

## Killing What's Killing You | Bitterness/Anger

Aaron Brockett | Ephesians 4

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Alright, what is up everybody? How are you doing? I want to welcome all our first time guests and visitors at all our campuses. I want to introduce you to a couple who for many of you needs no introduction. This is Matt and Kelly Hessel. They've been a part of our church family for a long time. Go ahead and give it up for them.

For those of you who may not be familiar with them, Matt and Kelly grew up in this church, they met in this church, and they got married in this church. Matt served on staff here for close to a decade, most recently as our Northwest campus pastor. Matt was one of my very first friends when I moved to Indy. I just love this guy and Kelly and her heart.

About six years ago we were in Seattle at a conference, in the hotel room, and Matt said, "Aaron, I really feel like God is calling me to be a lead pastor one day, but I don't know when and I don't know where. Would you just walk with me through this journey?"

We've been doing that the last several years, serving together but knowing the long-range vision would be to send him out. Neither one of us wanted to address that head on because it was emotional for both of us. It became very clear this past year that it was time for us to put this in motion.

Many of you were here last summer when Matt officially concluded his role as Northwest campus pastor and he began what was called a Lead Pastor in Residence. We had never heard of that before and to our knowledge no other church had done this before. We didn't know if it was going to work or not, but we used Matt as the guinea pig.

We entered into this season where we basically were like, "How can we help you and give you a long runway to prepare you for what God has next so that way you say yes to the right opportunity, not just the next opportunity?"

Matt and Kelly have interviewed at churches all over the country and have said no to some opportunities they might have been tempted to say yes to, simply because they would need a paycheck. But they said no to opportunities that seemed good but weren't the right fit.

We're confident that God has opened up the right opportunity for them. Here in a few weeks they are going to be relocated to Longmont, Colorado and Matt is going to become the lead pastor at Lifebridge Christian Church there. It is a great church. Give it up! It's one of our sister churches, a church of about 3,000. God is going to do some tremendous things in and through that church. I believe Matt and Kelly's leadership and influence is going to take them to the next level.

This is bitter sweet for me personally and for us as a church family because I don't want to see them go. At the same time, I'm not going to block them from going. God's got big plans for them. They are going to take a branch from our family tree and replant it in Longmont, Colorado and I can't wait to see literally the thousands of lives that are going to be impacted through their obedience.

Here is what we want to do. We are commissioning them and sending them out with our blessing. They will still be part of our church family, but they are going to be relocating soon. I'm going to ask all of our campuses right now, if you are comfortable with it maybe just extend a hand toward Matt and Kelly. If you are at a campus, just extend it toward the screen. This is just simply symbolic of, "We're lifting you up and we're sending you out."

Let me pray over them.

Father, we come to you right now and we are so grateful for the Hessels—Matt, Kelly, and their children Sawyer, Georgia, and Sutton. We love them. We thank you that we've gotten to do life together for many years. There are hundreds and hundreds of people who would all line up and give very vivid descriptions about the way you've used them to impact our lives.

I thank you for my friendship with Matt. How he has, in moments nobody has seen, lifted up my hands behind closed doors when things were hard and told me he would be there for me no matter what. God, I thank you for Kelly and her sweet disposition and her heart for people. God, I thank you for their three kids and how you've moved in their lives to reconfirm this is where you want them to go. They will always be a part of our church family.

God we send them with our blessing. We ask that you would give Matt wisdom to navigate the challenges that are coming his way. God, I pray that your blessing and Spirit would be upon that church to reach people who are so far from you.

God, we ask that you would protect them. I know there are going to be challenges that will come up in the next several weeks and throughout this first year that are going to be hard and complex. We pray your Spirit would comfort them. Thank you for them. Thank you for this opportunity. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Give them some love. Give it up for them.

