

GETTING DEFENSIVENESS OUT OF YOUR LIFE

I am always glad that you watch this show. Please let me know what you think. You can e-mail me and I will write you back. I like to know that God is touching your life through these shows. I have prayed to be a powerful influence for good on people. I have asked God if I could do that. Do you ask God for big things? He wants you to touch people's lives.

Today, I am going to touch a sensitive thing in people's lives. I have had to learn how to conquer it and you can, too. It is how to get rid of defensiveness in your life. Do you think you are a defensive person? I never really thought I was. I had a good friend in my life who really listened to God. She would try to tell me things that God wanted me to know for my life. She would try to talk to me about things. She would say to me, "Betty, don't get defensive, but listen to me. Just calm down." When she would begin to say that to me, I would think, "What is she talking about? I don't think I am defensive." Then I began to listen to how I had answered her previously. She would say things to me and I would have a reason why it was okay that I felt that way, or it was a touchy subject. I never knew I had it. Do you know you have blind spots in your life? If you do not have good friends in your life that will love you the way you are but not let you stay the way you are, then you are going to always have those blind spots. If you let Him, God will give you people like that. It is really God saying "Here is something you need to correct."

I want to give you some signs of a defensive person. You are never wrong. You find it hard to get close to people. You are unteachable. Your past hurts always cause you to keep your guard up. (That was mine.) You always want to appear to be right. You are defensive over your children and other people that are important to you. You have trouble receiving correction. You are overly hard on yourself when you make mistakes. (Again, that was me.) You respond to suggestions as if you already knew that. In other words, you are that person that says, "I know. I know." You do not give people time to speak because you are so busy keeping your guard up. "Yes, but. . . ; yes, but. . ." That is a sign of defensiveness. You always blame others rather than assuming the blame yourself. You quit jobs if you know you are going to be exposed. You cannot handle the failure of making a mistake. You rarely reveal what is in your heart. I was like that, too. I look like a real open person and I try very hard to be transparent. However, I began to discover that if I had not dealt with it yet, I had trouble exposing it to people that I really trusted. You are concerned what others will think. (I have done that.) You avoid intimate groups for fear they will find out what you are really like. That is not me but that does happen to people. You cut people off if they tell you something you something you do not want to hear. You do not even give them a chance to say it.

Does any of that ring a bell with you? Have you discovered that about yourself? It is a touchy subject. I want to talk to you about it because you can get rid of it. It is a self-protective device that you are using.

When people use it, they think being defensive is the only way to protect themselves. Have you ever seen a mother defensive about their child? That is the mother that the principal calls and says "Your child did this in school and this is going to be the punishment for it." Instead of bringing the child home and saying, "Did you do that? Why did you do that? We are going to deal with it at home, too," they say "My child wouldn't do anything like that. I don't know what you are talking about. My child would not do that."

When I was growing up, my parents would say things like, "If you get in trouble at school, you are going to get in double trouble when you get home." These days, I have seen parents march up to the schools believing their child could never do anything wrong while the child is a brat or the child really has a bad attitude. Isn't it sad that the defensiveness of the parent kept the child from being corrected in a way that they really needed? Defensiveness is not your friend. It is your enemy and God wants to help you really deal with it and get rid of it.

How did Jesus act? Jesus is our hero. Jesus is who we want to model our lives after. We want Him to live his life through us. He is still alive, you know. We want Him to live and move through us. So, how did Jesus act? For me, He did something I cannot even imagine. I do not understand how He could have done it. It says at the most difficult time in His life, when the pressure was the greatest and He was being accused of everything, even by Pilot, He did not answer back. He did not defend himself. He did not say, "Hey, I am the Son of God. Have you not seen the miracles I have done? Has anyone else done them?"

Has anyone else raised anyone from the dead? I am who I say I am." He did not do any of that. Why? He was in a very difficult place. Why did He not defend Himself? Because He trusted Himself to God. He believed that God was bigger; He believed that God had a plan and He was in the plan. Also, He understood that you have to take the heat because this is what you are supposed to do. If you have ever been in any kind of leadership position in your life, whether in church work, business work, academic world

been in any kind of leadership position in your life, whether in church work, business world, academic world, any area, you know the higher up you go, the more they pick you apart and the more they see your weaknesses. You do not have to be perfect to serve Jesus. You are going to make mistakes. I am going to make mistakes. I do not like making mistakes, but I am going to make them. You are, too. We have to be so careful that one of our survival tactics is not defensiveness. Jesus never answered back. Do you think you could do that? There is power in it. Think about what Martin Luther King did. He said, "We can do it another way," and he did it. It brought about a huge change in civil rights in America. It is possible. There is another way. So many times God's way of handling a situation is so different from what we would do. It is the complete opposite. Jesus did not answer back. That is amazing to me.

