



Word to the World
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Module : Healing the Wounded Soul
Session 2 : The Root of Bitterness
Focus : Bitterness – Causes, Effects, Solutions

Heb. 12:15

*See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God;
 that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled.*

In this session, we will address an aspect of the wounded soul that is rooted in bitterness. The Bible describes bitterness as a root. Roots are usually hidden underground, out of view. Every root gives rise to some kind of growth and will ultimately produce fruit. Bitterness is the root that produces poisonous fruit for both the person who hosts it and for the persons with whom they interact.

God warned Israel about not even one of them having bitterness:

Deut. 29:18 so that there will not be among you a **man or woman, or family or tribe**, whose heart turns away today from the LORD our God, to go and serve the gods of those nations; that there will **not be among you a root bearing poisonous fruit and wormwood**

Note in this verse the possibility of whole people groups of being infected by ‘bitterness’ – ‘family or tribes’.

‘**Poisonous fruit**’ in other versions of the Bible is rendered as ‘gall’ and has reference to the character of bitterness as a life-threatening condition.

None of us would ever admit to being BITTER, but the Bible says, ...

Prov. 14:10a The heart **KNOWS** its **OWN** bitterness ...

In my estimation, bitterness is without doubt the most singularly potent satanic weapon designed to damage relationships and the greatest frustrator of the GRACE of God.

It is important to understand biblical anatomy of the poison of bitterness; how to recognise it; its lethal effects in your life and that of those close to you; and how to overcome it.

May you and I be healed of any residual bitterness we may be carrying from past hurts or disappointments. Let's not swallow the BITTER pill; rather take the BETTER one, and there will be BETTER days ahead for us.

Bitterness is the root or seedbed of many negative traits of the unrenewed soul. If not healed, bitterness will certainly paralyse you. You will never reach spiritual maturity and much of your potential in God will be stifled. It is so serious a negative condition, that it could very well result in disqualifying you from your spiritual inheritance in Christ and also cause you to lose your salvation entirely. It is surprising how well

meaning sons of God will be very strong in their stance against immorality, and yet accommodate bitterness. Do not be deceived; bitterness is a poison that will kill you. May I encourage you to seek to be free from the poison of bitterness. There are many causes of bitterness, some of which will be addressed in this study. In our present study we seek just to understand the anatomy of bitterness, its ramifications and to provide the biblical remedy for it.

BITTERNESS EXPLAINED

Certain foods and drinks are said to be bitter in taste, i.e. it lacks sweetness and has a sharp pungent taste. The normal or average human body will usually react negatively to this taste. Your system naturally rejects that which is bitter. Similarly, an unpleasant or negative experience can result in bitterness in one's soul. This usually evidences itself in mental pain or resentment, anger, animosity, hatred, discouragement, etc. Just as your body repels that which is bitter in taste, so your soul should not tolerate bitterness. Yet, many people accommodate bitterness for protracted periods of time - some for their entire lives - with disastrous consequences for them and for those within their sphere of relationships or influence. Phrases like '**bitter memories**', '**bitter disappointment**', '**bitter anger**', '**bitter jealousy**', '**bitter animosity**', '**bitter rivalry**', etc. too often characterise many people's lives.

In the Greek, ...

Bitterness = pikria = acidity (especially *poison*)

(Implications of irritability, pungency, corrosiveness, harshness)

In the Hebrew, ...

Bitterness = Mar Marah = angry, chafed, discontented, heavy (Strong)

(Implications of heaviness of heart Prov 31; unhappiness 1 Sam 22:2 ; severe anger; complaint and murmur – Job 10:1)

The word Marah is also translated as '**he rebelled**'. Hence **stubbornness and rebellion** are either seen as synonymous with bitterness or outcomes of it.

Bitterness is an intense anger or resentment that one feels because of an offence you permitted to enter your heart. It results in deep inward discontentment. A hardness and even harshness develops within the soul. It manifests by complaint, murmur, unhappiness, pessimism, anger, hatred, malice, blame labelling, unforgiveness, etc. It has a corrosive effect upon the soul and personality of its host and defiles others with its poison. It is a condition of the unrenewed soul, of which we are cautioned to take extra special care not to entertain. The good news is that it can be healed; it can be overcome!

CAUSES AND SOLUTIONS OF BITTERNESS

Here are Some Causes of bitterness

- Negative Life Circumstances
- Unmet Needs
- Disappointment and Failed Expectations
- Abuse
- Offence of any kind
- Complaint, Murmur, Grumbling
- Anger and Resentment (Hosea 12:14)

[Resentment is indignation one feels toward someone else or toward a circumstance. This is compounded by a sense of one feeling seriously aggrieved within. Harsh or hard emotions tend to result.]

- Covetousness
- Jealousy
- Selfish Ambition

• Negative Life Circumstances

- The Sense of Loss

In the book of Ruth, due to economic pressure Naomi left Bethlehem in Judah, full and content, and journeyed with her husband to the land of Moab. They were attempting to escape economic pressure that the famine brought on everyone. They left an environment where the Word of God was highly appraised as indicated by the meaning of Bethlehem - House of Bread - bread being symbolic of God's Word. They went to a land, Moab, which means "What Father?" – a land where spiritual principles, especially the fathering principle or grace, is disesteemed. They placed economic security over spiritual well-being. In Moab, Naomi's husband and two sons died. In the meantime, God broke the famine in Bethlehem. Naomi returned to Bethlehem a bitter woman, even with a desire to change her name to **MARAH, which means bitter**. The name **Naomi means 'good, pleasant, agreeable'**, and the root of this name means GRACE. A name change meant a change in identity, nature and even destiny. She suffered a deep sense of loss that made her bitter. Now her bitterness was conditioning her entire person and began to characterise her.

