

Ephesians: *Dealing with Bitterness and Unforgiveness*  
Ephesians 4:29-32

So, it was my intent to move on into Ephesians 5 this morning, but I was struck this week with a notion that I believe came from the Holy Spirit. That notion has to do with unforgiveness, and it will require us to spend one last week in Ephesians 4. So, please stand, and let us read Ephesians 4:29-32.

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.

My message will fall under three subheadings: 1) America's New Pandemic; 2) The Unforgiveable Sin of Unforgiveness; and 3) Get Up and Walk.

### **I. America's New Pandemic**

Paul writes in Ephesians 4:31: Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

Last Monday I had a conversation with a friend who described an all-too-familiar scenario. My friend had been in a meeting with a particular person and several others...it was a meeting intended for reconciliation. However, when confronted with his sin, and particularly his sin of unforgiveness, this particular individual who claims to be a Christian exploded. Just about every word mentioned in vs. 31 was necessary to describe what happened next: there was bitterness, anger, wrath, clamor, slander...and maybe even a bit of malice. As my friend described the scene, it reminded me of so many similar situations I have personally witnessed over the last 10 years...stories featuring a person within the church who was so embittered that he or she was simply unwilling to ask for forgiveness or to extend forgiveness.

And that's when it occurred to me: what my friend described in that meeting was likely the very thing that Paul was dealing with in the early church: people who claimed to know Christ, but then refused to forgive.

Think about it: every descriptor in vs. 31 (bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, and malice) are exactly those attitudes and behaviors that we observe in people who have been hurt, angered, or offended and are unwilling to forgive. And there were plenty of reasons for unforgiveness to exist within the ancient church in Asia Minor. There were deep racial hostilities between Jews and Greeks. There were major issues of unresolved anger between slaves and slave owners, the Romans and those they conquered, and many wounded souls due to the constant persecution experienced by the early church. Even so, Paul makes it clear: there is no place in the redeemed community for unforgiveness. All anger, wrath, slander, clamor, malice and bitterness must be put away.

Let's look at each word beginning with anger. Anger is often where our unforgiveness originates. We get angry because we have been hurt, treated unjustly, disrespected, or possibly even traumatized. The Greek word for anger in vs. 31, *orgei*, is similar to the word *orgizomai* that Paul used earlier in vs. 26 when he wrote, "Be angry, but do not sin." *Orgei* is a feeling that comes naturally when we perceive that we are treated unjustly. Paul acknowledges that we are all going to feel angry. It's what we do with that anger that determines what comes next. Last week we heard Paul say, "Be angry, but do not sin. Do not let the sun set on your anger." In other words, deal with your anger quickly and redemptively. How do we do that? We confront our brother or sister who has sinned against us with the intent of resolving the conflict and being reconciled (Matthew 18:15-17). However, even if we cannot be reconciled, we are to put away our anger, right? That means we must forgive. If we do not forgive, we inevitably sin in our anger.

Our unwillingness to forgive provides an "opportunity for the devil" according to Paul...and we all know that's true. Our unresolved anger will always turn into something far worse over time...like wrath, for example. The Greek word for "wrath" here in vs. 31 is *thumos*. We find an example of *thumos* in Luke 4 when Jesus reads from the scroll of Isaiah in His hometown synagogue there in Nazareth. When the crowds respond with disdain because he is "Joseph's son," Jesus remind the Jews that God has a history of extending His mercy to the Gentiles when the Jews refuse to listen to God's Word. That didn't go well. In vs. 28 Luke writes, "When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath (*thumos*). And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill...so that they could throw him down the cliff." Wrath, or *thumos*, is an unbridled rage that often leads to acts of retaliation or violence. The longer we hold on to wrath, the more likely we are to become a wraith.

Paul also mentions clamor as a product of our anger and unforgiveness. Clamor is loud shouting and complaining. You might remember in Acts 19 when the Ephesian silversmith named Demetrius publicly accused the Christians of threatening their idol-making industry which would decimate their local economy. We read in vs. 28, "When they heard this they were enraged (*thumos*) and were crying out, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" That's a perfect example of wrath that led to clamor. Clamor is what happens in an argument when we are shouting down our opponent. Quite often clamor happens when groups of people take sides against each other and begin hurling insults at one another. Think the Chiefs game when the Patriots are in town...our fans are famous for their "clamor." Paul makes it clear: there is no place in the local church for clamor.

