

When I was younger, I watched certain movies and heard people give reasons why they wanted to be wealthy, gain authority and power, or achieve success. Among several motivations, one in particular always stood out to me: *"I want to be rich so I can show people pepper! All those who looked down on me—I will show them pepper!"*

In other words: *"I want to succeed so I can get back at people! I will get back at all those who looked down on me"*

We see that dynamic all around us today, whether in movie plots or modern politics, where people gain power only to target their political “enemies” or those who refused to support them.

Sometimes, the grudges we hold stem from small slights:

I asked for financial help and was turned down;

I reached out and never heard back;

they gave someone else the job or promotion.

Other times, the pain is deeply rooted and undeniably valid.

Consider the life of Joseph. Sold into slavery by his own brothers—his own blood. If I were in his shoes, I probably would want payback. Falsely accused of attempted rape by Potiphar’s wife and left to languish in an Egyptian prison for years—I would want payback against her, too.

Or consider King David. Suspected of treachery and forced to run for his life from King Saul—a man he had honored, served, and protected. If one finally came into power after years of being hunted, I may be tempted to get back at a person like that.

Many of us here have experienced our own terrible trials. Perhaps it was an abusive parent, neglectful children, a cruel spouse, or an unjust boss. For some, loved ones have been victims of devastating crimes.

Deep down, we hurt. We are angry. Naturally, a part of us wants those who hurt us to feel the exact same pain they inflicted.

You might expect me to tell you to simply “forgive and forget.” I am not going to say that today. Instead, I want to encourage you with a promise: **God sees**. He sees your hurt, and He knows every evil and injustice you have endured. He has promised us vindication and justice. As we hear in today’s Old Testament reading: *"I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked, and redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless."* Yes, we are called to stand against injustice and pursue righteousness.

Yet, God holds out a higher vision for His people.

Have you ever wondered why Scripture repeatedly echoes the principle of non-retaliation? *If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn the other. If they take your shirt, give them your coat as well. Do not avenge yourself. Bless those who curse you. Do not repay evil with evil.*

Does God want us to remain passive, silently embracing evil and suffering? Absolutely not! God orchestrates true justice and commands us to seek justice for others.

So why does this instruction against vengeance appear over and over again?

To guard the innocence and tenderness of our hearts.

God knows that if we allow ourselves to be consumed by rage, hatred, and revenge, we risk becoming the very thing that hurt us. An eye for an eye leaves the whole world blind, and those who live by the sword will perish by the sword.

To break the cycle of pain, hatred, and violence, God invites us to step into a higher calling: a calling of endurance, forgiveness, reconciliation, and incorruptible love.

That is why the Apostle Paul writes in Romans 12:21: *"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."* Don't let it win. You are an overcomer (1 John 4:4).

When we choose this path, we honor God, bring healing to our own souls, and reflect His light to the world.

As I conclude, I'd like us to sing a song that I learned back in Sunday school. I'll sing it once and then we can sing it together.

Add lyrics of the song that goes: Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good, do not be overcome by evil.

Amen.