Ephesians 4 (Part 5): 25-32 • Living the New Life

Teacher: Pastor Paul LeBoutillier
Life Bible Ministry

Ephesians 4, beginning in verse 25. Follow along as I read. It says:

"[25] Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. [26] Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, [27] and give no opportunity to the devil. [28] Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

[29] Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. [30] And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. [31] Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. [32] Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."(ESV)

Stop there. Let's pray.

Holy Spirit, we come before You always when we are ready to open our hearts to the Word because we know that You are the one who enlightens us so that we can actually hear. You are the one who enables us to have those spiritual ears to hear, a heart to receive.

You are the one who applies the Word to our lives, and You fill us with understanding and insight. And we're asking You to do that here today because as we dig into Your word, we want to grow. We pray that You'd help us to do it, and we ask it in the name of Jesus Christ, who is Savior, amen.

In the previous verses that we covered here on Sunday morning, in fact, last week, you'll remember that Paul was talking about the old you, meaning, the person that you used to be before you came to Christ. He called it the old self. It's referred different ways in different, even translations, but it's just the old nature, the old you, the old self. And he said that we are to put it off. Put it off. Stop living that way, and now begin to live with the new you, the new self,

which is being created in the image of God, to put on the new self. We talked all about that last week.

And now he begins in these final verses of chapter 4 to give us practical insights about what that means. Because you can say all day long, put on the new self, put on the new self, but if you're not given some specific understanding of what he's dealing with, what he's talking about, you might, be at a loss.

He begins by just talking about very practical exhortations that demonstrate this new life that we've been given in Christ. And he begins by saying: *"25 Therefore, having put away* (past tense) *falsehood*, (in other words, that was part of your old life; now he says) *let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor,* (and so he's talking about specifically those who are in the body of Christ, and in fact, that's why he says) *for we are members one of another."*

In other words, the falsehood that used to be demonstrated in our previous life, he says we are to put it off. And the word, falsehood really includes every form of dishonesty that might come from us. Everything from making promises that are ultimately not kept to betraying a confidence, or false flattery, or any other number of ways that we might stretch the truth or exaggerate, or something like that.

Basically, what he's saying is a believer's word needs to be trustworthy. When we say something, we need to mean it. Our yes needs to mean yes, and our no should mean no. And the reason, again, that Paul gives for this truthfulness is we are members one of another. What he means by that is we are the body of Christ, and you can't have a body that is being deceitful to other members of the body and have that body function.

Let me give you an example. The Bible is full of examples of our relationship as the body of Christ by using a physical body. We consider it a pretty serious matter when someone's physical body is doing things that it shouldn't do, such as the nervous system is sending signals to the brain that are wrong. We consider that a fairly serious issue. We would consider that a dysfunctional body, and we would say this person needs some medical help or something like that.

And it's obviously a serious matter when someone's eyesight is so bad that they can no longer perceive a threat when it becomes very real in their lives. They can't see danger approaching, and so that danger becomes very imminent and serious in their lives. Why? The body isn't functioning like it should. It wasn't functioning; it's not functioning like it was intended to function.

Now think about that as it relates to you and I. If I'm telling you something that isn't true, that's like a nervous system telling the rest of the body something's going on when, in fact, it is not, and that body is not going to function properly. We, as the body of Christ, will not function properly apart from truth. We need to speak truth one to another, and that is what Paul is telling us to do.

I think that there's another aspect to this exhortation to speak truth that we need to think about as well, and that is, how it relates to people outside of the body. I think we need to be very careful to be that person who passes along information that's unsubstantiated. We're not really sure if it's true, but I'm just going to pass this along because it's really sensational, and you might need to know this. I'm not really sure it's true. And we do that whether it's on email or Facebook or Instagram or wherever you happen to be on social media, and we throw things out there because people love to pass things along regardless of whether it's true. If it's sensational, that's all I need, and phew, out it goes.

