

St. David's Presbyterian Church  
St. John's, NL  
"Snake Bite First Aid"  
Dr. J. Dent

March 22, 2009  
Fourth Sunday in Lent

According to the University of Maryland Medical Center web site, over 8,000 people in the United States are bitten by snakes every year, averaging over 21 people everyday. (source: [http://www.umm.edu/non\\_trauma/snake.htm](http://www.umm.edu/non_trauma/snake.htm))

In Canada, you'll be glad to know that very few die from such bites. If, however, you are bitten by a snake, whether poisonous or not, Parks Canada suggests the following:

Stay calm. Although there may have been a bite, the rattlesnake does not always inject venom. This is called a dry bite and allows the snake to save its venom for real prey. That said, snake bites are a medical emergency and should be taken seriously. Within 15 minutes most bites are recognizable by the development of discolouration, swelling, and pain at the bite site.

- Do not panic, remain calm. Reassure the bitten person. The calmer the person is the better they can assist in their own recovery.
- Have the bitten person sit down, do not let them walk. Movement will increase blood flow and the flow of venom through the body.
- If bitten on the hand remove rings or any constricting jewelry immediately
- Wash and cleanse the wound.
- Splint the limb to reduce movement, if possible keep it below heart level.
- DO NOT apply a tourniquet, DO NOT apply ice, DO NOT cut the bite area and apply suction.
- Notify Park Staff or call 911. They will advise on transportation to the hospital and notify hospital staff.
- Attempt to identify the snake, take notes on colour, pattern, tail shape, head shape, size. DO NOT attempt to capture the snake. (Source: [http://www.pc.gc.ca/pn-np/on/georg/natcul/natcul2\\_e.asp](http://www.pc.gc.ca/pn-np/on/georg/natcul/natcul2_e.asp))

Now you may think that I have lost my way here a bit. After all, according to Heritage Newfoundland there are no raccoons, no porcupines, no skunks, and **no snakes** on the island, (source: <http://www.heritage.nf.ca/environment/biosphere.html>) although apparently, there was at one time a story going around that the moat around Government House was put there to keep the snakes out.

(source: <http://www.stjohnskiosk.com/stjohns-tour/Government-House.php>) And others have their own opinion on the existence of skunks and snakes here.

Nevertheless, snake bites are quite common. The Scriptures inform us that we all have been bitten, every human being across the face of the planet by the same snake that tempted Eve and Adam. What we read in Numbers 21 was not just a history of the people of Israel. It's all our history. We too rebel against God, thinking we know better than God does. We too complain against God and each other, many of us at times, about the food we have, some of us about the water, or the chlorine, about our leaders, whether political or spiritual. And when we do, we experience the venom of a critical spirit, the dysfunction of an ungrateful heart. Such venom can paralyze us. It can kill our relationship to God and others.

The venom is our rebellion against God. And our cure is looking up to the One who was hanged on a pole. Thus it was in the wilderness, so it is today. It's all about relationship with Jesus, that can heal us of such rebellion.

But once we have received this relationship to Christ, there are still other snake bites with which we must contend. The critical spirit is the one that stands before God and tells God why He is not doing the job He should be doing. Now don't misunderstand me. It is good to be honest before God, to ask questions and to identify those areas of our lives that we want to improve. But this critical spirit is the heart that chooses not to see the good God is doing, which does not thank God for the good we receive every day. The heart that only looks at what is going wrong will experience a poisoned life.

What we're trying to get behind is the attitude or character trait that the people had in the desert that led them to complaining. This attitude was one we might identify as bitterness. Now bitterness is neither consistent nor rational. A bitter person is his or her own worst enemy. It is also a major contributing cause of marital and family problems.

Bitterness comes about when we cannot fully extend forgiveness to others, when we dwell on offenses against us (which is sometimes called self pity), when we imagine terrible things happening to those who have hurt us (which is vengeance and malice) and when we stoke our anger and rage rather than pursuing kindness, compassion and forgiveness.