In Matthew 5:25 it says, "Agree with your adversary quickly." That is a complete reverse to defensiveness. How do you do that when you do not agree with them? You say, "You know you might be right. I need to think about that. What do you see that I am not seeing?" That is a teachable, correctable spirit. Do you have that? Can people come to you and show you where you are doing something wrong, correct something you are doing? Or, do they say behind your back, "Don't ever talk to them. They are not going to listen. They won't listen to anything." You want to be teachable and correctable. You want people to feel like I can come and say this and they will listen. If you are never wrong, your name is Jesus. Is your name Jesus? You are wrong and people have to tell you or you will keep making the same mistakes, especially if you are involved in a blind spot. When I was trying to walk out of defensiveness, I had people I could trust. I would say to them, "Do you see blind spots." I would even pray about it, "Lord, show me the blind spots in my life because I don't want to have them." Someone that I trusted and that I knew loved me, wanted to help me, and cared for me, said "Betty, you are doing such and such." My first reaction was "No, I don't." I was training myself to walk in this lack of defensiveness, so my second reaction was "Really? I try so hard to be teachable and correctable." When someone is exposing a blind spot in your life, you are really blind to it. You have to ask them, "Could you give me some examples of what you are talking about?" When they do, you remember that is how you responded and what you did. Because you are blind to it, you cannot see it and you think, "Well, okay. I am going to take your word for it because I do remember these situations." Then you begin to walk out. Later, the more you walk in the light of that truth, you think, "I was blind. I am so glad someone loved me enough to tell me." God loves you enough to tell you.

God loves you right where you are. I do not care if you are watching this in prison, in a palace or in the desert. It does not matter. God loves you right where you are. But, He loves you too much to leave you there. God's job is to make you a bride without spot or wrinkle, ready for the coming of the Lord. Correction is going to come and you cannot be defensive.

What does it feel like when you are having defensiveness rise up in you? You can feel it. Your muscles get tense and you begin to steel yourself inside yourself. You begin to explain and defend your actions. How do you walk out of defensiveness? Tell yourself to calm down and listen. They may be telling you the truth. Quit resisting. It is okay if you are making mistakes. It does not mean you are less as a person or less as a Christian because of this. Another way is to listen quietly. When you are trying to defend yourself in this defensiveness, you talk and talk, and explain and explain. They are trying to interject something to tell you and you just keep that constant talk going. Constant talk like that is a form of defensiveness. Just quietly listen. Tell yourself, "Jesus didn't answer back. I walk in His power. I don't have to answer back. I can really listen." Accept and think about what they said. Simply say, "Thank you. I will really think about it." Then, go to God and say, "Lord, is this in my life? Is this what I am doing? Am I being too defensive about my children, marriage, ministry, failures and mistakes in my life? Am I being too defensive? What do I do about it; how do I change?" I can assure you that God, who loves you so dearly, will tell you in such a way that it produces peace in you. Have you ever read the verse in Isaiah that says, "Come, let's reason together." Together is the key word. That means let us talk it over together. Let's not have me yelling at you and you think "God is mad at me." Let's talk it over and reason together. "Though your sins be as scarlet, I can make you white as snow." God can deliver you from defensiveness. He can make it go away, and He has a way to do it.

Why do people feel defensiveness or resistance? Why do they feel like they have to defend themselves constantly? One reason is past hurts. You have been hurt before and it hurt so much that you do not want to be hurt again. Sometimes people who really are bad people, or they do not like you at all, or they have an agenda against you, come after you. Think about the people in the Bible, the prophets. Jesus said, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you have killed the prophets that were sent to you." Sometimes you go through your whole life and do what God has called you to do, but you feel like, "They don't get it, Lord. I am trying but they don't get it." Sometimes you feel exposed, sometimes you feel challenged, especially if you are a teenager. You are trying so hard to think for yourself and become an adult. If you are not careful, in trying to do that, you become defensive and you will not let anyone tell you. I can tell you, it stops your growth in the Lord. It stops your growth as a person. It stops your growth with your friends. God wants you to have deep friendships. Some of us need a lot of friends. Some of us only need one. We are all made differently. You cannot have a deep friendship with anyone if you are defensive. It stops

at a certain level and you cannot go any deeper in the relationship.

How do you feel when your boss corrects you? If you are the boss, it is just as hard to correct someone as to be corrected. It is hard to confront people because people do get defensive. How are you when you are corrected? If you are a woman, how are you when your husband corrects you? If you are a husband, how are you when your wife corrects you? You say, "She shouldn't have to correct me." She is your partner, she loves you. I am not talking about a nagging wife. I am talking about the wife that says, "Honey, I need to talk to you about something you are doing. You have to quit." Just thank God that He put her in your life. The Lord says, "If you have a wise wife, she is from the Lord. Listen to her."