Paul also insists that we must put away all slander. When we get angry and we nurse our anger toward the person who wronged us, we often speak poorly about that person, even to the extent that we embellish the story to make the person out to be far worse than he or she actually is. That's slander...it's also called the assassination of someone's character. The Greek verb here is *blasphemia*, where we get our English word, "blasphemy." *Blasphemia* is exactly what Paul meant when he wrote, "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 it." *Blasphemia* is in every respect "corruptive"...it's typically inaccurate and it lacks grace...and Paul says it must be put away in the believing community.

Paul mentions that all malice must be away. Malice is the intent to do evil or inflict harm upon another person. The Greek word for malice is *kakia*, and it literally means “evil or wickedness.” Malice is planning and acting out our revenge against those whom we deem to be our enemies. Malice is the child of bitterness.

I saved bitterness for last, because quite frankly, I think bitterness is the new pandemic in America. Dr. Stephen Diamond, in a 2009 article written for *Psychology Today* entitled “Anger Disorder”, writes: Bitterness is a chronic and pervasive state of smoldering resentment...one of the most destructive and toxic of human emotions. Bitterness is a kind of morbid characterological hostility toward someone, something or toward life itself...it is a prolonged, resentful feeling of disempowered and devalued victimization. Most mental disorders stem directly from...anger, rage, resentment, hostility or bitterness. There is no question that, if left to fester unconsciously, anger, rage and resentment about having been traumatized become bitterness and hostility, which in turn give rise to self-defeating, sometimes passive-aggressive, destructive, vengeful or even violent behavior. Pathological embitterment is a dangerous state of mind that can and does motivate evil deeds.<sup>1</sup>

Church, bitterness is a huge problem. Dr. Diamond said it well: bitterness is “a prolonged, resentful feeling of disempowered and devalued victimization” that creates...leads to...accounts for “most mental disorders.”

I want you to think about that for a minute. Think about the horrific increase in public shootings, including and often specifically at schools. Have you wondered why the shootings are so often at schools? Bitterness starts early for a lot of people. Kids are bullied by their classmates; students are embarrassed by a teacher; and over time their “prolonged, resentful feelings of disempowered and devalued victimization” leads to malice in the form of vengeful and violent behavior.

The well-known Catholic counselor Gregory Popcak sums it up this way: “Bitterness is unforgiveness fermented.”<sup>2</sup> In a culture that has set aside a biblical worldview and the hope of the gospel...which is the forgiveness of sins through Christ...is it any surprise that bitterness is rampant amongst our children and our society at large? Ask any therapist, pastor, or counselor that you know, and I suspect most will agree: America’s growing pandemic is bitterness. Fortunately, there is a cure for bitterness.

As another well-known psychologist and contributor to *Psychology Today*, Dr. Leon Seltzer writes: Virtually every writer who has weighed in on the subject of bitterness has discussed its ultimate remedy: forgiveness. Forgiveness alone enables you to let go of grievances, grudges, rancor, and resentment. It’s the single most potent antidote for the venomous desire for retributive justice poisoning your system. Learning to forgive your “violatee” facilitates your recovery from a wound that, while it may have originated from outside yourself, has been kept alive from the venom you’ve synthesized within you.<sup>3</sup>

Even the secular scientists know that there is only one cure to bitterness and unresolved anger, and that is forgiveness. Sadly, we are increasingly a culture that resists forgiveness, even in the Church.

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<sup>1</sup>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/evil-deeds/200906/anger-disorder-part-two-can-bitterness-become-mental-disorder>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/evolution-the-self/201501/don-t-let-your-anger-mature-bitterness>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

## **II. The Unforgiveable Sin of Unforgiveness**

If forgiveness is the cure for all the ills in vs. 31, we must define forgiveness. Tim Keller, in his book entitled *Forgive* lists four aspects of genuine forgiveness.

