

You don't necessarily have to be very astute at recognizing changes in culture to recognize that culture changes, that there have been certain things that were once in style that are no longer in style, there is certain music or certain movies or even certain clothes or fashion or whatever it might be. If you go back and look at the 70's, it's different than the 80's or the 90's or even where we find ourselves now at 2008. And I was reminiscing about these changes this week as I was thinking about today and our message and where we were going. And I started thinking about things that I used to wear that I thought were so unbelievably cool. In second grade I got these things called Kappa high tops. I don't know if you remember them, but I do and they were unbelievable. I remember in the elementary school talent show I had these parachute pants that were unbelievably cool. I don't know if you had them, but they were awesome. Michael Jackson comes out with "Thriller," and so I needed that jacket with all of the zippers. It was red, I looked ridiculous yet I was cool. I don't know how to explain that, but it was unbelievable. I distinctly remember this one night I was in middle school and I had just got these coveted jeans, these Z Cavaricis. I just thought this is incredible. Not only did I have the jeans, but I had the Z Cavaricci long sleeve shirt, black on black, and then I had these shoes called Zodiacs. I walked in this restaurant with my parents I just was like, "Yup, I'm here. There's no one in here that looks as good as I do," as a 12 year old decked out in all black Z Cavaricci. It was awful, but somehow it was cool. And then I moved from these black jeans to acid washed/stone washed jeans. And do not judge me, you had them. Some of you even had the shorts, which I like to call "jorts" or jean shorts. You had those, and some of you even rolled them up. You would tight roll your jeans. And I did too, because that's just what we did in the 80's. If you grew up in the 80's or you paid for your kids to wear these things, that's just what we did. And this week, Bleecker and I went away to this cabin. We went there so he could write some music and I could work on this. It was kind of a restful week for us to study and pray and so some things like that. And then the last night we were there, we were flipping through some channels and saw "VH1's Top 100 Songs of the 80's." So we wasted hours and watched these songs just roll in, and we were like, "Of course, it doesn't get any cooler than that." The hair was this high for the guys. It went from *Whitesnake* to *Guns-N-Roses*. And the No.1 song of the 80's (for those of you who care) was *Bon Jovi's* "Living on a Prayer." Amen, aren't we all? John just kind of got it with our hearts. We are living on a prayer. Johnnie's working on the docks. We get it man, it's rough. Hang in there. I mean you just can resonate with that song. It was great. And we just laughed. We just laughed at how much things have changed and how much style had changed and how fashion had changed. And somehow there was a lot of nostalgia in that. It was hilarious to think about it and just to reminisce. It was good times. But the point is things change. There was a time, I don't know when or why, but more people had mullets, because apparently that was socially okay. And if you have that today, you're not a bad person. Nobody's judging you. We're just saying cut it off. Let's just cut ties with it and move forward. And it's fun to think about how things change and think about where we're going today.

The apostle Paul writes in the book of Ephesians, and he's going to say this. He's going to say, "Hey, you once had a style, and that style fit you. But now some things have changed, and your style now changes. You see, you no longer are who you were; you're someone new. And because you have a new life, this necessitates for you a new lifestyle." So that's where we're going, this new life necessitates a new lifestyle for you. There are some things that are just out of style for you if you're a believer. So that's what we're going to talk about. Let's turn now to Ephesians 4, and let me catch you up of Ephesians. The book of Ephesians is compiled of two major sections: chapters 1-3 and chapters 4-6. Paul writes this book to the church at Ephesus. He's writing this book to believers. And he's writing this book for this purpose, that these believers might understand the love of God and in turn love God more and that love would spill out towards other people. So it's to love God more and to love others. That's why he writes this book. So he's writing this book to believers, and the first three chapters of the book deal with this, the calling of the church. Chapters 1-3 deal with the calling of the

