

Everything that is hating someone else or wishing ill of someone else or on someone else, all of it, put it away, and the only way -- back to your original question -- how do you do that? The only way is to replace it with the love of God that's in Christ Jesus.

Welcome to the Radically Christian Bible Study Podcast. I'm Travis Pauley, and here we have one goal: Learn to love like Jesus. Each week I visit with Wes McAdams, minister and author, and together we explore biblical passages and topics. I hope you enjoy this study.

TRAVIS: All right, Wes. Welcome back.

WES: Thanks. Good to be back.

TRAVIS: We're back. We've got another question.

WES: Great.

TRAVIS: This says, "Hello, Gentlemen. I have a question regarding forgiveness and reconciliation in our relationships with Christians. If a Christian either sins against me or causes me harm over a matter of opinion and then I forgive that person, is reconciliation required? My reason for asking this question is both myself and my wife have incredibly strained relationships with our families. Some are Christians, some are not. Both myself and my wife want to forgive but are not prepared to reconcile until their behavior changes. Is this a scriptural position to take? Is there a line that can be drawn between forgiveness and reconciliation, as I am suggesting, or can you not have one without the other? What does the Bible say God's expectations are for his

followers in situations like these?" It's from Alexander.

WES: Okay. Well, Alexander, first, I empathize with your situation and I think there's a lot of people in those types of situations. In fact, a lot of the things I'm preaching right now at McDermott are about reconciliation and taking steps back towards one another because I think we underestimate how many of us have broken relationships that are in disarray and that we just don't know what to do with sometimes.

So let's hone in on some of these words like "forgiveness" and "reconciliation" because I think both are important. There is maybe a little bit of difference and a little bit of nuance that we can explore. I recently wrote a blog post on forgiveness and what that looks like and what that means. I think that we mean different things when we say "forgive." When someone says, "I've forgiven you," I wonder, what do we typically think we mean by that? What do we mean when we say, "I forgive you"? There's two -- there's at least three Greek words -- two of them have to do with -- they're very similar words and they both have to do with releasing debt. So a good text would be Matthew 18:21 through about 35. Let me pull that up real quick. I opened a different app on my iPad so it's taking a second. Okay. So Matthew 18. This is Jesus' parable of the unforgiving servant, so he's talking about a servant who's forgiven and then who turns around and doesn't forgive his fellow servant who owes him far less money than he owed his master that was forgiven. Again, it's from Matthew chapter 18. And Jesus says, "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to

him who owed him ten thousand talents," which is an astronomical amount of money that could never ever be paid back in a lifetime. "And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment be made." So that's what's fair, right? So that's the fair route that could be followed. That's justice, for them to be sold as slaves, indentured servitude, and for the payment to be repaid. "So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt."

So those two words that are translated "released" him and "forgave" him the debt, both of those words are used throughout the New Testament to talk about forgiveness, and they both carry the idea of releasing someone from debt. So the idea is that most of the time, when you forgive someone or you potentially could forgive somebody, there's a debt that is owed, and a lot of times it's very literal -- like very literal. Like you broke something of mine and, literally, there's a debt; there's a balance. If you come to my house and you bump a lamp and it falls over and it breaks, there is -- in some houses, there would be a big balance. At my house, it would be like a \$5 balance because I don't have expensive lamps.

TRAVIS: Look, I said I was sorry.

WES: Yeah, that's true, and here I am bringing it up on the podcast, like I haven't even forgiven you. Travis has never broken a lamp in my house, just for the record.

TRAVIS: Not once.

WES: And if he did, I probably wouldn't even notice it because I have two boys that have broken everything already, so...