And here's the problem: We're Christians, and we've been given the message of truth, which is the good news that Jesus died for the sins of the world. We can't afford to be labeled as someone who's unreliable related to speaking the truth to people's lives. If you and I are caught saying something or passing along some information that isn't true, and we find out later, oh gee, I guess that wasn't true, sorry about that, guys, well, people begin to wonder about the reliability of our ability to pass along information.

Speak the truth. And if somebody tells you something, or you hear something, or something's passed along to you, and you don't know if it's true, don't pass it along until you know…, because we are purveyors of the truth. We have been commissioned to take His truth to the world. We can't afford to be seen as anything less than truthful.

The next area where Paul encourages us to demonstrate the new life of Christ is in verse 26, where he says: *"Be angry and do not sin..."* Notice Paul doesn't say never be angry. He simply says be angry, fine, but don't sin. And the reason we know that anger isn't necessarily a sin is because Jesus got angry on some occasions, and we know that He was always without sin. It's possible to be angry and not sin.

But there's one very important thing you need to remember about that. You're not Jesus, and neither am I, and the possibility for you and I to get angry and flesh out is really good. And so, we need to be very, very careful about it.

And that is why Paul counsels us in our anger not to sin. In fact, he goes on to give us this advice: *"don't let the sun go down on your anger."* And that's a pretty interesting statement, but it simply means don't sit and nurse a grudge, or nurse that anger, or nurse that offense. Don't let too much time pass before you resolve that issue.

Now, wait a minute. Wait a minute. How do I resolve that issue? It's one thing to be angry; it's another thing for somebody to say, hey, listen, don't sin in your anger. Well, what exactly does that mean? And how can I resolve that if there doesn't seem to be any resolution? Well, you got to take it to the Lord. You got to bring it to God and talk to Him about it.

That's one thing I love about going through the Psalms, which we're doing now on Wednesday night. David took his issues and his anger to the Lord. And I know that he was genuinely angry about certain things and certain men and the way they treated him and others. And he brought it to the Lord, and he vented there.

There's nothing in the Word of God that tells us to repress our emotions. That's just not a smart thing to do because it's going to make you sick, or crazy, or both, and it's going to come back some other way. We don't repress things; we have to bring those things and talk about them to God. Like I said, sometimes there is no way to resolve an issue with somebody else; you just got to go, Lord, I got to.

This last week, I had a situation where I was at the gas pump, and I was just filling up my pickup, which takes forever. Anyway, I'm standing there with my hand on the thing so it'll go even a little bit faster, and there's a couple of ladies in the next thing, aisle, whatever, and getting into it with each other. I'm sitting there, thinking, really? One of them was mad because the other one wouldn't get her car out of the way so she could pull out, and it was not a big deal.

And I remember after I got done pumping my gas and got in the car, I was bothered, and I was like seething about it. I was like, how stupid that was for these women to go roar at each other, and it's like, all you need to do is just say, ma'am, could you slide your car over a little bit so I can get out or something like that? But instead, this one is using foul language and it's just getting weird, and I'm thinking to myself, how dumb is that?

I'm driving along all bothered, and they didn't even do it to me, but I'm still bothered by this thing, and I thought, good grief, how much more susceptible

am I to nursing issues when they're personal? This one wasn't even personal, and I— was just, couldn't let it go. Oh, how dumb, but we do that, don't we?

Paul says don't let the sun go down on your anger. In other words, when you get hurt, when you get offended, when somebody has really messed you over, bring it to God. Come to the throne of grace. You got to just start praying about it. Lord, I know that holding this in is not good. This is going to mess me up for the rest of the day. I know that I'm not going to treat people I love with the kind of grace and forgiveness and tenderness that I need to because I'm sitting here seething over this thing. Lord, I bring this to you. I just—I need to release this. God, give me the strength.

No nursing grudges, no harboring resentment, no keeping a record of wrongs, which we like to do.

