

# A beautiful way to end the year

Message for Sunday, December 26, 2010  
by Bruce Fraser

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:9-15; Philippians 4:12-13;  
John 15:4-6

## 1) Prayer of Confession

*From the time that I get out of the car coming to church, carry a large, heavy sack on my back. Keep it there, visible, through the service up to this point. It represents the burden of my grudges, which I have not yet forgiven.*

Lord Jesus, our feelings are sensitive like a hummingbird's wing:

we take offense at petty things;  
we imagine the worst instead of the best;  
and we nurse our hurts, peeling off the scab to look at the wound over and over.

Yet our hearts are hardened like cold steel:

we shut out any thoughts of our own wrong-doing;  
we can justify anything we do, while condemning others for doing exactly the same thing.  
we expect others to forgive and forget, while our steel trap waits to catch someone in their weakness.

Lord Jesus, you showed us a new way to live, and you promised to give us a new heart. Forgive us and heal us, we pray, as we forgive those who hurt us. Amen.

*Let the sack fall to the ground, loudly. Express the relief and joy of having that burden taken away from me.*

**Sermon:** "A beautiful way to end the year"

Not forgiving others hurts you just as much as the other person. I wonder how much illness is caused by people holding bitterness inside them. We know that bitterness destroys relationships — even friendships and families. But it can also eat away at a person's insides.

At Fletcher Church over the last month, we've heard about Brad McFadden, a nephew of Bev Stevenson. He was with the Canadian Armed Forces in Afghanistan, but he's back home now. His unit arrived back in Canada two weeks ago. But Brad didn't come home with them.

Brad came home two weeks before the others, after taking the blast of a roadside bomb. His specialty is finding and disarming these bombs. In fact, he had just finished work on one bomb when a child came up to him and said, "There's another one over here." Brad went over to get the robot they use to test a suspected bomb site. But as we was doing that, the bomb was detonated by remote control. The whole thing was a setup.

It was a massive bomb, and even from a distance Brad took a major hit. He lost his left arm, and had severe injuries to his right arm. He had burns to his face and neck. Shrapnel went right through his chest, puncturing his lung on the way before being embedded in his back.

Brad says, though, that he harbours no ill feelings towards the people of Afghanistan. "Muslims are not a bad people. They are good people, aside from the few crazies."

Let me ask you this: How will Brad's attitude affect his healing, both physical and emotional?

What if instead he said, "I hate those Taliban. I will never forget, and never forgive the people who did this to me. For the rest of my life, I'm going to watch and hope I meet one. When I do, I'll beat him to a pulp." How would that attitude affect his healing?

What do you think it would be like to be the girlfriend of someone who is filled with hate? How would that affect their relationship? Even though she had nothing at all to do with the attack on him, their relationship would become another victim.

Jesus tells us to pray: "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who have sinned against us" [Matthew 6:12]. Some people say that's too hard. Do you see how much harder it is to hold on to that bitterness? How much better to let it go, and be free!

Here's a testimony from Paul about how he handles difficult things.

### Philippians 4:12-13

**I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.**

Just think: wouldn't it be great to finish out 2010 by wiping the slate clean? What a great way to start a new year! If you've got stuff piled up in the closet of your mind, now is the time to clear it out.

## 2) Acting out our Prayer of Confession

Ask the congregation to stand in a large circle, hands joined together. Read:

**John 15:4-6, New Revised Standard Version:**

**Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can**

**do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.**

Ask people to imagine themselves as the living branches of God's vine.

Now ask them to stretch the circle as wide as possible, so they are just barely holding on to the next person.

Ask worshippers to think of a particular sin which pulls them away from God's vine. (Tell a few people ahead of time to keep on pulling even past this limit, so that the circle breaks.) This is what sin does: it breaks people apart from each other, and from God.

Ask people to imagine that they were broken off and separated from everyone. They were cut off from friends, family, church, school, work, neighbours. Remind them of others who are already isolated: the hungry, the homeless, those in prison, the sick, those trapped in drug abuse.

How does it feel to be separated? *Wait for answers.* Sin is lonely.

Ask people to move closer and closer together until they can get no closer. Encourage them to hug one another, while rereading John 15:4-5.

Pass around some (seedless!) grapes. Ask people to eat one as assurance that God forgives and feeds the branches of his vine.

### **3) Assurance of Pardon**

Read again from Philippians 4:12-13.