This is why the Lord encourages us in Ephesians 4:31 to “get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.” That’s a good verse to underline in your new Bible. And the next one is even better, “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” (Eph. 4:32) This is the antidote for the snake bite.

If you find yourself dwelling on what should’ve been your place in life, your status, your property, your position, but you got the dirty end of the stick; then you need to ask the Lord to reveal the bitterness in you which others might experience but you do not. Bitterness is just like a taste in the mouth that is hard to take. It puts other off. It does not help you grow but rather keeps you and me stuck when we give in to it.

Bitterness draws us away from others, keeps us selfish, inconsiderate and withdrawn. It can keep us away from truth and reality, from accepting Scriptural promises and healthy teaching. Bitterness can motivate gossip or tearing others down verbally. In Hebrews 12, in the passage that encourages us to make every effort to live in peace with everyone...it also says, “See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.” (12:15) When we choose to not treat others with the grace and mercy with which the Lord treats us, then we can be growing a bitterness bush in our garden. Just like we water and nurture our houseplants, we can grow a malevolent plant in our community. Such a plant can destroy one or several by encouraging bad mouthing, and tearing down someone for whom Christ died.

I don’t believe that anyone sets out to become bitter or that anyone plans to become such a person. But if we do not deal with expressions of hurt, hatred, and self-hatred, the plant can still grow and bring grief. Perhaps we have carried self-hatred and loathing that we may have carried since we were little, if adults told us we would amount to nothing or if we were constantly rejected, we can carry that in the form of bitterness. Wherever we have been hurt or maligned, these are possible roots of bitterness if we have not addressed that wound with forgiveness and grace.

This is the key. What we read in Ephesians 2 is so important, not only for our salvation, but also our growth in our relationship to the Lord. He knows we desperately need love and grace to grow. We are reminded that our relationship with the Lord and with others close friends and relatives is by

grace; certainly not because we are perfect or excellent, no matter how many good deeds we have done.

We wash the poisonous wounds that have been inflicted upon us with truly forgiving the other. Where we have been wounded by another person, we need to keep forgiving that person until we have truly let the offense go and no longer hold it over the other person's head. Until that happens, we have not truly forgiven the other person. Again, for what may have happened here in this congregation to you, we once again ask your forgiveness and want to spend time with you to be able to truly exchange forgiveness. When we forgive someone, we are loosed from the chains that bind us to that person. We let them off our hook, and leave them on God's hook. We give up the right to vengeance, and remember that God says he will look after the injustice and bring justice.

We confess our own sins, not only Sunday by Sunday, but also in private with trusted ones, to receive the healing we need and the assurance of pardon. We ask the Holy Spirit to fill us, and to experience the love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control that we need.

And I've found many other prayers that are helpful. I'll include them on the web site and in the written notes. Jesus was very kind in talking to Nicodemus in John, chapter 3. He notes his ministry was not to condemn people, but to bring them into relationship with Himself, to save them from their sins and rebellion. We all need such grace. I believe many of the challenges we face can be addressed through love and grace. Sometimes, all someone really needs is to be heard, to receive a thorough listening.

In that place, we communicate love and caring. So let us take our snake bites to the Lord, and enjoy a thorough recovery.

Let us pray.

\*\*\*

### **Overcoming Bitterness and Forgiveness**

**This article is from:** <http://sozo1.wordpress.com/2007/04/07/praying-the-word-bitterness-and-forgiveness/>

**PRAYING THE WORD! - For Emotional and Spiritual Wholeness**

...If we are to change, if we are going to make any forward movement against toxic emotions then we must spend time refocusing ourselves. Retraining our thinking and re-establishing truth about ourselves and God. Today's session is on Bitterness and Forgiveness. Read the scriptures prayers. Each prayer is a remix of the scripture verse. We have tried to stay true to the meaning of the Bible passage and are simply restating them back to God from a contrite heart.

### **Scripture Prayers for Bitterness and Forgiveness**

Lord, help me to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. For I agree with You, my anger can never make things right in Your sight.

