

10. The final words of our passage states, “*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good*” (v. 21). What difference would it make in our responses to painful circumstances if we really believed evil could be overcome with good?

Last Word: The Lord’s high standards for His followers grate against our me-first human nature. From a worldly perspective, the approach we’ve outlined seems naïve and appears to concede defeat, but God’s ways are not the world’s ways. There’s no doubt about it, there is profound power in a forgiving spirit.

Applying these principles can be difficult, but God hasn’t asked us to do something hard that He Himself hasn’t already done. His life serves as an example that we are to follow, “*When He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to Him who judges justly*” (1 Peter 2:23). Since Jesus chose to display a forgiving spirit when dealing with His enemies, even crying from the cross “*Father forgive them*” (Luke 23:34), we should do the same.

Offering our enemies a forgiving spirit is always worth the effort, because God delights to work in and through us as we serve Him, seeking to make peace with those around us.

Prayer: Think of someone who has recently mistreated you. Pray for that person by name seeking God’s blessing for them and asking Him for the strength you need to serve that person with acts of mercy.

Lesson 7

The Power of a Forgiving Spirit

Romans 12:14, 17-21

Peacemaking does not always go as smoothly as we would like. While some people, with honest hearts, readily make peace, others stubbornly and defensively resist our efforts to be reconciled. Sometimes they will become even more antagonistic, seeking new ways to mistreat us. Our human nature says to strike back at such people, or at the least to stop doing anything good for them. But what does God say?

At times, well-meaning Christians ask, “Do I have to forgive someone if they don’t repent?” It’s only natural to feel this way. However, this is the wrong question to ask because the negative nature of the query reflects a heart that doesn’t want to forgive. Rather, a better question is, “What can I do to show my forgiving spirit to the one who won’t repent?”

Scripture doesn’t encourage a passive response to sin. Instead, we are taught that we should go on the offense – not to beat down or destroy our opponents, but to win them over to God and us through a loving, merciful, and forgiving spirit. This is the kind of heart and spirit our Lord seeks of us. Will we obey?
Read Romans 12:14, 17-21.

1. In what way(s) are you tempted to respond to someone who hurts you and resist your pleas to repent?

2. What can we learn from 2 Corinthians 10:3-6 about the nature of the *unnatural* forgiving spirit Paul calls for in Romans 12:14, 17-21?

In our text, Paul outlines five principles to help us maintain a forgiving spirit with those who persistently resist our efforts to make peace.

3. First, Paul instructs us on the proper use of the tongue, "*bless those who persecute you*" (v. 14). What impact do you think doing this would have on our hearts?
4. Next, the apostle says to, "*give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all*" (v. 17). In your own words, what does Paul mean by this? (cf. 1 Peter 2:12, 15; 3:14-16)
5. Thirdly, Paul writes, "*If possible, as far as it depends on you, live peaceable with all*" (v. 18). From your perspective, what does this look like or include as a display of a forgiving spirit?

6. Building on the previous question, do you think it's ever okay to pull back from actively making every effort possible to be reconciled to someone? Explain.

7. Fourth, we're called to "*never avenge [ourselves], but leave it to the wrath of God*" (v. 19). This can be difficult, why do you think believers struggle with this command?

8. Finally, instead of acting vengefully, we are called to care for our enemy's needs (v. 20a). Think of a time when someone treated you (or another person) like this. What was it like for everyone involved?

9. Paul promises that by doing good to our enemy we "*will heap burning coals on his head*" (v. 20b). Using reliable resources, briefly explain this peculiar phrase and the promise it holds.