

1. In Lesson Seven we studied what it is like to live with **bitterness**. Bitterness can keep you from living with hope just like fear, worry, despair and depression, sorrow, and anger. Any one of these practices can become a stronghold, which gives the devil an opening to distract you from living with hope. *We know how...*

- A. **Bitterness robs** you of peace and joy and it hardens your heart over time. So first we will define bitterness and what leads to it, and then we will look at the life of Joseph; a man who could have become bitter but instead he choose to see how God was at work.

*Let's begin our review by defining bitterness...*

2. The KJV dictionary defines **bitterness** as having a deep distress of mind, holding a grudge, or feeling hatred toward someone whom you believe has done something against you.

- A. When you are bitter you hold onto the anger that you believe is justified against them. To learn if you are bitter toward someone ask yourself these questions:
- Are you are holding onto your anger against them? Do you have ill will toward them?
  - Or do you continue to resent them for what they have done?

*What is it like being around a bitter person?*

- B. Most of us have been around **someone who is bitter** about life in general or about a certain person. While there are varying **degrees** of bitterness from being mildly bitter to the point where their bitter attitude clouds everything and everyone in their life. Bitterness grows. For example...
- A bitter person is **unwilling** to consider restoring a broken relationship. They only focus on what that person did to them and overlook any wrong they may have done. Their bitterness hurts them and others in their life.
  - A bitter person is **critical** about most things. They will **focus** on even the smallest thing that is wrong. They also have a need to **fix blame** for a problem on someone other than themselves. A bitter person is **rarely pleased**. They generally have a depressed view of life.
  - A bitter person may say they forgive someone yet their **actions** often speak otherwise.

*Forgiving does not come naturally to us so ...*

3. You **learn** how to forgive and keep from being bitter from the Word of God. It teaches you...
- A. To **overlook and bear** with the flaws of another saint; to forgive them when they have wronged you or when you can't agree on something. You need to have a tender heart and show mercy to each other. Remember that Christ forgave you; now follow his example of forgiveness.

"And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:30-32).

"Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye" (Colossians 3:13).

*Furthermore we know that...*

- B. You **should not grieve** the Holy Spirit of God by being either unforgiving or bitter.

"And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:30-32).

- a. You **grieve** the Holy Spirit **when you refuse** to forgive others; because you have been forgiven everything by God!
- b. Compare Ephesians 4:32 with Colossians 2:13 and notice the **past tense** used: Ephesians 4:32 "hath forgiven"; Colossians 2:13 "forgiven".

Now ask yourself how many of your sins has Christ forgiven? The answer is **ALL** your sin: past, present, and future (the sins you've yet to commit). Remember all your sin was **future sin** at the **cross**.

"And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32).

"And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, **hath** he quicken together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses" (Colossians 2:13)

- C. Bitterness will **weigh you down** in the race God has set before you. It keeps your focus on what is wrong, making it harder for you to see the good. It gets in the way of your being able to trust other people and have loving relationships. Bitterness takes your focus off Christ. The answer is to **focus** on Jesus above all else.

"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God...Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled" (Hebrews 12:1-2, 14-15).

We know that...

- C. **Unforgiveness** leads to bitterness.
  - a. When you are forgiving you are willing to overlook offenses and are inclined to be reconciled to that person.
  - b. When you refuse to forgive someone over time that attitude grows into bitterness. You become unwilling towards reconciliation. Bitterness happens when you refuse to let go of your anger toward someone. First we will look at forgiveness...

What keeps us from forgiving someone?

- D. Some things that **our flesh** tells us so we won't forgive someone can be:
  - a. You never thought they would hurt you. They aren't who you thought they were.
  - b. What they did was wrong. How dare they put blame on you! You don't want to be confronted with what you did wrong as well. Their wrong was worse... (pride?)

- c. Forgiving them seems to take them off the hook because they need to suffer – at least a little - for the hurt they gave you. They need to experience how they made you feel.
4. Why you should forgive someone, even if they do not confess their sin and ask forgiveness...
- A. **When you obey** what is taught in these three passages of scripture you will be able to forgive someone.