Let me remind you of something about our anger given to us by James. In chapter 1 of James, on the screen, verses 19 and 20, he says:

James 1:19-20 (ESV)

Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

Know this, my beloved brothers (he's talking to believers)*: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak,* (and) *slow to anger;* (why?) *for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.*

Okay? Our anger and the things that we seethe over and get upset about, you're not going to bring about the righteousness of God through that anger. Let's take it to the Lord. These are things that— that kind of anger, that's the old life.

Next, Paul says in verse 28: *"Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor* (notice he says even) *doing honest work."* There's all kinds of honest work out there to do, but you'll notice that Paul's comment about not stealing is directly connected with the exhortation to do work, or to do honest work.

I think to myself, wow, if that doesn't apply to the United States of America today, I don't know what does. We are living in a culture today, in a society where people are every day stealing from the government by accepting assistance on false terms when they could be working. It's a staggering issue in our country, and I wouldn't want to be the president and have to deal with it. But here's the deal. As believers, we're to have no part of it. As believers—I mean,

it's one thing if there's a genuine need, but— as believers, we are not to steal when we are capable of doing honest work.

And I want you to notice, too, that Paul gives us an interesting thought related to why we work. Look at the end of verse 28; he says: *"so that you may have something to share with those who are in need."*

That gives a new spin on why we work, doesn't it? We tend to think about, I'm going to work so I can earn money and buy things for me and my family, and we can put food on the table, and clothes on our back, and all the things that we do with our money. And Paul makes reference to working hard so that you might give to other people. Isn't that interesting? The purpose for getting is giving.

Let me show you a very interesting proverb from chapter 19 of the Proverbs. It says:

Proverbs 19: 17 (ESV)

Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his deed.

Whoever is generous to the poor (actually) *lends to the LORD, and* (by the way, God has a very good record keeping system and) *he will repay* him for his deed.

That gives a different sort of an understanding, too, on the whole idea of giving and why we get.

Next, Paul goes, in verse 29, on to say: *"Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear."*

How many of you are raised with your mother telling you if you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all? We learned that from Bambi, for heaven's sake. That was something Thumper taught us. Some of you guys aren't even old enough to remember that. Well, this is the biblical version of that same thing. That's essentially what Paul is saying. Only speak words—this, again, this is the new life, okay? This is not— the old life used to backbite and say hurtful things, but the new life that is in Christ, let it only be the expression of words that build people up.

Can you imagine what the body of Christ would be like if we were to obey this command? If we only said things to one another that were helpful, we'd be

incredible. Everybody would want to come to this church, and then they'd ruin it, probably, by bringing—well, you know.

Think about it as it relates to marriage. What if married couples made the determination in their heart and mind that they will never speak a word to one another that is hurtful ever again? I'd be out of a job as it relates to marriage counseling, which would delight me no end— I don't mind telling you. But I've also been married for 40 years and I know what it's like to mess up in that area, and to say things that are not something that edifies but, in fact, tears down. We need to be quick to ask for forgiveness in those cases.

But I think we also need to make the determination, I'm not going to say anything that hurts. I'm not going to say—because you know why we do that? We do it to get back, don't we? When somebody's hurt us or done something or said something to us that's a little bit painful or whatever, we just, we just lash out with our words. We've been hurt, so we hurt back, and we do double damage because we've been hurt, now we hurt back; now we're both hurting. Now, where are we? We're a mess. And the very mouth that God gave us to praise Him is now being used to do damage.

Look what James says in the third chapter of his letter, verses 9 and 10. He says:

James 3:9-10 (NIV)

With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.

With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men (by the way, who were made in His likeness; but he says:) *Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.*

And we wholeheartedly agree. It should not be.