We are in week number three of this series of messages we are calling *Killing What is Killing You*. If you are just now coming into this, all of this is based upon something a guy named Paul writes in a book in the New Testament called Romans. We are in Romans 8:13, which simply says this: "But if through the power of the Spirit you **put to death** the deeds of your sinful nature, **you will live.**"

One of the things that oftentimes keeps you and me from fulfilling New Year's resolutions or even accomplishing some of the goals on our list, or even on our to do list during the day isn't because they are the wrong resolutions or the wrong goals or the wrong tasks. It's not because we are weak-minded people. It is because something got in the way. Something short-circuited what it is God desired for our lives.

There is a word for it. In his Word God refers to it as sin. It is important to understand that one of the original words for sin is an archery term that means to miss the mark. It's simply this idea that this is what God wants for you, and this is what God desires for you, this is what God's vision for your life is, this is his intention for you and then sin is anything outside of that. We end up missing the mark.

And Paul writes, "Let's put to death those deeds so that we will live." Oftentimes what gets in the way of some of our best intentions is something that keeps hanging us up, something that is killing us.

So over the last several weeks we've used the analogy of a spider web. I said on week one if you walk into a spider web your immediate reaction is to get it off of you and then to go on the hunt for other spider webs and knock those down. You might knock them down for a while until those little creepy-crawly things spin new webs. So if you want to get rid of the webs in your life, you can't just knock down the web you ran into. You've got to get rid of the thing that actually spun the web to begin with.

So on week one we said if you walk into the web of envy, chances are the thing that spun that web was comparison. And comparison is so deadly to our souls because what we're doing in that is trying to figure out our own sense of worth and value and identity by looking at someone else's opportunities and blessings.

Then a couple of weeks ago we talked about if you walk into the web of worry, chances are the thing that spun that web was fear and that the invitation to walk by faith is not clenching your fists and closing your eyes and trying real hard to believe something that is hard to believe. That is not a good definition of faith. Faith is identifying your fears and stepping into those fears, except this time with the strength God provides.

Today here is what I want to talk about, these things that are killing us that we need to be killing are these things called bitterness and anger and how these two play-off and interact with one another. I think all of us have the capacity to get angry in our lives. Anger oftentimes pops up in unexpected ways. Many of us display anger in different ways, depending on our personality.

Several years ago our family went on vacation with a couple of other families to the Outer Banks of North Carolina. We rented a house, shared the cost of all that. There was a beach north of the house where you could actually drive your vehicle out onto the beach. We thought that sounded like a good idea at the time. So we get out on the beach, but what I neglected to

see was the sign that said you need to let some of the air out of your tires so you get more grip, so you don't get stuck.

It was fine when I was driving close to the water where the sand was all patted down, but when I went to turn around and got into the soft sand we got stuck. And when I say stuck I mean sand was up over the running boards of the Suburban, the exhaust was covered up, it was bad.

So I'm angry, primarily at myself. I am getting frustrated. There was another couple who came over and helped us dig out. We ended up getting off the beach. We had to let some of the air out of our tires to get off the beach, which meant we had four semi-flat tires. I'm looking for a place to air them back up. The only place you could air them up was this tiny little gas station with a postage stamp sized parking lot.

There was only one parking stall to access the air hose, which meant there was line. So I'm kind of waiting in line and finally there is one car in front of us. These two guys got out and aired up their tires and then, to my disbelief, they walked inside the gas station on their own timetable. I'm waiting there. They come out with hot dogs and a 44 ounce big gulp, sit on the hood of their car, and casually eat their lunch.

I am sitting there like, "You have got to be kidding me." My wife is like, "Calm down, calm down, calm down." It is starting to simmer up to the top. What sent it over the edge, and I always wrestle with these moments because how much transparency should I give you? There is a fine line. Confession is good for the soul, bad for the reputation. I just want you to know that as your pastor I am a very flawed human being and this is one of many examples I could pick from

This delivery truck pulls in behind me in this tiny little parking lot. It is trying to get past us to do deliveries, but there is nowhere for me to go. I can't move the truck. And I'm certainly not going to leave because I need to get access to the air.