Naomi Lost:

- Husband
- Sons
- One Daughter-in-law
- Social Status
- Economic Security

Naomi blamed God for her negative life circumstances. She was convinced that God dealt bitterly with her when in essence, the cause of her negative state was the inaccurate decision of her husband in leaving Bethlehem to go to Moab. Often bitter people tend to blame God for their negative

circumstances, sense of loss and unmet need, and usually refuse to take personal responsibility. Deliverance starts with an acknowledgement of wrong on our part.

Back home in Bethlehem, Naomi entered into principles in God's Word governing the process of redemption for her and Ruth. Principles of the Word will result in your freedom from bitterness that block off grace from operating in your life.

Life's hardship and disappointments made her bitter and angry, even against God Himself. Fortunately for her, it seems that from the second chapter of Ruth onwards, she overcomes her anger and resentment, assumes the role of a spiritual father toward Ruth, and the grace of God begins to flow and work in her life again. This secured not just full redemption for both her and Ruth, but also the grace of God ensured that through her wise and godly counsel over Ruth, King David would ultimately be born, from whose line the Messiah Jesus Christ would come (Ruth gave birth to Obed, who fathered Jesse, who fathered David).

Obed born to Ruth was to be to Naomi a restorer of life and sustainer in her old age. **Proof that Naomi started to deal with her bitterness was her focus on helping Ruth attain her total redemption.** Usually bitter people tend not to look out of themselves to perceive the need of others and position themselves to help others. Their intense bitterness usually makes them self-centred and so inwardly focused that they are blind to the need or hurt in others. Their own internal grief tends to cloud and monopolise all their energies. Fortunately, Naomi was able to transcend her own bitterness and help Ruth. In doing so, Ruth became to her 'better than sevens' sons (Ruth 4:15). The sense of loss she felt when her two sons died was now healed, for Ruth, her daughter-in-law was to her, better than seven sons. There is no telling the degree to which God is able to restore and give back what was lost to you if you overcome and get healed of your bitterness.

Naomi focussed on helping Ruth access total redemption, guiding her daily toward her ultimate marriage to Boaz, a marriage that would in essence redeem BOTH of them. Your own restoration could be accelerated by your seeking to fast-track someone else's restoration. Bitter days can become BETTER days!

Solution: Naomi's bitterness was Healed Because:

- She accessed a principle and the power of redemption.
 - She consciously focused on helping someone else.
- Actively seeking to help and facilitate someone else's breakthrough or progress, whilst you are bitter or hurting, could very well be the balm to your own internal healing and path to your own breakthrough. Try it; it works!

The Example of Joseph: Joseph landed in prison through false accusation for a crime he did not commit. In prison, Joseph interpreted other people's dreams and brought momentum to their destinies, whilst his own dreams remain unfulfilled. He did not allow the imprisoning circumstances of life to embitter him to a degree where the sense of unfulfillment in him prevented him from aiding someone else towards fulfilment in their lives.

In fact, his interpretation of the butler's dream would ultimately be the singular factor that would

equate to his ticket out from prison and position him to be second in command next to Pharaoh. You never know what outcomes await you when you help someone else even while you yourself need help. Don't allow negative life experiences to fixate your senses on your own condition such that you become blind to the hurt in others. In helping others, you are helping yourself. Fulfill or facilitate the realisation of someone else's dream and watch how God fast-tracks your own.

Abraham's Example: Abraham's prayer to God to open up the wombs of Abimelech's wife and his maidservants was made while he and Sarah were still trusting Him for their own son. Immediately after this, the barrenness of Sarah's womb is broken and Isaac is conceived.

The principle is clear: Pray for and facilitate someone else's fruitfulness, even while you are unfruitful, and God will break your barrenness.

Gen 20:17-18 So Abraham prayed unto God: and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maidservants; and they bare children. For the Lord had fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech, because of Sarah Abraham's wife.

Gen. 21:1-2a THEN the Lord took note of Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as He had promised. So Sarah conceived and bore a son ...

- **Unmet Needs Makes One Prone to Bitterness**

Prov. 27:7 (nasb) A sated man loathes honey, But to a famished man any bitter thing is sweet.

Prov. 27:7 (Nkjv) The satisfied soul loathes the honeycomb, but to hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet.

'Sated' means **'full, satisfied, abounding'**. As sweet and enticing as honey is as an enjoyable food and source of nourishment and energy, it is despised by the man who is physically fulfilled and satiated. His state of internal satisfaction causes him to refuse something as nutritionally beneficial as honey. This is contrasted with a famished man who is lacking in nourishment. To he who is not 'fed' properly and thus famished, even a bitter thing tastes sweet. The bitter thing - which in context seems harmful - appears desirable and pleasant because of his internal lack. This person is vulnerable to the reception of bitterness, because of certain deficiencies in his own life. The ease with which one is prone to bitterness indicates a serious vacuum in one's life. Paul said that he learned in whatever state he finds himself, to be content. It is important to guard oneself against being easily prone to the infection of bitterness because of difficult life circumstances, unmet needs, loss of any kind, abuse, hurts, etc. These will create a sense of deficiency and 'famishment' within you and make you susceptible to bitterness, which ultimately will cause you to be deficient in grace. The Holy Spirit, by whom grace flows, becomes grieved - and thus the flow and operation of grace becomes impeded (Eph. 4:30-32; Heb. 12:15).

