

“Bitter Isn’t Better”

June 26, 2019

Stop It! In the Name of Love series

Carole Koch: Part 1 - Introduction

When I first asked to speak today, the choices were: Would I like to speak alone? Would I like to team with Brad? Would I prefer that Brad do it?

My immediate choice was that I would speak with Brad. First of all, we've done it before, and it works well. I like stories, he likes Scripture. I am a contemplative writer (each word is weighed, measure, tried on for size and sniffed for the odor of truth) and he is more extemporaneous. (He thinks about his subject, researches it...then goes for it). I have age and the lessons of experience; he has youth and the drive to help others. Together we are light and shadow, longitude and latitude; we are humble and bold. It's synergy and it works.

My dictionary defines a grudge as a "persistent feeling of resentment from a past insult or injury." I will add, from personal experience, that the injury can be real or just perceived.

Grudges have been around since humans became ... human. From Cain and Abel, to Jacob and Esau, to Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton, to the most famous grudge of all time, the Hatfield's and the McCoy's. It was a grudge that turned into a feud, which turned into an outright war of one family against another, lasting thirty years, imprisoning nine, resulting in the deaths of several dozen family members and supporters. And every grudge starts out small; usually with just a small injury or slight. And a small, ugly seed gets planted in your heart.

My Story. So this is where I tell you the story about the longest running, stupidest grudge ever. It's my story and it's true. And even though it was stupid, it's typical of grudges. So listen up.

I was the oldest of two kids in my family. I was, and am, typical of most firstborns. I was anxious to please, expected to always do my best, to mind my manners, say "Yes, Ma'am" and "No, Sir" and to keep my place. But kids who are both good and quiet don't get a lot of attention. When I was in 5th grade, we got a brand new teacher at Bluffton School; her name was Martha Marks and she came to us from the Heights School system. For some reason, she noticed me. She not only treated me like a person, she treated me like a person of value. She talked to me. And not so much like a sixth grader, but like an adult. She let me come in early if wanted, to ask questions, or talk, or just draw on the board. Anyway, because of her attention, I began to maybe develop something I never had before - something called "confidence".

And then the NEW GIRL came. She came from Heights, and Mrs. Marks already knew her. Pretty soon, NEW GIRL is there before school. NEW GIRL is writing and

drawing on the board. NEW GIRL was asking questions and reading books and spending time after school. My time. And a little seed of "ugly" planted itself in my heart.

Now, I want to point out what NEW GIRL has done to me. NOTHING. The issue was not based on anything but my perception of injury.

To continue - 5th grade and junior high and high school went past. NEW GIRL and I held positions of peaceful coexistence, but neither was in each other's circle of friends. We graduated, went our separate ways, had lives, careers, and families, and saw each other every five years at the class reunion. And at every reunion, I always made sure I looked great - partly to show NEW GIRL how well I was doing (though I managed to never, ever, talk to her) - and partly for that cute boy I liked so much; who never showed up, by the way.

Just before the 50th class reunion (and probably just after a sermon like this) I thought about NEW GIRL coming, and knew that I had to deal with this issue before it got any worse. So I thought about it, and prayed about it and got my answer. And I was appalled when I awoke to the truth. I was jealous! It was just stupid envy! The green eyed monster had taken over my heart and I had to fix it. And NEW GIRL was totally innocent. She hadn't done anything wrong, ever. She had not injured or insulted me in any way.

So I sought her out that night. I took her off to the side and actually talked. I came clean with my confession and apology and asked for her forgiveness for my terrible behavior. At the end of my tearful confession, she told me her side of it. She hadn't noticed my treating her badly (Thank God). She knew I was a quiet person and didn't think a thing of me not talking to her. As for the after school stuff, she told me she needed extra help when she came to Bluffton School, because she was so far behind!

And I felt about this big (demonstrate) and God clearly said to me, "Trust me. Things are not always what they seem." This grudge was totally of my own invention. It grew - flourished even - from that tiny seed of Ugly in my heart. I fertilized, it with my own imagination and watered it with envy. It had absolutely no effect on the life of NEW GIRL, but it ate at me. It festered in my heart and eroded my soul. What a waste of life.

Amazingly, the writers of scripture knew what would happen 3000 years ago. The earliest mention of Envy is in Proverbs 14:30. Most of us know that Proverbs are practical advice for a Godly life. If you're under thirty, there's this - Proverbs are wise memes. Proverbs 14:30 says, "It's healthy to be content, but envy can eat you up."

And after that confession of fifty-six years of festering stupidity, I'll turn this over to Brad.

Brad Hilleary: Part 2

Grudges can be wrong or misunderstood or perceived like in Carole's case, but **some** of the time they are real! They are raw! They are valid! **Some** of the time you have been really, really wronged or really, really hurt.

So when you have been really, really wronged or really, really hurt, YOU GET REALLY, REALLY MAD AT THE PERSON WHO DID THAT!

