

When life hurts

1 Samuel 30:1-8

You may have heard it said of someone with a serious heart condition, that they are a ticking time bomb. Similarly, there are spiritual conditions of the heart that if not treated, can manifest themselves in explosive and detrimental ways. One of those diseases of the heart is called bitterness.

Bitterness is described in Hebrews 12:15 as a root. The author of Hebrews writes: *“See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;”* (Hebrews 12:15).

What must happen first before a root begins to grow? A seed must be planted. What is the seed of bitterness? The seed of bitterness is a hurt. When the hurts, wounds or pains in our hearts are not healed by the grace of God, they can turn into bitterness.

There's a difference between the root and the fruit. Although one can more readily identify the fruits of bitterness, it's not as easy to detect the root of bitterness. This is why, with the help of the Spirit, we are going to undergo a spiritual heart check this morning.

It's been said, hurt people, hurt people. But I think it's more accurate to say, bitter people hurt people. On the other hand, healed people heal people.

Main idea: When we know the restoring grace of God we become instruments of His restoring grace in the lives of others.

To unfold this theme we are going to examine the source, signs and solution of bitterness:

1. The Source of Bitterness (Wounded by friends)

To begin our message this morning, let's examine the source or root of bitterness from the life of David. While David was still on the run from King Saul, beginning in verse 3 we read:

"And when David and his men came to the city, they found it burned with fire, and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive. Then David and the people who were with him raised their voices and wept until they had no more strength to weep. David's two wives also had been taken captive, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel. And David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because all the people were bitter in soul, each for his sons and daughters." (1 Samuel 30:3-6a)

If you have experienced some level of grief in your life, raise your hand. If you have love in your heart for people, you will grieve their loss. Grief is the cost of love. In fact, we grieve the most for those we love the most.

Grief is a part of life that we must all learn to process by the grace of God. And the grace of God helps us not to get over it but to get through it.

Although grief is a normal part of life, if we are not careful, it can turn into bitterness. We clearly see this happen in this account in the life of David. Before I comment more on the intense grief that David and his men experienced, let's get some context.

In first Samuel 30, David, who was running from Saul, had taken refuge among the Philistines, along with 600 of his loyal men and their families. While David was living among the Philistines, they went to battle against Israel and David and his men went with them.

On the way to fight against Israel, the Philistines decided they couldn't trust David. So they sent David and his men back home. And on the way back, they found that their village had been invaded by the Amalekites, who burned it down and also took the women and children captive.

Now when David and his men discovered that their wives and children were taken captive, they wept until they had no more strength to weep. Grief is a normal response to a situation like this. But if we are not careful, our grief can turn to bitterness. And a bitter heart sometimes looks for someone to blame for the hurt. This is what happened to David's men.

Moreover, when their grief turned to bitterness they not only blamed David, but they wanted to stone him. This helps us to define and describe what bitterness is.

Bitterness is a condition of the heart that harbors hostility, ill will or resentment.

According to Hebrews 12:15, when bitterness springs up in you, it will not only trouble you, but it can defile those around you. It's been said, misery loves company. But it is also true that although pain is inevitable, misery is optional.

In our pain, the enemy wants us to turn against those around us, but God desires that we turn to Him. God allows painful circumstances to make us better, the devil wants to make us bitter.

This brings us to our second point, the signs of bitterness.

2. The Signs of bitterness (Unwillingness to forgive)

Do you suffer from a root of bitterness? Remember that a root is underground. It's hard to detect the root of bitterness, which we can easily justify and rationalize. But we can more readily identify the fruit of bitterness.

So, as the scripture exhorts us to do, we must examine our hearts. To help us do so, I'm going to share with you ten symptoms of bitterness, which one Pastor identified, that can help us to detect a root of bitterness in our hearts.

When a person who has offended, criticized, or hurt you in some way walks into a room, how do you respond?

