable. "Good advice. Thank you." Obviously Grace isn't my enemy, she's my wife and her name is Grace. So she's God's grace to me. Many years later, we were married, I think we had all five kids, we were having an argument, kids were in bed, we were in our bathroom, and we were both in the junior high side of the brain, or at least Pastor Mark was. And we were arguing and it was escalating, it was getting worse, not better. So it's getting worse. And so God told Grace something and He said to her, "Tell Mark you're not his enemy." So she looked at me and she said, "I'm not your enemy." And I said, "Yes, you are."

- [Congregation] Wrong answer.

- Yeah, wrong answer. Yeah. That did not lead to the great intimate evening that I was anticipating. And so ultimately she looked at me and she said, "No, I'm not. That's a lie." And I believed a lie. The enemy lied to me and told me that Grace was my enemy. And as long as I believe that lie, I would side with our enemy against my wife rather than side with my wife against our enemy. And it just dawned on me, I mean, I'd been teaching the Bible, at that point for quite a long time. I knew about forgiveness and bitterness and, but in that moment I wasn't in

my right mind. I was seeing my spouse, my wife, my best friend, not through the lens of her love for me and her relationship with God, but out of my hurt, out of my woundedness, out of my frustration. So let me do this for the sake of time. I'm gonna skip the next slide. Let's skip this one. Here's my question I want to arrive at. Is there bitterness? Here's what it says. Hebrews 12:15 and 16. "See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God: "and that" quote, "root of bitterness springs up "and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled "that no one is sexually immoral or unholy." Let me just say there's a ton to unpack there. "See to it, first of all, "that no one misses out on the grace of God." And so what it's saying here is, everyone should get grace from you.

- [Congregation] That's right.

- Now this doesn't mean that they get eternal grace from God. Like you can love and forgive someone, but they've still got to straighten stuff out between them and God. But what he's saying is, as God's people our life is to be about putting grace on other people, just like God has put grace on us.

- [Congregation] That's right.

- Then he goes on. "That no root of bitterness springs up." What a root of bitterness is, it's something that oftentimes is in your heart, it's unseen, and it's there for a while, and it's digging in until it springs forth, and now it's visible. Just like a root underground; it can burrow in, strengthen itself, get nutrients, and eventually then it springs forth. Bitterness is like that. It gets into the heart, it gets into the soul, and sometimes you don't even know it's there until it springs forth and it births death. When I was a little boy, my dad told me to go pull the weeds in the yard, and I didn't want to. So I thought I'll just get a weed wacker and all weed whack all the dandelions, surely that'll fix it. And so I weed whacked all the dandelions, and we had more dandelions than grass. I don't know why the ratio was wrong. So I weed whacked all the dandy lines and I thought, "Well, there I fixed it." Did it make it worse or better?

- Worse.

- Worse.

- You know what I got? I got a lot, like, I was all of a sudden, like I have a brand new superpower of making more dandelions. That's what I can do. The dandelions just multiplied because I never got the root. Bitterness is like that. You get upset, you get angry, you get hurt, you lash out, you make bad decisions, you have anxiety, you can't sleep, you're frustrated. You're like, "I've got to deal with this issue." No, no, you've got to deal with the issue under the issues. It's the root of bitterness. And what he says is that eventually the root of bitterness grows up and it defiles everybody. This is where all of a sudden what's coming out of you about someone else in front of your kids is poison. Some of you grew up in homes where the things that mom and dad said about each other when the other wasn't present but the children were was catastrophic.