church, how God through Christ has called out a people for Himself. In chapter 1, he starts off and says this, "Praise be to God because He is the Father, He is the giver of every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places." And then Paul's going to unpack what he means by that. He's going to say this, "The Father has chosen you. He has selected you before the foundation of the world. He's called you out for Himself. The Son has sacrificed on your behalf. The Son was hung on a cross, all for the praise of His glorious grace." And then it's going to move from the Father to the Son to the Spirit as you see the work of the Trinity in your salvation and in my salvation. And he says that the Spirit is now a seal and a guarantee of our redemption until the day of the purchased possession. Which means that your salvation in Christ is locked up and secure and the very work of the triune God. That's what he's saying. It's done, it's sealed, it's forever. The Spirit is now a deposit guaranteeing that your redemption is still yet to be complete. So hope for that, long for that, believe in that. It is as sure as I'm standing here. And Paul is so confident of this and so hoping that you and I would get this, that he ends chapter 1 with a prayer. He says, "I just pray that you would understand this and that I would understand this, that we might see now with the eyes of our hearts, that we might be given wisdom and understanding, that we might be able to grasp really what it means to have been sealed by the Spirit, that the Son has sacrificed for you and that the Father has chosen you. Because it's the core, the very foundation of everything in our faith." He moves in chapter 2 by way of reminder. As if it wasn't enough in chapter 1, he says this, "It's by grace that you've been saved. This is the way you were, but God in Christ has saved you and redeemed you by His grace. This is a gift. It's nothing you've done. You can't earn it, you can't work for it, you can't muster it up. This is something that He gives to you and to me." And he says, "In light of what He's done among us, He's calling out a new people unto Himself called the church. It's a new class, it's a new humanity. It's no longer 'Jew' or 'Gentile' or 'Greek' or 'Barbarian,' it's now 'church.' So now we're called together as one." In chapter 3 he says, "Isn't this mysterious? I mean, isn't this absolutely mind-blowing, what God has done through His Son Jesus Christ? He's called out a people to Himself called the church." And He ends chapter 3 with another prayer. And His prayer is this, "I pray that you would be strengthened in your inner man, that the very core of who you are would be strengthened with this, that you might know the height and the width and the depth and the length that is the love of Christ, that that would be what binds you and holds you up and strengthens you." So that's chapters 1-3. He talks about the calling of the church. It's some of the most remarkable writings that we have in all the New Testament.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 talk about the conduct of the church. He moves from the calling of the church to the conduct of the church or from the position of the church, the position that we find ourselves in Christ to the practice of who we are to be and what we are to do. So I want to pause here because I know this might make some of us nervous. Some of you might be going, "Well, lists make me nervous, and I don't want this kind of checklist Christianity." That's not what I'm talking about. It's what Paul's talking about here. I'm not talking about a list, I'm just reading the list that Paul's going to give us. That's a little bit different. He says this, "In light of your decision, your practice is different. In light of who you are, you live differently." The interesting thing about chapters 1-3 is the enemy, he's nowhere to be found there. There's no mention of an enemy, no mention of an adversary. There's nothing like that. And the reason why is because the enemy has no place in God calling you to Himself. It's sure, it's steadfast, it's secure, it's done. It's done, so rest in that. But right when he starts talking about your life and your practice as you work out your salvation, the enemy shows up. He shows up right here in chapter 4. And Paul's going to go on and he's going to say this by chapter 6, "You are not wrestling with flesh and blood. This is not a war here. The war is up there; it's in the heavenlies. We're wrestling with rulers and principalities who are waging war against the very soul. As Christ is calling you to Himself and as we work out our salvation, we have an enemy who works against us." I think that's pretty obvious if you're trying to live this Christian life. You know that it is

a challenge, a struggle. Not only is your own flesh warring against you, but you have an adversary who wars against you as well. So chapter 4 begins in verses 1-16 with this, where he says, “You will walk in a manner worthy of your calling.” For me, that’s intimidating, it’s humbling. Because I think about the calling that I have in Christ, and now he says, “You walk in this.” And where we’re going to spend our time is verses 17-32, and it starts like this. *“Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ!—assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. 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. 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. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”*