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

"Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things" (1Corinthians 13:4-7).

"And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32).

*From these three passages of scripture we learn how to accept the wrong done to us and are able to forgive that person, even if they do not ask for our forgiveness...*

1. God has allowed this person to hurt you and do wrong. God has a purpose in allowing it to happen that he has/or is using to make you more like Christ. Considering this, you can forgive them even if they haven't asked for your forgiveness.
2. The charity that you have for your fellow Christians should seek their good. It is good for them that you always remain hopeful about them and are willing to overlook their wrongs. If you have the attitude of charity toward this person who has hurt you then you can forgive them even if they haven't asked for your forgiveness.
3. God forgave you of all your sins even without your knowing what all your sins were! Since God forgave you every single sin that you have committed then you can forgive someone else without hearing the words "I'm sorry".

*King James Bible information note...*

The King James Bible uses the word "charity" in 1Corinthians 13 rather than the word "love" and there is a good reason. Newer translations often use the word "love" instead. The word at issue is "agape", which is defined in Thayer's Greek Definitions as "brotherly love, affection, good will, love, benevolence". Our English word "charity" is defined as having benevolent goodwill toward others or love of humanity. "Charity" is the highest form of love because it is an unselfish love in contrast to "love" itself which is defined as a deep abiding or liking and can be selfish. It is charity that seeks only the best for the other person without any selfish desires. Whenever "charity" appears in the KJV it is in reference to Christian love toward fellow Christians.

*We understand why we are to forgive and how we can forgive but what about those troublesome relationships...*

5. How to live at peace **within troubling** relationships.
  - A. **Offenses** against us will be different: some are minor and some are severe. In some more severe situations the course of action may require you to **set limits** for that relationship because you seek to live at peace.
  - B. Forgiving that person simply means you are **not holding** onto your anger. You realize Christ has forgiven you and commands that you forgive others. However, when an offense is so severe, and perhaps continual, you may need to limit how much you should include that person in your life.
  - C. The Bible counsels us about setting boundaries, or limits, to **relationships**. Should their behavior show a positive change over time (so that you can see it is real) then your forgiveness will allow you to reconcile with them. Continue **praying** about it.

*The Bible advises us on setting these boundaries...*

"A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished" (Proverbs 22:3).

"A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the simple pass on, and are punished" (Proverbs 27:12). *Proverbs 22:3 and 27:12 must be important because they are included twice!*

"Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint" (Proverbs 25:19)

"If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men" (Romans 12:18).

A few examples of applying boundaries according to these scriptures...

1. Should someone show they **cannot keep a confidence** then the **prudent** person will stop sharing information with them. If you ignore this advice you will end up being punished the next time they share a confidence.
2. When someone has shown a **pattern of lying** then the **prudent** person will not believe what they said at face value without checking to see if what they said is true. If you ignore this advice you will be punished when you make a decision based on what they said and it was wrong.
3. If someone has **betrayed you** then you realize you cannot expect certain things from them. The **prudent** person will take a wait-and-see approach with them. This is establishing a boundary based upon that person's pattern of behavior. If you ignore this advice you will be punished when the treatment you receive is not what you had hoped for.
  - a. When you put your trust in someone who has shown themselves **to be unfaithful** then one day when you need them the most they may let you down. And it will hurt like a broken tooth or foot. Pay attention to the red flags when they pop up in someone's pattern of behavior.

*In all situations take the situation or relationship to the Lord in prayer seeking his wisdom, always hoping for the best and seeking to live at peace...*

6. How does **God** promise to **help us** when we are having difficulty forgiving or when we realize we are bitter?
- A. Throughout our Study on "Living with Hope" our "go-to" scripture has been Philippians 4:6-7. The advice given to us in this scripture helps us with our fear, worry, despair and depression, our sorrow and our anger. *And it helps us to forgive others so we will not become bitter.*

"Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7).