Well, that's okay, pastor. I never say anything mean to anybody, at least not to their face. I always do it behind their back, so it's not a problem. No, that's a problem, too. We don't say anything— we shouldn't say anything hurtful about anyone ever because this is the new life. This is the character of Christ that is residing in us by faith through the Holy Spirit. This is Him. This is what He's doing. This is His work. We need to yield to that work. Resist the old life; yield to the new work that's going on in us because that Christ in you, He will never say something hurtful about somebody else. He won't ever do that. You and I

will do that but when we do, make no mistake about it, it's the flesh talking. It's the old, stinking, corrupted flesh that is talking.

Verse 30. Paul goes on. Here's the next thing: *"And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."* And most people look at this verse and they see it as the key to this entire passage. Because grieving the Holy Spirit—I mean, all the things that we've mentioned previously: lying, unrighteous anger, stealing, corrupt talking—they all grieve the Holy Spirit. Paul is using this as a catch-all. If in case there's something that I haven't mentioned, let me just say this: don't grieve the Holy Spirit with whom you've been sealed for the day of redemption. All of those things are grieving to the Spirit.

And it's really, incredible to think about the fact that what I do or what I say can actually grieve the Holy Spirit. Isn't that amazing? We tend to think about possibly hurting other people, and we can understand that because we've seen that happen. We've seen the look in their eyes when we say something or whatever. But we don't usually connect with the idea of what I did hurt God. I mean, hurt Him, caused Him sorrow. We don't usually think about that. If we did, I think we would do less things that potentially could do that.

Now, conviction is obviously part of that process. Every time we're convicted of something that we've done or said, that's the Holy Spirit speaking to us through that conviction to say, that wasn't good, that was a bad thing. And you know what that's like: you say something to somebody in a fit of anger or whatever, and immediately you're just convicted by the Spirit, and you're like, oh, I wish I could take that back, but you can't. And you know that there's nothing left now but to go back and apologize and try to make it right or whatever the situation may call for.

Conviction is one thing but I'm talking about something even more significant, and I want to ask you, has the Holy Spirit ever communicated to you the depth of His sorrow over some of something you've done or said?

I ask that question because it's only happened to me once that I know of—I mean that I can really recall, and that was a time in my life when— I won't get into all that but— I was engaged in some activity. I was very young—very young as a believer, and I was still hanging on to areas of sin in my life that I had engaged in as an unbeliever. I had not let go of those areas yet.

I was driving along in my car, very cognizant of the fact that I'd been dealing with things that wasn't good or whatever. I wasn't feeling anything particularly

as I was driving along, but suddenly the Holy Spirit just communicated to me. It was Him saying, I want to show you how what you've done to Me, and I felt this sorrow; I felt this sadness; I felt this disappointment that washed over me like a wave of the ocean that I could not contain. I didn't just cry— and I'm not a crier; I didn't just cry— I sobbed uncontrollably for several minutes as the Lord just communicated to me the depth of His sorrow over my stupidity.

It was one of the most life-changing things I've ever experienced in my entire life, and I'm here to tell you that that particular sin that He showed me His sorrow over, I have never gone back and committed again. It was it was one of those incredible life-changing sorts of things, but it made me realize something very significant, and that is, I am not disconnected from my God.

My life is not disconnected from His. Good grief, He's the head; I'm part of the body. If something happens to you as part of the body, is your head unaware of it? Does your head not feel and understand the depth of pain that that member of the body is involved in? Of course. Jesus is not cut off in a loop from what's going on with the life of His body as well, and when the Holy Spirit communicates the grief that we have caused Him related to our own sin, it is a powerful, powerful thing. We can grieve the Holy Spirit, as crazy as it sounds.

And by the way—this is an aside, okay? — but this statement that Paul makes here in Ephesians about grieving the Holy Spirit is proof positive that the Holy Spirit is a person. And I'm giving you that as proof—not that you need it but— I'm sharing it with you in case that you might ever take on a conversation with someone who's trying to convince you that the Holy Spirit is not a person but is rather a force like gravity or wind—because there are many people who believe that. If anybody ever challenges you with that, I would encourage you to take him to Ephesians chapter 4 and have him read that verse out loud about grieving the Holy Spirit, and then follow it up by asking them when’s the last time they grieved gravity or the wind.