Paul starts off in verses 17-19, and he describes the old position, the old life, the old way in which we once lived. He says, “You’re not to live as the Gentiles live. You’re not to walk the way the Gentiles walk.” And for the Jewish mind, the Jewish mentality, since Paul is a Jew writing, he says that the Jews understood Jews and Gentiles. And the Gentiles were alienated from God; they were separated because of their ignorance. They did not know. And it says their hardness of heart perpetuated this alienation. But Paul says, “This is not the case with you. You have been given life. You now know, so walk differently. Don’t walk after them.” And you see the transition there in verse 20 when he says the word “but.” “But this is not the way you’ve learned Christ. As you learned the truth that is in Jesus, this truth has set you free from the way you used to live, the way you used to be. You have a new position, a new posture in the very person of Christ. Therefore your practice is different. A new life necessitates a new lifestyle. You’ve been given a new life in Christ.” And that new life as he describes it is this, that our mind is being renewed in the Spirit. You have the opportunity to now renew your mind in the Spirit, and you put on the new self. So with the Greek, what’s going on with these verbs is this. The verb used in describing the old self being corrupted by deceitful desires, it carries this idea that it’s being corrupted over and over and over again. It’s not that you’re just stagnant in your corruption, but your corruption perpetually gets more and more corrupt as you seek more and more for your own. Because the old life is characterized by self. It’s characterized by selfishness. You are protecting self, you are gratifying self, living for self. “It’s all about me.” But he says, “You’ve not learned Christ this way.” Christ is different, He has changed things. And just as my old self is being corrupted over and over again, my new self is being renewed over and over again. So just as my old self is being corrupt, I have to renew my new self in the Spirit. And he says you do this by renewing your mind in the Spirit and putting on the new self. And his readers would have picked up right away what he’s talking about. He’s talking about this idea of baptism, not that you go get baptized and you’re healed and everything’s perfect and wonderful, but in the baptism ceremony in the early church they would walk up as the church was there waiting for them to get in the water, they would get in the water and go down and be immersed. And the immersion as they went underwater was symbolic of the death of Christ and according to Romans 6 of their death as well, of my death. I died with Christ, I

share in his death. So I go down. And then coming up out of the water symbolizes the resurrection of Christ, but it also symbolizes my resurrection in Christ. You see, I have died in Christ and raised to walk in newness of life. So they are proclaiming the gospel. They are coming out of the water and being given a new robe. They put on a new robe that was clean and white despite however or whoever they were, liars, cheaters, swindlers, thieves, immoral wicked people just like me. But despite whoever they were, when they came out of the water, they came out new. There's nothing new or special about these waters; what's special about it is the death and resurrection of Christ. And what is being portrayed in baptism is just that. So Paul is saying here that the old life is characterized by self; the new life is to be characterized by selflessness. Whereas the old self is me-centered, this new life is other-centered. And the way you get from old to new is the gospel, the death and resurrection of Christ. That's it. That's your hope, that's my hope. Moving from old to new is the gospel.