But, again, back to the scenario, so if you broke a lamp of mine, then there's a \$10 balance and I can either insist that you pay it and say you're going to pay this \$10, which is fair, that's just, and you would legitimately say, "I don't mind. I broke it, so here's the \$10," and I would allow you to do that. So that's good. But if it's something that legitimately you can't afford, like you're broke, you don't have \$10 to pay me back, or it was a thousand dollar lamp and you don't have a thousand dollars, and to insist that you give me a thousand dollars would put you in a very bad situation, I could forgive you, which means I erase it from the debt -- from the balance sheet, but it also means that someone has to absorb that. Anytime forgiveness takes place, someone has to absorb the cost, and that falls on the forgiver. And in this case, the master has absorbed the cost of the debt, and so he says, "I will take it on myself because I can afford it and you can't, and so I will absorb the cost of this debt rather than insisting that you pay it," and that's what forgiveness is. And sometimes that's true -- that's a very literal way of taking forgiveness, like financially owing someone and then erasing that debt.

But there are also times where it's more of an emotional thing. You broke my heart; you broke my feelings, and I decide I'm going to absorb that cost and I'm going to erase it from the balance sheet and take that away. Now, there's a million times in life where that's true,

where we say you can't fix what's been broken. You can't afford to fix what's broken, or it can't be fixed. Some things are irreplaceable and it just can't be replaced; it can't be fixed, and so I can continue to hold that over your head forever and say, "Until you pay me back for something that can't be paid back, we'll never -- I'll never erase it from the balance sheet. You'll always owe me." Or I can say, "You don't owe me anymore. It's erased. I'm done -- I'm done forcing you to repay me for that."

Now, typically -- typically, in scripture -- I want to make sure that I'm saying this right -- that this idea about erasing somebody -- releasing people from the obligation to make restitution, "You don't have to restore what's been broken; I'm going to absorb that. I will take care of it; you don't have to," typically, this is contingent upon whether or not that person is sorry, whether or not that person has asked for forgiveness.

TRAVIS: Right.

WES: If someone doesn't ask for forgiveness, then -- and show remorse over what's been done, typically, there's not a requirement to release them from the debt. And, I mean -- and that makes sense, doesn't it? I mean, because in a very literal sense, you would just have to go around saying, "Oh, you don't owe me. You don't owe me. You don't owe me." You know, if somebody backs into your car and smashes it, you know, you're not obligated by Jesus to say, "Sorry, I'm a Christian, so that means I can't make you pay me back for what you just broke." But if somebody backs into your car and they say -- and they legitimately cannot afford to repay you and you legitimately can afford to just absorb

it and take care of it yourself, instead of selling them into debtor's prison, your obligation as a follower of Jesus, as someone who has been released from the debt you owe God -- because that's the point of the parable, that here this guy is released from all of his debt and then he goes out and he finds his fellow servant who owes him just a few bucks and who's begging him, "Please, please, please have mercy on me. I'll repay you," and he says, "Nope, I'm not. I'm not going to have mercy on you. You're going to pay me everything you owe me." And the master is like, "After everything I did for you?" And then all bets are off. Then the guy is, like, back in prison and, "You're not getting out until you pay me everything you owe me."

So the idea is if God shows mercy to you and erases your debts, then your obligation to the world is that when they can't repay you, instead of enforcing them to pay what they can't afford to pay, instead of being merciless with your neighbor, you must be merciful to your neighbor. But, again, if it's somebody that's just taking advantage and somebody that's -- or somebody that can legitimately -- "Oh, yeah, I owe you ten bucks. Here's your ten bucks," you're not under obligation to just go around and erase everybody's debts emotionally or, quite literally, metaphorically or literally. You're only obligated to do that under these types of situations when somebody says, "I wronged you, I broke this and I can't repay you, and I can't fix it, and I can't make restitution. I'm sorry." And you say, "You know what? God's released me of my debt and so I'm going to release you of your debt, as well."

There's another word, too, that is used. It is "charizomai," and

sometimes this is translated as "forgiveness." In fact, it's really interesting the way that our English word -- the root of "forgive" is "give," right? And so "charizomai" carries that idea of it's giving favor to somebody. It focuses on the generosity behind the release of their debt. So not only are you releasing somebody of their debt, but you're -- by absorbing that cost, you're actually giving them something. So while the first two words focus on the release and like "you don't owe me anymore," this word, "charizomai" -- and the root of that is "charis," where we get the word "grace" or "charity" -- so it's about showing charity and giving them the gift of being released. And so that's another part of this, is blessing somebody. In spite of what they've done, blessing them with freedom from the debt with favor and with friendship. It's about sharing with others -- this is the way I wrote it in my blog post: "It's about sharing with others the gift that God has shared with us." It's about grace. It's about showing people the kind of grace that God has shown to us.

