

Steps To Peace #5 & #6

Pastor James Richards

02 February 2025

As we were praying, I was reminded that in this prayer basically deals with the topic we're dealing with today. Help us to forgive others even as we are forgiven. And this passage, it's dealing with peace in the church and in the world. And we've already looked at some ways that we attain that. Our relationship to those who are over us and our relationship to each other.

And now he's going to talk about our relationship with those who have hurt us, who have done us evil, whether that's in the church or outside of the church. I have to confess that I've been meditating on this for a few days because I'm struggling with the passage. This is not something that we normally do, not something we want to do. And we can't help but ask God, why? Why should I be forgiving people that hurt me?

Why should I be doing good to people that hurt me? And as I was meditating on this, God reminded me of Isaiah 55, verse 6 through 11. And I won't read it, but it basically says, as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways. As the heavens are higher in the way the earth, so are my ways higher and your ways. And the thing that hit me as I was meditating on that is that God is a waymaker.

God is a waymaker. We're told that his ways are higher than our ways. It says later that His Word will accomplish his purposes, which ultimately is to glorify his name and to satisfy you. And I. And I believe this is crucial to know because that's not our natural way of thinking, is it?

ShepherdsStream.com

Blessing our enemies, doing good to our enemies? Proverbs 14:12 says, There's a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death and destruction. Left to ourselves and our own ways, we will always choose a way that is opposite of God's ways. That's the way we're raised. That's our human nature.

That's what makes us feel good. Somebody does something to me, I want to do something back. Let's get even. It feels good, doesn't it? But it's a way that leads to death and destruction.

It does not accomplish God's purposes. Since God's ways are so much higher than our ways, we cannot conceive of them on our own. The only way we can know his ways is to read His Word and listen to what he tells us and what he shows us about his ways. And so this passage is one of those passages that reveals God's ways. It's not new, it's mentioned in the law, it's mentioned in the Old Testament.

Jesus mentions it, Paul mentions it, and Peter mentions it, which means it's very important and something that you and I are to learn. And essentially, it's a secret way that only God can unlock by giving us the key, his word, to see that it's true. And so the problem we face is, because it's not our way, it often doesn't make sense to us. It's not what we feel like doing. And so he's told us to be at peace with each other, and he's given us some instructions.

We looked at some of those. Admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. And now he's saying, you can't take revenge on those who hurt you, those who are evil. In fact, you have to find a way to bless them. And we go, huh, what?

That doesn't seem right, Lord, but that is his way. So we'll look real quick at these two, and then I want to hopefully show why God asks us to do that. The first is no retaliation. He says, see that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. It's a tough one for us because we instinctively want to defend ourselves and get even when somebody hurts us.

If they say something bad about us, we want to say something bad about them. If they knock out our tooth, we want to knock out their tooth. And in the law, that was okay to do. Basically, we want our pound of flesh, don't we? Now, I know none of you do right now, we all do, one way or another.

We maybe can't get it, but we'd like it. Jesus deals with this same issue back in Matthew, chapter five in the Sermon of the Mount. If you want to turn there, verse 38 to 42.

And he said, you've heard that it was said that an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil, but if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

And so the law said, someone knocks out your tooth, you can knock out his tooth. We think that feels good. Yeah, that's Right. But Jesus says, no, not anymore. Don't resist the one who is evil.

Someone slaps you on the cheek, turn the other one. Don't hit him back. Someone takes your shirt, give them your coat. Someone wants you to walk a mile, walk two miles with you. And then he ends that.

A few verses later, he says, you must be perfect, even as your Heavenly Father is perfect and relating to what he has just said. And the truth is, is our Heavenly Father would have reason to punish every one of us. And that would be more than knocking out our tooth, wouldn't it? But his goal is higher than that. His goal is to save you and I, and he wants us to have that same goal in our lives.

Then, instead of getting retribution on someone who hurts us, we start looking for ways to show that the love of God to them. And this command with the words that are used applies to everyone all of the time. Everyone all of the time. Now, before I look a little deeper, it doesn't mean that you can't defend yourself or your family. It doesn't

mean that there isn't lawful ways to take care of problems.

But it really refers to someone who attacks you personally, especially in the area of your faith. And that we're not looking to defend ourselves, but we're looking for some way that we can show the love of God to that person and hopefully bring them to salvation. And that's hard. No retribution. But I think the second is even harder.

It says, but always seek to do good to one another and everyone, not just the people in church, not just your friends, but everyone. So not only we can't retaliate, we're actually to look for ways to do good to the person who hurt us. That takes effort, that takes intent to look for good for those who have hurt us. Not a passive response to evil, but an effort to really try to reach them with the gospel. That's what we all want to do when we're hurt, right?

No, that's not what we want to do. That's got to be the love of Christ working in us and giving us a love for those who have actually hurt us. And to seek it means to look for ways to do good to the One who did evil to us. And if we do that, we are opening a way for God to not only work in our lives, but God to work in their lives. Now, as I read this, and the thing I was meditating on and struggling with is why in the world would God ask us to do this?

