



TAKING THE BAIT
I'm Bitter
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The Crossing Church
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OPENING

This week we are continuing our series called **Taking the Bait**. There are many ways we can trap things, but in this study we're going to talk about taking the bait when Satan sets traps for us. We looked at offense in our first week and this week the subject is **bitterness which is always a trap**. In the next few studies we're going to look at some of the other traps Satan prepares for us: discouragement, anxiety and uncertainty.

SCRIPTURE¹

Genesis 4:24 If Cain is avenged seven times, then Lamech seventy-seven times.

Romans 12:17-21 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Luke 6:27-28 But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.

OBSERVATION

In Luke 17:1, Jesus used the Greek word "skandalon", which is defined as the bait or trigger of a trap. When the bait is taken it does one of two things. It either kills or cages the victim and this is Satan's agenda for us. Last week his trap was offense and it can become another trap – bitterness, anger and revenge. When we hold on to an offense, we automatically put those damaging emotions into our hearts.

QUESTION: Who do you know that is carrying bitterness in their hearts now? What are you seeing that tells you this?

Our culture says that, when someone hurts us, we should respond by doing something back to them. We will feel so much better when we get even. That "golden rule" seems to be to do unto others as they have done unto us! this mentality didn't just start with our society. In Genesis, when Cain killed Abel, he was banished from Eden and God said that anyone who killed him, would suffer vengeance seven times over. There was a man named Lamech, who was the father of Noah, and he killed a man for injuring him. He said that if Cain were killed he was to be avenged seven times so he, Lamech, should be avenged seventy-seven times for killing a man who wounded him. His arrogance is apparent as he presumed on God's mercy and kindness and viewed the absence of strict justice as liberation for him to do evil. In ancient Greece, Aristotle wrote: "To take revenge on one's enemies is nobler than to come to terms with them; for to retaliate is just, and that which is just is noble." It seems that Aristotle agreed with Lamech.

QUESTION: For whom are you carrying bitterness in your heart today?

¹ All scripture translation is NIV unless otherwise indicated.

APPLICATION

Then St. Paul came along and turned our thinking upside down in **Romans 12:17-21**. He gives us three “do nots” and three responses:

1) Do not repay evil for evil – live in peace. Returning evil for evil was an eye for an eye or a tooth for a tooth proposition. That was an ethic for the Children of Israel. It was a limitation on revenge so no killing would take place. Then Jesus said to them, “If someone strikes your right cheek, turn to them the other also.” So this isn’t just a command to not repay evil – it goes beyond that because our calling is higher. We represent Jesus and should respond in such a way that people would say, “That’s how Jesus would respond.”

QUESTION: When have you exacted an “eye for an eye?” How did you feel afterward? How long did that feeling last?

QUESTION: How could you have responded in that situation as Jesus would have responded?

But it might not be possible to live at peace with another. No matter what you do, it isn’t working. In a relationship where there is conflict, where do we spend all of our energy? On the other person, right? What if we would change, we would stop, we would get over ourselves? God says it is **always** our job to live at peace with everyone.

QUESTION: Tell us about a relationship where, no matter how hard you tried, the other person would not respond in a helpful, positive way. What finally happened to give you peace?

2) Do not take revenge – leave room for God. Why do we want to take revenge? We want justice. But it is deeper than that. When we feel wronged and we take the bait, we immediately put bitterness in our hearts. The offense causes bitterness and when we feel bitter, we have to do something with it. If we get back at the other person, we think we will feel better – and this seems to be true at the beginning. Modern science actually tells us that this is true: We do feel better initially. There is a study that found that people who take revenge are not able to move past the bitterness. They still had open wounds and continued to wrestle with the offense. The group that didn’t take revenge moved past the bitterness and were released from it.

QUESTION: When have you had the grace to step over an offense and avoid hanging onto it with bitterness?

QUESTION: How has God intervened when you were offended? How did He defend you?

Sometimes the greatest offenses are against the ones we love such as when our kids are hurt or our spouses suffer criticism. Even then Paul says to leave room for God’s wrath. It means to open up space for Him to come to our defense.

3) Do not be overcome by evil – overcome evil with good. We all carry the wounds from things that have been said or done to us. But it isn’t enough to remember them – we have to overcome those memories with goodness. This is our upside-down God speaking to us again. He is directing His words to those who have ears to hear – those who listen with spiritual ears. “If we only love those who love us, and do good to those who do good to us, of what value is it? Everyone does that.” But we have a higher calling -- to love our enemies and do good to them – and even more than that we are to bless and pray for them!! If we don’t do this, we are actually holding ourselves back from God’s best for our lives.

QUESTION: Do you recall the Modgnik series? What was that all about?

QUESTION: What good thing do you need to do for someone who has hurt you?

QUESTION: When have you prayed for someone who offended you? How did God bless you?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we want to live at peace with You and those around us. We have decided to step over offenses and not take Satan’s bait. Our bitterness only destroys us and this is exactly what Satan wants. We submit to Your authority and ask for Your grace as we repent of past failures in this regard. In Jesus’ name. Amen.



QUESTIONS

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