And, again, a lot of these things tend to imply or assume that the other person has repented of something that they've legitimately done wrong and that they've owned that, because it's very hard to release somebody from a debt that they continue to rack up, right? So I mean, if somebody continues to rack up debt and continues to back over your car and just over and over again unrelentingly, you just can't go around being like, "Okay. Well, you don't owe me. You don't owe me. You don't owe me. You don't owe me." That's not the idea. The idea is if somebody has done something wrong and they're sorry and they ask

you to forgive them, then because of what God has done for you, you say, "I release you. I forgive you. I give you the gift of freedom."

Pardon this very brief interruption, but I want to tell you about the Bible study software that I use, Logos Bible Software. If you want to take your Bible study to the next level, Logos is a great way to do that. They've partnered with us to give our listeners a special deal. Check it out at RadicallyChristian.com/Logos. Now back to the Bible study.

TRAVIS: One of the things I've noticed a lot in times of my life where I felt compelled to forgive, that that's necessary in a relationship whether it's financial or not, is that self-righteousness can play a big role, especially when I'm thinking about it in those terms of like, you know, there's something between us and it's on me to -- oh, I got to be the bigger person and forgive them. Even in times where, like you said before, they may not even be wanting that. You know, maybe it's just broken enough that they're not asking for it, and then I go, "I'm not giving it," and then there's that kind of thing. Because I think with financial -- well, there's a record; there's a number amount that's trackable. But with emotional heartbreak that we endure and perpetrate on other people, that can sometimes be a little bit more intangible. It can be easier or harder to ignore, depending on who you are and what the situation is.

But I think the thing that's always sort of snapped me out of that and hopefully taken self-righteousness right out of the equation is when

I think about paying it forward. When I can look at a situation that, yeah, I am hurt and I am -- and this person is indebted to me and that makes me angry, and maybe even, depending on the time that's passed, that makes me resentful, and it's not just that I can't see myself forgiving them or forgiving the debt, it's that -- what about after that? What about after I -- okay. So you forgive. What does that even mean? Because I think forgiveness -- and correct me if I'm wrong. I think forgiveness is -- it's started by one action and then it's something that has to continue. It's something that has to continue to cover us.

I think we see that in the forgiveness that Jesus offers us. He forgives us when we come to him, but I don't just need that forgiveness when I came to him. I've actually needed it a lot more since, and so it's something that needs to go a long time. And I think about, again, the only thing that's kind of snapped me out of being self-righteous and just letting resentment take over in the aftermath of trying to reconcile and forgive is thinking about, man, I've had people forgive debts. Man, I've had people -- emotional and otherwise, and that doesn't make me -- again, it doesn't serve to make me go, "Well, so I guess I should do it for somebody else." It's more like, "Oh, I know exactly how they're feeling right now." Whether they're saying it or not, I can only imagine how they're feeling. People are pretty aware, I think, of wrongs committed, and whether they'll admit it to you or not, that's going to hurt them and it's probably eating them up and I don't want to do the same thing to them that I've been through.

WES: Absolutely. And I think you hit on something incredibly

important, that the basis of the forgiveness that we extend to other people -- whether the emphasis is on us giving them the gift of forgiveness or the emphasis on releasing them from the debt that they owe us, either way, the basis for that has to be the forgiveness that we've experienced in Jesus, not on, "Well, I'm a good person," or on "I want to earn God's forgiveness." No. "Because of what he's done for me, I am obligated to give you this gift because that's how much his grace has overflowed to me. Now it has to be paid forward to you." That's how it works.