This delivery truck gets right up on my bumper and then the guy starts honking at me. And I lost it. I got out of the truck and this is what I did. I threw both of my hands up in the air and started walking toward this truck and I go, "Where am I supposed to go buddy? Where do you expect me to go?"

I'm getting all dramatic and I walk right up to the cab of this truck, which is really stupid because he was way bigger than me. Here is what he did. He rolled up his window, and then he told me I was number one. At least that is how I chose to receive that.

And so I turn and walk back to my truck and get into the Suburban. My wife said two things to me. She said, "Feel better?" and, "You're scaring the children." I turned around and saw the looks on the kid's faces and I felt about that big.

All of us have the capacity to get angry. It's a very real emotion. But we express it in different ways. Some of us have longer fuses, and some are shorter. Some of us blow up, others clam up. Some of us are kind of like a skunk when we get angry. We immediately spew it over the people around us. Others of us are more like a turtle. We kind of close up and go into our shell.

All of those extremes are damaging to our relationships and toxic to our soul. Now to be clear, God's Word never prohibits anger. It never says you should not get angry. In fact, it says the opposite. It says, "Be slow to anger." It says this, "In your anger do not sin," which means it's possible to be angry yet not cross that line into something destructive.

And there should be some things that make you angry in this world. Things like injustice, racism, sexism, abuse—all of those things should bring about a righteous indignation. It's like holy discontent, "That's not right and I'm going to get angry about it."

Jesus himself got angry. Jesus at one time got angry at a fig tree for not producing enough figs. He cursed the tree and the next day it completely dried up—poor tree. One time Jesus was walking into the temple courts and noticed they had turned it into an outdoor mall. And he went all WWE on them, flipping over tables and portraying his anger. Jesus got angry with the disciples and the religious leaders all the time, primarily for being selfish and cold-hearted toward other people.

Bitterness is a different thing. Bitterness is unresolved anger in our lives. Bitterness is the calcification of unresolved anger. Let me kind of give us a definition: Bitterness is the result of unresolved, unforgiven anger and resentment **built up over time**.

It's a result of maybe a painful experience or interaction that you had with somebody in your life and that experience turned into a belief. It became the lens by which you see others or maybe you see a certain group of people, or even by the way you live your life.

The author of Hebrews warns us in Hebrews 12:15, "Look after each other so that none of you fails to receive the grace of God."

That is a powerful sentence. It is basically saying to all of us: Don't block the grace of God coming into somebody else's life. And one of the things that can block the grace of God in other people's lives is your anger and bitterness.

Then it offers us this warning, "Watch out that no **poisonous root of bitterness** grows up to trouble you, corrupting many."

The thing about a root is you can't see it. It is underground. And he says this root of bitterness is in your heart. Maybe you can't initially see it, but be careful that it doesn't grow up to corrupt your relationships and the people you love.

We see an example of this in the life of Peter. Peter was one of Jesus' closest friends. He was one of his disciples. And he had anger issues. We see Peter's anger flaring up from time to time. One time he got mad at Jesus himself. The context here is that Jesus is getting ready to be arrested and crucified. He is trying to prepare his disciples for this.

In chapter 16 of Matthew, verse 21, it says this, "From then on Jesus began to tell his disciples plainly that it was necessary for him to go to Jerusalem, and that he would suffer many terrible things at the hands of the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, but on the third day he would be raised from the dead."

And Peter loses it in verse 22. "But Peter took him aside and began to **reprimand** him for saying such things. 'Heaven forbid, Lord,' he said. 'This will never happen to you!'"

Now it seems like a good thing to say. It seems like Peter is just expressing a real honest emotion. I think he was, but it crossed a line. His tone here is one of anger. He is actually telling Jesus what should happen. He was like: Jesus, why would you roll over and let this happen to you?

I think Jesus picked up on the tone and he picked up on the direction of Peter's heart. Jesus was an expert at reading hearts. What Jesus said next to Peter was a little bit jarring. This is in verse 23. "Jesus turned to Peter and said, 'Get away from me, Satan!'"