It just doesn't make sense that we would bless those who do evil to us. I want to look at a couple instances in David's life to see some example of that. The first is in First Samuel, chapter 25, if you want to turn there.

And God has anointed David and told him he's going to be the king, but in the meantime, King Saul is trying to kill him. David is hiding in the wilderness with 600 men who are following him. And they say an army operates on a stomach. If you don't feed them, they don't fight. And so he's got 600 men in his care that he somehow has to feed out in the wilderness.

Well, there was a farmer nearby named Nabal who had large herds, and it would have been easy for them to have just taken some of the animals that they had. But instead of doing that, they protected them. And so David reasons, since I protected Nabal's

longings, maybe he will share some of that with us. So he sends a message to Nabal, and Nabal responds by saying, who are you that I should help you?

And basically saying, you're just a scoundrel. I'm not going to help you. Why would you even think that I would do that? Well, this angers David, and He tells his 600 men, strap on your sword. We're going to destroy Nabal and everything he has.

Well, Nabal's wife Abigail hears about this, and when she does, she realizes how much trouble they're in. She gathers together a bunch of supplies and sends to David following behind. And when she meets him, she tells David in verse 30 through 31, and when the Lord has done to my Lord according to all the good that he has spoken concerning you, and is appointed your prince over Israel, my Lord shall have no cause of grief or pangs of conscience for having shed blood without cause, or for my Lord working salvation for himself. And when the Lord has dealt well with my Lord, then remember your servant. And Abigail reasons, with David, you're going to be the king.

King Saul is not going to win. When you are king, though, you don't want to have cause for regret of having lashed out in anger at someone and shed blood. And to have that on your conscience. And what she's pointing out to him is, our ultimate success in life is not, did everything work out the way we wanted it to our ultimate success in life? Was God able to accomplish his purposes through you and I?

Was God able to accomplish his purposes through ui by refusing to take revenge? David let God have room to accomplish his purposes. And he trusted in God. As a result of that, there was no regret. Later he left room for God to work.

When Nabal heard how close he had come to David and his men, destroying him and everything he had, he died of a heart attack. And justice was done sooner in this case than most often. And Abigail, David sent word and said, I want you to be my wife. And she became the mother of some of his children. And again it says in verse 39, when David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, blessed be the Lord who has avenged the insult I received at the hand of Nabal and has kept back his servant from wrongdoing.

The Lord has returned the evil of Nabal on his hand, and that is one of the goals in our life. How is God being blessed through your life? How are you glorifying Him? How are you lifting up his name? If you take things into your own hands which will lead to disaster, God will not be glorified.

It'll be something you did even if you succeeded. But when we leave room for God to do that work, he ends up glorifying we have a testimony of what he's done. And it often reaches those who know that they deserve judgment, but instead receive mercy. And so God's goal is much higher than our goal. We just want success, safety, prosperity, feel good, fun.

God wants more than that. He wants to glorify his name through us so that we can rejoice in Him. See another story about David over in 2 Samuel 16, 5.

And David's son Absalom has rebelled against him, and he's coming to Jerusalem with an army to overthrow his father and kill him. David has to flee with some of his fighting men. And as he leaves Jerusalem, a man comes out named Shimei, and he's on a hillside and he's shouting curses at David and he's throwing stones at him. As they are retreating from the city, one of David's generals said, let me go and cut his head off. And David replied in verse 10 to 12 he said, it may be that the Lord will look on the wrong done to me, and the Lord will repay me with good for his cursing today.

So David and his men went on the road, while Shimei went along on the hillside opposite him and cursed as he went and threw stones at him and flung dust. And just imagine the shame of that. First of all, having to flee the city because your own son is trying to kill you. But second, as you go out, this man Shimei is cursing you and throwing stones at you.

David's general was Right. He could have taken off his head immediately, but David tells him not to do it because the Lord was behind it. And we go, what? Why would the Lord be behind that? And, well, verse 11 and 12, David said to Abishai and to all his servants, behold, my own son seeks my life.

How much more now may this Benjamin leave him alone and let him curse where the Lord has told him to. Where the Lord has told him to. We have to believe that God is sovereign, that nothing happens in this life that he is not a part of, and that he does not have a purpose in. I believe one of the purposes of this is David was reminded of the fact that he had committed adultery with Bathsheba, that he had murdered Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, that there had been a curse placed in his life, that he deserved this and even deserving it, that God had a purpose in. Made me think about things in my life where I've been harmed and wanted to get upset and somehow retaliate, but then realized, no, I think God has actually been merciful to me.

One was a trip I made to Solduck Hot Springs on my motorcycle. Saunder and I were courting and I went up there on my own. A beautiful sunny day in July. And on the way home, I'm doing 53, 54, 55 miles an hour, just a little under the speed limit, which is unusual, and just enjoying the scenery. When you come to the ocean near Claylock, there's a long straight stretch there with a campground on the right.

I look down the road and I see a state patrolman sitting off the side of the road. And I think nothing about it. I'm doing the speed limit, I'm safe. I get close to him and he gets out of his car and he waves me over and he gives me a ticket for going 10 over. And I go, what?