And if they struggle with that one, take them to Acts chapter 5, which talks about Ananias and Sapphira—where Peter confronts Ananias with lying to the Holy Spirit— and then ask them this: When's the last time you lied to gravity, or to the wind? It's not possible because those things are forces, but you can lie to the Holy Spirit and you can grieve the Holy Spirit because He is a person.

But this reminder that I've, injected here about the personhood of the Holy Spirit should not distract us from the exhortation that Paul is giving in these verses related to we who are sealed by the Holy Spirit, not living in such a way so as to

grieve Him with our fleshly words and actions, which we can very well and easily do.

Verse 31, he says: *"Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice."*

He mentions these 5 things. Bitterness. Bitterness is a terrible thing. Bitterness is disappointment—could be disappointment with someone; bitterness can even come from disappointment from—with God.

And it turns to anger, and that anger, over time, smolders into bitterness. You can be talking to somebody who's bitter and not even realize it, but bitterness can captivate you, and you can become a slave to it.

You guys remember when Philip brought the gospel into Samaria? People were getting saved left and right, so Peter and John went up to Samaria to see what the deal was up there. It says that people had been getting saved but the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon—which is the baptism of the Spirit. They had not yet received the baptism of the Spirit, so they started laying hands on people, and they started receiving the Holy Spirit with the baptism of the Spirit. These people were already saved but—so, Peter and John are laying hands on these people.

And there's obviously a manifestation of the Spirit taking place because this man named Simon, the sorcerer, came up to Peter and offered him money. He said—because he had been, a magician type of person who impressed people, and he tried to offer him money— he says, here, give me that ability, so when I lay my hands on people, they receive the Holy Spirit.

You remember what Peter said to him? He said, may your money perish with you for thinking that you can purchase or buy the power and the gift of the Holy Spirit, and then he went on to say this: *"For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin."* And by the way, that was a word of knowledge. In other words, the Holy Spirit dropped it in Peter's heart to know and understand what this man's true condition was. He was literally a slave to bitterness.

Bitterness is horrible. Let me show you what the Book of Hebrews has to say on the subject of bitterness. It says:

Hebrews 12:15 (ESV)

See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;

See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble (because if it does, let me tell you something, it's going to defile a lot of people, it's going to affect a lot of people).

Bitterness is horrible. Don't let it continue in your life. If you recognize bitterness, bring it to the cross and ask God to help you deal with it because, I'm telling you, it's only going to hurt you. It's going to hurt you, and it's going to hurt your relationships.

He next talks about wrath, which is angry outbursts, is what that refers to, or as the NIV actually uses the word, rage. That's part of the old life, okay? That raging anger that just rises up white, hot, and hurts so many people. It's not part of the new life that is ours in Christ.

He talks about anger. This is the Greek word, *orge* (ὀργή), and it refers to just a constant, settled anger that continues and cannot be abated.

Clamor is the next word that Paul uses here in the ESV. It actually means brawling, okay? It's somebody who gets into fistfights regularly because he's just mad; he's angry, and people are always bugging him and getting in his way, and he's ready to fight at the drop of a pen. Paul says that's part of the old life; it's part of the flesh, right? It's not part of the work that Jesus is doing inside of you.

Next is slander, and slander, as you know, is angry words that have the intent of dragging someone's reputation through the mud. In fact, what it means is I'm telling you and I might not be doing this to the person's face— probably not, as a matter of fact. Most people don't have the courage to do that. What they'll do is they'll go behind their back, talk about somebody in a slanderous way, so as to damage their reputation. It's part of the old life.

We don't do that. Hey, if you can't go to the person that you're angry with and deal with it directly face-to-face in the power and grace and strength of the Lord, then you got a bigger problem than what that person did to you. Take it to them, and take it to the Lord, but do not talk to others. Don't do it. That's slanderous, and it's part of the old flesh life. It's the rotten, stinking, corrupted flesh.