We must not be fooled by the sweetness of bitterness. A soul in lack or want, etc. is prone to be deceived and cannot see or discern the lethal effect of bitterness (it tastes sweet to him/her). Internal dysfunctions or vacuums in the soul attract literally anything to fill it up and has the subtle effect of dowsing the senses as to whether the thing allowed in is good or bad for you.

Solution: Bitterness because of Unmet Needs can be healed by Learning CONTENTMENT

By the power of Christ within you, **learning to be content** with and in whatever condition you find yourself is key to not letting unmet needs make you bitter.

Phil. 4:11-13

- 11 Not that I am speaking of being in need, for **I have learned** in whatever situation I am to be content.
- 12 I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.
- 13 **I can do all things through him who strengthens me.**

Contentment in any and every circumstance is something you LEARN (Phil. 4:11). If it does not come naturally to you, then it can be learned. Also, do not attempt to learn it in your own power, but through Christ who strengthens you (Phil. 4:13). It is possible to live a godly life, yet be unhappy. If this is so, an extremely godly person can be imprisoned by bitterness. Great gain or advantage does not come to those who are godly only; rather it comes to those who add to their godliness, a huge dose of contentment, that safeguards their hearts against bitterness.

1 Tim. 6:6-8

- 6 But **godliness** actually is a means of **great gain** when **accompanied by contentment**.
- 7 For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either.
- 8 If we have food and covering, with these **we shall be content**.

Godliness that still accommodates complaint, discontentment and bitterness results in great PAIN irrespective of a claim to spirituality, but godliness accompanied by contentment and a sense of inward sufficiency is great GAIN.

1 Tim. 6:6 "Of course there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment" (NRSV)

- **Disappointment, Failed Expectations, Deferred Hope**

Prov. 13:12 **Hope deferred makes the heart sick, But desire fulfilled is a tree of life**

Hope is an ingredient of faith (Heb. 11:1a – Faith is the substance HOPED for). Hope is a mental attitude of expectancy regarding a positive future. Faith possesses it as a reality now. The ‘helmet of salvation’ is described as ‘hope’. Helmets are placed on the head, symbolically indicating a protection of the mind. When that for which we hope takes too long and sometimes has the remotest possibility of coming to pass, we ‘DEFER’ hope – post-poning it. Where pessimism dominates our thoughts regarding our future, or the future of our families’, a sickness enters the heart and soul. The word ‘sick’ here means to be ‘worn’ – figuratively alluding to a state of sickness, weakness, grief or wounded-ness. A spirit of grief, unhappiness and bitterness can set in if we remain in this condition.

Solution: The answer to this is to remain in a position of unswerving faith, like Abraham.

An Aside (1) : Parents should not promise their kids something they cannot provide for as it creates an expectation in the heart of the child, which if not met for too long a period, can create an open door for bitterness to settle.

An Aside (2) : If you have promised someone something or some favour, why not seek to do it as soon as you possibly can and bring the expectation or desire of the person to pass.

Unmet expectations in a child

A child who lacks wisdom, acts stupidly or is rebellious can make a parent bitter - this can apply naturally and spiritually:

Prov. 17:25 A foolish son is a grief to his father and bitterness to her who bore him.

Parents must not allow the waywardness of their children to inflict them with bitterness, anger or resentment towards them.

- **Covetousness and Jealousy/Envy is a Common Cause of Bitterness**

James 3:14-16

- 14 But if you have **bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart**, do not **be arrogant** and so **lie against the truth**.
- 15 This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is **earthly, natural, demonic**.
- 16 For where **jealousy and selfish ambition exist**, there is **disorder and every evil thing**.

Jealousy/Envy results from covetousness or envy over that which someone has, or the level of success they enjoy. Note in James 3:14 quoted above, it is described as 'BITTER jealousy' and is coupled with 'SELFISH AMBITION'. Having ambition in and of itself is not bad, but selfish ambition is frowned upon here. The bitter person has selfish ambition. Spiritual ambition, which is centred in self, fixates the accomplishment of a task or the attainment of some position, solely in bolstering the person's reputation in the eyes of others. By this, they derive their esteem and worth. So when they are unable to bring fruition to their intent, bitterness is further entrenched and finds a nesting ground within their hearts. Jealousy of others who attain their goals is then further nurtured and so the duo of bitter jealousy and selfish ambition becomes the fertile ground in which 'disorder' and 'every evil thing' grows and develops. There can be no positive result at all.

Solution:

- Centre your ambition in accomplishing outcomes that involve you but the attainment of which will also have a positive impact or blessing on others outside of you. This will prevent self-centredness and selfish ambition.
- Do not allow a spirit of competition to enter your heart. Jealousy thrives in a competitive environment. Celebrate the accomplishments of others, instead of becoming bitter by their successes. Do not rejoice over the failure of others, but rather seek to help them succeed. Do not see yourself as an individual but as a part of a greater whole. See yourself and others as complementary to each other and not in competition with each other.