I don't recommend you do this. If you get into an argument with your spouse, I don't recommend that this is what you say. Only Jesus can play this card. Jesus calls Peter Satan here. Did he mean that literally? No. What he says next gives us an indication as to why he says it.

"You are a **dangerous trap** to me." Satan sets dangerous traps. Peter's anger here was tempting Jesus, potentially riling him up and potentially giving Jesus an opportunity to go there in anger. He says, "You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God's."

That is actually a really good definition of anger. Jesus is saying to us that we keep want to change our circumstances. God wants to change us. Peter speaks up here and doesn't want the circumstances he is in. Jesus is like: Calm down just a minute. You are looking at this from merely a human perspective. You are not looking at it from a broader one.

Then Jesus offers Peter as well as you and me a way out of our unresolved anger in verse 24. "Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'If any of you wants to be my follower, you must **give up your own way**, take up your cross, and follow me.'"

I never understood this verse, but Jesus is saying this in the context of Peter's anger. He says: If you try to **hang on** to your life, you will **lose it**. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it.

How many of you like to give up your own way. Not many of us. A couple of us, people pleasers do. Jesus offers such clarity here, not only for what is at the root of some of our anger, but also the way for us to break free from the grasp of it.

I am reminded of what James says about anger in James 4 in the first couple of verses. "What causes quarrels and fights among you? Don't they come from the evil desires within you? You want, but you don't have so you kill and you scheme to get it."

What Jesus is teaching here and what James is simply reminding us of is that the root of all of our anger is this: The root of all anger is that I wanted something ... but didn't get it.

And here is the kicker. What you wanted, maybe you deserved. What you wanted was maybe something good for you. What you wanted was something you were actually entitled to, but you didn't get it for whatever reason and right then and there between the intersection of your expectations and your reality is a choice.

Am I going to stay in my anger? Am I going to sit in it, soak in it, and sour in it which leads to bitterness? Or am I going to spew it, which also leads to bitterness? Or am I going to work out my anger in a healthy way to guard my heart? It has very little to do with the other person who makes you angry.

And I think Peter here heard Jesus say this, but it didn't sink in yet. And the reason why I believe that to be true is that just a few chapters later Peter is hanging with Jesus and the rest of the disciples in the garden the night before Jesus' crucifixion and the Roman soldiers come to arrest him and Peter blows his top again. He actually takes a sword out and cuts off one of the Roman soldiers' ears.

It's kind of awesome if you think about it. He cuts the ear right off this guy whose name is Malchus. And what Jesus does next is stunning. Some of you know the story. Jesus bends down and picks up the ear on the ground and snaps it back on the side of the head of Malchus like a Lego block and tells Peter to cool it.

For a long time I just never fully understood that. I thought Jesus was being kind of ungrateful. Here you've got your friend who is actually defending you. But once again, Jesus knew Peter's heart. Peter's outburst of anger here I don't think had very much to do with the injustice toward Jesus. I think it had everything to do with his own fear.

He was afraid of what he might lose if they arrested Jesus. He was afraid of maybe the lack of platform if they took Jesus. Peter and the rest of the disciples were thinking that Jesus was going to usher in an earthly kingdom. And it just revealed where his heart was.

If anyone had a right to get angry in that whole example, it would have been Jesus. He just had Judas betray him and he was about ready to be arrested for no charges and tried illegally. But Jesus doesn't get angry.

What are some indications that our unresolved anger is maybe causing some bitterness in our lives?

The unfortunate thing about bitterness is you don't know you are bitter until you are already bitter. What are some red flags? I just want to give you a couple of real practical handles of application for you to write down, think about, and maybe discuss at home or with your group. Here are some ways we know anger is being displayed in some unhealthy ways and preceding bitterness.

One is just what I would call: Fume and spew.