He said, the speed limit is 45 here. Somehow I had missed that sign. And I'm just cruising along at 55 and got a \$90 ticket. And at first I was really upset, but then the Lord reminded me, how many times have you speeded and never got caught? Hundreds and hundreds of times.

And I realized, lord, I've deserved so much worse. And all this is, is a reminder of how good you've been to me and the fact that I need to be more careful. So guess what I did. I thanked the state patrolman. Thank you for this ticket.

And I thanked the Lord because he's shown me something that I needed to see about my life. And I can't say that I haven't speeded since then. Sandra can say I have, but I'm more careful and don't drive as fast as I did before and so God can use it for good.

Second of all, David says in verse 12, it may be that the Lord will look on the wrong done to me and the Lord will repay me with good for his cursing. And again, God is a waymaker.

He is not limited in what he can do. And he sees all that we go through. He knows when we've been wrong, when we've been cursed, when we've been hurt, and when we refuse to retaliate and look to do good to that person. God has a way to bless us, a way that we never would have experienced if we had not followed his ways in blessing those who curse us. This happened to me at the church in Cottonwood where I was pastoring.

And one Sunday, the head elder, who I don't think was even a Christian, he said, I want to move the Service up till 9am in the morning for the summer. And I said, well, we can't do that. I go to the prison and have a service at 9 o'clock in the morning and I can't give that up. And he said, well, we're going to do it. After the meeting was over, I found out he fired me and didn't tell the church no vote on it.

He just fired me. When the church found out about that, they had a meeting and said, wait a second, we should have a say in this. Well, you don't. I'm the head elder and that's what I've decided. And so I was fired.

My wife was going through cancer. Things were going well in the church. As a result of it, 60 of the 75 people left the church. I had nowhere to go yet, and they had no one to replace me. So guess what I did.

Every Sunday morning I preached to the 15 people that fired me.

And I tried to just preach the word. I wasn't trying to get any kind of revenge on them. At the end of the service, I would stand at the door and I would hug each one of them and thank them for coming. And it turned out to be one of the greatest blessings of my life. Because from there I went to Pony, Montana, where God did a wonderful work in my life, gave me some of the best friends I've ever had, and prepared me for coming here.

And by refusing to retaliate, God opened up a way that I never could have imagined. And I thank him for that. So the last thing we'll look at is Jesus. And he's a supreme example of not looking for retaliation. No one in this world has ever experienced as much evil as.

As Jesus did. Not only did they reject him as their Messiah, they persecuted him. And then they nailed him to a cross, killing him. And what was his response to that? Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing.

And he could say that because his purposes were more than just personal safety, he could have come down on the cross. He could have called a thousand legions of angels and destroyed them. But he stayed on the cross for the very people who were putting him to death. Because his goal wasn't his personal safety. His goal was salvation for others.

And that's what's happened throughout the centuries. That's why you and I are here, that Christ forgave our sins against him. Instead of cursing us, he has blessed us with his presence in our life. One good example of this was a man named Richard Wurmbrand. He was a pastor in, I believe, Hungary, first during the Nazis, and then later during the Communists.

And they both persecuted him to the place where he ended up in a prison where he was tortured for 16 years.

And he constantly prayed for those who were torturing him. One of his torturers came in, saw him praying, and said, what are you doing? He said, I'm praying for you. Well, stop it or I'm going to beat you. He didn't stop it, and the man beat him.

That man later came to Christ. But out of that, when Richard Wurmbrand was released, he was able to come to America, and he started a mission called Voice of the Martyrs that's still going today. And thousands and thousands of people around the world are being touched by this ministry that could not have happened if he had not gone through this suffering and trusting God. And so this is what I want to leave you with. God is able to take your worst experiences and turn them into something good when

we make it our effort to fulfill his desires in our life.

His goal is not so much our safety. Thank God, when we have it, for success for all those things. But his goal is that people will be saved. And that often happens when people realize you're different. You didn't try to get me back.

In fact, you did something nice to me. Why would you do that? And, of course, our answer is the love of Christ. And many have come to Christ as a result of that. People will see his miraculous intervention in your life, and he'll be praised.

You'll be able to point to him, and he'll be glorified out of that. And so here, close with this, God's ways are higher than our ways. But we have to leave room for him to work. When we try to do it ourselves, it's kind of like, get out of the way God. And he's not able to work in our lives.

Justice will be done. I could go into each one of these people that I've mentioned. Justice was done in God's time, but it was God that did it. But God has a higher purpose, and that's to glorify his name through our life and everything we experience. And when we submit to him, even in the midst of our trials, he will be glorified.

Let's pray.

Father, we confess that this is a hard area, a hard issue in our lives. Got everything in us. Wants to get even, wants to protect ourselves, doesn't want to suffer. And yet, Father, sometimes you lead us into situations where that happens. I just pray that you'd open our eyes to your ways, God.

We'd find not only ways not to retaliate, but we'd find ways to bless those who have hurt us. And we pray through that that you would accomplish your purposes not just in our lives, but also in the lives of others that we're trying to reach. Pray this in Christ's name. Amen.