Sometimes your children can correct you, and as a parent, you get defensive. I am talking about adult children. In our family, everyone is honest and everyone says things. I am not talking about being cruel.

They do not put up with bad behavior. I have had bad behavior that my children have had to correct. It is when I have overstepped my boundaries as an adult talking to another adult. They will say, "Mom, back up." I could get defensive. I could ask, "Humpf. What do you mean?" That little "Humpf" is another sign of defensiveness. It is just a little piece of air, "Humpf". Instead, I tell myself, "You trained your children. They are wise; they are independent. They love God. Listen to them. They are trying to tell you something."

The person that receives correction, and makes corrections from that, goes up higher. The person that does not receive correction either stays the same or go down. In order to go up, you have to let go.

Watch a balloon go up. It is light and goes higher and higher. If you want to go higher in the Lord, higher in your career, higher in your marriage, higher in your family, then you have to be willing that the people closest to you correct you when they see things, and do it in love.

At times, a conflict can occur in a family between all the relatives because somebody speaks and they do not do it with a lot of grace. When you correct people, do you have grace? When you point something out to someone, do you have grace and mercy or do you just do it in anger? Perhaps you made a serious mistake and you were corrected. You know it was right and you decided that you were not going to be defensive because you know in your heart they were right. Maybe, it was because you had a terrible temper. You might say, "I have a terrible temper and I lose it. I lose it in the office, I lose it on the ball field." Someone says, "You have to quit that." Maybe you made a serious error in judgment. What do you do; how do you conquer that? How do you live through that? You just begin to live the right kind of life. If you live it long enough, people will know you changed. If they see you under the same situations where you lost it, and you keep it, you do not answer back like Jesus, but you accept the correction, they will know you have changed. Listen to this verse in Isaiah 54:17. This is one you can live by. "In that coming day, no weapon turned against you will succeed or prosper, and you will have justice against every courtroom lie, any lie in life. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord. This is the blessing I have given you." God will defend you, God will make it okay. He will do that for you. You do not have to defend yourself. That is what Jesus knew. "I do not have to defend myself. God will defend Me."

Is there ever a time that you do defend your stand? Of course there is. It is when it is done the right way and God has said, "Now." An example from the Bible is Stephen in Acts. He was not in the ministry. He was just a regular person. The Bible says, "He was full of faith and mercy, and great signs and wonders followed him. He did spectacular miracles among the people." Everyone needs miracles. There are times when we say, "God, I need a miracle. I need a financial miracle." Stephen did spectacular miracles.

Someone turned against him anyway. This time he was right. Sometimes your defensiveness is wrong, because you are wrong. Sometimes you are right and people still come against you. How do you do it differently? They brought men to lie about Stephen. They accused him of things he did not do. "It aroused the crowd to fury," it says in Acts 6:12. The Jewish leaders arrested him and brought him before the counsel. Lying witnesses testified again. They said what they said. Do you know how God defended Stephen? It does not say that Stephen said, "Wait, you have it all wrong." "At this point, everyone in the council chambers saw Stephen's face become as radiant as an angel." God filled him up with the Holy Spirit, so full that it came out everywhere. His face was radiant as an angel. Then the high priest said, "Are these accusations true?" Stephen had an answer in a way you would not have done it. God will always have a way for you. He will make a way. You just need to learn how to listen and obey. Stephen did not say, "Hey, wait a minute. I know Jesus. I do miracles. I can bring up 15 people that can tell you I do miracles. I haven't run down anyone. I am standing up for Jesus. I am just serving God." He did not do any of that. He began a lengthy examination of the scriptures all the way through the Bible and God led him to do that. Make sure you keep an open mind. Look at what they are saying objectively. You will know the truth. It will force you to look at it right. Then listen to how God changes your life and how He enables you to move past this.

Some of you do not want to embrace the truth about yourself. There is someone watching this right now and God says, "It is true and you know that it is true. I want to help you. Just embrace the truth and let Me change you." Pray for defensiveness to leave your life in Jesus' name. It will go.

QUIET TIME QUESTIONS

1. What are signs of a person being defensive?
2. Why is it important to get defensiveness out of your life?
3. How can Matthew 5:25 be applied to your conversations?
3. How did Jesus defend Himself?
4. When you feel yourself getting defensive, how can you walk it out?

To watch the video on GETTING DEFENSIVENESS OUT OF YOUR LIFE, Pillar Five, Relational Skills, go to www.bettyswann.com.

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