

## Changing the Way You Think: “Heaping Coals of Fire on Your Enemy’s Head”

I recently received a letter that I would never have expected to have gotten in a million years.

- It came certified, and when I saw the name of the sender, my body tensed up, my heart rate increased, and my mind immediately assumed a defensive posture.
- A whole host of feelings washed over me like a flood...anger, deep hurt, betrayal, humiliation...a readiness, a desire to fight...I could not imagine what possible reason he would have to write me.

**In my 35 years of ministry, there is no one I disliked more than this man.**

- He humiliated me in front of my wife and children.
- He said that I had never heard me preach one sermon that was worth listening to...
- He challenged and provoked me physically by taking his hand and poking me in the chest in front of some of church members while belittling my ministry and work.
- He consistently and publicly challenged my motives – insinuating dishonorable motives.
- He literally searched the internet to try and find something of which to accuse me.
- He spoke maliciously of me to the elders, deacons, staff, and members of the church.
- He told me I was an utter failure as a pastor.
- When I accepted the call to come to Church of the Chimes, he wrote me a condescending letter under the guise of protecting the new church I was going to, by urging me work only as a counselor, and leave the pastoral work to someone with real ability.

**What made this profoundly more difficult, is that he and his wife had been the main leaders who had lobbied for my hire.**

- We had stayed and broken bread with him many times in his home.
- He would call and check on us – that we had arrived safely -- when we traveled to and from the church during the interview process.
- He had assumed a father-like care over us in the early stages of our arrival – which I warmly appreciated...and in some ways, longed for.
- He was a leading elder – and I trusted him.
- I believed he was my friend, and an ally who would help me navigate the challenges of a new landscape of ministry.

### Psalm 55:12

It is not an enemy who taunts me—I could bear that. It is not my foes who so arrogantly insult me— I could have hidden from them. Instead, it is you—my equal, my companion and close friend. What good fellowship we once enjoyed as we walked together to the house of God.

- **The Rejection and attacks were devastating to me.**
- There have been times where it has **seemed to me that my life has been nothing more than a collection of deep hurts, unhealed wounds, and disappointments.**
  - Birth Father’s Physical Abuse and Abandonment
  - Divorce
  - Close Friendships Dissolved
  - Torn and Tattered Family Relationships
  - Wounds of the Ministry

- Some hurts are very hard to let go of. Especially if there is no closure – no apology – no forgiveness. The lies those hurts whisper replay at every given opportunity...
  - Every time the scab is removed...you bleed all over again.
- It's just this huge inner mess that you don't know what else to do with but sweep under the rug, push under the bed, or throw in the closet when people come to visit.

### Romans 12:17-21

Never repay evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all people. <sup>18</sup> If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all people. <sup>19</sup> Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written: "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. <sup>20</sup> "But if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." <sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

- **Yes! I like that! Make him feel ashamed!!!**
  - In our Western Worldview, we grossly misunderstand this passage.
  - We think it means something like, do good to them, and heap feelings of shame that will be painful to their souls, like coals of fire burning through their skull...
- **But this heaping of burning coals on their heads is a metaphor of the ancient world.**
  - In the ancient Middle East, people had fire pans in their homes for warmth, and to cook with.
  - Keeping warm in Israel's North country, or even on the hills of Jerusalem could be a matter of life and death if the fire went out.
  - If a fire went out, or a family ran out of coals, they would be desperate for a refill in the container they would carry on their head to bring back to their firepan or fireplace.
    - **A neighbor or a friend might oblige – but would an enemy?**

*When a woman in ancient Israel knocked on a neighbor's door with an empty fire pan, the owners of the home had a choice to make: keep their coals for themselves, ensuring warmth, cooked meals, and life for their own family, or generously share their coal supply and risk going cold and hungry themselves. When people betray or insult us, we have a choice to make: bless their lives through acts of love or curse them through acts of revenge.*

**I asked Brittany – Why? What have I done? Why is he so bent on tearing me apart?**

**Brittany told me, "It's not about you Lee. It's about the work God is doing in Him."**

- Sometimes we may be the selected anvil on which God shapes, forms, and transforms another soul.
- We feel the impact of the blows of His hammer.
  - But in the end emerges a sharp, tempered, unbreakable steel.

**Don't repay evil for evil. Don't retaliate with insults when people insult you. Instead, pay them back with a blessing. That is what God has called you to do, and he will grant you his blessing.**

**1 Peter 3:9**

I want to read you the letter.

**God is Good!**

**He Makes all Things New!**