

‘Growing through Bitterness’. (5)

I was reading the news the other day and came across some interesting information about different banks. Following last week’s news that Origami Bank had folded, we are hearing that Sumo Bank has gone belly up and Bonsai Bank plans to cut back some of its branches. Karaoke Bank is up for sale and is going for a song. Meanwhile, shares in Kamikaze Bank have nose-dived and 500 back-office staff at Karate Bank got the chop. Analysts report that there is something fishy going on at Sushi Bank and staff there fear they may get a raw deal.

I would guess that some of you have been in raw deals or someone close to you has. Sometimes we make big deals out of what is really a rather small slight. But sometimes, there are very big wounds and they’re very unfair, and some of us in this church have been victims of raw deals.

People have said in their marriage vows, ‘Until death do us part’ but their partner didn’t mean it when they said it. You’ve devoted your entire working life to one employer, only to read in the paper, that you’ve lost your job. You grow up in a home where a parent has an addiction or you were abused, that’s a raw deal. You’ve given away your life savings to help a family member who promised to pay you back, and they haven’t. Perhaps your GP has misdiagnosed your problem and you’ll suffer for the rest of your life. And the list could go on and on of bad deals.

Now, here’s the point, Satan wants the wound to incapacitate you, for as long as possible. What he wants to do is help you cultivate a long-standing resentment against your offender. And the irony is that the bitterness you develop usually winds up hurting more than the original offence. **How have you been handling your raw deals?**

Here’s what the Bible says, **Hebrews 12:14+15** “Seek peace with all people, and the holiness without which no one can ever see the Lord. Be careful that no one is deprived of the grace of God and that no root of bitterness should begin to grow and make trouble; this can poison a large number”.

Perhaps today you are hurting over things that are unfair, underneath much of our misery is a root of bitterness. It’s interesting that the Holy Spirit chose the metaphor of a root to speak about bitterness, because you don’t see roots. We see the stalk, we see the branch, we see the trunk, we even see the fruit, but we don’t see the roots. That’s exactly how bitterness operates, bitter people rarely realise that they are and even rarer, they won’t not admit they are.

You see bitterness is an underground sin, it festers, it grows, it’s poisonous but no one really sees it. In fact, if you say to somebody your problem is bitterness, they’ll probably get angry and deny it with all their being. But the indisputable fact of the matter is this, there are an awful lot of sour saints. **Hebrews** was not written to unbelievers, it was written to Christians. The Holy Spirit says to the church, you be careful when you’re wounded, you be careful that you don’t allow a root of bitterness grow under the surface and spread its poison.

You see, the one who allows resentment to linger, not only hurts themselves, but they usually end up hurting other people too. Look again at **Hebrews 12:15** “Be careful that no one is deprived of the grace of God and that no root of bitterness should begin to grow and make trouble; this can poison a large number.”

That’s the irony about bitterness, you have allowed bitterness to spoil. You’re hurting yourself and you’re hurting the people around you, you love the most, as that poison spreads. There are many examples. **The woman who goes through a painful divorce, it’s awful. Evil should never have been allowed to visit her but she allows her spirit to become so angry, that the poison ends up affecting her kids. Or a guy who loses his job, he gets so resentful, that you can hardly stand being around him.**

There’s a lot being said in the media just now, about how much your future health depends on what you eat. That’s probably true but your future health also depends on what eats you. You may not be responsible for the initial hurt. But you must take responsibility if you have allowed bitterness to take root because of that hurt.

Two monks on a journey come across a woman standing by a river and she’s crying her heart out. They stop and ask what’s wrong and she told them she needed to get across the river but the bridge was down. The **first monk** said, ‘Don’t worry, we’ll carry you across.’ They made a seat with their hands and carried the woman across and sat her down. They walked about a mile and the **2nd monk** said, ‘Look how filthy my habit is, because we carried that stupid woman across the river!’

He walked another mile and complained his back was sore because he had to carry that stupid woman across the river. A few miles further on, he fell to the ground and said he couldn't go on because he was so worn out from carrying that stupid woman across the river. The 1st monk said, 'Do you know why you have not heard me complain?' He asked, 'Why?' He said, 'Because you're still carrying that woman. But I sat her down five miles ago!'

