

SERIES: THE PROCESS OF BREAKTHROUGH
PART 8: RECONCILE WITH OTHERS
Romans 12:17-18; Ephesians 4:31-32

Good morning/afternoon. We're in Part 8 of Pastor Scott Wood's series, THE PROCESS OF BREAKTHROUGH. I'm Scottie Alvarez, and I'm the Celebrate Recovery pastor here at CVCHURCH. Today we're covering 'R' in BREAKTHROUGH, RECONCILE WITH OTHERS. Lee Strobel, who has written *The Case for Christ*, *The Case for Faith*, and *The Case for the Creator*, and whose life story you can see dramatized in the movie *The Case for Christ*, says that sometimes in our attempts to correct the wrongs we have done to somebody, we make it worse. Today we're going to learn how NOT to do that—how to prepare ourselves to make right something that we have wronged. That's what this step in THE PROCESS OF BREAKTHROUGH is all about. It's about doing relational repair work. It's about going back with the Holy Spirit's leading and repairing the damage that others have done to us and that we have done to others.

Here's the 8th step to breakthrough, what I like to call the 'right my wrongs' step:

STEP 8. I make a list of those who have hurt me, and I willingly choose to work through the process of forgiveness to do my best to restore these relationships.

Romans 12:17-18 says **“Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.”** This breakthrough step is a willingness or preparatory step for Pastor Scott’s teaching next week. Next week he will focus on enacting forgiveness of how others have harmed me and taking action to make amends for the harm I’ve done to others. Before I’m ready to do either of these things, however, I must do the preparatory work myself, so that God can work on my heart before I face anyone else.

If you are with us for the first time, let’s briefly recap all of the other breakthrough steps we’ve covered in this series leading up to this step 8. We have restored God to the proper position of authority and power in our lives, and have put ourselves in the proper position of humbling ourselves, and of surrendering to God (steps 1-3). These steps have taken our focus off of our blaming of others and allowed us to see what we’ve done, to own the fact that we have missed the mark, that we have wronged others and that the consequences of these wrongs is spiritual, relational, emotional, and sometimes even physical death (steps 4-5). These steps 1-7 that Pastor Scott has guided us through have prepared us to face another person in humility, honesty, and integrity knowing that our root issues are many and deep, and that we have humbly surrendered them to God (steps 6-7).

Step 8 is based on Ephesians 4:31-32: **“Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of malicious behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.”**

This step has three parts:

- First, it is important to understand why God through Jesus Christ asks us to forgive.
- Second, we must learn how to forgive those who have hurt us. Today we have a very special testimony that will illustrate the power of forgiveness in the midst of discouraging circumstances.
- And then next week, Pastor Scott will conclude with the 9th breakthrough step, the third aspect of repairing relationships, and that is how to make amends to those I've hurt.

First, today, we're going to deal with those who've hurt you. This is the first fill-in in your handout:

I. Forgive those who've hurt me

A. Why are you and I to forgive?

1) Because God has forgiven me

Colossians 3:13 puts it very plainly: **“You must make allowance for each other’s faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.”** One area where our minds need to be renewed and retrained is in this most important area of forgiveness. When I remember how much God forgives me it makes it a whole lot easier to forgive other people. *You and I will never have to forgive anybody else, more than God has forgiven us.* When I have a hard time

forgiving other people it's usually because I don't feel forgiven. Forgiven people forgive. Unforgiven people find it difficult to forgive. How have you been forgiven? How can you show that same forgiveness to others?

Why am I to forgive? 1. Because God has forgiven me, and then...

2) Because resentment, bitterness and unforgiveness ruin my faith

Resentment, bitterness, and unforgiveness are unreasonable, unhelpful, and unhealthy, but we face these demons daily. God invites us into a relationship with Him partly to give us freedom from these unhealthy emotions. When we allow resentment, bitterness and unforgiveness to go unchecked in our lives we bring great sorrow to the Holy Spirit who is waiting for us to invite Him into our lives so that he can live on the inside of us and free us from these emotions. The Bible says that these hurtful emotions are all part of our sinful nature, a life lived under the influence of Satan whom the Bible calls the prince of the power of the air. Jesus comes to free us from all forms of resentment.

In Ephesians 4:30 Paul writes, **“And do not bring sorrow to God’s Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, He is the one who has identified you as His own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption.”** Bible scholar **Gordon Fee** writes that it is the Holy Spirit who has identified us as His own: **“Inherent in this imagery is also the notion of ‘authentication,’ and that seems to be the primary reference here. Paul is urging that by ‘sealing’ or identifying us as His own that we**

choose under the Holy Spirit’s influence to walk in ways that are ‘like God.’ To put that in another way, it is as we live the life of God empowered by His Holy Spirit that we demonstrate ourselves to be the authentic people of God.”

