

WHEN IT'S DIFFICULT TO FORGIVE, REMEMBER THE WORDS OF THE SAVIOR IN MATTHEW 5  
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SAVIOR IN MATTHEW 5:44

"Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you."

The Savior commanded His followers to love their enemies, but that, in all probability, was their most difficult assignment. Some people profess to love everybody, but evade the real issue by admitting they do not like everybody! When an innocent person has been maliciously slandered, and his influence for Christ and the church ruined, it becomes increasingly difficult to ignore what has been done. The idea of turning the other cheek is not the most popular Christian teaching. The Bible supplies notable examples of people who succeeded in overlooking the faults of their enemies.

David..... Who Spared the Life of King Saul

The story of Saul's inexcusable jealousy of the lad from Bethlehem has become one of the most infamous accounts in literature. Although David had given great service to his master, his kindly attitude was completely ignored, and a quivering lance embedded in the wall of the palace gave eloquent evidence of the monarch's ill temper. When David was given the opportunity to remove his enemy forever, everybody was amazed by the kindness of the long-suffering fugitive. His refusal to kill the tyrant guaranteed he would be worthy to reign over Israel (see 1 Sam. 26:6-9).

Martha..... Who Never Complained Again

Martha was very flustered. She was expecting about twenty guests for dinner, and she wanted everything to be perfect. Jesus and his twelve disciples would be present, probably Simon the leper, one of her neighbors would attend, and a few extra friends would spend the evening with them. Of course it would mean extra work and careful planning, but Mary would be a great help in arranging the details. But where was she?

Then Martha's eyes seemed to grow larger, and her blood pressure began to rise. It could not be! Her sister would never ignore her responsibilities in the kitchen! Martha glanced into the living room and rebelled. "Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received

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him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me" (Luke 10:38-40).

It must be admitted that Martha had legitimate reasons for complaint, but there is no record that she ever complained again. Other women might have sulked through the evening, and then refused to speak to the thoughtless sister for the rest of the week. Martha had not only invited Jesus into her home, but she welcomed Him into her heart.

The Savior... Who Spoke of an Unforgiving Servant

The Lord Jesus, who never carried a grudge against anybody, told a remarkable story of an unforgiving man. He intimated in His parable that a king's honored servant embezzled a large sum of money which was assessed at 10,000 talents. Today that would be in excess of two hundred million dollars. When the criminal confessed his sin and asked for pardon, his master forgave him. Yet, the

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same man refused to pardon a fellow servant who only owed seven  
dollars and fifty cents.

"And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors,  
till he should pay all that was due unto him" The Savior continued,  
"So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from  
your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses" (see  
Matt. 18:23-35).

These were solemn words which we may or may not appreciate.  
Yet one thing became obvious: if people expect to be forgiven by  
God, they must be willing to exhibit the same kindness in their  
associations with other people. Forgiveness is a seed capable of  
producing a great harvest.

When I was a young preacher, I spent five years preaching in  
Great Britain. I met and heard many other evangelists, but none  
impressed me so much as did the workers in the Salvation Army.  
For example, I heard of a young Salvationist called Jenny. One  
night as she spoke to her audience, a drunken man at the back of the  
crowd threw a potato which struck her in the face. For a few mo-  
ments she seemed disconcerted, but quickly recovering, continued  
to preach the Gospel. Later that evening she planted the potato in  
her garden and at the next Harvest Thanksgiving Service proudly

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displayed a basket of attractive golden potatoes. Then she took them  
to an old pensioner, and her gift supplied food for a whole week.  
God is able to make even the wrath of men to praise Him (see Ps.  
76:10). He can do even more when His people cooperate with Him  
(see Col. 3:13).

WHEN YOU THINK YOU CAN'T,  
REMEMBER PHILIPPIANS 4:13

"I can do all things through Christ  
which strengtheneth me."

I knew a lady who was an excellent game player, but she was her  
own worst enemy. Fully convinced of her inability to compete suc-  
cessfully, she would systematically explain reasons for her incompe-  
tence. Having done this, she would surprise herself with excellent  
play which vanquished her opponents. She would say, "I cannot do  
it," but she was mistaken.

It has often been claimed that it is better to try and fail than never  
to try. Francis Gay, in The Friendship Book for 1972, quoted these  
lines from an unknown author:

If you think you're beaten, you are. If you think you dare not,  
you don't.  
If you'd like to win, but you think you can't, it's almost certain,  
you won't.  
If you think you'll lose, you've lost, for out in the world, you'll find  
That success begins in a fellow's will-it's all in the state  
of the mind.  
Think big, and your deeds will grow. Think small, and you'll  
fall behind.  
Think you can win, and you will-it's all in the state of mind.  
Life's battles often go to the stronger or faster man.  
But sooner or later, the man who wins is the man who thinks he can.

Consider Goliath Who Said He Would and Couldn't

He was a one-man mountain, the pride of all Philistia, and the  
hem of the nation's army. When the sun shone upon his glistening  
armor, it was easy to believe the mountain was being set on fire.