James 1:19-20

Father, I refuse to sin by letting anger gain control over me. I choose not to let the sun go down while I am still angry, because I know that anger gives a mighty foothold to the Devil. Help me rid myself of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of malicious behavior. Instead, Father, I choose to be kind to others, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as You through Christ has forgiven me.(Ephesians 4:26, 31-32)

Lord, help me to remember that You said that if I forgive those who sin against me, that my heavenly Father will forgive me as well. But if I refuse to forgive others, the Father will not forgive my sins. I know that I am saved by grace and not works, but this shows me how serious You are about forgiveness. Help me to follow Your example! (Matthew 6:14,15)

Father, help me to remember that if my enemies are hungry, I should give them food to eat. If they are thirsty, I should give them water to drink. The truth is that when I do this it is as if I am heap burning coals on their heads, and I know that You, oh LORD, will reward me. (Proverbs 25:21-22)

Father, Your word tells me to never avenge myself. Rather help me to leave that to You, dear God. For You have written, "I will take vengeance, I will repay those who deserve it," says the Lord. (Romans 12:19)

Father, help me to aim for harmony in the church and try to build others up. Romans 14:19

Lord, help me remember that a gentle answer turns away wrath, but harsh words stir up anger. (Proverbs 15:1)

Lord, help me to control my anger because if I do I will have great understanding; those with a hasty temper will make mistakes.  
Proverbs 14:29

Lord, I choose to stop my angry habits! I need Your help in order to turn from my rage! Help me not to envy others—because it only leads to harm.  
Psalms 37:8

Lord Jesus, You said that if I am angry with someone, that I am subject to judgment! If I call someone an idiot, that I am in danger of being brought before the high council. And if I curse someone, I am in danger of the fires of hell. Lord, you take anger and rage seriously, I repent of this evil. Help me also, remember anyone that has something against me, and give me the strength to obey You and go and become reconciled to that person.  
Matthew 5:22-24

Father, help me to obey Your word where it says that if another believer sins against me, that I am to go privately to that person and point out their fault. Lord, if the other person listens and confesses it, then I have won that person back. But Father, if I am unsuccessful, help me to obey You by taking one or two others with me and go back again, so that everything I say may be confirmed by two or three witnesses. Lord, if after all this, that person still refuses to listen, then help me not to sin but take my case to the church. Help me to live as if I really believe You Jesus when you said that I am to forgive someone “seventy times seven! (Matthew 18:15-22)

Dear God, since You chose me to be one of your holy people who You love, help me clothe myself with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Holy Father, help me to make allowance for the faults of others and help me be obedient and forgive the person who has offended me. Lord, I choose to remember, that You have forgiven me of so much, that I must forgive others. Father, the most important piece of clothing I must wear is love. Love is what binds us all together in perfect harmony. So Holy Spirit, I want the peace that comes from You to rule in my heart because I am called to live in peace. And to always be thankful. And I do thank you Lord! (Colossians 3:12-15)

Father, even now, when I am praying, help me to first forgive anyone that I am holding a grudge against, so that You dear Father in heaven, will forgive my sins, too. (Mark 11:25)

Father, I keep working toward that day when I will finally be all that You saved me for and want me to be. I know that I am still not all I should be, but Lord, I am focusing all my energies on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead. Jesus I am straining to reach the end of the race and receive the prize for which You, through Christ Jesus, is calling me up to heaven. Philippians 3:13-15

Father, I cannot even begin to understand what You meant when You said, "I will forgive their wrongdoings, and I will never again remember their sins." Father, You are talking about me. So help me Lord when I am tempted to judge others to do the same thing You do. Help me forgive them for what they have done against me.

Hebrews 8:12

Jesus, You said that those who were without sin could cast the first stone at someone else's sin. The truth is if I say that I don't have sin, I am deceiving myself, but if I confess my sin you are faithful and just to forgive me from all my sins and unrighteousness! How then can I hold on to this stone? Lord, I put down the rock. I have been looking at the speck in their eye and ignoring the beam in my own eye. Lord, forgive my sins as I forgive those who have sinned against me. I choose to forgive!

John 8:7; I John 1:8; Matthew 7:35, Matthew 6:12