First, we must name the trespass truthfully as wrong and punishable (no excuses, no half-truths or watered-down dismissals). Forgiveness never entails dismissing sinful, hurtful behavior as “OK...no big deal.” Forgiveness is only possible when we can agree that the behavior was genuinely wrong and deserving of punishment.

Second is to identify with the perpetrator as a fellow sinner rather than thinking how different from you he or she is. It is to will their good.

Third, it is to release the wrongdoer from liability by absorbing the debt oneself rather than seeking revenge and paying them back.

Finally, it is to aim for reconciliation rather than breaking off the relationship forever.<sup>4</sup>

Now, the culture has its own theories on forgiveness. One is that we forgive as a means of healing ourselves. Many Christians have ascribed to this idea of therapeutic forgiveness, and it’s not completely wrong in that forgiveness does release us from the toxin of bitterness; but, in the end, this kind of forgiveness is still self-serving.

The culture also endorses a conditional brand of forgiveness based upon groveling. If we grovel enough...if we truly convince somebody that we are sorry enough...then maybe that person will forgive us. This is me when I get pulled over for speeding! You should see my sad face...I am a professional groveller when it comes to the Highway Patrol!

Both of these cultural forms of forgiveness lack the power of Christian forgiveness which is based upon the Gospel and beautifully articulated in our text this morning in Ephesians 4:32, “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you.” Christian forgiveness is possible because we are saved by God’s unmerited grace by which our sins were forgiven when we didn’t deserve to be forgiven. Our sins deserve hell...but in Christ we received unmerited mercy at the expense of God’s only beloved Son suffering the cross in our place. So, the Gospel mandate of forgiveness is not therapeutic, nor is it conditional based on groveling. The Gospel mandate of forgiveness is always exactly this: forgive as God forgave you in Christ.

Now, I am going to transition my comments from hypothetical to inappropriately personal. I am concerned about what I see happening in churches, including our own. It saddens me to admit that I have met many people in churches who look religious, act religious, serve faithfully in ministries, but when I get inside their lives and get a peek into their relationships, I discover an embittered spirit that is unwilling to genuinely repent and completely unwilling to forgive others. You might be shocked to discover how many people in this amazing church are unwilling to even speak to their own spouses, siblings, children, parents, or neighbors.

This trend is most prominent amongst the growing percentage of people who identify themselves as victims of abuse, neglect, or trauma. Now, before you get triggered and start composing an

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<sup>4</sup> Timothy Keller: *Forgive-Why Should I and How Can I?* p 9-10.

email in your mind, listen: I get it...I truly do. I was a victim of a sexual predator when I was about 5 years old, and that kind of trauma does not go away by itself. Many people have legitimate, horrible stories, and I know a bit about how trauma affects people and their ability to cope. I also understand that some churches or denominations have historically manipulated “mandatory forgiveness” as a means of covering up or even justifying abusive behavior. I understand that people in toxic, co-dependent relationships where there is violence or chronic harm are often shamed and manipulated by the language of forgiveness when, in fact, it would be best for those people to forgive from the heart and get out of that relationship altogether. Please know: I get it.

There’s more ground here than I can cover in this short message, but here’s what I want you to remember: the teachings of the New Testament are “trauma informed.” I think we could agree that very few human souls have suffered trauma to the extent of the Apostle Paul. In 2 Corinthians 11 Paul rattles off a short list including “several imprisonments, with countless beatings and often near death. Five times I received the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea;...many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.” Paul was well-acquainted with trauma, as was his Lord. In the last three years of His life, Jesus of Nazareth was homeless, without possessions, hated, falsely accused, betrayed by a close friend, denied by his best friend, abandoned by all of his friends, unjustly arrested, sentenced to death after being declared innocent, scourged to within an inch of his life, stripped and nailed to a Roman cross in front of hundreds of people who heckled Him with insults until He died. Jesus was trauma informed...and yet in the last gasps of breath He uttered, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing.” Several years later, chained to a Roman guard after rotting away in captivity for two years, the Apostle Paul writes, “Forgive as God forgave you in Christ.” The Bible is redundantly clear: as recipients of God’s unmerited grace, we are to forgive those who sin against us. That doesn’t mean that we voluntarily continue to subject ourselves to violence or chronic harm...it does mean that we release people from our prison of contempt. We forgive as we have been forgiven.