Our **plan** when we are having trouble forgiving or we believe we have become bitter:

1. Say 'No' to unforgiveness or bitterness: "Be careful for nothing..."
    - a. In your heart agree with God that you should forgive the person who has hurt you. Then make the decision to obey God's will and forgive the person.
  2. Ask God to help you to forgive the person who has hurt you: "...but in every thing by prayer and supplication...let your requests be made known unto God..."
    - a. Pour your heart out to God in prayer. Admit to God that you are having trouble forgiving the person who has hurt you and you need His help so you can forgive them. You know it is his will to forgive and you want to do his will.
  3. Be thankful: "...with thanksgiving..."
    - a. Thank God for the forgiveness he has given you for all your sins: past, present, and future. God has forgiven you of sins that you don't even remember or know about!
  4. Trust in God and let it go: You've taken your need to the Lord, now rest believing that he will enable you to forgive that person.
    - a. It's really a matter of accepting that it is God's will to forgive. Trust in God to guide you as you reestablish your relationship with the person who has hurt you. Continue in prayer.
7. What **assurance** do you have that **justice will prevail** when that person who has wronged you seems to be getting away with their evil behavior?
- A. When someone who has wronged you appears to be getting away with their evil treatment take heart. Evil greatly offends our holy God. God promises to judge and punish those who do evil and he always does what he has said he will do. He never lies. God wants us to **trust in him** to avenge the evil. It is God's job to avenge evil: not ours.
- "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, VENGEANCE IS MINE; I WILL REPAY, saith the LORD" (Romans 12:19).
8. Our apostle Paul gives us counsel about those offenses against you...
- A. **Accept** the fact that most of the time you won't understand **why** things happen...
  - B. Nor will you see people receive **justice** for the wrongs against you...so
  - C. You need to put those things out of your mind. Do not let them distract you from what really matters. What matters is that you live for your future which is in Christ...so
  - D. When life gets tough you put forth extra effort as you focus on the prize before you – your eternal home in heaven with your Savior Jesus Christ.



"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3: 13-14).

9. As we continue to learn what God's Word teaches us about bitterness, let's look at the life of **Joseph** who was the son of Jacob and Rachel.
- His life is a **beautiful story** of God's mercy when all seemed lost, and forgiveness when it seemed impossible. In spite of the emotional pain that Joseph experienced he did **not** become bitter.
  - In Joseph's life we see how God worked both **through** his life and **in** the lives of others *for his will to be done*. Our God is sovereign.

We can all **learn** from Joseph's life and be encouraged by **his example**: "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Romans 15:4).

*The Background of the Joseph's story and his brothers...*

- Joseph** was the second youngest of twelve sons born to Jacob. (Jacob is also named Israel). Jacob had two wives: Leah and Rachel. But it was Rachel whom Jacob loved, and by her he had two sons: Joseph and Benjamin. Now Joseph was **very special to Jacob** because he was born to him in his old age and he loved him more than his brothers.

"Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he make him a coat of many colours. When **his brethren** saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, **they hated** him, and could not speak peaceably unto him" (Genesis 37:3-4). Joseph also had a dream where his brothers bowed down to him: "And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told his brethren: and they hated him yet the more" (Genesis 37:5).

*We begin our story when one day Jacob sent Joseph, who was seventeen, to leave the Valley of Hebron and travel to Shechem to check on his brothers who were tending the flock ...*

- When **Joseph arrived** in Shechem his brothers were gone. A stranger told Joseph that he had overheard his brothers say they were leaving for Dothan, which is 12 miles north of Shechem. So Joseph left for Dothan...
- Now when his **brothers** saw him approaching they **plotted** to kill him, but Reuben protested. Reuben said they should throw Joseph into a pit in the wilderness instead. Reuben intended on taking Joseph back to their father later.

*Now this is what they did to Joseph...*

Joseph's brothers took off his coat of many colors and threw him into an empty pit. All of his brothers, except for Reuben, were eating together when they saw a group of traveling merchants passing by. It was Judah who suggested they sell Joseph to these merchants rather than kill him. Judah reminded them they would get no money from killing him so why not sell him. Furthermore, he is our brother. They all agreed so they sold Joseph for 20 pieces of silver to the merchants. That was the going price for a male slave.