- Do negative feelings immediately overcome you causing you to put on a hypocritical happy face?
- Do you intentionally turn away to ignore and avoid him or her?
- Does the mere mention of his or her name leave a “bitter taste in your mouth”?
- Does thinking about him or her “make you sick”—give you a bitter stomach?
- Do you have a similar negative reaction when you just hear his or her name mentioned?
- Do you resent his or her success—hearing any good report about him or her?
- Do you secretly desire misfortune or failure—or worse—to come his or her way?
- Does the person who offended or hurt you come to mind often?
- Do you mentally argue with them—i.e. dream or daydream about “putting him or her in their place”?
- Do you feel the need or do you see a tendency to talk to others about the failures or shortcomings of those who have hurt or offended you?

If you have any of these symptoms, perhaps a root of bitterness has sprung up in your heart and needs be eradicated! It’s been said, bitterness is the poison you drink expecting someone else to die.

As we noted already, David's loyal supporters experienced deep grief, which turned into bitterness. Bitterness, which starts off as a seed of a hurt, looks for someone to blame.

David’s men not only blamed their leader, they also became hostile toward him. David on the other hand, in his grief didn’t turn against his men. Instead he turned to God and strengthened himself before His transforming presence (v.6).

This brings us to our final point, the solution to bitterness.

3. The solution to bitterness (Worship the Father)

In his great grief and distress David turned away from His circumstances and turned His face to God. Notice in verse 6 we read: "*But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God.*" (1 Samuel 30:6b)

What does it mean that David strengthened himself in the Lord? It simply means that David got his eyes back on God. As He sought the Lord, he began to see God again as he had in earlier days when for example he defeated Goliath.

When David faltered in his faith he allowed his circumstances to obstruct his view of God. He was at His best when He viewed His circumstance through the lens of God's greatness and steadfast love. God was bigger and better to David than anything in the world. This is reflected not only in our text but in many of His Psalms recorded in the Bible.

In his book, *The Making of a Man of God*, Alan Redpath noted: "First [David] was looking at his enemies and these supposed friends of his, but now he sees them through God. If you begin with God, your enemies grow small. If you begin with your enemy, you may never reach God. If you begin with God, the problems begin to dwindle; if you begin with the problems, you never get through to God."

It's important to note that it wasn't just this incident in 1 Samuel 30 that caused David to lose his high and exalted view of God. Where was David and his men when their town was invaded by the Amalekites? They were living among Israel's enemies, the Philistines, for 16 months. What were they doing there?

As I mentioned earlier, David had been on the run from Saul who had become bitter and jealous of David to the point that he wanted him

dead. And it appears that while David was on the run, along with his men and their families, that he stopped seeking the Lord as he once did. As a result, he began to make unwise decisions that placed him in compromising positions. Furthermore, because he was not seeking the face of God, he was being led by his feelings rather than by faith.

Listen to what the bible says in 1 Samuel 27:1, which gives us greater insight into the heart of David during this period of time. While on the run for quite some time, we read:

“Then David said in his heart, “Now I shall perish one day by the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me than that I should escape to the land of the Philistines. Then Saul will despair of seeking me any longer within the borders of Israel, and I shall escape out of his hand.”² So David arose and went over, he and the six hundred men who were with him, to Achish the son of Maach, king of Gath. ³ And David lived with Achish at Gath, he and his men, every man with his household, and David with his two wives, Ahinoam of Jezreel, and Abigail of Carmel, Nabal's widow. ⁴ And when it was told Saul that David had fled to Gath, he no longer sought him” (1 Samuel 27:1-4).

Notice that David, who knew that God had anointed him to be the next King, began singing the blues. Do you know that David invented the Blues? David literally sang the blues as he spent time in the presence of God. These songs, which are recorded in scripture, are referred to as the Psalms of lament. But although David sang the blues, his life wasn't characterized by them. He was known as the sweet Psalmist of Israel.

The reason David was so mightily used by God wasn't because he never had moments when he was down or disobedient. David was a flawed man. David was greatly used by God because, whether in good times or in bad times, whether he was feeling blue or joyful, whether the circumstances looked favorable or unfavorable, David typically sought the heart and mind of God.

But more than that, David didn't just seek the Lord in a time of crisis. David's greatest longing and passion was just being in God's presence and enjoying communion with Him. (Psalm 63:1-3).