- **ABUSE of any Kind**

Abuse in any form is a significant cause of bitterness. This includes physical, sexual, emotional, and even spiritual abuse. Emotional and spiritual scarring is inflicted and the ultimate intent of the enemy is to entrap us in discontentment, anger, hatred, etc. through unforgiveness, and thus render us ineffective in the pursuit of our life's calling in the Lord.

Solution: Forgive the one who has abused you - whether they have asked your forgiveness or not. Healing of your inner wound because of the abuse will be healed through the work of the Holy Spirit.

- **Offence of any Kind**

When you become offended over any matter, it has the potential to lead to bitterness.

Offence = skandalon = a trap stick, a snare; figuratively, an occasion to fall or stumbling; a cause of displeasure.

An offence, in the Greek, refers to the trigger of the trap, that part of the trap on which the bait is attached. If the animal who is targeted to be trapped goes for the bait, the trap is activated and the animal is caught. When we become 'offended', we have fallen for the bait of the enemy to ensnare us with bitterness.

Solution:

- **Watch for Triggers** : This could be anything designed to draw you into a carnal response or adopt a bitter mindset or emotion. Avoid the trap.
- **Become Offence Proof** :
You do this primarily through the priority you give to the hearing, meditation and obedience to God's Word. This produces GREAT PEACE, a disposition which makes you offence-proof.

Psalm 119:165 (nasb) : Those who love Your law have great peace, And **nothing causes them to stumble.**

Psalm 119:165 (kjb) : Great peace have they which love thy law; and **nothing shall offend them.**

- **Forgive Instantly.** (This will be the focus of our next session)

An Aside: It is possible to even get offended at God. Jesus became a rock of offence to the Jews, because in their minds, He failed to live up to their expectations as a Messiah. Thus they rejected him. John the Baptist, too, became offended at Jesus and questioned whether he in fact was the Messiah at all. See scriptures below.

Romans 9:32-33

- 32 Why? Because they (*i.e. Israel*) did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone,
- 33 just as it is written, "Behold, I lay in Zion A stone of stumbling and A rock of offense, And he who believes in Him will not be disappointed."

Matthew 11:2-6

- 2 Now when John, while imprisoned, heard of the works of Christ, he sent word by his disciples
- 3 and said to Him, "Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?"
- 4 Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and report to John what you hear and see:
- 5 the blind receive sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.
- 6 And blessed is he who does **not take offense at Me.**

Often we become offended at God when He fails to live up to our own self-conceived expectations of how we think He should work in our lives or on our behalf. Thus we become bitter and at worse will possibly reject him as OUR God. We must always allow God to work as He deems fit and do not try to squeeze Him to fit into our ideas of how and when He must work.

THE EXPRESSION OF BITTERNESS

Bitterness Manifests In the following Areas

- ❖ One's Speech
- ❖ Seen in One's Actions
- ❖ Revealed in One's Attitudes
- ❖ Breakdown in Physical Health
- ❖ Self-Centredness
- ❖ Fear of being hurt
- ❖ Fear and distrust of others
- ❖ Fear of inner hurts being exposed
- ❖ Loneliness and Isolation
- ❖ Critical Attitude; Complaint; Fault-finding
- ❖ Self-Pity and Oppression
- ❖ Rebellion and Stubbornness
- ❖ Disobedience of God's Principles in His Word

Some of these have already been hinted at in our study. Let us just focus on one aspect here. **HARSH SPEECH** often reveals bitterness in the heart. Out of the abundance of one's heart, your mouth speaks. Bitterness is most readily detected in the words of our mouths – the spirit and content of our conversations.

Rom. 3:14 "WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS";

James 3:8-12

- 8 But no one can tame the tongue; it is **a restless evil and full of deadly poison**.
- 9 With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God;
- 10 from the **same mouth** come **both blessing and cursing**. My brethren, these things **ought not to be** this way.
- 11 **Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water?**
- 12 Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Nor can salt water produce fresh.
- 13 Who among you is wise and understanding? **Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom.**
- 14 But if you have **bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart**, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth.
- 15 This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is **earthly, natural, demonic**.
- 16 For where **jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing**.
- 17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.
- 18 And the **seed whose fruit is righteousness** is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Using the words of our mouths to bless God but also simultaneously curse men is evidence that ...

- we are not spiritually mature,
- that our tongues have residue 'deadly poison' and
- that there is latent bitterness present within us.

Psalms 64:2-4

- 2 Hide me from the secret counsel of evildoers, From the tumult of those who do iniquity,
- 3 Who have **sharpened their tongue like a sword**. They aimed **bitter speech as their arrow**,
- 4 To shoot from concealment **at the blameless**; Suddenly they shoot at him, and do not fear.

Note here that bitter speech is likened as unto an arrow. The analogy is apt and highlights the fact that the speech of a bitter person can affect the pure and innocent (the blameless) who are far removed from the bitter person – as does an arrow when shot can reach and have a lethal effect on a target some distance away.

Complaining, murmuring and general negative or critical speech often indicate evidence of a bitter person.

Job 7:11 "Therefore I will **not restrain my mouth**; I will speak in the **anguish of my spirit**, I will **complain in the bitterness of my soul**.

Job 10:1 "I loathe my own life; I will give full **vent to my complaint**; I will **speak in the bitterness of my soul**.

Grace also is imparted through WORDS. When the words of our mouths are defiled by bitterness, then this nullifies the capacity for those words to be carriers and conduits of grace. Grace and bitterness cannot reside in the same mouth. The bitter person nullifies the effect of grace in his/her own life and also their ability to impart grace to others.