Several years ago I was meeting this young guy for lunch that I had been mentoring and pouring into. We meet and sit down at a booth and both lean in and immediately the conversation went deep. It always did with this guy. He is confessing some things to me, he is wrestling with some things, and he tears up. While he is talking and I am listening to him, I grab my ice water and go for a drink and it goes down the wrong tube.

And have you ever had one of those moments where, without even thinking about it, your body just rejects it? Oh yeah. All the water that was in my mouth spewed out all over his face. It was right at this tender moment when he was confessing some stuff to me. There was a split second when he thought I did it on purpose.

Water was dripping off his nose. It was awful. I felt so bad. And you know what? There have been times I've done that in my anger toward people—totally blindsided them. It always is damaging to the relationship and it's always toxic to my own heart.

In Galatians 5:19 it says this. "When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, **outbursts of anger**..." When you are at the Outer Banks, trying to put air in your tires, and guys won't move.

The next one is this: Payback

It feels good to kind of follow the words of the great theologian Carrie Underwood. "I dug my keys into the side of his pretty little souped-up four wheel drive and carved my names into the leather seats. I took a Louisville slugger to both headlights and slashed all four tires. Maybe next time he'll think before he cheats."

And it's a catchy tune, but I always want to say back to the radio, "Carrie, I don't think he will think next time before he cheats. I don't think it will work. It might feel good momentarily, but it's actually not going to resolve anything."

Revenge is like cotton candy. It tastes good momentarily but doesn't lead you anywhere. Romans 12 tells us to never take revenge and to do things in such a way that everyone can see we are honorable. Revenge is a lie that keeps us from getting well. It is seeking to assume that someone else is responsible for the condition we are in, so now we're going to even the score. Even if it is true that the other person has wronged us, revenge never works. Nobody has ever blamed their way to happiness.

The next unhealthy way to display anger is this: Stealth attack

This is sometimes referred to as the silent treatment. The silent treatment has killed more friendships, working relationships, and more marriages than what we probably care to know. Ephesians 4:26 says this. "And don't sin by letting anger control you. Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a foothold to the devil."

That's just another way of saying: Go resolve this anger as quickly as you can because holding onto it is not going to benefit you or the other person.

If you have your own business maybe you've run a cost benefit analysis of an expenditure, an investment, or a project. I ran a cost benefit analysis of anger. What does it cost me and how does it benefit me? It's very, very clear that it costs more than what it promises. You just run through God's Word and you see this: It

Causes spiritual blindness: 1 John 2:9-11;

Affects my prayers: Mark 11:25; 1 Peter 3:7;

Is toxic to all my relationships: Hebrews 12:15;

Becomes my own prison: Acts 8:23, Matthew 18:21-35;

Makes my offering to God unacceptable: Matthew 5:23-24;

Changes my personality and attitude: Psalm 73:21-22;

Leads me away from God and into trouble: Proverbs 28:14;

Destroys my health: Job 21:23-25, Job 5:2.

It's just not worth it. So what are some ways we can deal with anger in ways that leads our hearts away from bitterness?

Well, one I would give you is this: Seek to understand.

When you begin to feel the emotions of anger and rage boiling up within you, you don't need to suppress it, stuff it, or spew it. You just take a deep breath, do what you need to do to calm down, and then you go, "Okay, I need to seek to understand what is going on here."

Where I always start is with, "God, search me. God, search my heart and see what is going on in here. Because I don't see what is going on in here and I need your Spirit to guide me through this so I don't do something stupid that blows apart this relationship or my influence in this life."

Ephesians 4:31 says, "Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior." If it is leaning toward bitterness, get rid of it.

Here is the second one: Deescalate the situation.

Figure out a way to dial everything down. Proverbs 15:1 says this. "A gentle answer deflects anger, but harsh words make tempers flare." It's just amazing. It's your tone. If you begin to see it is turning into a heated argument, just change the tone. Watch how a gentle answer deflects the situation.

And the third thing is this: Present an observation rather than an accusation.

An accusation is always like gasoline to a fire. Here is a little tidbit. Stay away from the word *always*. You always... That will light someone up faster than anything because the odds are they don't always, it just feels that way.