In other words, God’s people are known by their supernatural power to forgive. How else could a woman forgive her rapist? How else could a family forgive a drunk driver who killed their child? The writer of the book of Hebrews describes how resentment will ruin your faith if you do not put a stop to it. Hebrews 12:15 says, **“Look after each other so that none of you will miss out on the special favor of God. Watch out that no bitter root of unbelief rises up among you, for whenever it springs up, many are corrupted by its poison.”**

The Bible says that the way of forgiveness is not to deny wrongdoing or pretend no wrong has occurred, but to acknowledge it and cancel it with God’s grace, mercy, love and forgiveness. Please read Proverbs 19:11 out loud together, **“People with good sense restrain their anger; they earn esteem by overlooking wrongs.”** Resentment and bitterness hurts me more than the target of my resentment. When I get angry and resentful, I don't hurt them. I hurt myself. I’m busy worrying, stewing, and grumbling—I’m upset—but it's not bothering them at all!

Who hurt you five, ten, twenty, thirty years ago, and you're still resentful about it? They’ve long forgotten it but it's still making you miserable.

Resentment cannot change the past, it cannot correct the problem, it cannot

change your enemy, it cannot even hurt them, it only hurts you. Resentment makes you miserable. Does it make you feel any better? No. Bitterness turns you into an unhappy person. **The most unhappy people are those who carry grudges. Secular journals of psychiatry and psychology have shown (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2015) that resentment is the unhealthiest human emotion.** It's like a cancer that eats us alive and has physical consequences. A relative of mine has had cancer three times—it's not surprising that this relative is also trapped by resentment. **Dr. S.I. McMillin's classic book, "*None of These Diseases*," made the case that the two leading causes of physical problems are guilt and resentment.** He writes: *"It's not so much what you eat, it's what eats you that matters."* Thinking of that person, ex-girlfriend, ex-boyfriend, ex-husband, ex-wife, teacher who embarrassed you in school, friend who betrayed you, parent who didn't love you, that date who just dropped you and disappeared—we all hold resentments. It drains us. It prolongs the hurt. It's like emotional suicide. Forgiveness is the only antidote to resentment and bitterness.

Why am I to forgive? 1. Because God has forgiven me; 2. Because resentment, bitterness and unforgiveness ruin my faith, and...

3) Because I'll need forgiveness in the future

Mark 11:25 says, **"When you are praying, first forgive anyone you are holding a grudge against, so that your Father in heaven will forgive your sins too."** A core concept of the Bible is that we cannot receive what we are unwilling to give. Resentment blocks God's forgiveness in our lives. Think

about the Lord's prayer, the model prayer Jesus Himself gave us. "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." In other words, "Lord, forgive me as much as I forgive everybody else." Do I really want that? Forgiveness is a two-way street. I'm going to need forgiveness in the future. I don't want to burn the bridge that I have to walk across.

I am to forgive 1) Because God has forgiven me; 2) because resentment, bitterness and unforgiveness ruin my faith and emotional health; and 3) because I'll need forgiveness in the future. If I accept that I need to forgive, how do I forgive those who have hurt me?

II. How to forgive those who have hurt me

A. Reveal my hurt

Make a list of those who've harmed me and what they said or did

Admit it. Let it out. Face it. Be honest. *You can't get over the hurt until you admit that it hurt.* Tuesday, my daughter was getting ready for a phone call with a college coach who is recruiting her to play volleyball. Just moments before the call, she said "I don't want to talk to them." You see, there had been a coaching turnover at this college. The coaches who left were very excited about her playing for them, but the new coaches had hardly spoken to her for a year since they took over. The phone call that was about to happen actually was the first with the new coaches. I asked her what was she upset about. She didn't want to tell me, but I could see there was bitterness, resentment. As soon as I said, "It's okay, let it out," the tears started to flow.

“When I was little my dream was to play for that college,” she said. “These new coaches don’t want me, and I’m angry they don’t think I’m good enough. I don’t want to talk to them.” Now, I don't know why, but we don't like to admit when people have hurt us. When something we love or care about is lost or taken away, we want to hide it. We have a misunderstanding that we can't love something or someone and be angry with them at the same time. It’s as if we’re ashamed of our anger. Fortunately, we have options when it comes to hurt. We can repress it, just pretend it doesn't exist, ignore it, push it out of the way. That never works. Hurt always comes out in some other form of compulsion or addiction in our lives. You can suppress it, just say, "It's no big deal, it doesn't matter.” You can rationalize it, “They did the best they could.” No, they didn't. It hurt. Or you can confess it. Admit it. I've heard people say, “I want to close the door on my past. I'd like to get closure and just move on.” **There is no closure without disclosure.** First we must admit it. First you must reveal it. First I must own up and say, “That hurt. It was wrong. It hurt me.” Once my daughter said those words, let the tears out, and got honest, she was able to forgive the coaches and engage in the call. Those few moments of honesty totally changed her heart. Her new attitude fostered an openness on that call. She explained how she felt, they explained what happened over the past year during the transition and that they were trying their best to reach out to the previous coach’s players.