RESULTS OF BITTERNESS

ANGER, CLAMOUR, SLANDER, MALICE

Eph. 4:30-32

- 30 Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.
- 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.
- 32 Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

Note in Ephesians 4:30-32 quoted above, bitterness is listed together with 'wrath, anger, clamour, slander and malice'. These bedfellows of bitterness are the outflow of bitterness. Bitterness usually starts off with an offence, and if this initial offence is not dealt with speedily, it could spiral out of control leading to resentment, hatred, 'bitter jealousy' (James 3:14), slander, malice, rebellion and ultimately open up the person to deception and perversion. Bitterness is the seedbed for every evil work. Ideally, one should develop in maturity in the Spirit to a place where it becomes impossible for you to be offended in the first place – and this is possible. But where offence does occur, forgiveness should be instant and immediate to avoid 'trouble', 'defilement' and 'coming short of the grace of God'.

The Case Study of Esau: Read Gen 27:34 – 28:8

Jacob deceived his aged and blind father into believing that he was Esau, in order to secure the blessing of the firstborn son who had rights to the inheritance of his father. When Esau realised this, he became bitter and held a grudge against Jacob. This intensified into strong hatred for Jacob and he sought to kill him. On their mother Rebekah's advice, Jacob fled to Haran until Esau's anger subsided. This took twenty years.

Esau had no legal right to seek after the blessing of the firstborn, for he earlier had sold it to Jacob for a bowl of lentils. He dis-esteemed something valuable and spiritual. The inheritance of the firstborn was rightfully Jacob's (it was prophesied at their birth that the older would serve the younger). Jacob is at fault in the methodology he sought to access it. Esau felt betrayed, marginalised, etc. Sometimes we feel betrayed and tend to lay blame squarely at the feet of the person we perceive as having hurt us and not accept personal responsibility. Often, in spiritual matters, we show disdain for God's principles, and when we suffer the consequences, we blame God and others for what we should be accountable for. The focus tends to shift externally to persons or factors outside of ourselves.

Furthermore, Esau willfully disobeyed Isaac's command not to marry the daughters of Heth, just to bring injury to his father. A bitter person is willing to sacrifice biblical principles designed to safeguard and protect them, and embark upon a significant course of action or make strategic decisions (like marriage) not for their own betterment but for someone else's injury. This is malicious. Malice and bitterness are bedfellows.

GRIEVING OF THE PERSON AND WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Note the previous verse before verse 30 of Ephesians chapter 4 quoted above.

Eph. 4:29 Let no **unwholesome word proceed from your mouth**, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give **grace to those who hear**

Unwholesome speech emits from a bitter heart. This leads to carnal expressions described in our previous point above. The sum total effect of this is that the Holy Spirit becomes aggrieved (sorrowful and heavy) and thus is unable to effect His work and power in and through our lives. Bitterness has a stifling effect upon the person and work of the Spirit of God in our lives.

BITTERNESS – AN ENEMY OF GRACE

Divine grace is what causes you to become all that God has destined for you to be and to do all that HE has purposed for you. Bitterness resulting from offence is one of the greatest impeding factors to God's grace having its total effect in one's life. Bitterness works oppositely to grace. It prevents you from becoming all God destined you to be and to do. Through 'words' grace is released. Bitterness, which nullifies grace, is also released through words, which are toxic and have poisonous and lethal effects on the hearer.

Also, grace is received in vain if the recipient of that grace is prone to offence, which leads to bitterness and unforgiveness. This is seen in Hebrews 12, where we are warned not to "come short of grace":

Heb. 12:14-15 (NASV)

- 14 Pursue **peace with all men**, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.
 15 **See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;**

Note verse 15 in the following versions the Bible:

(KJV) : **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;**

(BBE) : **Looking with care to see that no man among you in his behaviour comes short of the grace of God; for fear that some bitter root may come up to be a trouble to you, and that some of you may be made unclean by it;**

(CEV) : **Make sure that no one misses out on God's wonderful kindness. Don't let anyone become bitter and cause trouble for the rest of you.**

(MKJV) : **looking diligently lest any fail of the grace of God, or lest any root of bitterness springing up disturb you, and by it many are defiled,**

(MSG) : Make sure no one gets left out of God's generosity. Keep a sharp eye out for weeds of **bitter discontent**. A thistle or two gone to seed can ruin a whole garden in no time.

(AMP) : Exercise foresight and be on the watch to look (after one another), to see that no one falls back from and fails to secure God's grace (His unmerited favour and spiritual blessing), in order that no root of resentment (rancor, bitterness or hatred) shoots froth and causes trouble and bitter torment, and the many become contaminated and defiled by it.



BITTERNESS CAUSES ONE TO COME SHORT OF GRACE

Heb. 12:15 See to it that no one COMES SHORT of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;

The phrase 'come short of grace' in Hebrews 12:15 is interesting.

'short' = *husteréo* = To be last, behind, posterior in place or time.
= To be behind, inferior, to lack; to be deficient

Coming short of grace means, in a literal sense, '**to be behind grace; to lack in grace**'. Grace is present – it is right there in a particular person, time or place, but you fail to access it – thus you come short of it and lack in it. Bitterness and its capacity to defile many leads to this position. Being at the forefront of God's purposes and will for your life personally or for the church corporately is an important feature of apostolic communities. We ought to be 'first' – and not 'last'. The phrase "coming short of grace", as is indicated in the meaning above, implies a posterior position – a last or inferior position. Our commitment to ensuring we do not succumb to bitterness will ensure that the continued reception and operation of the grace of God has its total and complete expression in and through us, and we maintain a first-fruit/firstborn position and function.