Don't worry, scripture has the answer to that, you can find it in James 1: 19-20: *Be quick to listen, slow to speak or get angry. For if you are angry, you can't do what God wants done.* Simple, right? WRONG!

What's worse is in most grudges the person who has hurt or wronged us has not and/or will not apologize. So yeah, grudges are real, they are raw, they are valid! But are they **valuable**?

Last week we talked about letting go of our regrets. Regrets being things we did or did not do that we are sorry about or wish they were done differently. Pastor Mary wore a backpack to illustrate the heavy burden that regrets have on our lives. Maybe regrets are past sins or past wrongs or even pains we have caused others. The message was and is give those regrets to God. Give your heavy burdens/backpacks to him. Ask for forgiveness, apologize, say you are sorry and move forward. Don't dwell on the past. I was impressed that many came forward to have Mary Pray over them. Maybe some of you, like me, stayed in your seat and prayed to God for forgiveness and for help to leave my backpack behind.

For me the coolest takeaway from last week was: Moving forward, not dwelling on the past does not mean you forget about the past; you simply accept it, and move forward with God.

My story on grudges is not my own story, but I am greatly affected by it. I have a very close friend who was hurt as a young child, by another older child. Very real, very raw, and very valid. For almost forty years now they have carried that grudge/backpack filled with hate, sorrow, and fear. If I am to be completely honest with you, that grudge is bigger and badder than ever. The hatred has grown over time. It's so bad that the mere mention of the individual's name or even a member of their family will cause my friend enormous pain and mental anguish. The grudge runs their life. When I try and talk to my friend about this, I can't. They won't allow it. They basically say, "Don't you understand how real, raw, and valid this is? Isn't my anger and sorrow justified?" I want to answer, "Yes it is, but it is so unhealthy." Giving up regrets is really hard, because we have to say and mean we are sorry to others and God.

To give up a grudge, we have to let it go - without an apology.

Carole Koch: Part 3 – Whys and Redemption

Before we get to the redemption part of the sermon, I've got to talk a little bit about the whys of grudges.

I talked with some of my friends about grudges and was surprised by some of the answers. One of my friends told me she was still competing with her siblings for their father's attention - even though her siblings are in their seventies, and their father is long deceased. Their grudge has become a part of their on-going behavior. They've grown accustomed to it.

Another friend told me "It's my grudge, and I'm going to hold on to it." Honestly, at this point I was beginning to feel like Dr. Phil, and I truly wanted to say "How's that workin' out for ya'?"

I've been retired for twenty years and quite frankly, I'm still a little angry about a boss who took my ideas and presented them as his own. I should have felt compassion for him; if he was using my stuff, he was obviously struggling.

How do we ask forgiveness for this kind of behavior? For hanging on to slights, working to outdo each other and refusing to let go? For letting grudges move in and take up residence in our comfort zones? As humans, we can't see the total picture of what's happening, of what really happened first, and who hurt who, and what it's going to look like fifty years from now. Frankly, that's God's picture.

Jesus, living his human experience with his divine intuition, knew that we humans would always have a shortfall - that we would always have an inability to let go, an unwillingness to forgive and even a sense of comfort from our oft-repeated grievances. He knew because he was one of us. He knew that we would always have a debt to others and that others would have the same shortfall with us - they would be our debtors. That's why he included it in his prayer to his Father. That's why we repeat it every Sunday. That's why we say it at every gathering of Christians around the world. "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." Honestly, it has taken me over seventy years to understand the meaning of that one phrase, and it came to me like a thunderbolt. He knew all along that we would always fall short because he saw the big picture. He knew how to insure our forgiveness, and he said to us in his simple way, "It's okay. I got this."

Brad Hilleary: Part 4

Grudges tear apart our spiritual life. The more we hang on and cling to our anger and grudge, the further we are away from the relationship with God that he most desires. Jesus tells us to Love our neighbors, forgive our enemies, and shoot he forgave those that were literally killing him.

In Galatians 5: 16-17, Paul writes:

¹⁶ So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.

Paul goes onto list the fifteen desires of the flesh. Don't worry I will not be listing all of them off. It is interesting however to see the correlation with eight of the fifteen desires. They all revolve around a lack of agreement and harmony with others. Hatred, envy, jealousy, discord, factions, dissensions, fits of rage, and selfishness all of which propel an individual towards holding a grudge. For us to be one in the spirit, we need to walk by the spirit. We need to be in agreement and have harmony with each other which means, we need to ask for forgiveness and say we are sorry, and we need to give forgiveness, even when it is not deserved for not one of us deserves God's grace, not one of us is good enough, and yet he gives it freely.

I don't know if you are holding any grudges, but if you are, please, forgive the person who really, really hurt you or wronged you. Please give God your backpack full of grudges, hate, sorrow and anger.

And just like last week move forward, not dwelling on the past, not forgetting it, but accepting it, and move forward with God.

Amen!