So let's go back to verse 25 and on. *“Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. 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. 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. . . Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”* He's writing to believers now saying, “Reject what destroys community and promote what builds it up.” And what he's going to say right here is either a rejection of one thing or a promotion of another, and he's going to give the reason why. And right out of the gate, he says that the first thing that you and I as believers in Christ are to reject is lying. And here's the deal. You probably don't just flat out lie. Most of us are just honest. There are some people who are just liars. But he's saying it doesn't fit anymore. But lying in the church shows up in a little bit more subtle ways. When we do it, we just kind of wear a mask. We'll put forth an image. We just have that smiley, pearly veneers that just beam with how joyful and filled with the Spirit we are. And we want everyone to see it, but really inside we're crushed and weak and wounded. Our marriages are falling apart, our kids are a wreck, our job is a wreck, we desperately need prayer, but we will never let you know about it. Because then what could you possibly think about me? As if the whole gospel was centered around how good you come across. So lying to the church often takes the form of pretense or image or putting forth something that is not genuine, that's not what it seems. But he says that any sense of falsehood is to be put away. Scheming, cheating, lying, deception, manipulation, it's all of the same deal, and he says it has no place in the church. And he gives the reason why. Because we are members of one another. And if you and I are going to do life together, then one thing I'm going to need from you and you're going to need from me is a foundation of trust. And if I'm a liar or you're a liar, it's very, very difficult, nearly impossible to have that trust. I had a friend who was a liar in college, and he just lied about things that made no sense. I had no idea why he would lie about certain things. Well I know why. It seemed like it made him look better, and behind that was really a desperate need for approval. So he just puts forth lies. It wasn't even pretense, it was just downright lies. So one of the most awkward conversations I've ever had was to sit down across a breakfast table and just say, “You are a liar. I mean, you flat out lie, man.” And he broke. It was one of the most fruitful conversations I've ever had. But to call someone on the carpet on their lie, it was unbelievable, but we all do it. I'll tell you what. Week in and week out, all across this church as our home groups meet, there will be people who come in and lie. They'll lie about just the pretense of where their marriage is or about where they are or how their kids are doing. They just put forth an image that everything is smiley, shiny and just downright good. Well that's a lie. And we can't move forward as a church if this is what we put forth. God is asking of us to have an honest heart, an honest disposition to the very nature of our relationships

and how we relate to one another. Now that doesn't mean if I come up and say, "Hey, John. How are you doing, man?" you don't have to unload everything. "Well, I'm having six affairs..." There is a time and a place for when and where you share. But when that time and place is right and we continue to perpetuate falsehood, Paul's saying, "It's got to go. It's just out of style. It doesn't work anymore. Because you and I belong to one another now. We're members of one another. That's the reason." If you think about it, lying is the first sin that was judged in the church. Acts 5, Ananias and Sapphira was the very first sin dealt with and dealt with very harshly. In John 5, Christ is described as the one who comes full of grace and truth, and His people are to mirror that. So you reject lying, you promote truth because we belong to one another.

The second one is that you reject anger. He says don't let the sun go down on your anger. If we reject anger, we keep this idea of keeping short accounts. Do not let the sun go down on your anger. And as anger flashes in you, if that's how it works...and that's how it works in me. It just comes up at the most awkward times, or it just doesn't make any sense of why it would come up here or why it wouldn't come up here. It just flashes in me. And I spent some time looking for a loophole here hoping that maybe I can justify my anger as being righteous anger. So I can go, "I'm frustrated at my wife, Lord, because I am so zealous for You. And I love You so much that I'm also, along with You, angry at her." It's just ridiculous, but I'll try to do anything I can to justify it. The way she drives drives me crazy. Because I get frustrated, I get angry. "Take a right. Get over in the right lane now. Why? Because it's the right time to do it. It's how I would do it. I know you've been driving for fifteen years, but do it my way." Why does that rage up within me? And it's often because my anger is really more about me being absolutely steadfast entrenched in my own rightness. "This is the way the world should revolve, right around me. And you need to get on board with that, woman...or whoever else." It's not very different than the way my two year old acts. It's really not, at it's core. You see, I'm entrenched in my own rightness, that all should bow to me and I am right. And when my rightness is challenged, I'll rage up, I'm ready to go. And he's going to deal with some other things that just my legs off, but still I want to be right. And he says when that happens, you deal with it early and often. You do not let the sun go down on your anger, and he gives the reason why. He says if you do, you're just giving an opportunity for the devil to get a foothold. You're just giving an opportunity to the enemy. The Greek word for "foothold" translates "place." You're an opportunity for the devil to take up a place in your heart. So listen to this, some manifestations of anger. I've been going through this with a group of guys. Anger can take the form of hating God, refusing to allow Him into our lives, turning our backs on a personal relationship with Him, refusing to use our talents and gifts or pursue the mission that God has given us, blaming others and not accepting responsibility for the negative conditions that we have brought on ourselves and the inner decisions that we have made that have contributed to our own unhappiness. Anger can also look like being cynical, purposefully trying to ruin someone's reputation, gossiping, profanity, grumbling, attacking somebody verbally, quarreling, nagging, rudeness, raging. Or it can be expressed physically through hitting, torture, murder, harsh or excessive punishment of children or others over whom we have authority, forcing our will on others, seeking revenge and retaliation. Or maybe it's this, turning our anger on ourselves such as through self-mutilation, cutting, overeating, bulimia, anorexia or pushing ourselves to overwork or to be perfect, refusing to let anger merge and thus causing depression, allowing anger to manifest itself in disease and conditions harmful to the body, self-pity. Anger is out of order when we refuse to forgive and are unwilling to let go of bitterness or love one another as God does. We refuse to love the unlovable or our enemies. Anger in the form of passive/aggressive behavior is demonstrated when we ostracize another person, spoil another's pleasure by snubbing or being moody or being uncooperative, physically or emotionally sabotaging someone. And my hope is that that list right there doesn't just describe you to a T. That's a rough list, but there might be some things that hit home. Perhaps the reason you strive to be perfect is not really out of a righteous heart, but you are so frustrated at