- F. When **Reuben returned** and found out what they had done he was so **upset** that he tore his clothes. What would they **tell** their father **Jacob** if they returned home without Joseph? *This is what they did to cover up their crime of selling Jacob to the merchants...*

They put a goat's blood on Joseph's coat of many colors. Now when his brothers returned home and showed this coat to Jacob he was distraught, believing Joseph had been devoured by a wild animal. He grieved by tearing his clothes and wearing sackcloth. No one was able to comfort him: "And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days. And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted; and he said, For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning. Thus his father wept for him" (Genesis 37:34-35).



In the second half of Joseph's story we will see how God took what was meant for evil and used it for the good of Joseph and of many people...including his brothers who had harmed him. God gave Joseph mercy and grace so that Joseph prospered. In human terms Joseph had every reason to hate his brothers and seek revenge; yet Joseph gladly forgave them and restored their relationships. Joseph is an example to us all of forgiveness.

- G. Now when the merchants arrived at Egypt they **sold Joseph to Potiphar**, a man who held a high position as the captain of Pharaoh's guard. Because the LORD was with Joseph he was good at everything that he did.
- H. Because of this, **Potiphar** made him **the overseer of his house** so Joseph was in charge whenever Potiphar wasn't there. Later on, after Joseph refused the advances of Potiphar's wife, she accused him of the very thing she had tried to do...
- I. Following **false accusations** by his wife Potiphar had **no choice** but to put Joseph **in jail**. The LORD was with Joseph in jail and caused the keeper of the jail to approve of him so much that he made him a supervisor of all the prisoners.
- J. Now the Pharaoh's chief of the butlers and the chief of the bakers were also in jail because each had dreams which they nor anyone else could interpret. Joseph told them that interpretation of dreams **belongs to God** and asked them to tell him their dreams. They did. The chief of the butler's dream resulted in him being restored, whereas the chief of the baker's dream resulted in his death. Joseph told the chief of the butler about his past mistreatment and asked him to remember what he had done for him.
- K. **Two years later** when Pharaoh had a dream that no one could interpret the chief of the butlers remembered Joseph. So he told Pharaoh how Joseph had interpreted his dream and the dream of chief of the bakers. After hearing this, Pharaoh called for Joseph to interpret his dream, which Joseph did and he gave all the credit to God. Joseph's interpretation of...

**Pharaoh's dream** showed there would be seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine throughout all of Egypt. In the dream there was also a plan to prepare for the seven years of famine. Because Joseph had interpreted his dream Pharaoh made him second to Pharaoh in authority throughout Egypt. Joseph prepared Egypt for the seven years of famine while they were experiencing the seven years of plenty. Joseph was just thirty years old.

- L. In his personal life Joseph married Asenath, an Egyptian and had **two sons**: **Manasseh** (For God said he, hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house), and **Ephraim** (For God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction).
- M. Now when the **famine** began it spread all over the known world. So when Jacob heard there was corn in Egypt he sent 10 of Joseph's brothers to buy corn. But his younger brother Benjamin stayed home with Jacob.
- N. When they arrived in **Egypt** and Joseph saw **his brothers and they bowed down** before him, but they didn't recognize him. However, Joseph recognized them but **he didn't** let them know. After they introduced themselves and told Joseph all about their family, he tested them by accusing them of being spies.
- O. To **verify** that they were telling the truth Joseph told them to **bring their youngest brother** to Egypt to see him. One brother must stay with him in prison while the others would take the corn back to their father. When they returned to Egypt with the youngest brother Joseph would release the brother held in prison.
- P. After Joseph told them what he expected he overheard his brothers confessing their guilt to one another. Since Joseph spoke in Egyptian through an interpreter to them his brothers had no idea that he could know what they had said. But what they said **moved Joseph to tears**. He didn't let them see his tears.