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When he roared his challenge to Israel, it sounded like thunder preceding a storm. When he flexed his muscles and waved his enormous weapons, his opponents trembled. Yet the giant was amazed when a small boy with pebbles in his hand challenged his superiority. This was an affront to his dignity, an unforgivable insult to his prowess.

"And the Philistine said to David, Come to me, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field" (1 Sam. 17:44).

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His face was flushed with fury-tis child was not even a dog, he was a senseless puppy! "Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield, but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel whom thou hast defied. This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine ..... that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel" (1 Sam. 17:45-46).

That small boy was tall enough to look over the shoulder of the giant and see God behind him. Goliath said, "I will" but couldn't. David said, "I will" and did!

Consider Philip Who Said He Couldn't and Did

The Sea of Galilee was probably resplendent with the glow of a setting sun. The evening breeze was gently playing a tune in the leaves of the trees. As Jesus looked from the hill to see the immense multitude that had followed him, He sighed. They were hungry. They were "as sheep without a shepherd." The children were asking for food, but the excited parents were too intent on waiting for another miracle to pay attention to the needs of their offspring. It was wonderful to tell people about the bread of life, but they needed a meal. The little people had to be fed.

"[Jesus] saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them that every one of them may take a little" (John 6:5-7).

Master, what you suggest is impossible. I would need to work every day for nine months in order to obtain enough money to buy provisions for this crowd. There are no shops, and we have no money. A boy's lunch! Five barley loaves and a couple of small fish! Pardon my laughter, Lord, but common sense says it can't be done.

And yet it was done, and Philip helped do it What a difference Jesus made in that difficult situation. It is not known whether Philip ever met the apostle Paul, but in any case, he would have fully agreed with Paul's statement, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

Consider Paul Who Said He Could and Did

Paul was an enigma, difficult to understand and even harder to explain. Writing to the Corinthians he said, "Of the Jews five times

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received I forty stripes save one." Therefore on five different occasions he was lashed for his faith - but he could not be silenced! "Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned." Other prisoners died during such punishment, but Paul survived. "Thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep." He either clung to the wreckage of a ship, or lay in a tossing lifeboat, yet he did not sink (see 2 Cor. 11 :24-33). It is believed that Paul suffered

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from extremely poor eyesight, yet his letters comprise most of the  
New Testament. He could not have been a robust man, yet within  
his lifetime he evangelized the known world. He did not always  
succeed in his mission, but he never quit. Men and women of his  
caliber never do.

WHEN THE PRESSURES OF LIFE MAKE YOU IRRITABLE,  
REMEMBER ISAIAH 30:15 AND MARK 6:31

"For thus saith the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel... in quietness  
and in confidence shall be your strength." "Come ye yourselves apart  
into a desert place, and rest a while."

When the children of Israel entered Canaan, they were given  
explicit instructions regarding their agriculture. "When ye come  
into the land which I give you, then shall the land keep a sabbath  
unto the Lord. Six years thou shalt sow thy field, and six years thou  
shalt prune thy vineyard, and gather the fruit thereof. But in the  
seventh year shall be a sabbath of rest unto the land, a sabbath for  
the Lord: thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard"  
(Lev. 25:2-4).

During the passing of time, regulations changed the attitude of  
farmers. Aware of the increasing needs of mankind, governments  
ordered that fertilizers and other commodities be used to restore the  
elements removed by successive crops. Fields are not "rested" as  
they once were.

When a man or woman works under pressure, irritability is inev-  
itable. When people are emotionally upset, they say and do things  
which beget tension and destructiveness. Relationships are ruined,  
and contacts with neighbors become a nightmare. God knew this  
and prepared a remedy for His people.

Stillness... The Mother of Confidence

During my stay in Rotorua, New Zealand, I went with a famous  
guide to see the wonders of the national park. All around were pools  
of boiling mud and geysers of varying size. Yet the main attraction  
was the huge central waterspout which sent a column of water high  
into the air. When it seemed reluctant to entertain visitors, I saw a  
slight frown appear on the face of the lady lecturer. Suddenly, she  
approached and threw something into the base of the geyser. Within  
moments the earth seemed to erupt, and the famous phenomenon  
came to life. I was fascinated when she explained, "Sometimes, it is  
necessary to throw some detergent into the gaping hole. I do not  
know what happens exactly, but the trick always works."

I smiled, for I had often seen the same phenomenon among men  
and women. Volcanic eruptions are not reserved exclusively for  
national parks. Sometimes eruptive energy fills the souls of human

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beings, and it only needs a little encouragement. One unwise word  
or thoughtless action may lead to problems in a home, a communi-  
ty, and even among nations. Such energy needs to be quelled, not  
encouraged! Jesus said to His exultant followers, "Come apart, and  
rest awhile," and to make this possible, He led the disciples into the  
desert. They needed to be still and know that He was God.