And then, finally, he uses the word malice, which is the intention of anger to do harm; to think it through; to work it out; to intend to do it.

Paul says, put all these things away, all these different expressions of anger, and then he ends, finally, with a positive exhortation in verse 32. He says: *"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."*

3 commands:

1. Be kind (I think we all know what kindness is),
2. Tenderhearted (refers to compassionate, not hardhearted), and then
3. Forgiving.

That last command comes with an example: be forgiving as you've been forgiven, as God in Christ forgave you. In other words, as freely as you've been forgiven, forgive others.

I'm going to preface the next thing I have to say to you by telling you ahead of time that what you're about to hear is my opinion, and so, you might want to just turn off your ears for a moment because my opinions aren't worth a lot, but here goes nothing.

I believe that unforgiveness—and when I talk about unforgiveness, I mean the unwillingness to forgive—is what is behind much of what our society labels as mental and emotional illness.

Now, that is my personal opinion but I do believe that the unwillingness to forgive has a crippling effect on the person who is unwilling to forgive, and as believers, there are few things—few, very few—that are more deadly and more grieving to the Lord than our unwillingness to forgive.

Frankly, I get a lot of questions about this, by email or whatever. People wanting to know about—they understand that the Bible commands us to forgive but what they want to know is they want to know when. They want to know when they should forgive. And so, I get all these questions from time to time—and it's not uncommon at all. Explain to me here, Pastor Paul, when should I forgive my brother? Do I need to wait until he asks me for forgiveness? Or how about, I think— I don't think I need to forgive him until he repents, right?

My question—or my answer to their question is a question back to them, and that is, well, when do you want to be free? Because you see, unforgiveness is

what binds you, not them; it's what puts you behind bars. And so, the question is, so when exactly do you want to be free?

Most of you guys know that Jesus told a parable about this. It's about a master who had a servant who owed him an incredible amount of money, what probably today would be millions and millions of dollars. The master decided to call in the loan, and the servant came and fell on his knees before the master, and begged for more time to pay it back. He said, please give me, be patient with me, and I'll pay this all back. And the master was so moved with pity toward this individual that he ended up just forgiving the entire debt altogether, just canceled the whole thing.

Now, we're told in the parable that after that took place, this servant went out and found a fellow servant who owed him what amounted to a few dollars, grabbed him by the throat, and demanded immediate repayment. Well, the second servant said the same as the first, please be patient with me, and I'll pay back everything I owe you. But instead of responding graciously, this first servant threw the second servant into debtor's prison until he might repay the entire debt.

Now, you guys also know the rest of the story. Word got back to the master about what the servant he had forgiven had done. He called that servant in and was very angry toward him and said, should you not have shown mercy on your fellow servant the way I showed mercy upon you? And we're told that, in anger, the master threw that servant into the jail until he could repay all of the debt.

And I've thought a lot about that story over the years, and I believe that that jail is a very real place because Jesus was talking about unforgiveness, and He was talking about refusing to extend forgiveness when we ourselves have been forgiven so powerfully, so completely, and then turning around when someone offends us and refusing to extend the same.

Now, obviously, that's greatly grieving to the Holy Spirit, but what does it do to you? You put yourself into a self-imposed jail. Make no mistake about it. You are in prison when you refuse to forgive, and you will not get out until you come to terms with that at the foot of the cross and recognize, with the amazing forgiveness God gave you, you are to forgive others.

Let me show you this really, really cool quote I found because you know I love quotes. Goes like this:

The moment a man wrongs me, I must forgive him. Only then will my soul be free. If I hold the wrong against him, I sin, and jeopardize my own forgiveness with God. Whether the man repents and asks for my forgiveness or not makes no difference. I have forgiven him. Now, he must deal with God over the wrong he has done, but that's between him and God. Whether he reconciles with God or not is irrelevant to this one truth. I must forgive the man.

