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“From Bitter to Better”

Acts 8:4-25

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Have you ever battled bitterness? It’s not that uncommon. Bitterness usually sets in after one painful or disappointing event, or series of events, that rob people of the joy they once had. Sometimes bitterness is expressed outwardly—people who are mean, angry, moody, and negative. But sometimes bitterness is internal—people who are suffering on the inside but smiling on the outside. Whether external or internal, God wants to heal us of bitterness and restore the joy of our salvation.

1. [Acts 8:4-25](#) - *“Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word. Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. And there was great joy in that city. But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, ‘This man is the great power of God.’ And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time. But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done. Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, ‘Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit.’ But Peter said to him, ‘Your money*

perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity.’ Then Simon answered and said, ‘Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me.’ So when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.”

2. A man named Simon

- a. Because of persecution, the early church followers began to scatter into the countries surrounding Israel
- b. Philip, one of the original deacons, went to Samaria and began evangelizing
- c. Simon, a man who formerly practiced sorcery, was saved
- d. Upon seeing individuals receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands by the apostles Peter and John, Simon offered money in exchange for the same power
 - i. He wanted the prestige that came with being the conduit through which people received the baptism of the Holy Spirit
 - ii. Peter, by discernment of the Holy Spirit, recognized bitterness and envy in Simon’s heart

3. Common causes of bitterness

- a. Envy and jealousy about what others have that you don’t
 - i. This was the attitude Peter recognized in Simon
 - ii. Simon was envious of the power the Lord had granted the apostles
 1. **Acts 1:8** – *“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*
- b. The disappointments of life
 - i. Hannah struggled with bitterness when she could not conceive
 1. **1 Samuel 1:10** – *“And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed to the Lord and wept in anguish.”*
- c. Betrayal and rejection by other people
 - i. Esau dealt with bitterness when his brother Jacob took the blessing that was supposed to be his
 1. **Genesis 27:34** – *“When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, ‘Bless me – me also, O my father!’”*
- d. The hardships and misery of life
 - i. Job faced bitterness when God allowed him to face the loss of his family, possessions, and health

1. **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.”*
 - e. Personal loss and the death of loved ones
 - i. Naomi became bitter after the death of her husband and two sons
 1. **Ruth 1:20** – *“But she said to them, ‘Do not call me Naomi [Pleasant]; call me Mara [Bitter], for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.’”*
 - f. Personal failure
 - i. Peter was bitter as he grieved over his denial of Jesus
 1. **Luke 22:62** – *“So Peter went out and wept bitterly.”*
4. Dealing with bitterness
- a. Bitterness affects all those around us and is a sin against God
 - b. When we allow bitterness to settle in our hearts, we become sour
 - c. God commands us to get rid of bitterness
 - i. **Ephesians 4:31-32** – *“Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.”*
 - ii. **Hebrews 12:14-15** – *“Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled.”*
 - d. God wants to heal us of any bitterness
 - i. Getting rid of bitterness almost always involves forgiveness—either toward someone else or yourself
 - ii. We must pray for God to remove any bitterness
 1. **Acts 8:24** – *“Then Simon answered and said, ‘Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me.’”*

Discussion Questions

1. Read **Acts 8:4-25** to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Why did Peter rebuke Simon?
3. Read through the common causes of bitterness. Are there any you identify with? How have you experienced bitterness in your own life? (See #3 above)
4. Read **Ephesians 4:31-32** and **Hebrews 12:14-15**. Why is it important that we deal with bitterness? (See #4a-#4cii above)

5. How do we deal with bitterness? (See #4d-i and #4d-ii)

6. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)