There was a book written about the great confederate general, Robert E. Lee. It was called 'Lee - the last years of his life.' Lee as an old man was visiting a woman in Kentucky and she took him out onto the porch and showed him what was once a majestic old tree that had been destroyed by union canons. She complained and expected Lee to commiserate with her, Lee looked at the old tree and said, 'Cut it down my dear and forget about it.'

That's what you need to do, you have to cut that root of bitterness down, root it out. Ephesians 4:31 says 'Any bitterness or bad temper or anger or shouting or abuse must be far removed from you, as must every kind of malice'. Get underneath the surface and root it out, and here's how to do that.

1. Don't curse your offender. That's the worldly thing to do, when we get struck, we want to retaliate, when we get wounded, we want to wound back. And it is so easy to rationalise, it's so easy to justify your offence and to want to hurt back. Most people in life think you survive by hurting back, you slap me and I'll slap you back harder.

A dog bit a woman and she went to her GP who told her that she had caught rabies. The woman pulled out a piece of paper and began writing. Her GP said, 'You don't need to write a will, there's a cure for rabies.' 'This is no will', said the woman. 'This is a list of people I want to bite.'

That's how we think, I can give it back as good as I can take it! Why do we think we can heal a wound, by causing another one? Why do you think by hurting someone else that is going to help your hurt? The Bible says in Romans 12:14 "Bless your persecutors; never curse them, bless them". Don't curse your offender, if someone hurts you, the first thing you want to do is shout at them to God.

You want to curse them to God, you might even want God to damn them. You certainly aren't going to pray for them. And then you're going to mouth about them to anyone that will listen. You'll make sure that you'll tell everyone how bad they are and how badly you've been treated. And if you get a chance, boy, you'll tell them right to their face how miserable they are, that's cursing someone.

Any time you curse, you have just admitted that you did not ask W. W. J. D. What Would Jesus Do? Do we have any record of Jesus cursing when He was wounded? Check out the record in 1 Peter 2:23 "He was insulted and did not retaliate with insults; when he was suffering he made no threats but put his trust in the upright judge."

You want to let your enemy have it? The Bible says no! Do what Jesus did, let God have it. Just hand over the whole situation to God and trust Him with it, if you need to talk out your pain, talk it out with God, don't curse your offender.

2. Don't nurse your pain. Bitter people look for reasons to justify how they feel. If you want to justify your bitterness, you'll find out it's pretty easy to do, you'll come up with some good arguments. Bitter people will articulate their injustice over and over to anybody that will listen, all you're doing is nursing that pain. You could rationalise your resentment.

How does holding onto it change the past or repair broken relationships? Some people cling to their pain, they seem to enjoy it, it has become their new identity. I'm the woman who got abandoned, I'm the kid who grew up with an alcoholic dad, I'm the guy that fought in Iraq and got messed up by the Government. And that's going to be their identity for the rest of their lives.

The Bible says no, there's a better way, you deal with your resentment immediately and radically. Ephesians 4:26+27 "Even if you are angry, do not sin: never let the sun set on your anger or else you will give the devil a foothold". When you nurse your anger, you are letting yourself become vulnerable to satanic intrusion. You're saying to the devil, 'I'm going to take off my armour on this whole side of my body, go ahead, shoot all the darts you want right here.' What you do not release, you will begin to resemble.

The founder of the American Red Cross was reminded one time of a person who had years before done something very ugly to them. The founder acted like she couldn't recall it.

Someone asked her 'if she was saying she could not remember that'. To which she replied that 'she distinctly remembered forgetting it'.

Don't nurse that pain, instead do this. You rehearse how God has forgiven you, you will never eagerly dispense grace until you understand how much you need it. Remember in Matthew 18? There was a guy who owed somebody an absolute fortune, he was up to his eyes in debt to another man. It was so horrendous he knew he could never pay it off.

The man who was owed the money told the guy he would wipe the slate clean. He didn't have to pay a single penny of his debt, then this guy found someone else who owed him a few bob, a pittance in fact. But what did he do? Matthew 18:30 tells us that he had his debtor thrown in jail. When the first man found out what had happened that someone whom he had released from a huge debt wouldn't release someone from a small debt, he had him thrown in jail eternally.