Let’s look a little deeper into the teaching of Jesus on this matter of forgiveness. In Matthew 6 Jesus teaches His disciples to pray: “Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors...” We still say that prayer, but have you considered what you are asking of God? You are asking God to forgive you just as...to the extent that...you forgive those who have sinned against you.

Now, in case you think that’s not what Jesus meant when He taught His disciples to pray that way, Jesus makes His point perfectly clear in Matthew 6:14-15, “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

Church, it doesn’t get clearer than that. Our unforgiveness will render us unforgiven.

Now, why is that? Surely, we cannot be expected to forgive *everybody* who sins against us, especially those who KEEP sinning against us over and over again, right? Lucky for us, the Apostle Peter literally asked that exact question in Matthew 18:21-22: “Lord, how often will my

brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.” Peter thought he was being generous. Jewish teachings required that you forgive a person three times, but Peter doubled that and added one in for good luck. Jesus responds with a ridiculous number...a number that represents completion times infinity. Our forgiveness is to be inexhaustible. Why?

Christians forgive because we have been forgiven...much. To illustrate that point, Jesus goes on to tell a famous story in Matthew 18 about a King who decides to settle accounts with His people, and he comes upon this man who owes Him 10,000 talents. A talent was a year's wage...and the man owed 10,000 years of wages. To gain some perspective, if the average annual wage is \$40,000 dollars in America, the modern equivalent of 10k talents would be about 400 billion dollars today. Jesus chose the highest currency in the empire and the highest number in the Greek language that had a word associated with it. In other words, the amount owed to the king was incomprehensible and unpayable. The law of the kingdom for such indebtedness was clear: the man who could not pay his debt was to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he owned as a means of payment towards his unpayable debt. Naturally, the man falls to his knees and begs for mercy. He asks for time so that he can work hard and pay back all that he owes...which is completely ridiculous. The man would have to live 10,000 years to pay back what he owed...it's a false and desperate promise. Even so, the King, out of pity for the man and his family, forgives the debt. Which means, the King is now and forevermore short 400 billion dollars...that is an enormous deficit that he is willing to assume out of His mercy for this unfaithful, irresponsible, flat out guilty, groveling, desperate servant...and this is just one unfaithful servant out of hundreds of thousands, many of whom may owe the King just as much.

Now, ironically, minutes later, when the forgiven servant spots one of his buddies who owes him about three months' worth of wages, he walks right up to him, grabs him by the throat, and says, “Pay what you owe...now!” His buddy drops right to his knees, struggling to breathe, and begs, “Have patience with me, and I will pay what I owe.” Given what just happened minutes earlier...given that he had just been forgiven a debt of 400 billion dollars...we would expect the forgiven servant to extend the same kind of mercy toward his fellow servant who owed so much less. But that's not what happens. In Matthew 18:30 we read: He (the forgiven servant) refused and went and put him (the other servant) in prison until he should pay the debt.

Now, there were witnesses who saw what took place, and they made sure the King was notified. The King then summons the unforgiving servant, and this is what he says in vs. 32-33: “You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant as I had mercy on you?”

Church, that's the question of the day. I know you have your reasons for holding on to your anger. I know you will come up with the most impossible scenarios to beg for an exception; but please, first, consider the question of the King: “Should you not have had mercy on your fellow servant as I had mercy on you?” That is the question we will all be asked if we refuse to forgive.

Listen: If you can't forgive the person who has sinned against you...and you can't even really identify what role you played in the conflict...and you don't really think that God forgave you of all that much since you have been a rather decent person after all...then listen: you have never truly repented, you are not forgiven in Christ, you are not saved, and your unforgiveness is completely reasonable. However, if you have ever heard Jesus speak over you that your debt has

been paid...if you have ever known that you have been forgiven an insurmountable debt...like the dude that owed \$400 billion dollars...then your unwillingness to forgive those who have sinned against you is as bewildering as the story of the unforgiving servant. And that doesn't end well for you.

