

Lesson 2:

The Destruction Caused by Bitterness¹

- I. Matthew 18:21-35 provides a study of the “Unmerciful Servant.”
- A. To be “turned over to the jailers” is a picture of God withholding the fullest extent of His mercy so that we reap what we have sown (Galatians 6:7).
1. We will bring about our own misery, while blaming everyone else, until we become willing to forgive.
 2. It is not what others have done to us that has the power to take our peace and joy. It is our refusal to forgive them that brings torment.

*God’s purpose in turning us over to tormenting emotions
is **REDEMPTIVE** not **PUNITIVE!***

- II. Ephesians 4:26-27 tells us that we can give “ground” to Satan through unresolved anger.
- A. “Foothold” is defined as “a position usable as a base for further advance.”²
In a battle, it would mean giving ground to the enemy.
- B. Unforgiveness becomes a “root of bitterness.”

¹ Bill Gothard, *How to Tear Down the Stronghold of Bitterness* © 1992 by IBLP. Used by permission. Ideas behind the material used in this chapter were influenced by Mr. Gothard’s teaching.

² By permission. From *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary* © 2004 by Merriam-Webster, Incorporated. (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/>).

*A root of bitterness is prolonged unforgiveness and unresolved anger
that lies just beneath the surface.*

III. Bitterness defiles the soul.

A. Hebrews 12:14-15: (“Defile” =“To corrupt or make filthy”³).

Bitterness corrupts our soul, decreasing our capacity to love God and receive His love in return.

B. Psalm 23: When we repent, God restores our soul (our mind, will and emotions).

C. Begin the Process of Forgiveness

1. Forgiveness is a choice that we make, and then a process we work through, as we surrender control to the Holy Spirit.

2. The past is not truly in the past until we deal with it. If we’re still harboring unforgiveness in our heart, it is today’s sin, no matter how long ago the offense may have occurred.

The Process of Forgiveness

Please begin by asking the Lord to help you make a list of all whom you have not truly forgiven; those toward whom you have negative feelings or from whom you have closed off your affections. It’s important to ask the Lord to show you, since you may have blocked out your bitterness towards someone. Include yourself (ways in which you

³ *ibid.*

have degraded yourself through sin, or injured and failed others, etc.). You may need to include God on your list, not because He can sin against you, but you may have become bitter towards Him because of situations He allowed in your life (“Lord, if you love me, how could You let this happen?”).

On a sheet of paper, make two columns on which you can list (on the left) the names of those God brings to mind. Under each name, state honestly what they did that so deeply hurt you. (It really does help to write it down and look at it.) Then, in the right hand column, beside each name, honestly state your sinful response to them. How have you retaliated? If you did not forgive, then you did retaliate; those are our only two options. Also, I’ve found that we all retaliate in different ways. Some people are soft spoken and non-confrontational, but may talk about their offender and slander them behind their back. We’re all guilty of that at times, aren’t we? That’s what is called passive-aggressive. It’s making someone pay in an indirect way. Other ways of retaliating are giving our offender the cold shoulder, or acting angry with them. What is your method of retaliation?

Hold onto this list temporarily, since we will be referring to it in the next lesson.

Prayer for Freedom From Bitterness

“Heavenly Father, please do not treat me as my sins deserve, but have mercy on me. I confess that I have harbored unforgiveness in my heart, and that I have not walked in love. I realize that much of my pain was a result of my own unforgiveness, and that I have deceived myself. Only You can change me. I am trusting in You for the ability to show mercy to my offender and to allow Your Word to transform me. I pray that the life and virtue of Jesus Christ would be made manifest in me. For it is in Christ’s Name I pray. Amen.”

This Week’s Memorization Verse: Matthew 6:15

“But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

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Small Group Discussion Questions

Note to Discussion Leaders: It is helpful to begin by asking the women if there was some point in the lesson that they identified with, or that was new to them, before turning to the following discussion questions.

1. Can you think of a specific example in your life where you struggled to forgive someone? How did that make you feel?
2. You may, or may not, have been deeply wounded as a child. Regardless, we all have had times when we have let unresolved anger turn into bitterness, and even hatred, toward a person. Can you think of a time when bitterness affected your life? If not, where are you in that process?
3. Bitterness can be a generational stronghold. As you look back over your past, do you see any pattern in your relationships where you held a grudge? Was there a pattern in your family, or in the family of someone close to you, where you saw this stronghold.