

# Operation 180

## Session 6: A covenant of peace

### Home Group Edition

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## Session 5 review

- ❖ Daily meditations
  - Did any of the readings stand out to you?
- ❖ Prayer to remove shortcomings
  - Any praise reports?

## Introduction

In this session, we begin to examine *our* impact on our family and friends and begin the hard work of acknowledging all those that we have harmed through our self-destructive behaviors, and seek to make amends wherever possible.

## Forgiveness is the hinge

We will see in this session that *forgiveness is the hinge about which our recovery operates*.

Our recovery begins with our door closed as we have been working on ourselves. We have engaged in deep self-work, performing a searching and fearless inventory of ourselves, humbly acknowledging our shortcomings, and asking God to remove them.

But now, in this session, *our recovery goes public*.

We open the door to our friends and family, inviting them into our recovery process. It is here that we begin to heal broken relational connections and restore *shalom peace* to our lives, little by little.

It is *forgiveness* that allows that door to open and lets the light of God shine into our lives again. Like the Cycle of Psalms we saw earlier in this series, forgiveness moves us from *surviving* to *reviving* and finally to *thriving* again. Forgiveness *recreates us* for a new season. As we will see below, forgiveness is God's way of breathing new life into us and making us a new creation.

Where we have been previously focused on our personal sins and shortcomings, we will now shift to anger, bitterness towards others, and grudges, often referred to under the umbrella term of *resentment*. This is because the sins related to resentment are directed at someone else.

But as we are about to see, while resentment is outwardly directed toward others, it actually hurts *us* as well, often worse, and sometimes fatal. Let's take a look.

## Resentments kill

How many times have you heard someone say "I will forgive but never forget." Often times we will hear someone say "I made up my mind to just move on, I feel better now," like forgiveness is just a decision or a feeling we call up on demand.

The original program of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) was very focused on removing resentment and healing anger. And for good reason, their wisdom shows time and time again that resentment and anger are key components of addiction. Here is one passage from AA's basic text, the Big Book:

*Resentment is the "number one" offender. It destroys more alcoholics than anything else. From it stem all forms of spiritual disease, for we have been not only mentally and physically ill, we have been spiritually sick. AA Big Book, pg. 64*

For those in recovery, resentment is enemy #1 because it destroys us *more than anything else*. Little has changed here since 1939 when The Big Book was published.

AA also teaches a causal connection between anger and resentments - from anger springs resentments:

*If we were to live, we had to be free of anger. The grouch and the brainstorm were not for us. They may be the dubious luxury of normal men, but for alcoholics these things are poison. We turned back to the list, for it held the key to the future. We were prepared to look at it from an entirely different angle. We began to see that the world and its people really dominated us. In that state, the wrong-doing of others, fancied or real, had power to actually kill. How could we escape? We saw that these resentments must be mastered, but how? We could not wish them away any more than alcohol. This was our course: We realized that the people who wronged us were perhaps spiritually sick. - AA Big Book, pg. 66-67*

The “grouch and brainstorm” have always been one of my favorite AA-isms, and was always memorable in my early recovery. But behind the vivid imagery is an important fact - *anger is poison*. And we need to be free of the poison of anger.

But how do we start? Look at the very next sentence - *we turned back to our list*. What list? That is our 4th Step Sin Acknowledgement Sheet that we prepared a few sessions ago. Why would we pull that thing out again? Aren't we done with that? Turns out that *it holds the key to our future*.

That is quite a statement. (This is why it is so important to make sure you do the work and diligently complete your 4th Step Sin Acknowledgement Sheet.)

How is it the key to our future? As we will see in this session, *it shapes how we see others, particularly how we perceive those that have harmed us*.

This quote from AA says that we cannot wish away our anger any more than we can wish away our addictions. So, instead, *we change how we view others*. This *reframing of our people-view* is precisely what the Holy Spirit wants to work in all believers.

Fear of others, often unfounded, is the seed of anger. When we attach fear to another person, we give ourselves permission to be angry with them. This saying is true:

*Anger is fear that we put a face on*

Recovery wisdom states that fears come in three buckets. Fear that someone is going to:

- 1) take away something you have;
- 2) get something you want; or
- 3) call you out for something you did in the past.

When we attach one of these fears to another human being, we can now get angry with them. And over time, that anger will fester and grow into resentment, living in and poisoning us, *whether the fear was real or not*.