Jesus finishes the story in vs. 34: "And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt"...all 400 billion dollars. Jesus then looks back to Peter and says, "So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

Church...are you listening? Jesus said those words to His disciples...to Jesus followers...to believers. He is not speaking to rapists, murderers, fornicators, human traffickers, or even your ex-husband! Jesus is speaking to God-fearing, Bible-honoring, church going people. And here's his incredibly clear point: it is not OK for us to withhold our forgiveness in our Christian families or within the Church. It is not OK to withhold mercy when we have received unmerited mercy and God's forgiveness of our unpayable debt. We are to forgive just as God forgave us in Christ. What is more, we are to be kind to one another. We are to be tenderhearted, "with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," remember that?

Call me jaded, but over the course of three decades in ministry, I've sat through countless conversations with church people complaining about their spouse or their parents or their co-workers or fellow church members, and it regularly goes something like this:

"Pastor, I'm done with him. I will never speak to that SOB again. He can rot in hell as far as I'm concerned."

To which I will gently respond, "You know, Jesus said you have to forgive him, right?"

And here is the predictable response: "Oh, I've forgiven him. I forgave him a long time ago."

Let me make this perfectly clear: Finding pleasure at the thought of people rotting in hell is NOT forgiveness...write that down. Assassinating someone's character is not forgiveness. Bringing up the same old story of your spouse's sin against you over and over again is not forgiveness. Embellishing your story to make people feel sorry for you at the expense of another person's reputation is not forgiveness. Plotting revenge, or even angling to ensure someone suffers "what they deserve" is NOT forgiveness.

Let me tell you a personal story of forgiveness that happened many years ago. Back in 2010, a man asked me to loan him a few thousand dollars for a car repair. I knew he was hurting for cash; I had recently helped get housing for him and his family; and I felt that we had a good relationship...I felt like I could trust him. But after a few months, the man had not paid me back...not a dollar...and I am not a guy who has a few thousand dollars to spare. I had borrowed that money, and that debt was accumulating interest. Whenever I tried to talk to him about paying back his debt, he made promises to come by with the money, but it never came. Our relationship became strained; the couple stopped attending the church; and I was completely

frustrated by the situation. That is until the day the Lord led me back to Matthew 18, and I realized where I was in that story. Here I was...a guy who had been forgiven an insurmountable debt of sin...I was a man who deserved Hell but was now promised Heaven by the unmerited grace of Jesus. And yet I was stewing over a brother who owed me a few thousand dollars? I remember that moment because I immediately got into my truck, went to his workplace, walked right up to him and his wife who was standing next to them, and said, "Brother, your debt is forgiven. Please do not give it a second thought. I love you and your family, and I will never mention your debt to you again...ever. It's done. Let's move on." That's forgiveness. Out of compassion, I absorbed the debt at my own personal expense. And I set the man free...we never spoke of his debt again. And why did I do that? Because that's how God forgave me in Christ, and I have been commanded and empowered to do likewise. I'll never forget the way his wife wept at that moment...hers were the same tears I have seen so many times at the altar when one burdened with an unpayable debt hears those words from Jesus: "My Child, your debt has been paid. I love you, and I will never bring up those sins again. It's done. Let's move on together."

That's Christian forgiveness...and it changes a human soul. The forgiveness of Jesus is the most powerful antidote to bitterness and unresolved anger the world has ever seen. In fact, it's the only antidote to the toxic poison of bitterness that is eating up a massive percentage of the people in this room and every room.

Listen: I'm not asking you to set aside justice, but I am asking you to trust God for justice while obediently forgiving as you have been forgiven. I'm not asking you to pretend that horrible things didn't happen. Horrible things always happen! Horrible things have been happening to people for thousands of years, but building our entire identity around the horrible things that have happened to us is a relatively recent thing that is leading to toxic, bitter, resentful souls that will ultimately spend an eternity in torment because they refuse to forgive.