This is where people start leaking and venting at work. And heaven forbid that they get on social media, all of a sudden they're just defiling many. Like there's bitterness in here and it needs to infect and affect everyone out there. And what it says is that ultimately many become defiled and then you become sexually immoral or unholy. Adultery is the result of bitterness. Adultery is not a thing in and of itself, it's the consequence of a bitter root. When you're bitter against your spouse, you think, "I deserve better, I deserve more. "They owe me. "They didn't give me what I wanted "so I'm gonna go get it for myself." All of a sudden that leads to sexual sin, immorality and unholiness. Oftentimes people will say, "In our relationship "we've got problems with adultery," and I would say, "Actually, you have problems with bitterness." 'Cause you can deal with your lust all day, but until you dig out your bitterness, that root will come back. Bitter people think "It's okay what I watch online 'cause I don't see "what I like in my life. "It's okay if I flirt with someone else "because I don't get the response I want at home. "It's okay if I choose a work spouse, "which is a relational unhealth with someone at work "because I don't get my needs met at home. "It's okay if I slide into my DMs or contact an old, "you know, college girlfriend or boyfriend "because my marriage is a bit disappointing." Bitterness is really the issue under all the issues. And sometimes bitter people, and let's just be honest, we've all been bitter about someone or something, none of us every time we've been hurt has responded like Jesus and just prayed for their forgiveness. And sometimes what we'll do when we're bitter, we'll rename it so that it doesn't sound quite as bad. Hurt, disappointment, a wound, grudge, beef, axe to grind, resentment, brokenness or offense. And I had a season, I had many years, I'm being honest with you, it's just us. I had many years in our marriage, even as a Christian and a pastor, that I was bitter against my wife. She hurt me, and I'm not gonna tell you what it was 'cause that's what bitter people do. They tell you exactly what happened to sort of get you to align with them against the other person. And so Grace did something and she was repentant of it, she apologized for it, she never did it again, but I chose not to forgive her. That was my sin, not hers. That was my sin, not hers. And we'd be doing okay in our marriage and then something would happen, and then we would be in the junior high side of the brain or at least Pastor Mark would, and then it would escalate and it would always end up with the mushroom cloud. And I was like, okay, I can't think, I've got to be better, "I've got to be kinder, I've got to be more loving. "I preach good sermons, "I probably should listen to one." 'Cause the person who's not getting grace from me is a girl named Grace. And I realized the real issue was that every time we got into a certain argument or conflict, I became an archeologist. What does an archeologist do?

- They dig up the past.

- They dig up the past. So I would go take, "Oh here's what you said in 1997. "Here's what you did on 1993." And I would bring the past into the present so that I could control the future. And it was bitterness. And what bitterness causes you to do is to take a shovel and be an archeologist and keep bringing the past to bear in the present. And then I was so convicted, we were on vacation, how many of you fight on vacation? You know why you fight on vacation? You have extra time, that's why. "We have extra time, now we have more time to fight." And so we're fighting on vacation, and God just dealt with me very sternly and was like, "You're just bitter against Grace. "Like this was years ago but you keep bringing it up." And God convicted me that

I didn't need to use a shovel to dig up the past but to dig up the root, the root of bitterness. And this was primarily between me and the Lord. It had a lot of consequences for Grace, but it was primarily between me and the Lord. So I went out and I bought a shovel, little sort of decorator shovel and it had a little mason jar and it was like a country kitsch decor. And I took an old school handwritten receipt and I put in there "Grace Driscoll's debt is paid in full," and I put this verse on it. And I said, "Honey, I will use the shovel, metaphorically speaking, "to dig up the root of bitterness, "not to dig up the past." And grace put it between our sinks in our bathroom, and I have to look at it every single day. And if I don't obey it she'll hit me with a shovel. So that's where we find ourselves. But the point is, you're gonna be hurt and you can either forgive or be bitter. And what happens is, you're only one person and if you're a bitter person against anyone, it affects your relationship with everyone. If you're bitter against your dad, it will affect your marriage. If you're bitter against your ex, it will affect your kids. If you're bitter, it infects you, there's only one you, it brings out the worst version of you for everyone else. So here's the equation. Repentance plus forgiveness equals a healthy relationship. Let's try to run through this fairly quickly. Repentance plus forgiveness equals healthy relationship. Any of you ever been canoeing? Okay. So if you go canoeing, let's say it's two people going canoeing together, the key is both people need to get their oar and they need to row together, otherwise?

- You keep going around.