The context of this passage is one of relationships: note the emphasis 'peace with all men' (v.14) and 'many be defiled' (v.15). If for whatever reason, you allow a root of bitterness in you to defile others with whom you relate, then the grace of God within you will become frustrated as well as the ones who then become embittered by you.



BITTERNESS TROUBLES YOU

Note that the root of bitterness 'springing up' causes trouble in and among those in whom it is. The words 'springing up' denotes the quickness and ease with which bitterness can occur.

The seed of unforgiveness manifests itself in a root of bitterness which the verse above says '**TROUBLES you**'. The Greek word for 'troubles' is *enochleo*, which means "**to disturb, to annoy (causing distress)**". The root word means a "crowd or a throng".

The devil has a legal claim to trouble you to the extent where you feel like a crowd of people thronging you causing you great internal disturbance and annoyance – implying the **sense of overwhelming threat of danger**. The person who is bitter because of unforgiveness in his heart, issues an open invitation to the

enemy to **TROUBLE** him – he feels as though he been pressed in on all sides – there is no escape – no peace and no internal composure and rest. Bitterness troubles you internally.

Bitter people infect others with their bitterness troubling them – bringing upon them also an annoyance with people, or an internal disturbance about persons or situations that results in specific behavioural patterns and responses that lead to tension in relationships. Do not let anyone infect you with their bitterness virus; this will trouble, annoy and disturb you; and may affect your relationship with people. The God-given grace within you will be frustrated and you will always be ‘behind’ and function in an inferior position to what the grace given allows you.



BITTERNESS DEFILES MANY THROUGH NEGATIVE IMPARTATION THROUGH WORDS

Heb. 12:14-15 (NASV)

- 14 Pursue **peace with all men**, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.
 15 **See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;**

Notice also that bitterness contaminates others around you: “by this many become defiled”. The word ‘defiled’ here implies some degree of pollution or contamination. This could happen when one is hurt and shares it with others thereby transferring the hurt to a third party and more; and even if reconciliation takes place between the two original parties concerned, there may be a host of others that are still carrying the offence.

Bitterness in one individual has the potential to **DEFILE** many.

Defiled = miainō = to dye with another colour, to stain (Thayer)
 to defile, pollute, sully, contaminate, soil (Thayer)

The warning in Hebrews 12:15 is targeted at two types of people :

- 1) Those who are bitter
- 2) Those who permit themselves to be embittered by a bitter person

The effect of bitterness is likened unto a dye used to stain or re-colour something. The appearance of the element (e.g. cloth) which is dyed is transformed, usually permanently. This image is used to stress the severity of the effect of bitterness in that it could affect and alter a person significantly. A degree of contamination sets in, the impact of which is negative. Do not allow bitterness to settle within you and also do not allow yourself to be defiled by the bitterness of someone else.

THE INABILITY TO RECEIVE AND OBEY GOD'S WORD

Exodus 15: 22-25

- 22 Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness and found no water.
- 23 When they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter; therefore it was named Marah.
- 24 So the people grumbled at Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?"
- 25 Then he cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a tree; and he threw it into the waters, and the waters became sweet. There He made for them a statute and regulation, and there He tested them

Israel suffered as slaves for 430 years in Egypt. They developed a hardness and bitterness within because of their cruel bondage. Even after being set free and having crossed the Red Sea, they still had the residual effects of their historical enslavement within their hearts. This posed a serious barrier to their capacity to hear and obey God in their wilderness journeyings toward Canaan.

They thirsted, and when they drank water, it tasted BITTER to them, so they called that place 'Marah'. Water is symbolic of God's Word. God's Word is pure (Psalm 12) and not bitter. It was the bitterness of the people that superimposed itself onto the taste of the water. Until we deal with the bitterness in our hearts, even what is pure and sweet, will taste bitter. Bitterness will prevent the Word of God from having its total effect.

Titus 1:15 To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled.

Remaining bitter over an issue that occurred seven years ago will render of no effect the sermon you heard seven days ago. The tradition of the Pharisees nullified the power of God's Word. So too does bitterness for which the person has no inclination to seek healing for.

The tree thrown into the water represents the CROSS of Jesus Christ. His redemptive blood can heal you of your bitterness. When He died, you died with Him. All your hurt and pain was nailed to the cross, not just your sin. By His wounds you are healed of your own woundedness.

Results: Disobedience to God's Word/Voice

Isa. 50:4-5 The Lord GOD has given Me the tongue of disciples, That I may know how to sustain the weary one with a word. **He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple.** The Lord GOD has opened My ear; And I was not disobedient Nor did I turn back.

Listen = shama = to hear intelligently with a view to obedience.

The prophet affirms that he was not 'disobedient' and did not 'turn back' to that which God opened his ear to.

Disobedient = marah = to be bitter, to rebel

As is evidenced by the meanings of the words cited above, **disobedience, translated as bitterness here, can at times result because of depression, disappointment**, etc., within the soul that did not blindly follow the light received with the spirit. Many times we ‘flinch’ at the command of God, for although we have heard correctly, **we allow the negative state of the soul to predominate to a degree where our actual intention to obey established within our spirits is eroded by negativity within the soul.**

Connection to one’s Spiritual Father/Oversight and the Word they bring is Essential

Israel, because of their bitterness as a result of their long, cruel bondage in Egypt, initially could not listen to Moses, the one sent by God with his Word for them. Yet, heeding the Word of the Lord in Moses word was key to their deliverance.