something or someone that this is how you do life. Or maybe the reason you are so self-loathing and so self-pitying is because really the disposition of your heart is angry, angry at a spouse, angry at a friend, angry at a coworker or a neighbor, or probably angry at God for letting these things happen to you as you see it. But Paul's going to say you've got to deal with this early and often, and if you don't, you have given the enemy an opportunity just to take a place, to get a foothold. And that will manifest itself later down the list when we talk about bitterness.

So he says this, "You reject lying, you embrace truth because we're all members of one another. You reject anger, you keep short accounts so as not to give the enemy a place." And he says this, "You reject stealing, and you promote work. And the reason why? So that you can give to others who are in need." He says it like this in verse 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.*" Now here's the honest truth. I don't steal. There was a day I did. I was 5 years old, it was 1982, "E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial" had come out, we were going to see it that night in the drive-in theater in Plano. I was at the Safeway with my mom, and we were getting stuff. And I was walking down the aisle where the cap guns were. I had a cap gun, because I needed one as a five year old. There were caps and I didn't have my cash on me, so I decided I just probably needed to take those. No one suspected me, I was 5, it was awesome. I took them, put them in my corduroy shorts which are now out of style. I tucked them in the shorts and I'm walking out. I walked outside the door and a wave of guilt just came over me. I wasn't a believer, so this wasn't Holy Spirit guilt, it was more social pressure. So I'm just feeling this and I said, "Mom, I stole these." And I was thinking she would just say, "Josh, I applaud your courage and honesty at this time. Let this be a lesson for you." That's not what happened. She grabbed my by the ear, yanked my back in there, gets the store manager and they just played good cop/bad cop. I almost wet myself thinking, "Oh my God." They were like, "Kid, I was just about to lock you up in jail and have you shot if you hadn't turned those caps back in." I was just terrified. I remember that, so I don't really steal. And I don't know if that's righteousness or just fear of my mom still, but I just don't steal. And most of you probably don't steal either. If you steal a lot, quit. It's awful. I understand the book of Ephesians personally better than any other book in the Bible. I've studied this book more, I've been in this book more devotionally and for study, I've read it more, I've thought about it more, I've structured it and outlined it more. But this week this verse, it's like it popped off the page for the very first time. And I'm not sure why or what it was, but here's what got me. If you steal, don't steal any more. I think I just read that and was like, "I don't steal, I won't steal any more. No big deal. Move on." Get a job is what it says next. Work, do honest work. I'm thinking, "Great, I've got a job. I'm on board with this. The Lord is pleased with me." But the next phrase, the reason for my work is what got me. He says, "If you steal, don't steal. Get a job, do honest work so you can give to those in need." Here's the frustrating thing. This probably has more to do with the motivation of why I work than whether or not I work. Because I assume most of you have jobs in here. And Paul is saying the reason I have a job and the reason you have a job is not for you, it's for others. The reason that I get a paycheck is not just for me, it's for those who are in need. The money I make, the money you make is grace towards me so that I might give to those in need. This is upside-down for me. It's a paradigm shift. You see, I don't make money so I can pay for my mortgage, my car, my clothes, etc. Paul is saying this, you work so that you can give to those in need. Now there's no question that I have a responsibility to take care of my family, because Paul says in another book that those who don't take care of their family are worse than a non-believer. I have a responsibility to take care of my family. But if it doesn't go outside of my walls, if it doesn't get beyond the Patterson house, he's saying, "You do not have the understanding of Christ. The reason, Patterson, that you have a job is that you might give to those in need. So when opportunity arises, when it's there, we can step in and be conduits of God's and grace to somebody else, because He's been good to me to provide. Let's get past this, because that's way too convicting."

