

How to Get Revenge on Your Enemies

Throughout history, people have quipped about revenge. Filmmaker Alfred Hitchcock liked to say, "Revenge is sweet and not fattening." Edward Gibbon believed, "Revenge is profitable, gratitude is expensive." And you've probably heard it said, "I'm back with a vengeance."

I have to admit it. I've been tempted to take vengeance on those who have wronged me. I could take justified legal action to collect 12 years of unpaid child support and have enough money to go on an extravagant European vacation. I could justifiably file suit against the brother in Christ who ran off on Christmas Eve with \$10,000 of my cash, never finishing the job he was paid for and leaving me with one toilet, no shower and no kitchen. I could expose those who have spread malicious lies about me and bring them to public shame.

Yes, I've been tempted to take revenge. But the Lord makes it emphatically clear that vengeance belongs to Him—and He will repay (Romans 12:19). Despite the emotions that rose up when I was wronged, I ultimately believe God's vengeance will work out better for me than any forceful yet feeble attempt I could make to even the score. God sees everything. That's why I reject the quips of Hitchcock and Gibbon in favor of the idea that Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius offered, "The best revenge is to be unlike him who performed the injury."

When we take revenge into our own hands—when we try to punish someone who injured us physically, emotionally or financially—we are playing God. More than that, we aren't trusting God. More than that, we are tying the hands of a just God who wants to make it up to us. And more than that, we cause our souls greater damage. When we decide to forgive the matter, we become more like Christ, we display our trust in

God, and we give God free reign to make it up to us.

Wouldn't it be better, then, to come back without a vengeance? That's what I've done, and that's what I would suggest you do. (Of course, I'm suggesting it. God commands it.) It's been said that living well is the best revenge. It's difficult to live well—or to do much else for God—when we are plotting and planning to swap railing for railing. Jesus said to love and pray for your enemies (Matthew 5:44). And Peter warned: “Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult ... [but] with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing” (1 Peter 3:9, NIV).

When you leave the vengeance to God, there's always a blessing in it. First of all, you are obeying Scripture. If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the good of the land (Isaiah 1:19). Read Deuteronomy 28 for the many blessings that fall upon the obedient. Obey the Lord's command to forgive, and you will be blessed. It's not always easy, but stand on this promise: “Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God; He will come and save you” (Isaiah 35:4, NKJV).

When you leave the vengeance to God, you will also see healing and restoration in your life. An old Dutch proverb says, “The tree of revenge does not carry fruit.” I disagree. I believe the tree of revenge carries rotten fruit. But the tree of forgiveness yields the fruit of emotional healing. Seventeenth Century British author John Milton put it this way, “He that studieth revenge keepeth his own wounds green, which otherwise would heal and do well.” Your emotional well-being is connected to forgiveness, and so is God's justice.

When you leave the vengeance to God, it makes a statement in and of itself. Believe me, when you commit your spirit to God, the people who know the wrong you suffered can discern the difference between the spirit your enemies moved in and the spirit you are moving in.

Let me give you a practical example: About a year after I was sorely persecuted by some believers who were angry that I moved on, several people came to me and shared how they watched the public attacks on the Internet against me—and witnessed how I never retaliated or even defended myself. That spoke volumes about who was moving in the wrong spirit. That in itself was vindication enough, but I know God has an even greater repayment in mind.

“An eye for an eye would make the whole world blind,” Ghandi said. Indeed, someone has to be the bigger man. Somebody has to be willing to obey God. Somebody has to decide to live the Sermon on the Mount lifestyle—a lifestyle that blesses and prays for the enemy. English philosopher, statesman, scientist, lawyer, jurist, author and pioneer Francis Bacon put it this way: “In taking revenge, a man is but even with his enemy; but in passing it over, he is superior.”

My brothers and sisters, God is your vindicator. Vengeance is His. He will repay. Next time you are wronged, launch into prayer. I find Psalm 17 especially helpful: “Hear a just cause, o Lord, attend to my cry; give ear to my prayer which is not from deceitful lips. Let my vindication come from Your presence; Let Your eyes look on the things that are upright” (vv. 1-2).

And remember this: Living well is the best revenge anyway, and living well means living according to the Word of God. He will take care of the rest.

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