And when somebody hurts you maybe it was intentional, but most of the time it's unintentional. But to be able to come to somebody with a gentle tone and say, "When you said that," or, "When you did that," or, "When you didn't say that," or, "When you didn't show up," here is how I took it. Is there any truth to that? Could you help me dispel that narrative that is running around in my brain? And from my experience nine times out of 10 the other person says, "Man, I didn't mean it that way at all," and they explain what they meant and it just takes it from nuclear to rational.

Proverbs 16:32 says, "Better to be patient than powerful; better to have self-control than to conquer a city."

You see, some of you today listening to this are wrestling with bitterness because of something that happened a long, long time ago to you that you can't do anything about. Maybe you are wrestling with bitterness right now because one of your parents consistently manipulated your emotions when you were growing up, or they were never around.

Maybe you are bitter right now because a close friend betrayed your trust and there was never any resolution to the situation. Maybe you are really wrestling with bitterness right now and

you don't want to go to work tomorrow because you got overlooked for that promotion. You put in the time, energy, and effort and somebody else who didn't deserve it got it.

Some of you are feeling bitter because you feel marginalized and diminished right now, maybe because of your ethnicity, the color of your skin, or your gender. Some of you are bitter right now because a spouse cheated on you and it hurts even though you decided to stay together. Some of you are wrestling with bitterness because something changed on you and nobody asked your opinion. It just seems like the world went on.

And here is the thing. Your anger isn't wrong. Maybe it's entirely justified. Anger is an honest, healthy emotion. In many cases, what happened to you was wrong. Here's the thing. Your unresolved anger may have become a poison and you allowed it to get into you. So your anger isn't wrong, but you allowed it to take you to a wrong place. And your heart got hardened and the result was bitterness.

And bitterness not only hardens your heart on the inside, it hardens your features on the outside. It's not just what you eat that determines your health, it's what eats you. And bitterness is an emotional and spiritual cancer. It's usually caused by the words and the actions of someone else, but they can't make you bitter. Only you can do that.

And at some point you've got to draw a line in the sand and say, "No. I'm not going to become a bitter person." That doesn't mean you need to deny reality. It doesn't mean you need to just take all of life's lemons and make lemonade. That doesn't help.

It means that at some point you need to choose to extend this word that many of us have a love-hate relationship with. We love it when we receive it. We hate it when we have to give it—forgiveness.

One of my earliest memories is getting left at preschool all by myself. Some of you are like, "That explains a lot. Now we know." I was probably four or five years old. I went to the preschool at the church we attended. Many churches have them. That's where my parents sent me.

I was really good friends with my preschool teacher's son. It was his birthday. He was having a birthday party at Pizza Hut. I'll never forget. We all walked out as a small class to a couple of vans. I climbed up into the van with my friend and sat down next to him. I'll never forget. She opened up the door and looked at me and said, "Aaron, you're not going."

She made me get out of the van in front of all my friends and go back inside the building. There were other older classes there, but I was largely by myself. I remember walking back into the back of the auditorium and sitting down in the pew. I knew I needed to call my mom, but I didn't know how. So I just kind of waited. I was sitting out on the curb when my mom pulled up. She couldn't believe I was out there all by myself.

Come to find out years later what had happened is this lady had gotten upset with my dad for something he had done. I don't even remember what he did. But she decided to take it out on me and uninvited me from the birthday party.

And many years later, like when I was in college and working a part-time job at Sam's Club as a cashier, guess who came through my line? Oh yeah. And here was this amazing thing about it. I hadn't even looked up yet, but I smelled her perfume. And as soon as I smelled her perfume, all the memories came rushing back and I looked up.

Here is the thing. She was so nice. She greeted me, smiled, and she was like, "How are you doing today?" It dawned on me that she had no idea who I was. I'm bigger than her now. I'm stronger than her now. I've got the scanning gun and I could double-ring her toilet paper.