Reject lying, convey truth, reject anger, keep short accounts, reject stealing, promote good work that you might give to others. And he says this in verse 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.”* You reject destructive words, and you promote helpful words. Why? Because it gives grace to others. Now here’s the challenge here. You might be able to take this text and proof-text it a little and say, “See, cussing is wrong.” That’s not really what it’s talking about. He’s not really talking about cussing. And I have my own challenges there. What this is talking about is not four-letter words, but it’s about how you use words, what you use words for. This is unbelievably convicting for me. My very essence, the love language of my soul is sarcasm, and I just feel so built up when someone mocks me. When a dear friend just chops my legs off, I think, “Man, he loves me enough to make fun of me.” That’s just how I think, and most guys are that way at some level when you get in with your buds. You just kind of rip on one another. That’s just what we do, but Paul’s saying that’s just out of style. Your words now have the opportunity to give grace. You can be a conduit of grace and build up. One of the biggest lies I ever learned was a nursery rhyme. “Sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” That’s a lie. Words won’t just hurt you, they will crush you. They will rip out your heart and stomp on it and spit on your grave. A man can absolutely in some level affect the way a person’s life goes by some words. You can absolutely destroy. And when I think about the things I have said to people, unbelievably destructive. It hurts my soul to think about it. Because people have said things to me that have crushed me. I can remember them, whether it was from a playground or from a week ago. I’ve had people say things about things I have done here at the church, it’s just hurtful. But I have the opportunity to speak and give grace, and as a believer in Christ you do to. Your words can build up and give grace, something that is helpful. And he says that you will be able to discern in a situation and be able to speak a word that’s appropriate for that time, for that need. So not only do you work so that you might meet some needs physically, but you speak so that you might meet some needs emotionally and spiritually. There’s nothing more convicting than being around a group of guys and you’re cutting one another down and it’s just what you do, and there’s the spiritual one who’s like, “Hey dude, the Lord’s really using you. I just think you’re great.” It’s encouraging, but it’s too convicting. It’s frustrating, but it is a mirror for me, that I can hear what I’m saying thinking, “I’m out of step here.” It’s very comfortable. It’s like the old comfy sweatshirt, but it’s just out of style. And I’m very used to it. It’s very second nature to me, but Paul is saying, “It’s old nature, Josh. You’ve got a new nature now. Walk in that. Walk in the newness of your life. Your new life necessitates a new lifestyle.”

And then he ends in verse 31. He says, *“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”* This is kind of a summary of everything. This idea of bitterness is what kind of spurred on this entire message. This past week, Bleecker and I were out talking, talking about life, talking about our upbringing, talking about all this stuff. And we talked about how comfortable and easy it is to sit in bitterness. Because the thing that’s so deceptive about bitterness is that usually you’re right. Usually you were wronged. Usually you should have gotten this or should have gotten that or you were mistreated, you were abused, you were victimized, you were taken advantage of. Usually it’s true. And so we take that posture and we stand in it, and we demand something that we’re not entitled to. And what happens is that little seed just grows, it festers, takes root and it calcifies your heart, a heart that maybe once just beat with such vibrancy. But it can’t pulse anymore, it’s got no room, and it just petrifies. Hebrews 12 says this, “Take care and let no root of bitterness be found in you.” Because the end result of your bitterness is that it will eventually begin to define you. It will eventually be the lens by which you see everything in life. And the writer of Hebrews says this, “At that point, when that bitterness has taken that much control of your life, you