- Q. Now when his brothers returned home they found money in each of their sacks and this made them afraid. Yet **Jacob would not let** them take Benjamin back to Egypt. So they stayed home but as the famine continued Jacob and his sons ran out of corn. Jacob had no alternative but to send them back to Egypt for corn. The sons protested reminding Jacob that they were told only to return with the youngest son. Jacob was upset at them for even mentioning a younger brother!
- R. **Judah** promised that he would be totally responsible for **Benjamin's safe return**. To make things go well, Jacob sent presents with them for Joseph. When they arrived they told the steward of Joseph's house about the money left in their sacks from their first trip and were told that it was a gift from their God. The steward then released Simeon to them. He was the brother who had been held in prison.
- S. When Joseph came home **his brothers bowed** before him and answered questions about their father's well-being, then they bowed their heads to him. When Joseph saw Benjamin, his younger brother he was very touched. He quickly found a reason to find a place to weep.
- T. When it was time for them to return to Jacob with the corn, Joseph told his steward to put every man's money in his sack and also place his **silver cup** in Benjamin's sack. Shortly after they left Joseph sent his steward to follow them and search their sacks. When the **silver cup** was found in **Benjamin's sack** Joseph told his brothers that Benjamin would remain as his servant and the rest could go back to their home.
- U. Judah **pleaded** with Joseph telling him that his father would die of grief if they did not return with Benjamin. Now Jacob, their father had two sons by his beloved wife Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin. As far as Jacob knew Joseph was dead and only Benjamin remained. Judah understood all this so he told Joseph that he would remain as his servant instead of Benjamin.

It was at this point that Joseph could no longer keep from them who he really was! He **wept with joy** telling them who he really was. They came near to him as Joseph reassured them that he had no ill will toward any of them and he told them:

"Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life. For these two years hath the famine been in the land: and yet there are five years, in the which there shall neither be earing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt. Hast ye, and to up to my father, and say unto him, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt: come down unto me, tarry not" (Genesis 45: 5-9).

- V. **Seventeen years** after **Jacob** came to Egypt he died and afterwards Joseph's brothers feared that he would then hate them because of their past sin against Joseph. So they went to Joseph and fell down before him asking to be his servants. His response: "And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones, And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them". (Genesis 50: 19-21).

- a. When we compare **Romans 8:28**, our teaching for the Body of Christ, we see how **similar** it is to **Genesis 50:20**. God's character is the same today as yesterday. Both scriptures convey the same truth: everything, including the evil that happens in the lives of believers **God has allowed** and uses it for our good and for his purposes. This comforts us because we may have no idea why God is allowing evil in our lives, yet we can trust what God has said.

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

#### In conclusion...

1. **God** tells us in His Word that we are not to be **bitter** and furthermore we are to be **forgiving**. We know that unforgiveness often leads to bitterness. As we study how to live with hope we have come to realize that there are obstacles we have to overcome and they are: fear, worry, despair and depression, sorrow, anger, and bitterness. These obstacles or strongholds, will **distract** us from placing our trust and our focus upon Jesus. The **devil** will use these **strongholds** to keep you from maturing as a Christian and being used by God as he desires.
2. We cannot forgive, or overcome strongholds in our own strength. We need the help of the **Holy Spirit working** within us as we **submit to God's will**. In our Study we have explored many scriptures giving us direction with each obstacle/stronghold. I suggest you review the lesson for whatever area is challenging for you. Our walk as a Christian has hills and valleys, so remember what Paul told us in Philippians 1:6: "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ". And never give up **praying** about it!

Ladies, next week we will cover Lesson 8 which is the last lesson in our Study "Living with Hope". Lesson 8 is "Living for our Hope". We have been studying all the distractions such as fear, worry, despair and depression, sorrow, anger, and bitterness that take our focus away from our Hope and from trusting in him... We want to give these distractions to the Lord and set them aside, never to pick them up again. They are excess baggage that will slow us down as we "...run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith..." (Hebrew 12:1-2). When our focus is completely on Jesus we will truly be living with Hope.