- This is what a lot of marriages feel like. You're like, "I'm getting sick, and we're going in a circle, "we're making no progress and we're getting exhausted." And so one of you gets an oar and it's called repentance. The other gets an oar and it's called forgiveness. And at times you're gonna trade oars. Forgiveness is the oar that you get when they've sinned against you. Repentance is the oar that you get when you've sinned against them. At times you're gonna trade oars. My question to you would be, who do you need to forgive? Like Jesus says, "from the heart." And here's what the oar of forgiveness is, it's overcoming the sin to be healthy. "You know what? "This brokenness, this hurt, this bitterness, "it's bringing out the worst version of me, not the best. "I wanna be healthy and get to the other side." Accepting their repentance. If they say they're sorry, accept it. It's between them and God. And then releasing them from punishment. Sometimes punishment is the silent treatment, it's control, it's, "you owe me." Let me say what forgiveness is not. It's not ignoring what happened. It's not ignoring it, it's dealing with it. It's not necessarily trusting the person. You can forgive in an instant, and maybe trust takes a little bit of time. I wanna be careful not to weaponize this. But let's say you find out that your spouse has been communicating with someone covertly, sliding into their DMs or texting. You're like, "I didn't know about that," and then they get caught. You're like, "I forgive you, "but I don't fully trust you yet, "cause forgiveness is free, but trust is earned. "Maybe now we need to share passwords "so that we have total, open and honest, "transparent life and relationship "so we can rebuild broken trust." Forgiveness is also not a religious form of control and weaponizing. What religious people like to do, they like to put forgiveness at the finish line not the starting line. Well, here's the 10 steps to earn your forgiveness. "And I need to see the signs of repentance, "and you need to prove it to me over time, "and you don't seem contrite enough." No, put it at the starting line where Jesus does not at the finish line. They work from it not for it. And then lastly,

you know you've, how many of you, okay, I can just feel it. I'm not getting as much affection as I was hoping. Okay, let me ask you this. Just could you do me a favor, just close your eyes for a second. Holy Spirit, please show them who they need to forgive. In Jesus' name. Amen. Okay, open your eyes. If you saw a face, if you remembered a name, if you were taken back to a moment, that's someone you need to forgive, there may be a root of bitterness there. Now how do you know that you've forgiven someone? Do you want to know? Some of you say, "But I already forgave them." Okay, question. How do you know you've forgiven someone?

- You can bless them. Jesus says, "Bless those who do evil against you." And if you're like, "Well, I can forgive them, "but I can't bless them." Blessing is how you know you've forgiven them. And sometimes blessing is, "I'm just not gonna say what they did." Sometimes blessing is, "I'm just gonna pray God's best for them." Sometimes blessing is, "I'm gonna do something to make their life better, "even though they tried to make my life better." If you're at the point you're like, "I forgive them, but I can't bless them." You've not forgiven them. Question. If you're a Christian, has Jesus forgiven you?

- Yes.

- Yes. And has he blessed you?

- Yes.

- Yes. And so we need to be forgiven and forgiving, and we need to be blessed and blessing. The second is, the second oar is repentance, and I'll let this briefly and bring God up, bring Grace up, rather. It's owning your sin. Repentance is not, "You're too emotional." That's not repenting. Repentance is not, "Hey, if I've ever said or done anything that hurt you," "I'm sorry." Does that feel real genuine from the heart like Jesus says? Like, "Oh my gosh, this changes everything." What they're basically saying is, "I'm not sorry for anything, "but I'd like to pretend once so we could be done with it." It's owning it. It's also not partial confession. "Well, I did a lot, I'll confess a little, "so hopefully they don't find the rest and we can move on." It's owning it. It's saying, "I was wrong, that was sin. "I am sorry." It's owning it. In addition, it's apologizing to both God and the person. When we sin, we don't just sin against them, we sin against Him. So you're like, and let me tell you this, if you need to repent to somebody, you need to own it. Go meet with God first, and then I tell you what, He'll get your heart ready to meet with them. You're like, "You know what? "I was talking to God, I was wrong. "I don't have any excuse. "That was inexcusable, that was painful. "I'm not here to defend myself. "I'm gonna be totally honest about exactly what happened. "Maybe there's some stuff you don't even know. "But I've met with Him, now I need to meet with you. "I'm gonna be honest with Him, "and I'm gonna be honest with you." And then lastly, it's reversing your sin and future. "It's, you know what? "I don't like this version of me. "When I say that, I'm not proud of that. "When I do that, I'm ashamed of that. "I know that it bothered you, "you need to know it bothers me." "And as a result, I wanna change, "and I want God to help me change. "And I want you to get a better version of me." Now, if you have this heart and you're face-to-face, unless the person has tremendous bitterness inside of