When David was intimate with God he was not intimidated by man. But that's not what is happening when David decided, while on the run, to seek refuge among the Philistines.

In 1 Samuel 27:1 when David said in his heart: "*Now I shall perish one day by the hand of Saul*" he was singing the blues, but not to God. He wasn't casting his cares upon the Lord. He wasn't seeking, as in other times, for God to be his refuge and strength.

David wasn't singing praise to God when he also said in 1 Samuel 27:1: "*There is nothing better for me than that I should escape to the land of the Philistines.*" David was singing the blues to himself.

Notice also that the bible says in 1 Samuel 27:4 that when David sought refuge with the Philistines, because he believed the lie that Saul would kill him otherwise, Saul did cease pursuing David. This no doubt gave David a false sense of security. But this false sense of security, although it probably was a welcome relief from all the pressure, was only temporary.

Remember that David's story is a mirror into our lives. We are and will be tempted to find relief or comfort in sinful ways or in the things of this world. But sin in the end will always leave us more broken and empty. It's been said, sin will take you farther than you want to go, cost you more than you want to pay and keep you longer than you want to stay.

When David and his men found that the Amalekites had invaded their village, burned it with fire and took their wives and children, this wasn't just about the fact that David was in a place that he should not have been. God was getting His attention. David, the blues singer, who was anointed by God to be the next King of Israel, needed to get back to being the sweet Psalmist of Israel.

Contrary to what the prosperity preachers say, sometimes God has to strip us of all the false securities in our lives to get us back to the place that we need to be—the place that we were created for, the place that Jesus shed His blood for, which is finding in Him our supreme security and satisfaction. This is what true worship is.

What David thought was his worse nightmare, God used to bring him back to where he needed to be, namely, enjoying close fellowship with God. David was at the end of his rope, but rather than turning on others, he turned to God and strengthened himself in the Lord.

Perhaps on that day when his own friends turned against him, he turned to God by singing a Psalm that he had previously written or perhaps he wrote a new song. Maybe it sounded something like Psalm 18:

“I love you, O LORD, my strength. ² The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. ³ I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies. ⁴ The cords of death encompassed me; the torrents of destruction assailed me; ⁵ the cords of Sheol entangled me; the snares of death confronted me. ⁶ In my distress I called upon the LORD; to my God I cried for help.” (Psalm 18:1-5).

Brothers and sisters, life is hard sometimes. And we will become bitter if we lose sight of God and cease to daily avail ourselves of His restoring grace.

Now because David was restored by the grace of God in the presence of God, he arose from his time with God as an instrument not of revenge but of restoration. Later he became an advocate for his men who were turning on each-other (v.23).

Earlier we looked at the signs of bitterness. In contrast, what is a vital sign that you have been restored by the grace and forgiveness of the Lord? When you’ve been restored by God’s grace, you will be quick to extend grace and forgiveness to others (Ephesians 4:31-32).

An unwillingness to forgive, which will sow bitterness in our hearts, will not only affect our communion with others, but it will disrupt our communion with God. We cannot, as believers, come before God's throne of grace to receive grace if we are unwilling to extend grace to others.

Several times in the Gospels Jesus connects our forgiveness of others with God's forgiveness of us. For example, in Luke 6:37 Jesus says, "forgive, and you will be forgiven."

Now Jesus is not saying that when it comes to our salvation we have to earn it by first forgiving others. Rather, if we are saved and sanctified by the grace of God, our lives will be characterized by a willingness and readiness to forgive others.

On the other hand, a determined unwillingness to extend grace and forgiveness is a sign that we have not experienced the transforming grace and forgiveness that the precious blood of Jesus made possible.

I'm not saying that a believer will always find it easy to forgive. Depending on the offense, extending forgiveness can be very challenging at times. However, when you have experienced the transforming grace of God, but you're finding it hard to forgive, you will be willing to be made willing.

And if you come before God's throne of grace, which you have access to by the blood of Jesus, and you're struggling with unwillingness to forgive, you will know that it would be a disgrace to the grace of God to ask Him for anything else but for the grace to be willing to forgive.

