



## GROWTH EXPECTED

“How to Overcome the Evil Aimed at You.”

Romans 12:14-21

***We all grow old but we don't all grow up***

**OPENING DISCUSSION:** Last week we looked at how to get along with others in the Church. This week Romans 12 turns to handling opposition, persecution and relational conflicts. Those conflicts come from the conflict of faith, but also may come from conflict of personalities and offences from others and offences I have caused to others. In other words, how to handle opposition that we both deserve and that we don't deserve. This week's section (Romans 12:14-21) is a continuation from last week's (12:9-13) where we were told to *don't just pretend to love others. Really love them!* (12:9). **Discuss this statement: Love isn't love until it successfully navigates through conflict. How have you experienced the truth of that statement?**

**READ:** “Bless those who persecute you. Don't curse them; pray that God will bless them. Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with each other. Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all! 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.

Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, “I will take revenge; I will pay them back,” says the Lord. Instead, “If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals of shame on their heads.” Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.” (Romans 12:14–21, NLT)

*How to Avoid Hurting Another - 12:14-16*

*How to Forgive Others Who Have Hurt You - 12:17-21*

*All of us cause hurt at some time, and all of us have been hurt by others. You can't avoid that, but you can choose to grow through that rather than stagnating growth through bitterness.*

*How to Avoid Hurting Another - 12:14-16*

**Responding to Hurt from others 12:14-15**

**What are the two actions that the Bible gives us for responding to a hurt from others in 12:14**

*Bless...don't curse.*

**To Bless:** “does not mean that we should say good things about those who curse us, but rather that we should invoke God's blessing upon them by praying that they may be turned from their ways through God's intervention in their lives.”

**To Curse:** “to wish or ask for evil or ruin, to give one over to ruin.”<sup>1</sup>

**How does focusing on revenge turn you into the person who hurt you?**

**What ways are easy for you to slip into cursing those who hurt you?** *Vern mentioned gossip, complaining (which is a focus on the evil they caused rather than on the good you want to do).*

**READ: Luke 6:28** “Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you.” (NLT)

**What does Jesus call us to replace cursing with?** *Pray for those who hurt you.*

Our prayers can often be requests for God to control and manipulate people to our own ends rather than the kind of prayer Jesus calls us to here. Here is the kind of prayer Jesus calls us to pray for those who hurt us. . . .

**READ: Romans 12:15** “Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep.” (NLT)

It is easy to think theoretically about how we *should* feel about those who have hurt us, but we need to insert a name and a circumstance to help this passage come to life.

**Ask the group if someone would be willing to share about a struggle with a person who seems to have a vendetta against them. This may be a family member, someone at work, a neighbor, etc.**

**Why do you think Paul tells us to replace revenge with entering into that persons joys and sorrows?** *The Gospel is about Jesus leaving His position in Heaven to walk with those who hated Him and providing for our restoration. He is calling us to do the same with those who seem to want our destruction.*

## Relating to those who are Different than You 12:16

**READ: Romans 12:16** “Live in harmony with each other. Don’t be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don’t think you know it all!” (NLT)

One of the core issues of responding to those who have hurt you is the more basic issue of learning to harmonize with differences. When we gather people around us who like what we like and view things just as we do we become shallow and reinforce the weaknesses in ourselves. Differences deepen us!

**What are the differences Romans 12:16 implies that we need to accept and enjoy?** *Harmony implies the blending of differences, ordinary people.*

“Ordinary People” are people of a different social position than we are. While it primarily means people on a lower social status than you are, it can also imply accepting people on a different culture, or on a higher social status than we are in.

“know it all” – thinking I don’t need anyone else’s contribution into my life.

**Where have you cut off people from influencing you?**

**Where are you resistant from receiving help from other people?**

## *How to Forgive Others Who Have Hurt You - 12:17-21*

<sup>1</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary : New Testament*, electronic ed. (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

## Relating to those who are Different than You 12:16

**READ: Romans 12:17–20** *“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. Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, “I will take revenge; I will pay them back,” says the LORD. Instead, “If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals of shame on their heads.””* (NLT)

“The greatest bottleneck to growth, stagnation of spiritual growth, the thing that gets people stuck in one place is unforgiveness, bitterness and an ungodly reaction to pain caused by others.”

**Have you experienced forgiveness from someone else for a failure on your part, from a debt, etc.?**

Review the three stages of forgiveness –

1. **Forgive...A choice I must make** (when I discover that I am rejoicing when they mourn and weeping when they rejoice)
2. **Forgiving...A process I pursue** (Jesus calls us to pray for those who persecute you)
3. **Forgiven...The completion of the process** (when I reach the point of rejoicing when they rejoice and weeping when they weep)

**How does this process help you begin the work of forgiveness?**

**Is there someone who you would pray that they would forgive you?**

**Is there someone you need to forgive for a hurt they have done to you?**

Don't mix up forgiveness with justice. This is not an excuse to let others continue their bad behavior & continue to hurt you! However, forgiveness is allowing God to bring justice, or even the government rather than you (12:19). God is not encouraging dysfunctional behavior, nor is He calling Christians to co-dependence.

**How does the distinction of forgiveness and giving justice to God help you work through this forgiveness process?**

**Where do you need to begin the process of forgiveness with a former friend, teacher, co-worker, neighbor, relative, spouse, church....?**

Take time to pray for one another for the difficult task of forgiveness.