them, they are going to? They're gonna give you grace, and you're gonna give them grace. And grace is the only thing that can sustain a relationship. I'll close with, I'll close with one thing and then we'll bring Grace up. And I'm going a little longer than I'd hoped, but I feel like we need to go a little slower than I thought. Sometimes the reason we have a hard time forgiving someone is we think, "Well, why would I give them a gift?" Like, "Why would I give them "this gift of grace and forgiveness?" Let me say this. When you give them a gift, you're sharing God's gift with both of you. And there's a guy named Luskin, he wrote a book called "Forgive for Good". He runs the Forgiveness Project at Stanford University. It's not a Christian book. The best Christian book written his R. T. Kendall's book, "Total Forgiveness". And he'll be preaching here again in a bit. But he just did this study of people who try to forgive what happens to them. Physically you get better, you have less ulcers and heart attacks and headaches. You have less sleepless nights and anxiety, that literally bitterness starts to physically break the wellness of your body. And when you forgive, physically you start to heal. The same is true emotionally. Have you ever met somebody that's just, they're bitter, they're hurt, they're broken, and maybe we even understand why. Like they've been through trauma, and pain, and betrayal, and I understand, but because they're holding onto it and they're not forgiving it, because they're carrying it and they're not sharing it with the Lord, emotionally it has broken them. They're just a hurting, wounded, defensive, maybe controlling or hopeless or domineering person who's just not well. It's because they've allowed the pain to be the Lord of their life. They've not invited the Lord over their life to heal that pain. In addition what happens is, mentally you start to just heal. When you have bitterness, and anger, and hurt and you're frustrated at them, every time they're blessed, you're triggered. Every time you hear their name or see their face you're frustrated. If they have a good day, you're having a bad day. And it starts, heaven forbid you're checking in on them on social media just to peer into their life and just put all that torment in your mind. And by forgiving them or saying, "Lord, I just released them to you. "I forgive them. "I don't know what their future holds, "but that's between you and them, "that's not between me and them." And I'm just gonna start thinking about you and my future, not about them and my past. In addition, what happens is relationally you start to be able to enjoy healthy relationships. If you're an unforgiven broken person, you're not well. I love you with all my heart, I truly do, but you can't have healthy relationships. What you're looking for are people who will align with you in the fight. You'll look for people who have been through the same trauma and are in the same broken place so that now you have allies. You'll find people who will excuse your brokenness or your hurt and you can't enjoy healthy relationships. God loves you. God forgives you. God pursues you. God blesses you. God has hope and a future for you. God wants to serve you. God wants to heal you. God wants to fill you with His spirit so that you increasingly become like His son, Jesus Christ, the best version of you.

- [Congregation] Amen.

- God wants you to enjoy your life. God wants you to enjoy His grace. God wants you to be free from your worst day and move on to the better days. And when you forgive someone, you are not just letting them get away with something, you're letting yourself get away from everything.

- [Congregation] Amen.

- You're unburdened, you're freed, you're healed. The best version of you is the repentant version: I own it, and the forgiving version: I'm gonna let it go. I'm gonna bring Grace up. We'll do a little Q&A, and then we'll tell you what we're gonna do next. Can I just pray for you? I feel like it's heavy in the room. Father God, I pray against the enemy of servants, their works and effects. God right now the enemy wants to come in and bring condemnation, which is the counterfeit of conviction. He wants to bring law instead of grace. He wants to bring death instead of life. God, I thank you in Jesus' name that we can be forgiven. I thank you in Jesus' name that we can be blessed. I thank you in Jesus' name that we are pursued. I thank you in Jesus' name that you forgive us not just seven times, but 70 times seven. And God, I thank you in Jesus' name that there is a way to deal with sin, there is a way to restore a relationship, there is a way to heal hurt, there is a way to mend brokenness, and it's through repentance and forgiveness. God, I'm sorry. The person I've offended, I'm sorry. God, please forgive me and help me to forgive them. God, I pray for a lifting of the burden that so many have been carrying. I pray God, that they would be able to move forward, in joy and in faith and in freedom. And I pray God that they would enjoy a healthy relationship with you and one another. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

- [Congregation] Amen.