In Don Whitney's book, *Ten questions to diagnose your spiritual health*, in the chapter where he asked the diagnostic question, *Are you a quicker forgiver*, he writes, *The testimony of Martyn Lloyd Jones should be the heart cry of every Christian: 'I say to the glory of God and in utter humility that whenever I see myself before God and realize even something of what my blessed Lord has done for me, I am ready to forgive anybody anything.'*

Notice the phrase, 'I am ready to forgive anybody anything.' Many do not understand the difference between being ready to forgive and actually extending or expressing forgiveness...Perhaps it will help to think of forgiveness as consisting of two parts, inward forgiveness and outward forgiveness or forgiveness with the heart and forgiveness with the mouth. Inward heart forgiveness is always required of the Christian. But the Bible does not demand outward verbal forgiveness unless the one who sins against us seeks our forgiveness.

When someone sins against a Christian there are two parties involved and both have a responsibility to resolve the matter. The role of the Christian is to be ready to forgive and to act in such a way that demonstrates his readiness. But the offender has a responsibility as well—to repent and seek forgiveness. The issue cannot be settled [individually] by either person; both must do their part. Leon Morris, a New Testament scholar noted, "we can always think of some 'good' reason why in any particular case we need not forgive. But that is always an error." Growing Christians will recognize that error and become quicker to say, I'm ready to forgive."

Now notice also that as David turned his face to the Lord he began to seek God's word and will for his life again. Beginning in verse 7 we read: "*And David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelech, 'Bring me the ephod.' So Abiathar brought the ephod to David. ⁸ And David inquired of the LORD, 'Shall I pursue after this band? Shall I overtake them?' He answered him, 'Pursue, for you shall surely overtake and shall surely rescue'*" (1 Samuel 30:7-8).

The ephod that David was speaking of here is where the high priest kept the Urim and Thummim. We don't know what they looked like, but it appears that in the Old Testament using them was like casting lots. More importantly, the Urim and the Thummim was ordained by God as a vehicle for determining God's word and will for a particular situation.

Now since the priesthood and the Old Testament system of worship was perfectly fulfilled in Christ, even if the Urim and the Thummim

was discovered it would be of no use today. However, what is still essential for us today is not the fact that David used it, but why he used it.

David was going back to God's word so that he would once again be led by God and not his feelings. And by seeking the Lord again, David was not only restored by God's grace, he also became an instrument of restoration.

As a result, David and his men, with the help of God, took back what the enemy had stolen. What a powerful means of grace it is when those closest to us are close to Jesus.

Let me ask you, are you walking by faith or being led by your feelings? Are you taking God at His word and obeying Him regardless of the circumstances or are you allowing your emotions to lead you astray and into positions of compromise?

Beloved, don't ever make decisions in life when you're seething with anger, deeply discouraged or filled with bitterness. Get alone with God first. Worship Him in prayer and in the word. Get close to people who are close to Jesus. He will restore you and lead you in the path that you should go.

Where are you today? Are you in a compromising relationship? Are you seeking security through compromise? Are you in a place where you feel wounded—wounded because of your own sin or the sins of others or because of circumstances beyond your control?

Perhaps you're passed feeling wounded and have allowed your heart to become bitter, resentful and hostile because of something or someone. As a result, you're not only robbing yourself of God's best for your life, but you're hurting those around you.

God can bring you out of that miserable pit. He can turn your sadness into gladness, He can turn your hurt into hope, He can turn your bitterness into blessedness. And he will do so if you turn to Him in repentance and seek His restoring grace in Christ.

Conclusion

Give God your brokenness and bitterness. Ask Him to heal your wounds in His love, forgive your compromises, and eradicate the poison of bitterness by expressing to Him your readiness to forgive as God for Christ sake has forgiven you.

If you're struggling with being willing to forgive, in view of the cross of Jesus and God's constant willingness and readiness to forgive you, tell Him that you are willing to be made willing by His grace.

Come to Jesus and seek Him to not only restore your soul by His grace but to make you an instrument of His restoring grace to the glory of Him name.