

**Life in the Body Battling Bitterness 7/23/24**

1. Intro:

- a. Bitterness: hurt incurred from either real or perceived offense, gone unchecked, and allowed to continue by failure to apply biblical principles and thinking to the hurt, resulting in hatred and resentment.
- b. Bitterness is the quick fix for the flesh when we feel offended. Dealing biblically with conflict and hurt becomes too much work. We maybe tried to talk with our spouse to that friend, but things did not go as planned. Bitterness offers a quick fix since we feel justified in the response because the other persons did not respond well. But, though it delivers for a moment, it destroys in the long run.
- c. To be sure, real hurt occurs far too often through atrocities such as abuse and criminal acts. In these cases, fighting bitterness can be excruciating. Even and especially so, God extends comforting and transforming grace for the greatest of life's hurts (cf. Gen. 50:20).

2. **Do not underestimate the power of bitterness.**

- a. It amazes me how easily bitterness has slithered into my own heart. And equally amazing is how many people in normal life scuffles have said, "Oh, I'm not bitter, I'm just struggling a bit." Or "I'm just frustrated."
- b. If you have been like me at times, we will say, "I'm not bitter, I'm just struggling a bit." Perhaps. However, "struggling a bit" in the wake of a relationship scuffle is often residual bitterness.
- c. Obvious signs of bitterness include hating someone in our hearts, slander, vengeance, and unjustly cutting off a relationship.
  - i. Are you continuing to dwell on the person/incident in an unfavorable way?
  - ii. Have you brought up the person or incident to use it against them?
  - iii. Have you brought up the person/incident to others who do not need to know the details?
  - iv. Have you quietly enjoyed how others have taken your side in the matter, against another?

- v. Are you unnecessarily allowing this incident to stand between your relationship with the person?
- vi. And are you considering writing off this person?
- vii. If so, bitterness may have begun to infiltrate your heart.
- d. And beware of those mental cage-matches we like to have. Despite the quick and easy pleasure it may deliver, the practice of winning arguments with people in our own mind feeds our inner Pharisee and the monster of self-righteousness.
- e. We do well to pray with David, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way” (Ps. 139:23-24).

**3. Keep that morning quiet time.**

- a. When we are in the battle with bitterness, the fight for biblical thinking can start even before our feet hit the floor.
- b. And, since bitterness is largely a battle for the heart, bombarding it with the goodness, grace, and glory of God at the outset of each day will prove effective in the battle. “Those who love Your law have great peace, and nothing causes them to stumble” (Ps. 119:165).
- c. And in that quiet time, we can replace bitterness towards a person with love by praying biblical prayers for them.

**4. Fight for an accurate, high view of God.**

- a. Our personal bitterness has far more to do with God than it does other people. Certainly, sins against us are real and unpleasant. However, God has outfitted us with all things needed for life and godliness, not the least of which is the sin of bitterness. The greatest of these things, of course, is himself.
- b. Trusting the sovereignty of God when tempted with bitterness, we hope in him.
- c. Recalling the goodness of God, we rest in him.
- d. Embracing the discipline of God, we grow in him.
- e. Remembering the holiness of God, we acquiesce to him.
- f. Aiming for the glory of God, we align with him.

- g. Especially in the battle with bitterness, when we fight to think on a more correct, exalted view of God, we will have less space for being offended by what so-and-so did or said.
  - i. As we will see later, we also need to remember how God deals with us when we sin against him.
  - ii. As we think about the cross, we ought not to have room for bitterness towards others. Especially when we become bitter toward someone over a preference issue. Phil 2:3-4, 4:1-4

**5. Refuse to separate yourself from the body of Christ.**

- a. It's always easiest to hit the eject button in relationship wrangles. You don't have to deal with it. No more worrying about, "What am I going to say if I see them?" The awkward factor is gone. "I'll find a different church or home group or town."
- b. But that's why there are no less than 40 one anothers. God wants us to get over ourselves, face the awkwardness, actually speak to people directly, probably get our fragile egos cracked a few more times, and deal with it. And he wants that because he loves us. Bitterness kills us. It strips God of glory and opens the door for a slew of other sins and misery. "He who separates himself seeks his own desire, he quarrels against all sound wisdom" (Prov. 18:1).
- c. Doing local church God's way is the hardest thing. That's why it's the best thing. If we will be obedient and stay candidly connected, it's both the hospital for healing our self-absorption and the proving ground for real love.

