



Week 2: Freed from Bitterness

Big Idea

Forgiveness of others the way God forgives us is the key to letting go of bitterness.

Ice Breaker

If you were made “King for the Day” what law would you make (or get rid of) to eliminate one of your “pet peeves”?

The Problem

Bitterness holds many of us hostage and stops us living in the freedom God desires for us.

We all get hurt and betrayed. When we don't handle it the way God wants us to, we absorb the pain we feel and it grows inside us.

1. What is your immediate reaction to someone hurting or betraying you? How do you feel after a few hours? And a few days?

Scripture describes bitterness as a poisonous root. Hebrews 12:14-15.

“Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy, because without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and to defile many.”

Did you ever put white flowers into ink and watch their color change as the ink was absorbed up the stems and taken into the flowers themselves? Bitterness produces a poisonous fruit. As we store bitterness and hatred inside us our lives start to reflect hatred, anger and rage. Our relationships are poisoned. We all know what it feels like to be in a situation where one bitter person with a personal agenda can affect the whole tone of the gathering. It is hard to admit to being a bitter person so we find reasons (or excuses) to justify our feelings. Here are five qualities of a bitter person

1. Tend to justify their bitterness – I deserve to be angry after what they did to me.
2. Overly critical – You pick apart the person you are angry with.
3. Secretly celebrate the misfortunes of others – God is leveling the score
4. Tend to write off entire groups of people – Hurt by one or two in the group, but mistrust the whole group.
5. Struggle to see the bitterness in themselves – Say, “if only so or so were here to hear this”! Everyone else sees your bitterness but you don’t.

2. Do you identify with any of these qualities? Which of them do you struggle with the most? Why do you think that is?

3. How do you think bitterness has affected your life in the past? How is it affecting your current relationships?

4. How do you feel when you think about your struggles with bitterness? Do you feel like you’ve gotten better or worse when it comes to bitterness, as you’ve gotten older?

Jesus gave us some high standards for our relationships in Matthew 5: 43-48

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy’. But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even the pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly father is perfect.”

Jesus said we need to show love to all of those in our lives, including those we may think of as enemies. A loving spirit towards those that have hurt us demonstrates that we are God’s people.

5. Who are the “enemies” in your life right now?

6. What makes it so difficult to love them?

7. What would have to happen in your heart in order for you to be able to pray for an enemy?

Now what?

We are given clear instruction in the Bible on how we should deal with the hurts and betrayals that come our way.

Ephesians 4:31-32. “Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words and slander, as well as all types of malicious behavior. Instead be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.” (NLT)



We need to acknowledge whom we are bitter with. We need to kill the root of bitterness with forgiveness. I am a big fan of Roundup to kill the weeds in my yard. It's all too easy to pull the tops off the weeds but they soon grow back. Roundup gets right to the roots and totally kills the plant so it has no chance of returning. Many of us have been hurt in ways that seem impossible to forgive. We don't really want to forgive. It seems too difficult when the hurt is too deep and well established in our lives. We get used to feeling the hurt. We need to acknowledge the depth of the hurts in our lives. When we remember how God has forgiven us then we are able to start forgiving others. If we choose not to forgive, we are allowing that person to continue to hurt us over and over, because we carry that pain with us. The pain will grow and affect our other relationships if we do not let it go and ask God to help us to forgive.

8. Have you been able to forgive someone in the past? Share how God has helped you on your journey. What lessons did you learn that might help others in a similar situation right now?

9. If you are currently struggling with bitterness towards someone in particular, how can you begin to forgive him or her? How can the group help you?

Remember: Bitterness ruins... forgiveness restores.

What's Next

Don't forget the truths you have received this week. If you identified someone in your life that you need to forgive, take steps to forgive him or her. Pray for them and ask God to bless them. Pray for strength to let the pain go and live in freedom from bitterness. Ask someone you trust to pray with you and share with him or her how you are doing.

Journal the changes in your heart as you continue to pray for those you thought of as your enemies. Take time to read Matthew 18:21-35 and journal what God is telling you through this passage.

Week 2 Leader's Guide - Freed From Bitterness

1. Allow people time to express themselves. Everyone has an answer but not everyone can express their feelings as eloquently as the next person.
2. Encourage everyone in the group to name one and explain why that one has become their particular struggle.
3. Try not to dwell too long on stories of despair. We will be looking for answers later on.
4. Again, allow time for people to think before they express their feelings. Everyone's feelings are valid, if not always too positive. People may feel defeated, frustrated, disappointed, that they should know better.
5. Jesus equates enemies with those we feel bitter towards, the people we are in broken relationships with. Don't let people get off the hook with abstract political views at this point.
6. Some people are difficult to love but Jesus is calling us out on our lack of love and true compassion. Remember harmonious living is not in Satan's plan for our lives.
7. This might be a difficult question for people to answer. It demands a real change of attitude. Sometimes we just have to do what we are told to do and trust God to do the rest.
8. Here is a time for celebration. This is not a time for "advice giving", but a time for genuine sharing of past victories. Allow time for interaction and comments between group members. Encourage conversation with comments such as "tell me more", "what does everyone else think?" rather than your own reaction.
9. Forgiveness starts with viewing the enemy the way God sees them. God loves that person and sees the potential in them. We need to get ourselves into perspective. The other person may well be hurting himself or herself. Remember holding onto bitterness will make us into bitter people and stop us enjoying the freedom God desires for us.