

# Hurt and Bitterness - Study Guide

## I. Recognizing Hurt

Characteristics of a bitter person:

- show a lack of concern for others
- avoid meeting new people
- stubborn or sulking attitude
- experience mood extremes frequently
- speak empty words of flattery/ sharp criticism
- sensitive and touchy
- show little or no gratitude
- unwilling to share or help others
- hold grudges
- very possessive of a few friends

## II. Bitterness - The Seed of Hell

What begins as a little seed of hurt grows and festers into a very dangerous thing.

**Hebrews 12:15 "See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled."**

Question: In what ways does bitterness **not** just hurt the person who is bitter?

Answer: Possible answers - spreading bitterness to other people, alienation of family and friends, terrible witness of Jesus to others, causing others to fall away from God in their bitterness, etc.

## III. How Hurt Happens

Typical pattern of hurt: Johnny's story (read out loud or recap) a little boy whose dad promises time and again to take him fishing for his birthday. The boy is counting down the days, but when it gets to it his dad has to go out of town and has the secretary buy a pole instead - boy sees dad up and getting ready on the big day...but not to go fishing. He's hurt terribly, dad is impatient to leave, boy doesn't even open the present. Dad is angry at boy's ungratefulness.

**-This story is just an example of a pattern that happens to many people:**

### Step One -Love is cut off in the heart

In his heart the bitter person says, "I won't say thank you because you hurt me". When we get bitter, we begin to lose respect and affection for the person who hurt us and we become very, very ungrateful

### Step Two - Open rebellion

(Keep reading story or recap) Now the boy is 15 - when his dad asks him to do his chores, the boy refuses, manifesting an inward rejection of his father's authority. The father makes stricter rules that the boy promptly disobeys. He has become his own boss and is openly rebellious.

### **Step Three - Bad Company**

Now the boy in the story is his own boss, but is also lonely and scared. He looks for other people to be around with loneliness and a rejection of authority in common, and their relationship is based on mutual rebellion and bitterness. At this point he does anything he wants - however bad it may be - openly. He even begins flaunting his rottenness and defending what he knows is wrong.

In other instances, a bitter person may not turn to illicit behavior, but they will still surround themselves with other bitter people, either people who were already bitter themselves or people that they infect with their own bitterness.

### **Step Four - The End of the Road**

**Deuteronomy 5:16** ("the commandment with a promise") **"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged and that it may go well with you."**

It stands to reason, then, that if you do not honor your parents that your days will not be prolonged and things will not go well for you. Open rebellion and a continual defense of wrong actions end up in a "short and lousy" life, just like the bible says they will.

In this phase, the bitter person experiences incredible mood swings. Ecstasy one minute, and deep depression the next. They can't handle it and see no way out - until they start thinking about suicide, which is the ultimate expression of selfishness. "I'll show them".

## **IV. The Filing Cabinet of Your Mind**

-In bitterness, you focus on what that "horrible person" has done to you, keeping a mental filing cabinet full of every thing they have ever done or said to hurt you. One cause of persistent bitterness is that we try to balance out the guilt and blame - "I'm wrong, but they're worse", or "I have a good reason to be bitter - you have no idea what they did to me!"

-Sometimes holding on to anger and bitterness is a form of revenge - I'll show you and you'll be sorry! - except the only person who gets hurt is me! When I choose to dwell on someone who was mean and hateful to me, I will probably become mean and hateful. We inevitably become more and more like the things we focus our attention on.

## **V. Getting out of the Bitterness Trap**

-**The Lord's Prayer Matthew 6:9-13, vs. 12 says, "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors".**

-The thing that causes hurt to develop into bitterness is failing to respond to the help God can give at the time of being hurt. Forgiving doesn't mean pretending you aren't hurt, but allowing God to deal with the hurt in our lives.

**Forgiveness Checklist** - go through this together, making sure to emphasize the fact that we must see our wrong in the matter. We tend to magnify other people's wrongs and minimize our own! Realize that we have hurt the Lord with our unforgiveness. Take the time to destroy the files - mental files and the symbolic piece of paper on which you wrote out your hurts.