Exod. 6:8,9 I will bring you to the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you for a possession; I am the Lord. So Moses spoke thus to the sons of Israel, but **they did not listen to Moses on account of their despondency and cruel bondage**

The KJV translates ‘**despondency**’ as ‘**anguish of spirit**’. The literal rendering of the term ‘despondency’ in this verse is “shortness of spirit”. Long-term slavery of almost 430 years made Israel so despondent that even when the Word of the Lord came to them, they could not embrace it and obey it, by virtue of the depression of the soul, that ultimately impacted their spirit capacity to resolve to obey. **Guard against discouragement and despondency.**

David’s four hundred men who gathered to him at Adullam were in bitterness of soul, but due to their connectivity to David who shepherded and guided them, they all overcame it and emerged **as mighty men of valour.**

1 Samuel 22:2 Everyone who was in **distress**, and everyone who was in **debt**, and everyone who was **discontented** gathered to him; and he became captain over them. Now there were about **four hundred** men with him.

The term ‘**distress**’ (matsoq in Hebrew) means ‘**a narrow place, confinement or disability**’. Narrowness or confinement produces distress and anguish in the **MIND**. The term, ‘**discontented**’ (‘mar marah nepesh’ in the Hebrew) here is translated ‘**bitter in soul**’.

The Need for Conscious Obedience:

Deut. 29: 14-19 (NLT)

- 14 “But you are not the only ones with whom I am making this covenant with its curses.
- 15 I am making this covenant both with you who stand here today in the presence of the Lord our God, and also with the future generations who are not standing here today.
- 16 “You remember how we lived in the land of Egypt and how we traveled through the lands of enemy nations as we left.
- 17 You have seen their detestable practices and their idols made of wood, stone, silver, and gold.
- 18 I am making this covenant with you so that no one among you—no man, woman, clan, or tribe - will turn away from the Lord our God to worship these gods of other nations, and **so that no root among you bears bitter and poisonous fruit.**

- 19 “Those who hear the warnings of this curse should not congratulate themselves, thinking, ‘I am safe, even though I am following the desires of my own stubborn heart.’ This would lead to utter ruin.

Disobedience and Rebellion

Neh. 9:26 “But they became disobedient and rebelled against You, And cast Your law behind their backs And killed Your prophets who had admonished them So that they might return to You, And they committed great blasphemies

Psalms 50:17 “For you hate discipline, and you cast My words behind you.”

Ezek. 23:35 “Therefore, thus says the Lord God, ‘Because you have forgotten Me and cast Me behind your back, bear now the punishment of your lewdness and your harlotries”

FORGIVENESS IS THE CURE FOR BITTERNESS

Deliverance from bitterness will not come through prayer or fasting. It comes through forgiveness. Living free of any kind of bitterness so that grace will have its complete work in our lives, demands that we master and live consistently in and by the principle of forgiveness. Deliverance and healing from bitterness comes through you making a conscious choice to sincerely forgive the one who has offended you. We will discuss forgiveness in our next session.

THE PASSOVER MEAL

Exodus 12:8 They shall eat the flesh that same night, roasted with fire, and they shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.

At Passover, the lamb was to be eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Unleavened bread is a picture of pure doctrine of God’s Word. This meal depicts how bitterness is to be dealt with. Bitterness, as represented by bitter herbs, was to be internalised along with the Lamb and His Word. The antidote to the negative effects of bitterness was the Lamb of God.

- Firstly, ... His sacrifice helps me to deal with my bitterness. He was bruised in His death on the cross for me; He bore my bitterness so that I do not have to accommodate it in me.
- Secondly, ... His character as the lamb – innocent, mute, sacrificial, living unto others, etc. is the posture I need to adopt in dealing with bitterness.
- Thirdly, ... if I accept the principles of His pure Word and live by them, bitterness can be extracted from my system and thus not have its intended effect.

Unleavened Bread. Bread is a symbol of the Word of God or doctrine – even of Christ Himself, the Bread of Heaven. Leaven indicates sin or erroneous doctrine.

Prior to Passover, the mother would plant ten pieces of leaven in the house; the father would find the leaven and sweep it into a wooden spoon – wrap it with a linen cloth – and cast it outside; next day he would burn it in the fire. The spiritual father has to turn the light on – turn on the WORD and find the leaven.

DO NOT ALLOW SUFFERING TO EMBITTER YOU

At His birth Jesus was given myrrh as one of His gifts. Myrrh symbolises suffering, and is also symbolic of bitterness. This gift was depictive of the life of suffering that Jesus would have to endure. But His suffering never produced bitterness within Him. Instead, through suffering, He fulfilled the will of His Father. Even at the height of His suffering on the Cross, He functioned in total forgiveness instead of harbouring anger and unforgiveness.

Jesus refused sour wine (vinegar) mixed with gall just before His crucifixion. Afterwards, when He hung on the cross, just before His death, He accepted the sour wine, without gall or myrrh (Matt. 27:48).

