

Revenge and Payback

This resource has been created to help you begin a conversation about the topic of **Revenge and Payback from a Biblical Christian worldview**. The information is designed as a tool to inform interested adults who have kids in their lives and will aid in equipping them to adapt conversations towards kid's questions or to begin a conversation about the topic.

Thinking Theologically about Revenge and Payback

Revenge is harm done to someone as a punishment for harm that they have done to you or someone else. (Cambridge Dictionary)

Revenge is a very real human inclination and desire of our sinful hearts. It is the desire to get even, to payback wrong for wrong or to take justice into our own hands. In the Bible there are many examples of revenge between individuals and between entire nations. One such desire for revenge can be found in the story of twin brothers Jacob and Esau (Genesis 27). In the story we see revenge in action when Esau hears that his blessing has been taken by his brother Jacob. Firstly he cries out bitterly, then he holds a grudge against his brother and finally he plots to kill him. We learn more about Esau's feeling for revenge when their mother Rebekah, warns Jacob of his brothers fury and sends him away until Esau's anger subsides and he forgets what Jacob did to him. The story captures some of the breadth of the emotions associated with the desire for revenge- bitterness, anger, fury and plotting harm.

God deeply cares about our hearts and has given us a clear, consistent and direct word about revenge and payback; God says, don't do it!

"Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbour as yourself. I am the Lord." **Leviticus 19 :18**

"It is mine to avenge; I will repay. In due time their foot will slip; their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them." **Deuteronomy 32:35**

"Do not repay evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written. 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink." In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. " **Romans 12:17**

"Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else." **1 Thessalonians 5:15**

"God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you, and give relief to you who are troubled and to us as well." **2 Thessalonians 1:6**

These passages tell us not to take revenge and then proceed to give us the reason behind the instruction, because God the just judge will bring to justice and judgement for all wrongdoing and sin. God's word also gives us godly actions to pursue instead of plotting revenge. These include the instruction to love your neighbour as yourself, live at peace with everyone, overcome evil with good, strive to do what is good. This way of living is all possible with the help of the Holy Spirit that lives in those that believe the good news that Jesus is Lord.

The Bible also has an wonderful example for us to follow in the actions and words of the Lord Jesus. As he was crucified by evil men, he did not retaliate, plot evil or take revenge instead; When they hurled insults at him, he did not retaliate, when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. **1 Peter 2:23**

Jesus chose to forgive those who crucified him, as he suffered on the cross, the cruelest action in history. Our Lord Jesus is the best example of what it looks like to choose not to be overcome by evil, but how to overcome evil with good.

It is important to make clear what revenge is not. When Jesus says to turn the the other cheek Matthew 6:39-40, in no circumstances does he mean allowing yourself to be bullied or hurt. No Christian is ever called to subject themselves to the attack of others.

How to start the conversation

Revenge is too often a default reaction to wrongs and evil done towards us or a group of people we love. Therefore there is no shortage of real situations where conversations with children and families will present themselves in the natural ebb and flow of life. Wisdom will help you decide when the most helpful time for these conversations to occur. Sometimes reflections on this topic will happen once the emotions of anger and hurt have subdued rather than in the heat of the moment or sometimes you may be able to intercede with a chat just before any revengeful actions are taken.

Your conversations may start with:

A reflection on a real event in the child's life:

The opportunity for revenge and payback is everywhere, so there will be no shortage of situations that will present which have a real choice for kids about what to do next. Take a real situation and chat together about the feelings you have and choices you can make in response to them.

An example in the news of retaliation or revenge that the child brings up

There are also plenty of real life situations in the news or in stories that kids will encounter that will helpfully provide a catalyst for the start of a conversation on this topic.

A confession and apology of your own failure in this area

No doubt there are times when we fail in this area and payback wrong with wrong. With the children in your life, work with them to explore some relevant situations. Confessing sin and getting children to help you navigate a way forward, if appropriate, is showing kids what it looks like to be Christian.

Share what the Bible says about revenge and payback.

It is very important that you ground your teaching about this topic for your child in God's Word. In your own words, you could summarise some of the theological principles written above using God's word to shape them. Make sure you open the Bible together and read a passage that gives them instruction or direction. It may be an excellent idea to memorise a part of Scripture together that is helpful for this topic.

The Bible also gives us other wisdom on some things that may feed revenge like gossip, anger as well as jealousy and envy; so explore God's word together to find the treasure of wisdom it contains in this area.

It is also good to explore the way that God's good idea of living clashes with the culture around them. Some examples include; What do the other voices around them encourage them to respond? How is God's way different?

Helping kids to see this will give them a solid foundation of how living God's way will set them apart from others and how this is a good thing.

Just a note to help kids see what revenge is not. It is not simply being silent about wrongs, encourage kids to speak to someone that can help them if they are hurt by someone or unsure about a situation. Bullying is never okay so a responsible adult may need to help kids by stepping in and taking action to address the issue.

But don't just stop with words and ideas; there is one more step in helping kids really understand.

Land theology in practice

Helping kids to think about what to do when you have a choice to take revenge or choose to live God's way is a really helpful step in consolidating learning.

Talking about responding to reoccurring situations at home, school or church is a great place to start because it is relatable and entirely practical.

Demonstrating your own failure in this area and helping kids to help you with what you should have done would be really helpful too. This shows your commitment to godliness and obedience to Jesus in this area of your life.

Spending time pray for people and situations is also an excellent way to help put into practice the things that you have learnt together.

Further Resources

We love helping Children, Youth and Families grapple with big questions of life and theology. If you have further questions start by speaking to your child's Kids Church leaders. Staff and others are also available to help so please don't struggle alone. We love to hear good stories about how people are teaching and encouraging children and youth so please let us know via email: info@christchurch.com.au.