

# “THE AXE FORGETS, BUT THE TREE REMEMBERS”

*A Biblical Exploration of Heart-Wounds, Unforgiveness, and Divine Healing*

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## CORE PROVERB & SCRIPTURAL FOUNDATION

*“The axe forgets; the tree remembers.” — African Proverb*

*“A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city, and contentions are like the bars of a castle.” — Proverbs 18:19 (KJV)*

*“See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no ‘root of bitterness’ springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled.” — Hebrews 12:15 (ESV)*

## 1. INTRODUCTION: THE ANATOMY OF A HIDDEN INJURY

In pastoral counseling and spiritual warfare, few dynamics are as destructive—yet as frequently misunderstood—as the asymmetric impact of offense. The ancient African proverb **“The axe forgets; the tree remembers”** captures a profound spiritual and psychological truth. When an offense occurs, the perpetrator (the axe) often swings, strikes, and quickly moves on, completely oblivious to the depth of the mark left behind. The axe does not carry the scar. It moves to the next log, unburdened by memory, unbothered by consequence.

Conversely, the victim (the tree) absorbs the full physical and structural weight of the blow. The trunk is notched; the bark is torn; the inner rings of growth are permanently altered. Even if the wound heals over time, the tree carries the rings of that impact deep within its core. In this intensive four-part study guide, **Pastor Mitchell Turner** unpacks how unforgiveness metastasizes within the human heart, how Christ provides the ultimate framework for complete liberation, and how believers can move from deep structural injury into divine fruitfulness.

### Key Spiritual Dynamics of the Proverb:

- **The Blindness of the Offender (The Axe):** Offenders frequently minimize their actions ('It wasn't that big of a deal,' 'You're being too sensitive'). Because they do not feel the impact, they assume no lasting harm was done.
- **The Burden of the Victim (The Tree):** The injured party carries the silent weight of the cut. Long after the incident is forgotten by the room, the individual's inner world remains shaped by the impact.
- **The Illusion of Time Healing:** Time alone does not heal tree wounds; it merely grows bark over unresolved damage. Unaddressed emotional and spiritual strikes rot the heartwood from within.

## DISCUSSION & REFLECTION QUESTIONS

**Q1.** Can you recall a season where someone struck you like an 'axe' and walked away completely unaware of the injury they caused?

**Q2.** How does recognizing the natural tendency of the 'axe' to forget change your expectations of receiving a human apology?

## 2. THE ROOT SYSTEM OF UNFORGIVENESS

Unforgiveness is rarely a static condition; it is an active, subterranean process. In Hebrews 12:15, the Scriptures warn against allowing a “**root of bitterness**” to spring up. A root grows underground in the dark, feeding off negative thoughts, replayed memories, and unspoken resentment, until it eventually produces bitter fruit that defiles whole communities.

### The Four Internal Stages of the Unforgiving Heart:

- **Stage 1: The Strike (Trauma & Offense):** An unexpected breach of trust, sharp word, abandonment, or betrayal hits the soul. The structural integrity of peace is shattered.
- **Stage 2: Replay & Rumination (Mental Fixation):** The mind continuously rehearses the scene. The individual relives the strike, reinforcing the emotional pathways of injury and deepening the groove in the tree trunk.
- **Stage 3: Encapsulation & Bitterness (Hardening):** To guard against future strikes, the soul builds internal walls (Proverbs 18:19). What was once a soft, vulnerable spirit hardens into self-defensive cynicism.
- **Stage 4: Spiritual Toxicity (Defilement):** Unforgiveness becomes an idol of justice. The victim believes their pain gives them the right to hold the offender hostage, yet they themselves are the ones bound in chains.

### The Physical, Emotional, and Spiritual Toll:

| Domain     | Manifestation of Unforgiveness                                       | Scriptural / Pastoral Insight                                                    |
|------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Spiritual  | Blocked prayer life, hindered worship, loss of divine intimacy.      | Matthew 6:14-15 — Divine mercy is structurally linked to human forgiveness.      |
| Emotional  | Chronic anxiety, explosive anger, persistent cynicism, depression.   | Proverbs 14:30 — 'Envy and wrath rot the bones.'                                 |
| Relational | Distrust in new relationships, emotional withdrawal, projected pain. | Hebrews 12:15 — Bitterness defiles not just you, but 'many' around you.          |
| Physical   | Elevated cortisol, high blood pressure, sleep disturbances, fatigue. | Modern medicine confirms unreleased resentment maintains fight-or-flight states. |