### **III. Get Up and Walk**

One more story and then we'll be done. Do you remember the story of the paralytic lowered down through the roof by his friends in Luke 5? Do you remember what Jesus said to the paralytic on the mat after he was lowered through the roof? He said, "Man, your sins are forgiven."

We can almost imagine the guy on the mat looking down at his withered legs saying, "Hey Jesus, don't you think I have a more urgent need here?" To which Jesus would respond, "No, you don't. Look around: everyone here can walk, but does that fact fill them with contentment and bring them joy? No. If I only heal your legs, you will find momentary joy, but in the end, you will just be like the rest. What you need more than anything else is forgiveness of your sin...that is the only cure for the alienation between you and God and the alienation within yourself."<sup>5</sup>

You see, so many of us are like that guy on the mat. Jesus keeps telling us that our sins are forgiven, but we keep leaving church disappointed that He didn't heal our legs. In fact, we're so disillusioned that our lives are still painful and difficult that we quit coming to hear from Jesus because we're tired of being told we're forgiven. Just once we would like to be told "You're right. You truly are a victim. You truly are misunderstood. You truly can't be blamed for

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<sup>5</sup> Keller, xix.



anything. It was never your fault. You didn't do anything wrong. It's all their fault. You have every right to be angry, and you should use that anger to assert yourself, get your revenge, and pursue your passions no matter what anyone says. To hell with God, to hell with everybody who gets in your way. Do what makes you happy.”

Let me ask you a question: does that sound like something God would say...or does that sound like something Satan would say, given the opportunity?

If you are still nursing your anger, if your soul is embittered, you give the devil an opportunity to lie to you every single minute of every single day. And that lie, unsurprisingly, sounds an awful lot like the messaging of just about every Hollywood movie, rap song, and popular slogan in the past twenty years. It's a lie that has led a record number of bitter souls to buy a gun and blow up children. It's a lie that has led to the deaths of over 109,000 people due to fentanyl-laced drugs in the past year. It's a lie that is blowing up marriages right here in our church. It's a lie that is enslaving men to pornography and addicting women to wine. It is a lie that will carve out an entire section of hell for church going people who should have known better than to withhold their forgiveness when they had received the King's unmerited mercy. Make no mistake: if you are constantly embittered, you are what Scott Peck describes as “People of the Lie” in his book by the same title. People of the Lie are so wrapped up in their bitterness that they become narcissistic destroyers...they are what Peck defines as the scientific definition of evil.<sup>6</sup>

Church...don't believe the lie...believe the Gospel. In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven. So get up and walk! We are no longer victims...we are free...we are forgiven...we are chosen...we are adopted...we are redeemed! And just as we have been forgiven, so are we to forgive one another. And as we forgive those who have sinned against us...on the day we stand before the King, so shall He forgive us. Therefore, be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God forgave us in Christ. Amen?

As we close, if by any chance you are desperate to hear Jesus speak into your embittered soul...if you are by any chance a person who has never heard Him say to you, “My Child, your debt has been paid in full”...please, please pray with me right now, and when I'm done praying, I'm going to ask you to come to the front and let me pray over you. There's only one cure for what ails you, and His name is Jesus.

Let's pray.

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<sup>6</sup> Scott Peck, *People of the Lie—The Hope for Healing Human Evil*. This is one of the most important books I have ever read in terms of understanding evil and human behavior. Peck makes a very strong case for evil people as those having a “malignant narcissism.” They are void of empathy and unwilling to acknowledge their own guilt or sin. They cannot tolerate the pain of their own conscience, the pain of the realization of their own sinfulness and imperfection...thus they are continually engaged in sweeping the evidence of their evil under the rug of their own consciousness. This is, in fact, what bitterness accomplishes over time. When we dwell incessantly on the sins of others, we are effectively blinding ourselves to our own sin. Once we cannot see our own sin or become so unaccustomed to seeing our sin that we can't tolerate the pain of acknowledging it, we are in the grips of narcissism, which inevitably leads to evil by every account.