**6. Fight to believe the best about others.**

- a. It seems so simple; almost trivially so. But this is one of the greatest areas of sin during relationship scuffles. One side incurs hurt from another's sin. Instead of asking questions, getting the full story, and fighting to give others as much grace as we give ourselves, we close off, make myopic conclusions, and it's end of story. The other side, subsequently reacts similarly. Views are formed. Self-righteousness fuels it. Bitterness vines its way throughout hearts and minds. We ask, "How in the world did it get to this point?!"
- b. But we have got to fight it by putting the brakes on quickly. Ask questions, though we may seem certain about an issue. Flooding our flesh with passages like 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, Proverbs 18:13, and 18:17, an amazing thing will start to happen.
- c. Failure to believe the best and ask questions is often symptomatic of a sinfully high view of one's own wisdom. It's a worshipping one's own ability to discern

and see things consequent of a high-mindedness. If I can accurately see every situation, but have not love, I am nothing.

**7. Restrain the desire to air hurt feelings.**

- a. Now, especially in situations such as abuse and criminal activity, the violated individual can be helped by sharing their hurt. They should do so for constructive purposes.
- b. But we have to be careful. In most situations, sharing how we feel can often mask a desire to continue boiling our resentment. It feels good, as others come, and partake of our pity-party, are hypnotized by it, and take our side. Everybody favors the underdog. Which is why we need to really fight this manipulative tactic.
- c. One of the greatest dangers we face in relational scuffles is believing our hurt feelings.
  - i. They are powerful over the undiscerning mind and strong flesh. My hurt becomes the standard by which conclusions are made. “You hurt me, therefore you must [insert self-serving demand]. I am hurt, therefore, I cannot trust [which is to say, ‘love’] you.”
  - ii. Aren’t we glad that Jesus did not take that approach to us in stepping out of heaven, obeying the law, and assuming God’s wrath due us on himself at the cross?
- d. We can take our hurt to Jesus (cf. Heb. 4:14-16). But, even then, recall that Jesus is not to be our verbal vomit catcher or our cosmic psychologist.
- e. Certainly we can share our struggles with him, while recalling that his agenda is, as should ours, our progressive holiness. Other than our Lord, we should not be airing our feelings on the matter. Hurt feelings are not a matter for repeating, but repentance.
- f. And we should be cautious of dwelling too much on the idea that our hurt feelings are someone else’s doing. The presence of hurt feelings does not automatically mean that someone did something wrong.
  - i. We might be hurt and offended because we have an inflated view of ourselves, and our pride was damaged.
  - ii. We may be hurt because had already formulated a negative view of someone, thus, sinfully filtered what they said to us, though it was biblically permissible.

iii. Or, we may be hurt because we are too proud to receive advice and criticism.

g. If we're not careful, our hurt feelings can begin to form our identity.

**8. Look to Christ's example.**

a. If anyone has faced understandable temptations of bitterness, it is the Lord Jesus Christ. No one in history has been as unjustly bombarded with sin as he has. He was constant perfection being barraged with constant imperfection. People regularly believed the worst about him, suspected him, misjudged him, lied about him, betrayed him, and hated him. And eventually, they murdered him. Through it all he *never* sinned.

b. We might understand if our Lord thought things like, "Don't you humans know what I have done for you?! I created you. I am sustaining your breath, lungs, heart, biochemical bodily processes, your family, and, I am about to die on the cross!" Yet, incredibly, Jesus always obeyed God the Father by avoiding bitterness. "For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps" (1 Pet. 2:20-21).

**9. Extend the forgiveness which God has extended you.**

a. Especially in extreme violations, this can be the most difficult. But God's love extended to us in forgiveness through Christ is not a matter of mere paper and theory.

i. We could not possibly count the times we have failed God's good moral standard (cf. Matt. 5:48).

ii. Never will we overestimate the seriousness of our sin against God. For all practical purposes, Christ likens our debt to God as infinite (cf. Matt. 25:21-35).

iii. "If you, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared" (Ps. 130:3-4).

b. It comes down to this: forgiven people forgive (Eph. 4:32). Having been released from an incalculable debt and eternity in hell, God calls us to imitate in kind, though not in quantity.

c. A flipside word is necessary: if we have sinned against someone, it's best for us to not demand that they just get over their bitterness. While they should repent of it,

we also should expect that doing so can take time. Our greatest efforts begin with our own biblical responsibilities.

- i. Nor should we demand that the person we sinned against and may be struggling with us, forgive us. Yes, they should forgive, but nowhere in Scripture does it say that we need to force or demand that others forgive us.
  - ii. We are responsible for our own actions and heart responses, not for that of other people.
  - iii. If someone is having a hard time forgiving and struggling with bitterness, we probably need to ask ourselves what we have done to make things so hard for them, rather than being bitter that they are struggling with being bitter.
- d. In the meantime, we can pray for others. As we do, God, by his Spirit and word, will strengthen us to successfully face the normal battle with bitterness.