**DIAGNOSTIC REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

**Q1.** How has carrying a 'root of bitterness' impacted your spiritual momentum and personal relationships in the past?

**Q2.** Why do you think the human ego naturally prefers holding onto a grievance over releasing it to God?

### 3. THE BIBLICAL BLUEPRINT: TRANSFORMATION AT THE CROSS

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To move from the lingering scars of the tree to complete spiritual resurrection, we must align our understanding of forgiveness with Holy Scripture. Worldly forgiveness says, *"Forgive when they apologize and deserve it."* Kingdom forgiveness says, **"Forgive as Christ forgave you while you were still an enemy."**

#### Deconstructing Myths vs. Biblical Reality:

- **Myth 1: Forgiveness means minimizing or excusing the sin.**  
Reality: Forgiveness names the sin as deeply evil, illegal, and wrong, but chooses to transfer the judgment seat to Almighty God (Romans 12:19).
- **Myth 2: Forgiveness requires immediate trust and reconciliation.**  
Reality: Forgiveness is a unilateral decision of the heart; reconciliation is a bilateral process requiring mutual repentance and proven trust over time.
- **Myth 3: Forgiveness requires forgetting the past completely.**  
Reality: God does not have literal amnesia; He chooses not to count our sins against us. True forgiveness changes the memory from an active wound into a closed scar of God's grace.

#### The Four Pillars of Gospel-Centered Forgiveness:

- **1. Acknowledging the Cut (Authenticity):** Do not pretend it didn't hurt. Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus and agonized in Gethsemane. Healing begins when we bring the honest debt before God.
- **2. Canceling the Legal Debt (Release):** In Greek, the word for forgiveness (Aphiemi) means 'to release a debt, to send away.' You surrender the right to inflict payback or exact emotional interest on the debt.
- **3. Severing the Invisible Chain (Freedom):** Unforgiveness binds you spiritually to the offender. When you release the offender from your inner courtroom, you discover that the prisoner you freed was actually yourself.
- **4. Blessing the Offender (Divine Favor):** Jesus commands in Luke 6:28: 'Bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.' Praying for their true salvation and healing breaks the final hold of bitterness.

#### THE ULTIMATE EXCULPATION

*"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." — Ephesians 4:32*

*"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." — Luke 23:34*

#### DISCUSSION & REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Q1.** How does distinguishing between forgiveness (unilateral release) and trust (earned relationship) give you emotional and spiritual freedom?
- Q2.** What specific debt are you holding against someone that God is asking you to cancel today?

## 4. HEALING THE TREE: PRACTICAL STEPS & THE PRAYER OF RELEASE

Pastor Mitchell Turner outlines a clear, actionable roadmap to transition from the memory of the axe into the permanent flourishing of a tree planted by rivers of living water (Psalm 1:3).

### Five Practical Steps to Walking in Freedom:

- **Step 1: Write Out the Debt:** Identify the exact names, actions, and losses involved. Bring what was hidden into the clear light of God's presence.
- **Step 2: Declare the Surrender:** Verbally state: 'I release [Name] from the debt of [Offense]. I remove myself from the judgment seat and place them in God's hands.'
- **Step 3: Guard Your Mind Against Relapses:** When the memory returns, remind yourself: 'The debt was paid at Calvary and canceled in my heart. I will not re-open a settled case.'
- **Step 4: Practice Active Blessing:** Whenever their name crosses your mind, replace malicious internal commentary with a quick prayer for their spiritual redemption.
- **Step 5: Embrace the Beauty of the Scar:** A scar is proof that the wound did not destroy you. Let your healed mark become a testimony to encourage other bruised trees.

### Summary Handout Checklist:

- ☐ **Identify** the 'axe' in your life and recognize their human limitations.
- ☐ **Confess** any hidden bitterness, resentment, or desire for vengeance as sin.
- ☐ **Choose** to forgive as an act of obedience to Christ, not based on temporary emotions.
- ☐ **Separate** the decision of forgiveness from the ongoing evaluation of boundary wisdom.
- ☐ **Reclaim** the joy, health, and peace that unforgiveness held hostage.

### PASTORAL PRAYER OF LIBERATION

*"Heavenly Father, I acknowledge the strikes I have borne and the deep scars left within my heart. I confess that I have held onto resentment and played the judge. Today, I surrender the axe and the injury to You. By an act of my will, empowered by Your Holy Spirit, I forgive [Name] for [Offense]. I cancel their debt. I release them into Your hands and choose to walk in absolute freedom, healed and restored in Jesus' name. Amen."*

### FINAL PERSONAL COMMITMENT

**Q1.** What is your immediate next step today to ensure the root of bitterness is fully uprooted from your life?

**Q2.** How can you turn your healed wound into a source of hope and encouragement for someone else going through deep hurt?