

Positively Speaking

By Mark Wilson

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Bitter or Better?

My friend Arthur Erickson, founder CEO of Urban Ventures, has graciously granted me permission to share this powerful article he wrote concerning our attitude towards the unfair things that happen in life.

Life Is Not Fair:

- There are many things in life that are not fair.
- Life should be fair, when it is not; we mistakenly feel that this is wrong.
- It is wrong...
- But unfair things happen!

When you are treated completely unfairly, you have an opportunity to become **bitter** or **better**. It is a choice you choose! A choice to give into the hurt, anger, resentment, bitterness cycle - or the choice to choose another option.

- The difference is in the letters **I** or **E**.
- If I choose to be self-centered and demand my rights, I become *bitter* (bltter).
- On the other hand, if I am willing to surrender my ego, the big I can change to *better* (bEtter).
- I must allow the values of eternity to guide me, and surrender The Big E.

10 years ago I happened to sit at a table next to Terry Anderson at the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington, DC. In 1988 Terry was one of a group of hostages and news reporters who were released after being held captive in the Middle East for 6 3/4 years. When they got off the plane in Washington, DC they were interviewed. There were two opposite reactions from people who had been locked up and mistreated:

- Thomas Southerland: "Retaliate! Make them pay! Punish them! We must get retribution for what they have done! "
- Terry Anderson: "I forgive them for what they have done to me."

Time magazine's evaluation of Terry Anderson's experiences and responses follows:

"As the last Americans came out, they were freed from their symbolism - no longer did they stand for national helplessness and failed presidencies, for the ill-fated scheme and foreign policy with its principles and held hostages. Instead they were real, grateful, living people with daughters they had never seen, scars of that will never heal, long nights full of lessons they will never forget."

What is the best unit of measure for courage? It is registered in the 2,455 days lost, the countless millions of ribbons tied, the prayers asked, the letters sent, the rumors of death, the hopes dashed and then raised again? Where did he find a generosity of spirit to smile when he walked out of captivity into a room full of colleagues and told them, 'You can't imagine how glad I am to see you. I've thought about this moment for a long time, and now it's here, and I'm scared to death. I don't know what to say.'

In a way, what was most impressive was what he didn't say. Here was a man who had been wrapped like a corpse from head to foot in adhesive tape and moved from one hiding place to another in a coffin. With others, he endured beatings and blindfolds and boredom, months spent chained to furniture, months without bathing, without real food, nor his professional staple - news of the world outside his grave. **And yet there was no hatred, little bitterness, only that**

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great wide smile and a promise of forgiveness that prompted the millions who watched to wonder: How would I have fared? Would I have that strength?" Time Magazine, December 16, 1988, p.16.

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