



+ **YOU**

Sermon Series: How to Avoid Life's Pitfalls
To be used with Session 5: The Pitfall of Bitterness

Sermon Title Possibilities: Overcoming Bitterness

Scripture: Genesis 45:1-5,9-11

Connection with Unit Theme: To complement the small group study *"How to Avoid Life's Pitfalls: The Pitfall of Bitterness,"* use this sermon outline. Bitterness is continual anger and disappointment because of unfair treatment. The actions of others towards us—hatred, betrayal, defamation, neglect—can leave some people bitter all of their lives. In his song, "God Favored Me," Hezekiah Walker wrote: "They whispered, conspired, they told their lies (God favors me), my character, my integrity, my faith in God (He favors me), will not fall, will not bend, won't compromise (God favors me)." It is the ability to see God's favor in unfavorable circumstances that helps us to forgive those who've wronged us and prevent the pitfall of bitterness.

Introduction: Joseph was released from prison (Gen. 41:14), interpreted Pharaoh's dream (Gen. 41:25-32), counseled Pharaoh on how to handle a future famine (Gen. 41:33-36), and as a result was given authority over all of Egypt (Gen. 41:41-44).

The famine became so severe that Joseph's own brothers were forced to buy food in Egypt (Gen. 42:1-5). But his brothers do not recognize him (Gen. 42:6-9). Concealing his identity, Joseph put his brothers through a series of tests (Gen. 42-44:1-17). After seeing their change of heart (Gen. 44:18-34), Joseph finally revealed himself (Gen. 45:1-4), and not only displayed no bitterness, but acted in forgiveness (Gen. 45:4-14).

The remarkable attitude and actions that Joseph demonstrated teach us valuable lessons in how to overcome bitterness and forgive those who've sinned against us (Matt. 6:12).

1. Release your hurt. (vv. 1-3)

While we do not sorrow like those who have no hope (1 Thess. 4:13), even Jesus wept over the death of his friend Lazarus (John 11:35).

Ecclesiastes 3:4 says, there is "a time to weep and a time to laugh." When we finally release the pain from past experiences, we often find that while weeping may have an extended stay, it is still temporary, and that joy often follows when we let healing tears flow. Psalm 126:5 declares, "Those who sow in tears will reap with shouts of joy."

Lifeway

© 2021 Lifeway Christian Resources

The Biblical Counseling Coalition states:

“Scientific evidence indicates that when we cry, the body releases stress-relieving endorphins like when we exercise. These chemicals help us feel better and stabilize our moods. Tears also release built-up toxins from emotional stress.”¹

The presence of God and the purpose of tears helps to explain Joseph’s ability to overcome bitterness and forgive his brothers.

2. Embrace those who’ve hurt you. (vv. 4,14)

Joseph was able to embrace his brothers after a period of demonstrable repentance (Gen. 44:14-16,18-35). While Jesus calls for us to forgive immediately (Matt. 18:21-22), the restoration of relationships often takes time (John 21:15-19).

There are times when financial debt may be forgiven. However, financial institutions may not lend money nor extend credit cards because the restoration of credit takes time. We demonstrate our understanding of debt forgiveness by paying our bills on time, which then builds up our credit score and earns the trust of financial institutions to lend money and extend credit cards to us again. Just like our credit has to be built up again, relationships have to be built up again.

3. Acknowledge that God allowed your hurt to help others. (vv. 5-8)

While God does not always agree with what He allows, He can use what He allows to accomplish His purposes (Rom. 8:28). Joseph recognized that God used the hurt he experienced to position him to help save people’s lives (v. 5).

It’s one thing for God to use your hurt to help other people. It’s another thing when God uses your hurt to help those who previously hurt you. Joseph acknowledges that what happened to him was to save the very brothers who betrayed him (vv. 6-11). This insight was not only because of Joseph’s relationship with God, but Joseph also understood God’s prophecy concerning his people (Genesis 50:25). Proverbs 2:6 says, “For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.” Psalm 119:105 declares, “Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light on my path.”

In light of the cross, Christians should not be surprised that God uses our hurts to help others, even those who hurt us. Jesus died to save those who hurt Him (Luke 23:34; Rom. 5:6-10). What is more remarkable about Joseph is that his insight was before the cross!

4. **Do good to those who've hurt you** (vv. 10-11)

In order to overcome bitterness and truly forgive we have to put feet to our forgiveness by doing good to those who've hurt us. Jesus said, "But I tell you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you... Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." "Perfect" can be translated *complete*. An attitude of forgiveness is completed by acts of forgiveness.

Conclusion: When it comes to forgiveness, it is more than an attitude. It's an action word. When we release our hurt, embrace those who've hurt us, acknowledge that God uses our hurts to help others, and do good to them as well, that is complete forgiveness and helps us to overcome bitterness in our lives.

Jerome F. Coleman is a graduate of Luther Rice University (MDiv) and Carolina University (DMin). He has pastored the First Baptist Church of Crestmont, Willow Grove, PA for over 13 years. He has been married to Kimberly for 25 years, and they have two adult daughters and one granddaughter.

1. Coulter, Karen. "A Time to Cry." *Biblical Counseling Coalition*. Downloaded from <https://www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/2011/10/19/a-time-to-cry/>.