



Bitter or Blessed?

Focus Verses:

“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.” (Hebrews 12:15, NKJV)

At the time of this writing, I am experiencing a weed problem in my yard. I have tried pulling them out by the roots and using a weed spray. Yet, they show their persistence by quickly growing back. It may be my imagination that those pesky weeds reappear within just hours—or perhaps even minutes. Why do weeds grow so much easier than my flowers?

Bitterness can be as stubborn as the weeds in my flower bed. Once it takes hold, it's difficult to eradicate. Unfortunately, like weeds, bitterness can spread and affect those around us. Bitterness often results from hurt or offense. Unless we guard our spirit, unresolved hurts turn into anger, resentment, and bitterness.

A bitter root (Hebrews 12:15) can only produce bitter fruit. Nothing good will grow in such a situation.

Life Reflection:

What are some of the root causes of bitterness?

What are the long-term effects of bitterness in our lives?

Why is it so difficult to overcome bitterness?

Let's look at the life of someone who faced serious hurts and disappointments and see how she responded to these difficulties.

MICHAL'S STORY

Michal, the daughter of King Saul, may have expected a "happily ever after" life when her father announced she would marry David, the shepherd boy who had become the national hero. We are told Michal loved David, but she didn't really get the "ever after" she hoped for.

The unraveling of Michal's story began with her father's intense jealousy of David. Saul decided to use Michal's love for David as a means to rid himself of a perceived enemy. Allowing her to marry the man she loved was merely a trick to get David killed, with Michal as the unknowing victim of her father's deception. The bride's price Saul required wasn't money but the death of one hundred Philistines (Israel's enemies). Saul was sure David would die while carrying out this demand. Instead, David killed twice the number of Philistines, and the couple married. (Read I Samuel 18.)

Michal's life story is messy and sad. When David later had to flee for his life (I Samuel 19:11-17), Saul spitefully gave Michal to another man, Phalti, as his wife. After Saul's death, Michal's life was again disrupted as David demanded his wife's return (II Samuel 3:13).

The sad result of the many upheavals Michal faced turned her into a resentful, bitter woman. When David brought the Ark to Jerusalem, he returned home to bring a blessing. But Michal's bitter words kept him from pronouncing that blessing upon his household. Because she scorned David's joyful worship, God cursed her with barrenness (II Samuel 6:16-23).

When we observe Michal's response to her painful situations, we find her bitterness:

- Deprived her of joy.
- Brought her barrenness.
- Blocked God's blessings.



THE ROOT OF BITTERNESS

Bitterness has been described as a slow poison. It gradually builds inside us until it destroys us. I suspect this is what happened to Michal. As she endured one hurt after another at the hands of those who should have loved and protected her, she allowed herself to become poisoned with bitterness. That bitterness kept her from worshiping, leading to barrenness in her body and soul.

Life Reflection:

Was Michal justified in feeling bitter about the difficult things in her life?

What steps could she have taken to overcome her disappointments and hurts?

JOSEPH'S STORY

Joseph was Jacob's favorite son, a fact apparent to the young man's older brothers. Because of his favored status, the brothers became jealous and hated him. The situation was not helped when Joseph reported their evil actions to his father. He also openly shared dreams God had given him, which only further incensed them. (Read Genesis 37.)

When Jacob sent Joseph to check on his brothers and the flocks, it gave them the perfect opportunity to get revenge. Their original intent was to kill him, but then a company of merchants traveling to Egypt gave them a better idea. They sold their brother into slavery. They were rid of him without having to kill him. Subsequent chapters in Genesis tell us of Joseph's time in Potiphar's house, the false accusations of his master's wife, and his years in prison. Yet, through every dark circumstance, Joseph maintained his integrity and faith in God.

As we keep reading in Genesis, we find Joseph did have opportunities to get revenge on those who had so viciously wronged him, but he chose forgiveness over bitterness.

"As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them. (Genesis 50:20-21, ESV)



Even in lonely, difficult times, Joseph recognized God's hand upon his life. He suffered at the hands of many through those years, but instead of bitterness and revenge, he chose to show comfort and kindness.

Joseph lived a blessed life because of his trust in God and refusal to become bitter.

- God advanced him to a position of power in Egypt.
- He was reunited and reconciled with his family.
- He saved the lives of all his family during the great famine.
- He maintained his integrity in all circumstances.

Life Reflection:

What similarities do you see between the life of Michal and the life of David?

What contrasts do you see in how each faced the difficult trials in their lives?

THE REMEDY

Have you been hurt, disappointed, misunderstood, rejected? Do you find yourself growing bitter at life's onslaughts and desiring to strike back for the wrongs you've endured? Or are you willing to lay aside thoughts of revenge so you can become more Christlike? The Lord understands your heartache. He really does know how you feel.

*"For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin."
(Hebrews 4:15, NKJV)*

"He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him . . . He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth . . ." (Isaiah 53:3, 7 NKJV)



How do we handle life's painful experiences without becoming bitter? Ephesians 4:31-32 shows us the correct way to respond to the hurts and offenses that will eventually come to each of us.

*"Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."
(ESV)*

Truthfully, these steps may prove difficult to carry out. Our human nature longs for justification and revenge, but that is not God's way. He asks us to show kindness, compassion, and forgiveness and tells us to take the first step. The person who caused our pain may never seek forgiveness or acknowledge their actions. But Matthew 18:15 (NKJV) says:

"Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother."

Life Reflection:

How do we guard against developing a bitter spirit?

Why is forgiveness for offenses essential?

How does bitterness affect those around a bitter person?

Instead of seeking revenge, seek God's favor and strength as you face life's heavy trials. Be blessed instead of bitter.

Additional Scriptures to Study

Matthew 6:14-15

Mark 11:25

Romans 12:17-21

Colossians 3:8-13

James 1:19-20

Author: Mary Loudermilk