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I love that quote. I think it's very well-spoken because it simply puts the responsibility— it takes it out of the realm of what has he done, and just, it's my heart with God, and my own walk with God, my relationship with God, and just how healthy do I want that relationship to be, and how free do I want to be in my own life, and how healthy spiritually, emotionally, even physically do I want to be?

Hey, you can sit and eat all the organic food that you can possibly consume all your life and be sick because of unforgiveness, bitterness, and anger. We talk so much about living a healthy lifestyle, and we completely ignore the spiritual, emotional aspect of our lives.

Before we close here today, can I just add one more thought about the issue of forgiveness? I think this is an important one, and I'm just going to put it like this. Forgiveness is not the absence of wisdom.

And let me explain what I mean by that. I want you to imagine for a moment— we take the parable that Jesus gave us that I've told you about just a moment ago, and let's imagine for a moment that after this servant was forgiven for his millions and millions of dollars of debt, that he returned a few months later to ask the master for another loan.

Now, we're not applying this in my story where the master isn't a picture of God and the servant isn't a picture of you. It's just he's a master and he's a servant. Let's just talk people for a minute. If the man is a pretty good businessman, he's probably not going to just say, yeah, sure, come on in, let's write up a contract, after forgiving this guy millions and millions of dollars. Why? It's just not wise. It's just not wise.

And the reason I bring up that example is because I believe that there are times in our lives when we forgive people because we're commanded to forgive people— and it's a good idea to forgive people because we ourselves are free when we forgive people—but then afterward we recognize there's no change in the individual; there's no repentance; there's no anything. But that's not why we forgave them. We see and we understand that wisdom would tell us this is probably not a good relationship to reconnect with.

You know what I mean? Because there hasn't been any change and so on and so forth, and I don't see any real future here, and so I'm going to forgive this person, but we're not going to move on with any kind of relationship because the toxicity level here is just off the charts. And so, I'm saying to this individual, verbally or not, we're done. Now, I'm not mad, and I'm not withholding forgiveness. In fact, I can even genuinely say I love this person.

And by the way, people ask me all the time, how do I know when I've really forgiven somebody? Well, I'll tell you something. When you can pray for that person, and genuinely pray God's blessing over their life and mean it, God has done a work in your heart, and you're walking in real, genuine forgiveness.

And that's the way we're supposed to treat our enemies, by the way. People that hurt us, we're supposed to pray for them, right? And that doesn't mean, God, kill them, okay? That's not the kind of prayer we're talking about. We're talking about praying blessing into their life. That's hard to do at first. When somebody's really hurt you badly, and you know that you're called to forgive and pray for them, for a while you're praying blessing through clenched teeth, and I get that.

But there comes a time, over time, as you continue to pour out your heart before the Lord, pray the blessing of God upon that individual that you know, suddenly, you realize one day, I'm delighted to do this. I want you to— God, I really want you to bless this person. You've arrived at the place of forgiveness, praise God, and don't stop praying until you get there because you want to be free, okay?

But even though you can say to yourself I love this person and I'm not mad, and I truly have forgiven, and I can pray for them genuinely for God's blessing upon their life but, but, but I realize moving on with this relationship just isn't productive, I want you to know that that's okay.

And the reason I share this is because I think a lot of Christians struggle because wisdom tells them this person is just going to keep hurting me and my family,

but the Word of God tells them they need to forgive. And they think they're one and the same. They think forgiveness equates with the idea of embracing this person back into their life wholeheartedly.

Sometimes, people whom we've forgiven will actually say that to us when we resist the attempt to reconnect. They'll say, wait, I thought you forgave me. And what we do is we cave; yeah, you're right, come on. And we open the door of our lives when wisdom would tell us that's not a smart move.

Listen, you can be obedient to God and forgive, and still keep a distance just because it's wisdom. Wisdom and forgiveness work together in those sorts of situations. Know that you can still forgive completely.