So, yeah, so there's that, and I think there also has to be said -- you mentioned the word "bitterness" or "resentment." It's so important that we release resentment, that we do not harbor resentment for people, and that's true --

TRAVIS: How do you do that?

WES: Well, and that's a great question, and that's something we have to work through, but that, I have to say -- that's usually what we mean by forgiveness, and we often talk about how we're obligated to forgive people whether or not they repent. That's true if by "forgive" you mean don't harbor resentment. Now, we are all obligated not to resent others, regardless of what they do or don't do. So to harbor resentment is to hate them in our heart. It is to loathe them; it is to wish ill upon them. It's to say, "I hope they get what's coming to them. I can't stand them." That is an active doing something, right? It's not just saying, "Look, they owe me a hundred dollars." That's just a fact. But even if they owe you a hundred dollars and they have no intention of repaying and they're not

sorry they did whatever they did, you know, you still are obligated to let go of the resentment and say, "I don't hate you. I love you." If Jesus expects us to love our enemies, that means he expects us to do good for our enemies, to cook them dinner, to give them something to drink, to not hate them, to not wish ill on them, to wish well for them. You can continue to keep somebody's record on the book because, for their own good, they need to be held accountable for what they've done, and they're not sorry and they can repay it, and it's okay not to release them from that debt because of the situation, but it's not okay for you to resent them. It's not okay for you to hate them. It's not okay for you to wish evil on them.

You know, I think about so many things that the New Testament has to say on this issue. Ephesians 4:31, Paul says, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice." I mean, he covers all the bases there. Everything that is hating someone else or wishing ill of someone else or on someone else, all of it, put it away. And the only way -- back to your original question -- how do you do that? The only way is to replace it with the love of God that's in Christ Jesus. If our heart is so full of what God has done for us in Jesus, there's no place left in our heart for hatred for other people regardless of what they've done to us. So while there is a place for holding people accountable, there is a place for saying, "No, no, no, I'm going to hold you to this until you've learned your lesson, until you're sorry" -- and, again, we can -- that can kind of get fuzzy sometimes, too, but it's like parenting, right? I mean, when my kids do

something wrong, there's a time where I let it go and I say forget about it. It's okay. I'll absorb the debt. And there's other times where I say, "Nope, you're going to pay for this one. You're going to own this one." But it's not okay for me to hate my kid. It's not okay for me to hold on to anger for my kid. That's not okay, and the same is true with all of our relationships.

TRAVIS: Well, and that makes -- when you talk about parenting, that makes perfect sense. You're the authority figure; you're responsible for teaching lessons and whatnot. I don't feel responsible teaching lessons to someone that I consider -- that I don't feel I have authority over.

WES: Your sibling, your neighbor, yeah.

TRAVIS: Sibling, friend, yeah. Neighbor, yeah.

WES: Yeah, and that's a legitimate point, but I still think that there is a place in the church for accountability. So the way Jesus would talk about it was, you know, if somebody sinned against you, go and talk to them and tell them what they've done. And if they listen to you, great; you've gained your brother. And if they don't, take somebody else with you. And if they don't listen to them, at some point you've got to tell the church. And as the church family, you've got to hold them accountable. So there is a place for accountability and responsibility and sort of disciplining people. You're right in that that probably shouldn't ever be a one-on-one thing, like, "Hey, I'm going to hold you responsible." That's got to be worked out in the community of the church because we can be very unfair judges, and we're biased. You know, for that matter, we're biased because, you know, you hurt me. It's one thing when somebody

on the outside says, "No, actually, this is kind of a two-way street and you both need to own your part." But if it's me being the judge of my own case, well, I'm always innocent. It's funny how I never mess up, you know, but when somebody else, an unbiased third party, says, "No, no, no, wait. You both own some of this and you need to take responsibility for it," I think there's a place for all of those things in the church and there is a place for continuing to hold somebody accountable for something that they've done until they own it. But there is no place for resentment. There is no place for anger.