The point of the parable is this, we have run up debts in different ways. But every single one of us are debtors and none of us could pay our debt before God. But we have a God who freed us from our debt even though we had wounded Him greatly. Have you ever seen a front door mat which reads, 'Welcome Enemies'? Because God has a mat just like that on the front door of His heart, that's the only reason we are saved.

How can we receive unlimited grace from a God like that and then decide that we have the right to dispense grace in measured amounts as it pleases us? The parable doesn't say the man was angry because the guy had a huge debt, he was angry because the guy wouldn't forgive his neighbour. You say can, 'But I have been wronged! And justice demands that someone pays for that wrong.'

There's a hill outside of Jerusalem called Calvary and that's where Someone did pay for it. Why do you want your enemy to pay for something that Jesus has already paid for? If the blood of Jesus has satisfied God for the sin, why are you still not satisfied? You see, the cross has invalidated all justification for holding a grudge.

Ephesians 2:16 "And through the cross, to reconcile them both to God in one Body; in his own person he killed the hostility." That doesn't mean you still can't hate, it means you don't have a right to. You have no right because of the righteousness of the cross of Jesus to be holding onto a grudge with anybody. We have got sufficient motivation to let go of bitterness. That's not the problem, the problem is, we don't have sufficient desire.

Matthew 18:30 "But the other would not agree; on the contrary, he had him thrown into prison till he should pay the debt." That's the problem with bitterness, we aren't willing to let go of it, we want to hang on to it, and we want to hold people in our debt. The struggle to forgive is the struggle of the will and to soften your will, you have to do some serious business at the cross. Forgiveness is hard but so was Calvary and that's our model.

Ephesians 4:32 "Be generous to one another, sympathetic, forgiving each other as readily as God forgave you in Christ". Colossians 3:13 "Bear with one another; forgive each other if one of you has a complaint against another. The Lord has forgiven you; now you must do the same." The cross does not make forgiveness easy, but it does make it possible.

How do you root out that bitter spirit? Don't curse, that won't help it, don't nurse it, that won't help it. You rehearse what God did for you and you dispense the hurt by going and doing likewise. You do what God did, you focus on your enemy's needs instead of your hurts. You act, instead of react, you initiate instead of retaliate.

If you listened closely to our Scripture reading from Luke 6:27-36 you would have noticed that Jesus said time and time again that Christianity is active, not passive. Here's the bottom line. Christians are warriors, they're not just survivors, we're not trying to survive evil, we're trying to conquer evil. You conquer evil by throwing good back at it, God is stronger than evil.

When you root out bitterness and do good to your enemy, it may not change your enemy, but it will change you. God's in the changing people business, God will be relentless if you hold onto bitterness. Nails did not silence Jesus, He prayed for His enemies.

Luke 23:33+34 “When they reached the place called The Skull, there they crucified him and the two criminals, one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, “Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing.” Then they cast lots to share out his clothing”.

What are you going to let silence yours? Have you ever seen an iceberg? Those things are huge but all you see is a just a glimpse of what lies beneath the sea. You see we can't see what's rooted deep inside each other but I do know from experience if bitterness is rooted deep within your soul you need to root it out. Because it is just going to gnaw away at your faith and your relationship with God and His people.

Don't let Satan get a hold of you with bitterness, let it go by talking to God about it. Our God is big enough to take it and listen, He understands when people hurt you and let you down, He's been there in more ways than we will ever experience in this life. But He will not change His mind on Colossians 3:13, “Forgive as the Lord forgave you”. Don't dwell on things and people who really hurt you years ago, it's time to let go.

Love ones, will you let go today of any bitterness you may have? Will you allow Jesus to take it away today?

I hope and pray that you do because like I said speaking from experience the joy will come into your life when you throw out the bitterness from your life. To grow through bitterness you need to practice what Jesus preached a little earlier in our Scripture reading. Love your enemies, do good to them, feed them when they are hungry, give them clothes when they are cold, and visit them when they are sick.