How do I reveal my hurts? You make a list of those who've harmed you, what they said, what they did, and what effect it had on you, and you put it down on paper in black and white so you can look at it. It's not this vague thing that I resent, but it's a specific act or situation. Think about that teacher

who embarrassed you or that parent who said, "You'll never amount to anything". That person who was unfaithful to you. You write it down and specifically spell out your hurt. To forgive those who have hurt me, I A) reveal my hurt, and:

B. Release my offender

How do I release my offender? I let them go. Whatever I have felt they owe me, they don't owe it to me anymore. I cancel the debt. I surrender the hurt. How do I do that? How do I release an offender? I do it by forgiving them. It's the only way I can release them. I don't wait for them to ask for forgiveness. I don't wait for them to admit what they did. How long have you been waiting for them to apologize when they clearly aren't going to? You release them whether they ask for it or not, because you're following God's law of healthy relationships. *We cannot experience relational or personal freedom without learning to live a lifestyle of forgiveness.* Imagine you, the warden of your own prison, walking your prisoner to the prison gates, removing their shackles, and saying "you're free to go." Release your offender and forgive them because this is the way of Jesus. I've asked Adrian Stark to share her story of forgiveness this morning.

<ADRIAN SPEAKS HERE>

Adrian's story is an amazing example of the power of forgiveness to bring freedom and reconciliation. If you ask her how many times she had to forgive her husband and his girlfriend who had wronged her, she would tell you, probably a million. Every day. Jesus answered this question in Matthew

18:21-22, let's read it together. **“Then Peter came to Him and asked, ‘Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?’ ‘No, not seven times,’ Jesus replied, ‘but seventy times seven!’”**

Jesus is saying it's got to be continual. Forgiveness is not a one-shot deal where you say, “I forgive them,” and that's it. Because those feelings are going to keep coming back and every time you get those feelings you've got to forgive them again. *The resentful feelings are a signal to us to release them again.* Forgiveness is a repeated practice. Every time they come to mind, you forgive them until you know that you have released them fully. That may take three hundred times, a million times. It will take as long as it takes, but when it's gone, you will feel the power of God's forgiveness.

How do you know when you have released an offender fully? **You can think about them and it doesn't hurt anymore. You can pray for God's blessing on them. You can begin to understand their own hurt, rather than focusing on how they hurt you. You gain empathy.** When you begin to understand their hurt, that's when you know you've released them. You keep forgiving and working the breakthrough process until finally you can think of them and it doesn't hurt anymore. How do you forget a divorce? How do you forget a horrible abusive relationship? You can't forget, but you can get rid of the pain. You can forgive your way to freedom. To forgive those who have hurt me, A) I reveal my hurt, B) I release my offender, and C:

C. Replace my hurt with God's peace

Please read with me Colossians 3:15, **“And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful.”** But, it's unfair! If I forgive them, there's no justice. They get away with it! No they really don't. Let God settle the score. He can do a much better job than you can. The Bible says, one day God is going to settle the score and He's going to call to account and He's going to balance the books, and one day He's going to have the final say. Let God have the last word. He'll take care of it. He's the judge. He is just. Jesus talked more about hell than He did heaven. The Bible says, there will be judgment, but you aren't the judge of another human being. You release them and win freedom for yourself and in the meantime you focus on God's peace rather than getting even. Let God's peace rule in your heart.

Relationships can tear our heart to pieces. They can just rip it apart. But God mends those pieces and surrounds us and covers us with His peace. Notice that Adrian's family was reconciled only after she forgave. God's peace that surpasses our understanding. You release those who've hurt you so that God can work His miracles. What prevents forgiveness and healing is arrogance. All of the preparatory steps in the breakthrough process we've covered today prepare our hearts and minds and souls to break through our ego, our pride, our arrogance, they prepare us for truly forgiving someone, for canceling the debt of what you believe they owe you, and focusing on humbling yourself and taking responsibility for your part—if you had one. And usually, we had a part. Only when I stop blaming others does God have a chance to work in my life. Let's pray.