We often hear the saying, “*Fear is a poison that we drink, expecting the other person to die.*” This saying is true, indeed. The Big Book speaks to this and says that resentment and anger *kill us dead*.

*We found that it is fatal. For when harboring such feelings we shut ourselves off from the sunlight of the Spirit. The insanity of alcohol returns and we drink again. And with us, to drink is to die. - AA Big Book, pg. 66*

Feel free to substitute whatever your personal go-to self-destructive behavior or shortcoming is for alcohol - the fact is that *to remain in our addiction is to die*. Period.

This quote also takes us back to the first two sessions, where we saw that *sin is separation*, here separating us from the *sunlight of the Spirit*. Harboring resentment causes us to deconstruct ourselves and our relationships, leaving us alone and in despair.

The origin of the word *resentment* comes from the root word *feel*. Resentments are literally old feelings of anger that we re-feel over and over. We play old grudges over and over in the magic replay machine of our minds.

Resentment is the perfect fuel for a constant cycle of addiction, spinning us around and around, deeper and deeper into despair. Our minds can replay vivid memories of our perceived wrongs continuously on demand, like an endless video loop in our head, locking us in a cycle of despair.

Unchecked, the addiction cycle is fatal.

Theologian and pastor Frederick Buechner provides a vivid and colorful description of resentment and its self-destructive consequences:

*Anger is possibly the most fun of the seven deadly sins. To lick your wounds, to smack your lips over grievances long past, to roll over your tongue the prospect of bitter confrontations still to come, to savor to the last toothsome morsel both the pain you are given and the pain you are giving back—in many ways it is a feast fit for a king. The chief drawback is that what you are wolfing down is yourself. The skeleton of the feast is you.*

Anger can be addictive to many in its own way. For some, it makes life exciting, as the quote says. But in the end, anger is self-defeating. Resentment is the ultimate self-destructive behavior.

As quoted above, “*if we were to live, we had to be free of anger.*”

Why? Jesus tells us so. Let’s see what Jesus says on this subject.

# Jesus on anger

Jesus gives us two examples.

First, from the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus begins by reminding us of the commandment of “You shall not murder.” But then Jesus raises the bar, using a series of hyperbole statements to focus our attention on not just the actual transgression (murder), but anger in our hearts. Jesus states:

*“But I tell you, everyone who is angry with his brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Whoever insults his brother or sister, will be subject to the court. Whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be subject to hellfire. So if you are offering your gift on the altar, and there you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled with your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.” (Matthew 5:22–24)*

This Scripture is read in nearly every Christian recovery program throughout the world for the proposition that believers should reconcile with each other. That is true enough, but there is so much more happening here.

The Jewish context is very important to fully understand the impact this passage had on the listeners in the first century. The Gospel of Matthew was written to a Jewish audience, and Jesus’ example involving an altar would be heard loud and clear. For Jews that still observed temple practices, Jesus is making an incredible statement here.

Jesus is saying that *if you are holding anger or resentment in your heart against another Christian, you are spiritually unclean and unworthy to approach the altar.*

**BAM!**

In other words, the physical act of violence is just a manifestation of a deeper, spiritual problem, namely, anger. To restore ourselves to a condition worthy of approaching the altar, we first must reconcile ourselves with our brothers and sisters, *and only then* can we reproach the altar.

Anger and resentment separate us from the altar and impair our ability to worship at the altar.

As we have seen throughout this series, anger and resentment separate us from God.

Jesus also teaches us that grudges are an impediment to effective prayer:

*“Therefore I tell you, everything you pray and ask for—believe that you have received it and it will be yours. And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven will also forgive you your wrongdoing.” (Mark 11:24–25)*

Notice that Jesus closes all loopholes by stating “anything against anyone,” which would include anger, bitterness, unforgiveness, grudges, etc.

Prayer can only be effective if we know and believe that we are forgiven. It is only through that faith that we can ask as if we have already received it. Therefore, we must forgive others first for our prayer to be effective.

So let’s review. Anger and resentment do the following things to us:

- 1) Kill us dead;
- 2) Make us unclean before God
- 3) And get in the way of our prayer life.

Sounds like a bad deal.

But if I can't wish anger and resentment away, then how do I get rid of this poison? How do I reframe my people-view, as mentioned above?