- Hey friend, that got really, that got heavy.

- Yeah. It's a heavy topic.

- I'm sorry that I had years where you lived under my bitterness.

- I've already forgiven you.

- I know, I appreciate that. Otherwise we wouldn't be here.

- We've both had a lot to forgive for, and I'm thankful that God has exposed that so that we can continue to work on what that looks like to have health and healing in our marriage.

- So I just, kind of, just a thought. Sometimes a couple will say, "We fell out of love." Do you think that they fell out of forgiveness?

- Absolutely. Yeah. They're usually bitter at that point. They will not look at each other in the eye anymore because they know that there's hope if they do. And I think, yeah, it's not really, I mean there's days that you wake up not feeling like you love each other, but it's a choice to continue to love each other and work toward an amazing relationship that God has. So if we do it his way, it'll work, but if we get off track and get bitter, it doesn't work at all.

- Do you wanna answer a question or should we just go on date night?

- Well, we've got nine minutes. It's a good question. It says, "For Grace. "What tips do you have on how to balance "respecting your husband while holding your ground?" I remember when we wrote our "Real Marriage" book over 10 years ago, you asked me to write the chapter on respect. And I thought, "Okay, I've got this. "I'm good at this." And I gave it to you after pouring into it for a while and you said, do you remember what you said?

- No, I'm afraid to ask. Afraid to ask.

- You said, "This isn't good." And I was mortified "Like, what do you mean this isn't good? "I wrote this chapter, I spent time on it. "You asked me to write it." I really struggled in that moment with being disrespectful to you, and I had just written the respect chapter. And so I remember going back to the Lord and just praying, "Lord, why isn't this good? "It's all right, it's all scripture. "It's everything is correct in this, "theologically and everything." And the Lord convicted me that there were areas that I was bitter and I wasn't respecting you in our marriage. And I couldn't write the chapter again until I dealt with that. And so I had to go back and repent to you of ways that I had been disrespectful, in ways that I was bitter, resentful. And then God allowed me to write the chapter, and then I don't even remember writing it because the Holy Spirit wrote it, and people say, "Oh that was really helpful." I'm glad the Holy Spirit allowed me rewrite that. But you were, you knew in that moment, even though you didn't know that I had been disrespectful necessarily, I mean you probably did at times, but the Holy Spirit, all this to say, the Holy Spirit does a way better job at convicting us than each other, we cannot change our spouse. So no matter how much ground we try to hold, respect comes from our love for each other, and God asks the husband to love the wife and the wife to respect the husband. And if our heart isn't in a place of wanting to love and respect, then we will do exactly the opposite. And so for me, I have had to learn to pray constantly to have a heart of respect for Mark. And that looks different for him than it does for all of your spouses. So I could sit up here and tell you all the ways that he feels respected, but you need to check with your spouse how he feels respected specifically.

- On the same, too, sweetie pie, the Bible says, "Husbands love your wives." You better ask your wife what that looks like.

- Yeah.

- Otherwise you know your wife's like, "That doesn't feel loving to me. "It may for another woman." And this is where you've got to have the conversation about how do I love you in the way that is loving for you?

- Yeah. And I think for us, I thought it was loving when we had issues for me to just be quiet and to kind of become a doormat. And that was the respectful wife, right? No, it's not because that's not me loving you.

- Well that's not helpful.