Solitude... The Means of Communion

Many teachers believe that Moses did not deserve the punish-  
ment which terminated his ministry. He had brought Israel out from  
the bondage of Egypt to the borders of Canaan. That he should be  
excluded from Canaan because of the failure of the people and his  
own moment of anger when he smote the rock seemed to be a

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travesty of justice. God had special reasons for His treatment of  
Israel's leader, but it is thought-provoking that during his times of  
testing Moses climbed into the mountain where his ruffled spirit  
was calmed.

love;  
"To bear up under loss; to fight the bitterness of defeat, and the  
weakness of grief; to be victor over anger; to smile when tears are  
close; to resist evil men and base instincts; to hate hate, and love  
to go on when it would seem good to die; to seek after the glory and  
the dream; to look up with unquenchable ..... that is what any man  
can do, and so be great" -Zane Grey

#### Self-Restraint... The Method of Conquest

Moses and Paul belonged to the same family. In some ways they  
might have been twins! Paul gave his life for people who criticized  
him, and he sacrificed everything that undeserving people might be  
helped. Surely there were occasions when his natural instincts desired  
to retaliate, but on the solitary occasion when he yielded to impulse, he  
apologized for his outburst (see Acts 23:1-5). His phenomenal success  
was due, at least in part, to the steady hold he maintained upon his  
personal feelings. He had learned to say, 'Not I, but Christ liveth in  
me' (Gal. 2:20).

Too much work can promote oppression, worry, discontent, and,  
finally, criticism of other people. Since the tongue can be a dangerous  
member of the body, it is often wise to keep one's mouth closed!

God said, "In quietness and confidence shall be your strength," and  
this is an excellent text for a depressed or irritable soul.

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#### WHEN YOU ARE MISJUDGED OR FALSELY ACCUSED, REMEMBER 1 SAMUEL 1:12-14

"And it came to pass, as she continued praying before the Lord,  
that Eli marked her mouth. Now Hannah, she spake in her heart;  
only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard: therefore Eli  
thought she had been drunken. And Eli said unto her, How  
long wilt thou be drunken? Put away thy wine from thee."

It is a terrible thing to be misjudged and condemned, especially  
when the criticism comes from a person who should know better.  
During moments of anguish the soul may become hurt, annoyed  
and retaliatory - or miraculously tolerant and patient. Let it be  
admitted, it is difficult to remain serene when unkind words un-  
dermine one's influence for God. The Bible supplies numerous  
examples of people who remained calm under fire.

#### Hannah Who Interceded

The woman was desperate. She had no child, and according to the  
belief of her culture, her barrenness was considered to be a curse  
from God. To make matters worse, her husband's second wife "pro-  
voked her sore, for to make her fret, because the Lord had shut up  
her womb" (1 Sam 1:6-7).

Hannah was filled with sadness when she prayed silently before the altar  
at Shiloh. "She spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was  
not heard, therefore Eli thought she had been drunken." The words spoken  
by the high priest were humiliating, but Hannah remained calm. Had she  
denounced the priest, she might have lost the greatest blessing of her

life.

#### David Who Intervened

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Poor David! He was perplexed. He was being accused of all kinds of indiscretions and was being hunted as "a partridge in the mountains" (1 Sam. 26:20). Then suddenly it seemed his troubles were ending; Saul, who had misjudged and vilified him, lay at his feet. "Then said Abishai to David, God hath delivered thine enemy into thine hand this day; now therefore let me smite him, I pray thee, with the spear even to the earth at once, and I will not smite him the second time. And David said to Abishai, Destroy him not: for who can stretch forth his hand against the Lord's anointed, and be guiltless?" (1 Sam. 26:8-9).

If David had acted impetuously, he would have made one of his

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greatest mistakes. He subdued his anger, and any desire for revenge or self-justification was suppressed. Perhaps he listened to God who said, "To me belongeth vengeance, and recompense" (Deut. 32:35).

#### The Savior Who Instructed

The Sermon on the Mount was the greatest message ever delivered to a congregation. The hillside audience was enthralled and yet amazed by the words of Jesus the Carpenter. His ideas were different from anything they had ever heard. His highways to blessing ran through unexplored territory. The people had been taught to resist enemies, and in a corrupt world they knew how to survive. Jesus introduced a new life - style, and they were not sure whether they could accept it.

They listened as the Teacher said, "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against

you

falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven" (Matt 5:11-12).

The Lord not only recommended these virtues, He practiced what He preached. Of Him it was said, "Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not: but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously" (1 Peter 2:23). It should never be forgotten

that

when God raised the Lord and exalted him to the right hand of the Majesty on high, the Savior had more than demonstrated His worthiness for that honor. His amazing teaching must be the inspiration of the church, and His deeds the example for every Christian.

#### Paul Who Imitated

The church at Corinth was composed of a cosmopolitan people who did not live together peacefully. Although Paul founded and established the church, he was not always proud of his converts. His message to them was self-explanatory. "Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: Being defamed, we entreat; we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day. I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you. For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Wherefore, I beseech you, be ye followers of me" (1 Cor. 4:12-16).

Paul's advice was obvious. When Christians are attacked by unkind critics, they should ascertain if there was truth in the statements; if not, they should rejoice. Their attitude would guarantee excellent company.

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