## Reframing our people-view

The Apostle Paul gives us an example of what it means to completely change how we view others:

*“From now on, then, we do not know anyone from a worldly perspective. Even if we have known Christ from a worldly perspective, yet now we no longer know him in this way. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!” (2 Corinthians 5:16–17)*

The term “know” implies *consider, perceive, see, understand*, and the term “new” implies a *refreshed creature or building*. Putting these together, we see that Paul is saying that *if we consider ourselves a new creation, we must then see others as new creations, too*. It works both ways. No excuses. *Everyone and anyone who is in Christ must be treated as a new person, not who they were at their worst behavior.*

In other words, the hard work here is developing the ability and discipline *to see others for what they can be, not as who they used to be.*

*We must see others for what they can be in Christ, not as who they used to be in the world.*

But this is exactly what the New Covenant is all about. Recall this passage from the Prophet Jeremiah:

*[T]his is the LORD's declaration. "For I will forgive their iniquity and never again remember their sin." (Jeremiah 31:34)*

When God forgives, He *chooses* not to remember our sins. We must do the same thing with others - *we must choose not to remember the sins of those around us.*

We can only reframe our people-view of those around us if we start with a blank slate, and that slate sees everyone around us as new creations in Christ.

Instead of seeing everyone at their personal worst and replaying their perceived harm against us over and over, we must begin to see those around us as needing our prayer and assistance. As we mentioned last session, Kingdom Power is the authority and ability to establish peace in others' lives. We establish that peace through *forgiveness*. More on that later.

## Removing obstacles to our peace

As mentioned last session, we must remove any obstacles to our sanctification, and shortcomings were the subject of the last session.

Recall this statement:

*We are sanctified in our own recovery so that we can create unity by proclaiming healing for all through God's Word and forgiveness.*

If we are to *proclaim* forgiveness, we must first *receive* forgiveness. A truism of recovery is that *we can't give away something that we don't have.*

*We must experience the forgiveness of God before we can forgive others.*

## Self-forgiveness

But self-forgiveness is one of the most difficult aspects of forgiveness to realize. We know what we did to others and what we were thinking when we did it. The magic replay machine in our

minds replays events of our past, showing vivid first-person accounts of our shameful escapades over and over. *“If people know what I did,”* we tell ourselves, *“no one would ever forgive me, much less God.”*

So we stand at the altar of self-sacrifice, beating ourselves up over and over, expecting something to change. But it never does.

The writer of Hebrews addresses this very situation. The writer says:

*“Every priest stands day after day ministering and offering the same sacrifices time after time, which can never take away sins. But this man, after offering one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God. He is now waiting until his enemies are made his footstool. For by one offering he has perfected forever those who are sanctified. The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. For after he says: This is the covenant I will make with them after those days, the Lord says, I will put my laws on their hearts and write them on their minds, and I will never again remember their sins and their lawless acts. Now where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer an offering for sin.” (Hebrews 10:11–18)*

Note that the writer quotes the passage from Jeremiah shown above, stating that the Lord says, *“I will never again remember their sins and their lawless acts.”* Jesus chooses to not ever remember your sins again.

*Now is the day of your salvation, accept this truth in your life. You have been purified by the blood of Jesus and are welcome at His altar.*

This passage also recalls how the priests in the Temple had to continuously offer sacrifice after sacrifice, none of which could ever permanently take away sins. But Jesus, our High Priest, did so through His finished work on the Cross *“after offering one sacrifice for sins forever.”*

*Stop trying to be your own priest, forever offering yourself and your life as a perpetual sacrifice. Your sins have been forgiven, and “where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer an offering for sin.”*

But we have seen thus far that holding anger and resentment can block us from God, and now we can see how holding onto past hurts can also block us from accepting the fact of our forgiveness in Jesus’ eyes.

We want to worship at the feet of Jesus, but we are burdened down with our shortcomings and grudges.



We look like this:



When we want to look like this:



Must drop our baggage of shortcomings and resentment. We can't worship with our hands full.

So let's get to work on our part, our sanctification in the area of anger, bitterness, grudges, and resentment. Let's drop any and all obstacles that block us from the sunlight of the Spirit.

## Our part

As mentioned above, we begin by returning to our Sin Acknowledgement Sheet. We now look at it from a different angle. We examine it with a different purpose. This time, we look at the list and search for *our part*.

Note that if you were an innocent victim of a crime, if you were abused as a child, *you had no part in those events*.

But for the vast majority of events that happen in our adult lives, we had some active role, even if 1%. Pay special attention to the iniquity part, the *what you were thinking part*. Much can be found here that pays off in the amends process.