- It's not helpful at all. And so then as I started healing from my trauma and realized, "Okay, yeah, "I guess I do need to speak into that," then I found my voice a little too much and was disrespectful in that season. And then the Lord really had to do a work in me to learn how to actually respect you with my words, with my tone, with how I even treated you in different scenarios. And I mean that was like 10 years into our marriage. We did a lot of damage those first 10 years to each other and just not stopping to say, "Okay, where is that root of bitterness, "or where is that resentment coming from?" And had we done that earlier, it would've been a much easier healing process. But it gives us hope that it doesn't matter how long we've been married, we just need to start there. We need to start digging up that root of bitterness. We need to start. And this question, you know is a good question because I want to respect you, but I don't always know how. But the Lord knows how and the Lord can instruct me on how to best respect you just like the Holy Spirit can instruct you on how to best love me. And so I think for me it's not a matter of holding our ground, I want you to be the best version of you that the Lord has. I have opinions of what I like and don't like, you know, about certain things, but ultimately that doesn't matter. I want who God wants you to be. And that will be fulfilling for me, and it'll be amazing for me because God looks out for me as well and he wants the best for both of us. And so it's holding our ground isn't the issue, it's respecting one another and loving one another and wanting the best for one another. And then the Lord will give you, when you spend time with the Lord, I've had to ask the Lord, "Give me the tone, give me the timing, "and give me the words." When I need to lovingly speak into something that you're struggling with or that you've done that's been hurtful, I spend time with the Lord first to make sure my heart is in the right place, otherwise it will not come across well. And if you don't respond well, that's between you and the Lord. If I know that I've corrected something or come to you because I care and you don't respond well to that, that's something the Lord will work on in you, and I don't need to take up offense for that.

- Well, and that's when, I'll let in a little secret, that's when you pray for me. And then I call it sicking, the Holy Spirit on me. And so sometimes we'll have a disagreement or an argument and we're not getting anywhere and you'll just say, "Okay, you go talk to the Lord, "I'm gonna go talk to the Lord." And I go talk to the Lord, and then you go talk to the Lord about me, and then the Lord doubles down on me. And usually the conflict here is resolved here.

- Exactly.

- And once we work it out with the Lord, talk it out with the Lord, sorted out with the Lord, then it moves a lot quicker toward the reconciliation of the vertical, the vertical relationship, it really informs the horizontal relationship. Let people pray and process in just a second. If we let a root of bitterness into our relationship would we be married today?

- No.

- Even though we're Christians.

- Correct.

- Even though we believe the Bible and study it and teach it.

- Correct.

- But would bitterness have grown up and destroyed our kids and our family?

- Yes. Because we can't just know it in our head and our heart, we have to do it. And if we do it, it transforms us and it makes us live a healthy relationship with each other just like Jesus. He could have said, "I forgive you," but then gone to the cross. It doesn't forgive us of our sins, we have to live it, and do, not just listen to the word but do what it says.

- So as we transition the service now, honey, what would your recommendation be? Every human being who, you know, really evaluates, probably has a person or persons that they need to forgive, unburden, heal from, and or God has told them, "You need to go to that person and apologize "cause you, have really damaged that relationship "or burdened that person." What would you encourage them to do with that, that struggle right now that I can sense in the room.

- I mean, I had a picture of someone come to mind as well, so we all have those seasons where bitterness can start to come in, and I think if you have a name or a face and you don't deal with it, you will let that root get deeper. And so I would encourage you to spend time with the Lord when you get home or in your car or whatever, he's always available to spend time and say, "Lord, I'm really struggling with this." This is what I have to do when there's already a root starting. "I'm really struggling with this "and I don't wanna forgive this person, "and they really hurt me," and whatever, just be honest about it. I also have written processing letters that I don't send to the person, but I just unburden all that I'm carrying around 'cause we carry bitterness around with all the wounds and everything. It's like a backpack of rocks that we're just carrying around and it burdens us. And so I unburdened through writing it out, kind of journaling everything, completely honest, because the Lord already knows our thoughts. And then I at the end I write out, "Lord, I am giving this person over to you. "I forgive them and I no longer wanna carry this burden." And then like you said, ultimately we have to bless, and that can be the hardest part. And I think when we don't do that, then we truly haven't given it over. And so I would encourage you to actually do something with this sermon so that you don't have to carry that burden around of unforgiveness anymore.