Just in a few seconds all these things, these thoughts flooded through my mind of how I could get even with her. Maybe I could tell her off or whatever. And I'll never forget, right there in that moment—it didn't come from me, because clearly I have anger issues, but there was this still small voice of the Spirit of God. And he was like, "You need to forgive her."

I was like, "No, I'm not going to forgive her. She deserves whatever she's got coming to her." I wanted to get even and he was like, "It has nothing to do with her." Number one, you don't know what she was going through at the time. Number two, you never heard her side of the story. Number three, she probably doesn't even remember it. This has everything to do with you, Brockett, not her.

I remember as I handed her the receipt it took everything within me to smile at her and say, "Have a great day." As she walked away I thought to myself, "I probably will never see her again," and I just said it, "I forgive you."

She never responded to me. She never turned around. The sky didn't open up and angels didn't come down. None of that happened, but I felt this hardened calcification around my heart start to loosen.

One time the disciples would ask Jesus about this. They would say: How many chances should we give somebody? We've heard seven. That seems pretty gracious. Jesus goes: Oh no. How about seven times seventy? The disciples are like: 490?

So 490 times we'll give somebody a shot. But then at 491 we're drop-kicking them in the throat. That's what we're doing? No, no, no, this is figurative. That's actually another way of saying this is a way of life. It's like breathing. How many times should I breathe during the day to stay healthy? I don't know, just keep breathing. How many meals should I have between now and the end of my life? I don't know, just keep eating. How many times should I forgive? Just keep forgiving.

I know some of you didn't clap right there. I'm serious. It is painful. You're like, "You got left at preschool. Big deal. Let me tell you my story." Good point. But is it really making anything better?

Have you noticed that we live in a really, really angry world? People get angry at the drop of a hat. One of the most distinctive things about people who have trusted their lives to Jesus should be that we handle our anger differently. When somebody looks at you they just go, "What is your deal? It's not that you're Pollyanna, but you're so gracious."

And you look back at them and say, "It's because I'm extending the grace that's been given to me. God forgave me, and I don't deserve it. God has actually extended forgiveness through Jesus to this entire world, and not everybody will receive it. But God still gave it, so I'm going to give it to you."

And the key to this is Christ living in me. I can't do this on my own. If you are trying to give forgiveness and get free from bitterness on your own, you're not going to be able to do it. You've got to invite the Spirit of God into your life to be able to do this because it is a supernatural thing. It's not something that you can do in your own human strength. And you begin to realize that when you forgive you're actually unlocking the prison cell and you're walking out, not the other person.

So here's what I want to invite you to do. I realize I'm going really long right now. There is a fine line between a really long sermon and a hostage situation. This is turning into a hostage situation. I'm closing this thing down. I want to give you an opportunity just to receive Jesus into your heart, either for your salvation or to release yourself from your bitterness or maybe both.

And it's just very simple. Right where you are seated, at any campus, you just simply go, "I give up. I'm going to put to death the deeds of my sinful nature. It's missing the mark in my life. God, this isn't your best for me. Jesus, I invite you in to be my Lord and Savior. You've done everything sufficient for my salvation. Let me live this life with the strength of your Spirit."

Let me pray and then our teams are going to lead us in communion and worship. Please don't leave. I know some of you might have schedules to run to, kids to get to, or lunch to eat, but this is the most powerful time in our gatherings together where we allow the Spirit of God to work on our hearts.

Father, I come to you right now and I just pray that you would release multiple people today from their own bitterness. Maybe they didn't even know they were bitter. But maybe they are going to see it in their lives and they've allowed this poisonous root to get ahold of them.

I ask that you would give them the strength. Nobody is telling them to just suck it up. Nobody is telling them it is no big deal. What we are saying is that when they choose to forgive, they are being set free.

It's making our heart softer so you can do a work within our lives.

God I pray that you'd radically change somebody's life today, somebody who would go from darkness to light, from death to life because of your grace. May we as a people give a picture of that to a world that is so angry and needs what only you can give.

Meet us in this place right now. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.