Next, examine your list of shortcomings. Compare the Sin Acknowledgement Sheet to your shortcomings list. Are there any overlaps? Can you see where multiple iniquities might be caused by one general shortcoming?

Seeing these patterns is key to our recovery, as these patterns will form the basis for our amends.

## Their part

Next, we look at others' behavior that was directed toward us. In doing so, we must begin to see others through a new perspective, as discussed above.

Often at this point, the Holy Spirit moves in us supernaturally and convicts us of the need to forgive others immediately.

Many times I have heard something like this" *"As soon as I saw my part in the mess, I immediately understood why they reacted to me the way they did. I would have done the same thing if someone behaved that way to me."*

Another common theme I hear: *"As soon as I saw that many of my transgressions were caused by the same shortcoming, I suddenly understood why everybody was reacting to me in the way that they did. I had people mad at me at home, at work, and at church, but it turns out it was all because of my same shortcoming."*

I pray that you have such a supernatural revelation as well. But sometimes, we still have more work to do on the “others” part. More on that later.

## Make a list

Now, down to the nitty gritty part, time to make a list. It is time to name names.

The amends process is laid out in Steps 8 & 9 as follows:

**Step 8: We made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.**

**Step 9: We made direct amends to such people whenever possible, except when doing so would injure them or others.**

As we enter this phase of our recovery, it is critical to keep our eye on the spiritual ball. We are making these amends and offering forgiveness *for our own healing and recovery*. As a result of this process, relationships *might* get restored. But that is not the goal. In fact, many of our past relationships are beyond repair, or for various reasons *should not* be restored. But we become *willing* to make amends to them all *so that we may be healed. Willingness is the key here.*

The Biblical definition of forgiveness implies the following: *to send away, to bid going away or depart, to let go, let alone, to give up, keep no longer*. We are here to send away and keep no longer the hurts of our past.

Like the illustration above, we come to this part of the process to drop our baggage of shortcomings and resentment and walk back into God’s light and the pathway of peace. Many times, relationships *will be restored*, but this is not the goal. Like the Israelites coming out of slavery in the Exodus, we are breaking the chains of bondage that prevent us from worshiping at the altar of our God and Creator.

To do this, we will look into the deeper meaning of the Hebrew word *shalom*, and look at the active form of the word *shalam*. This is the word used in the Old Testament when the Torah commands someone to *make peace*. Shalam implies *actions*, such as: *to be safe (in mind, body or estate); make amends; make good; to be at peace; to make restitution, to restore.*

But importantly for our purposes, the underlying process always involves ***actions that lead to being in a covenant of peace with others.***

Recall our Kingdom purpose, which is to *establish peace*. To do this, we will look at three general categories of people that we need to establish a covenant of peace with.

### Amends List

First, people that I need to make good with, make whole with, or otherwise recompense. These represent the most basic type of amends. Examine your list of sins and shortcomings, and write those names here:

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With that group out of the way, let's move to a more difficult group to identify, but one where anger and resentment can fester for years unchecked. These are people that we have an outstanding issue with that never gets resolved. There may be no physical harm or damage, but there are unspoken issues that we never talk about. These may be an issue that we need to finish, complete, or put to an end. A key aspect of *shalom peace* is closing these loops and establishing *tranquility*. This may involve us resolving an issue that *makes others feel unsafe around us*. This is impossible if there are unresolved issues that keep us apart from others. Write the names of those you have unresolved issues with here:

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Finally, there are people that we need to simply make peace with, or *as much as it depends on us*, to resolve to live in peace with. We may never get along with these people or become friends, but for our recovery and healing, we need to establish a covenant of peace with them. Write their names here:

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## Tips for making amends

- Be diligent in making a list
  - Review **all** of the work you put into this series so far. Examine your Life Timeline, are there more names that pop out? Who was around you in your down moments?
- Never make amends for making amends
  - We are to make direct amends wherever possible, but *not when it would hurt them or others*. This means being mindful of the content and context of your amends. Is there new, possibly hurtful information that you plan to communicate? Be in prayer and in contact with an accountability partner.
- We cannot force someone to meet us
  - We are to make direct amends whenever possible, but this does not mean forcing a face-to-face meeting with someone. Often a letter will do. Willingness is key.
- Never make a “non-apology apology”
  - “I am sorry I offended you” or “I am sorry you took it the wrong way” are not examples of making amends. *Take responsibility for your part.*
- Take responsibility for *your* iniquity and shortcomings
  - Get to the core issue that you are working on in *your* recovery and lead with that. Your iniquity and shortcoming list should be the guide for how you word your amends. These are the issues that people want to hear that you are addressing.
- Express empathy and genuine remorse for your part
  - If you now understand why they reacted the way that they did, let them know that. Express the situation from their point of view and show them you understand their side. Healing for both parties often follows when empathy is expressed.
- Sweep your side of the street only
  - Keep your amends focused on *your part only*. If they wish to broaden the discussion, follow their lead, but be mindful that we are taking responsibility for our part only. This is not a time to offer them life advice or preach.
- Ask if there is anything you can do now to help
  - By offering to help, you are showing that you are finally ready to take responsibility for the situation and move forward. In situations where an addict has left a mess behind, offering to clean up is often the best we can do to get started.
- Finally, all this on God’s timing
  - We are often excited to get this part of our recovery moving and want to reach out to everyone at once. Be patient, forgiveness happens in God’s timing. Often, He will put divine moments in front of us unexpectedly. Be prayed up and in season!

# Prayer for deliverance from resentments

In spite of all the work we have done so far, we may still have some people that we cannot become willing to make amends to.

Last session, I mentioned that sometimes we need to act our way into a new way of thinking. To help overcome unresolved anger, we can also *pray our way into a new way of thinking*.

If you have a stubborn resentment, pray the following prayer every day for two weeks and watch how the Holy Spirit will remove that resentment and anger from you.

**Father, I acknowledge my resentment and unforgiveness against \_\_\_name\_\_\_. I repent of this sin and come to You, entirely ready to have this sin removed from me. I humbly ask that any and all anger, bitterness, and unforgiveness against \_\_\_name\_\_\_ be removed and replaced with a blessing from You. I ask that You bless \_\_\_name\_\_\_ with everything that I would have You bless me with. In Your name, I ask that health, prosperity, and happiness be poured out upon \_\_\_name\_\_\_. I ask for myself the same tolerance, compassion, and patience for \_\_\_name\_\_\_ that I would cheerfully grant a sick friend. I ask that You show me how I can be helpful to \_\_\_name\_\_\_. I ask that You save me from being angry.**

**I ask for the strength and endurance to obey the Holy Spirit as I seek to die to my old ways and rise in the power of the resurrection as a new creation in Your Son, Jesus Christ. I ask all these things in the name of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

This prayer shows the process of *reframing our people-view*, and how the Holy Spirit wants to work in all believers.

When we pray for others in this manner, we obey Jesus' command that *we love our enemies*.

Church father John Chrysostom put it this way:

*No one can feel hatred towards those for whom he prays. - John Chrysostom*

I close with a prayer for forgiveness:

*God of compassion, you have reconciled us in Jesus Christ who is our peace: Enable us to live as Jesus lived, breaking down walls of hostility and healing enmity. Give us grace to make peace with those from whom we are divided, that, forgiven and forgiving, we may ever be one in Christ; who with you and the Holy Spirit reigns for ever, one holy and undivided Trinity. Amen.*

# Daily Meditations

**Theme: Forgiveness**

## Day 1

“For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have appointed it to you to make atonement on the altar for your lives, since it is the lifeblood that makes atonement.” (Leviticus 17:11)

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## Day 2

“But this man, after offering one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God. He is now waiting until his enemies are made his footstool. For by one offering he has perfected forever those who are sanctified.” (Hebrews 10:12–14)

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## Day 3

“let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed in pure water. Let us hold on to the confession of our hope without wavering, since he who promised is faithful.” (Hebrews 10:22–23)

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## Day 4

“Or do you despise the riches of his kindness, restraint, and patience, not recognizing that God’s kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?” (Romans 2:4)

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## Day 5

“Therefore I tell you, everything you pray and ask for—believe that you have received it and it will be yours. And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven will also forgive you your wrongdoing.” (Mark 11:24–25)

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
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## Day 6

“But I tell you, everyone who is angry with his brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Whoever insults his brother or sister, will be subject to the court. Whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be subject to hellfire. So if you are offering your gift on the altar, and there you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled with your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.” (Matthew 5:22–24)

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## Day 7

[T]his is the LORD’s declaration. “For I will forgive their iniquity and never again remember their sin.” (Jeremiah 31:34)

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