will drift away and be like an evil, wicked person.” That’s terrifying, not to mention very harsh sounding. So let that be a warning to me and to you that bitterness is a very serious deal in our hearts. It is to be dealt with. And our problem bitterness is that I can usually gain an ally. I can go to a buddy, I can go to a friend and go, “Man, I just got screwed over on this. Can’t you see that?” “You sure did, man. You’ve got to fight. Stand up. You were wronged...You were entitled to that...You did deserve that...I can’t believe she did that...I can’t believe he did that...” Do you know what that’s doing for me? It’s just feeding my own entitlement, my own sin. You know what I need? It’s just a few verses before when he says this, “You speak the truth to somebody in love and you give the appropriate word in the time of need.” Do you know what I need in that moment? I need somebody to go, “Hey bro, you’ve got to get rid of that. That’s going to own you one of these days. Do you know what you’re entitled to? Death. You know what you’ve been given? Grace. You know how you’re to walk? With grace.” And I’m not saying to you that what happened to you wasn’t wrong, wasn’t despicable. You’re right. It was awful, you were betrayed, you were short-changed, you should have been given this promotion, but what Paul is saying is this, “There is no tragedy more tragic, there is no grievance more awful than the very sacrifice and slaughter of his son.” Do you know who did that? We did that. Do you know who forgave us? He forgave us. Therefore, because of the forgiveness that you and I have received in Christ, we walk in grace. Any crime against me pales in comparison to the crime I committed to our Lord. And if I get that, I can no longer hold so tightly to this. And over time, by His grace, my hands which are clenched around this entitlement and this bitterness that has begun to take a hold of me begin to loose and my grip gets weaker and weaker as I understand the grace of God in my life. I can’t hold on to it anymore. I’ve got to let go. It’s choking me out and it doesn’t make sense with the gospel. I have been forgiven of everything. And as wicked and deplorable as my life is who am I to hold on? I’m not saying what he or she did is right. In fact, I’m calling what it is. It was wrong, it was wicked, it was sinful, but I cannot stand in judgment. I cannot stand as one who would hold back against you. I forgive you, not in my strength but because Christ has forgiven me. And so I can put that over here and begin to walk, learn to walk in what Christ has taught me to walk in, which is forgiveness and compassion and kindness and being tenderhearted towards those who don’t deserve it because that’s exactly what He’s done to me. So you move from one who is so defined by your own bitterness to one who is freed from it, walking in absolute captivity, to one who walks in the power and Spirit of Christ, one who when others are around you that’s all they know about you, especially the ones close to you.

And so my hope is that the style that this church, the Village Church would be known for would have a whole lot less to do with what we wear, how we look and how we come across, but would have a whole lot more with us walking in truthfulness, us working that we might give, us rejecting anger and when it flashes up we keep short accounts because we don’t want the enemy to gain ground and that our words would be so full of grace and so perfectly timed that we’re building up one another and rejecting all bitterness and slander and clamor and malice, so that we could promote the very things that Christ has gifted us with, compassion, kindness, forgiveness. Wouldn’t that be great? I know that we can’t do it alone. So let’s beg God for some help. Let’s go to the Lord in prayer, and I would encourage you wherever you find yourself today just to feel the freedom, just to come out of the shadows. Christ has purchased that for you. You have the opportunity to walk in courage now, to deal with these things. And every single one of us has some issue, something that we just need to deal with. Let’s pray. “Father, we do pray for help, knowing that this renewing of the mind and putting on the new is absolutely impossible for us to do apart from You. You are the vine, we are the branches. Apart from You, we can do nothing. We need You desperately. And so God, I ask through Christ that You’d be working these things in us so that we might display to the world, to our neighbors, to our families the very character of Christ. We thank You for Him. He has certainly made every bit of difference. It’s for Him and through Him and by Him that we pray these things. Amen.”