Matt. 27:34 they gave Him wine to drink **mixed with gall**; and after tasting it, **He was unwilling to drink**

This combination of sour wine (a common drink of the Romans) and bitter gall or myrrh had a sedative effect – it stupefies the senses. It was often given to those who were to be crucified to help deal with the pain

This was symbolic:

1. He refused assistance to help alleviate the pain and suffering attendant with the cross. He **fully** bore our pain and sorrow.
2. He did not allow His suffering to produce bitterness within Him. His willingness and readiness to forgive evidences this fact. He held no grudges or animosity towards those who crucified Him.

Consider Mordecai:

The name 'Mordecai' means 'little man'; 'bitter bruising'; 'bitterly reduced'; 'bitterness of my oppression'.

Mordecai's suffering brought him to a place of humility (Paul too). Suffering keeps us humble, but what God permits us to go through must not produce bitterness within us. This is Satan's intent. Mordecai was 'bitterly reduced' and was a 'little man', a term denoting his humility and lowliness, devoid of arrogance or pride. He was used mightily by God to lead Jews in humbling themselves before God through national fasting and he guided Esther to function effectively in the key role she played to bring deliverance for the Jews. At the time of a serious threat to his life and that of his people, the outcome of all his bitter sufferings produced within him a man of courage, fortitude and faith. Allow God to bitterly reduce you through the things He allows you to suffer, but be on guard as not allowing bitterness to enter your heart, and so render yourself ineligible to be used by God as a key role player in effecting His purposes.

A thorough understanding of the elementary doctrine of the Baptism of Suffering (Fire) is essential in order

to avoid bitterness from entering our hearts whilst we are in the vortex of our personal trials.

Take it to the Lord in Prayer

Hannah wept in bitterness of soul because she was barren. But, she directed her bitterness, pouring it out unto the Lord in deep prayer. We would do well to do the same.

1 Samuel 1:10 She, greatly distressed, prayed to the Lord and wept bitterly

(The phrase 'greatly distressed' in the original Hebrew is rendered 'bitter of soul')

CASE STUDY : SIMON, THE SORCERER

[Read Acts 8:9-24](#)

Acts 8:18-24

- 18 Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money,
- 19 saying, "Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."
- 20 But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!
- 21 "You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God.
- 22 "Therefore **repent of this wickedness of yours**, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you.
- 23 "For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity."**
- 24 But Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me yourselves, so that nothing of what you have said may come upon me."

In Samaria, Simon, the sorcerer, believes the message about the kingdom of God preached by Phillip, the evangelist, and follows him, observing many signs and great miracles that occurred. The Apostles at Jerusalem sent the apostles, Peter and John, to Samaria, who when they came, prayed for the people to receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Simon requested of them to grant him the power to do the same for a sum of money. The apostles perceived that he was wracked with a deep level of bitterness and bound by serious iniquity, even though he had believed the message of the Kingdom. Phillip, the evangelist, did not perceive this. Apostolic ministry is essential to bringing accuracy and rectitude to our personal and corporate lives. It unearths deeply entrenched patterns of thought or behaviour that are in contradiction to the ways of the Kingdom of God.

Simon had great success and fame as a sorcerer. Perhaps he was jealous and envious of the apostles as they functioned in the supernatural dimension of the Kingdom in administering the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Phillip, the evangelist, brought him to Christ, but the apostles Peter and John were intent in forming Christ within him. He was wracked with 'bitter jealousy', and this naturally led to thoughts of sin and iniquity. Saturated with bitterness, he thinks he could transact his way financially into securing the authority to administrate the impartation of the gift of the Holy Ghost to people. spiritual gifts. He surmised that spiritual power and authority could be attained through carnal means. This is what bitterness does to a person. **It blinds you to spiritual protocol and acceptable codes of conduct and behaviour within the Kingdom of**

(KJV), 'look with care' (BBE), 'make sure' (CEV), 'exercise foresight' (AMP) that none of us 'come short of grace' (NASV), 'misses or gets left out (CEV; MSG) of God's favourable dealings and empowerment of us. This demands a serious decision on our part. This is one area we must not find ourselves being subtly drawn, lured or sucked into. We must be vigilant that someone who carries an offence and root of bitterness does not affect us with the same, otherwise, grace is frustrated.

SEE TO IT that no root of bitterness SPRINGS up – it can happen so fast. We need to be vigilant. We must say as Jesus said, "The prince of this world has come but he has nothing in me' (John 14:30). We must not give 'place' to the devil' (Eph. 4:27) – i.e. do not let him find anything in us that is akin to him and thereby provide him ground or a foothold from which he might leverage his work in our lives. He must not find bitterness within us. We must constantly guard our hearts against bitterness and the enemy will not 'touch us' (1 John 5:18).

You prosper as your SOUL prospers. All forms of total life prosperity hinge upon the degree to which our souls are prospering. Bitterness in the soul can never result in the better-ness of your life. Entrance into an abundant life requires the exodus of bitterness from your life. To 'taste' prosperity, demands the release of bitterness, Be free today of any residual bitterness and enter into all of God's purposes for your life.

Job 21:25 (Esv) Another dies in BITTERNESS OF SOUL, never having TASTED OF PROSPERITY.

There are some who not only live in bitterness, but DIE in bitterness. This is probably the most saddest and miserable condition to exit this life. Do not take your bitterness to the grave. Take it to the cross. Forgive and ask God to heal the bruise in your soul.

3 John 2 (Nasb) Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just AS YOUR SOUL PROSPERS.

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