Now, does that mean that everything goes back to the way that it was before? Not necessarily. I mean, trust is something that isn't a necessarily given in any relationship. When I meet somebody on the street, I don't -- you know, somebody asked one time, "Do you automatically trust people or do you automatically distrust people?" And somebody said, in response to that, "Well, I'm agnostic. When I meet somebody, I'm agnostic. I don't know whether or not I should trust them." And sometimes that's true in a relationship, too. It's not that you distrust somebody that you've forgiven, and it's not that you automatically trust them, or that when you forgive them you automatically go back to fully trusting them. You go back to saying, "Okay. We're going to start over. I've forgiven you for that. I've taken that off the record. I don't hate you. I'm not mad at you. I want to have a relationship with you," but trust sometimes has to be earned. You know, not that it has to be earned back, like, "Hey, you have to prove to me that you aren't the guy you used to be," but it's just that, "I don't

know whether I can trust you. Show me that I can trust you." And it doesn't necessarily prove you haven't forgiven someone if you don't know yet whether or not you can trust them. That just means that you're starting back at square zero in some regards.

TRAVIS: I think a lot of the reason we trust people to begin with is because we have experience with them. We have memories of times where they've come through and that we came through for them and so that trust is built. So now you just have to make new memories, but you probably have to be way more intentional about it than you were when you had more of an organic relationship.

WES: Yes, absolutely. When you trust somebody, it's because they've made deposits into the trust bank, and somebody that has done you wrong has been overdrawn in the trust bank, and if you've forgiven them, you've sort of come back to zero, but they haven't made any new deposits so the level of trust hasn't been built back up, and so it has to be increased to some level.

There's another phrase or idea that I want to cover before we close, and it's overlooking wrong. In Proverbs 19:11 it says, "Good sense makes one slow to anger and it is his glory to overlook an offense." There is a place for just overlooking things, and that, I think, is where it requires the most discernment. It's one thing for me to say, "You legitimately hurt me and you took something from me that needs to be paid back," and then for us to go from there and talk about how is that going to be paid back? Am I going to absorb that or are you going to pay that back? Am I going to forgive you, or is that going to be, you know,

something that I hold you responsible for? That's a question that sometimes is legitimate.

But there's also a time -- and I would say most of the time, a million times a day where we have to just overlook offenses. You cannot write everything down and say, "I'm going to hold you responsible for that" or even, "I'm going to forgive you for that." How audacious is a person who says, "I forgive you. You got in my way, but I forgive you"? It's like, who do you think you are? Get off your high horse and just ignore it. Ignore it. Yes, they offended you; yes, they hurt your feelings; yes, they shouldn't have done that. Overlook it. It is to your glory to be able to overlook offenses.

But if you're going to write everything down and say, "Okay. Well, here this is on the balance sheet and I'm going to make a big deal about crossing it off" -- there is a time for that. There is a time to say, "You hurt me in a way that can't be just ignored and it needs to be fixed and we're going to fix it by me forgiving you, and I forgive you and I release you from that debt." Yep, there's a time for that, but there's also a time to just ignore it. Don't bring it up; don't write it down; don't make a record of it. Just overlook it. And sometimes I don't think that we realize that's an option. You don't have to hold them accountable for it. You don't have to teach them a lesson. You don't have to drag them into court. You don't have to bring a witness and talk it over. You don't have to talk about trust or forgiveness. Just overlook the offense.

And so sometimes -- sometimes there's a debt that needs to be forgiven; sometimes there is an offense that needs to just be overlooked,

but in all of the situations, there cannot be resentment; there cannot be hatred; there cannot be bitterness. All of that -- all of that -- if we're going to be followers of Jesus, our heart has to be so full of his love and what he's done for us that we do not harbor resentment or bitterness against anyone regardless of what they've done.

I really hope you enjoyed this Bible study and I hope you'll subscribe to hear future episodes of the podcast. A big thank you to Travis Pauley, as well as our McDermott Road church family for helping to make this podcast possible, and a special thanks to all of you for listening. We love you, God loves you, and we hope you have a wonderful day.