

FAITH MOVES FORWARD 04 THE SYCAMINE TREE STUDY GUIDE

Read Luke 17.1-6. Jesus here in these verses is giving us a picture on dealing with unforgiveness by faith. And he shows us how to deal with it once and for all. Jesus said: If you had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea, and it should obey you.

Now normally in faith we talk about moving mountains – but here, when it comes to a talk about unforgiveness, Jesus mentioned a sycamine tree. And I want to talk about that tree, and explain why Jesus chose that tree, and not a fig tree or apple tree or any other tree. Remember culture determines what you think when you hear something. If I start talking about a pine tree, some of you will start thinking of Christmas because of culture.

Now back then, a sycamine tree was the tree for coffins. It was called the “coffin tree” or “casket tree”, the wood was used for making coffins throughout the middle east. The reasons for this were because it grows anywhere, it grows when there is no rain, it is a very strong wood. Now, Jesus is using this tree as an image of bitterness. Why?

Bitterness grows very quickly, it doesn't take long to get totally out of control and be so bad you say things and do things that quite frankly are just stupid. Bitterness will grow anywhere – you could be in ministry, you could be working, you could be any age, any gender, any background, and bitterness will grow in your heart if you are not careful. Bitterness also grows well when there is no rain – when you are not worshipping, not reading the water of the Word, not in a community that loves you and that walks in the Spirit. And finally – bitterness will end up being your coffin if you do not throw it out of your heart. Unforgiveness is the number one way that satan puts us six feet under – it will kill your soul, your prosperity, your ministry, your life.

The sycamine tree also has a huge root system, the deepest root system of any tree in Israel, they are tall trees, often thirty-foot-tall, and the roots go deep. Whenever we deal with bitterness, we must deal with the root, we must take the axe of God's Word and lay it to the root! We have to deal with bitterness in our heart and change not just our behaviour but our attitudes or we will never be free from it – it will just grow right back!

The fruit of a sycamine tree is very bitter. The fruit looks very similar to a fig, but it does not smell or taste like a fig. It has a sour, tart, bitter taste and a pungent smell. But because figs were expensive, the sycamine fruit became a poor man's substitute. But they were so bitter you could not eat a whole one, you had to nibble on it and get used to the taste. Then you could nibble a little more, then a little more, then over time finish it off.

And that is how people deal with bitterness – it stinks and it tastes vile, and you chew on it for a long long long time – nibble on eat, then pause and let that go down and nibble on it a bit more – think about it a bit more, and then take another bite and another and another. It goes on the slow burner for weeks, months and even years. You think about that incident over and over and over and the fruit gets inside you and makes you sour and bitter and pungent too!

And just like it was the poor that would sit around nibble the sycamine fruit, those who sit around and are constantly talking about and thinking about and meditating on the wrongs committed against them, are normally bound in poverty. Certainly, if that is your

soul finances, your soul is very poor indeed. And that always leads to defeat, to depression, to sickness and financial poverty.

In addition, the sycamine tree is pollinated by wasps. The wasp stings the fruit, and that is the key to producing more fruit. Satan wants to sting you and make you produce bitter fruit. Ever heard someone say something like this – that person stung me. Their words stung, what they did stung. It stings. I am not letting them sting me again.

You see what is going on – it's not God trying to make you fruitful, God isn't behind it all – satan stings you to pollinate your heart to bitter fruit. Satan sends a wasp to sting you to produce bitter fruit in your life. Here is the truth – if you keep your heart free from offense, the devil cannot produce bitter fruit in your life! The best way to avoid the fruit is never let the pollination take place. If you keep the stinger out of your heart, it will never produce more bitterness!

So we can all see why Jesus chose this tree – it is a graphic visual picture – bitterness will end up being your coffin, it will root itself into your life, and the bitter fruit is exactly how you will end up eating your own thoughts, and it will keep you poor. We do not want to end up like that, we are going to get set free. And Jesus told us how to get set free – and gave us the power to be free. We have the power to be totally free, we have the power to walk in victory, jerk the roots out of the ground – and get free! How do we get free? The answer is in the Word – by using faith-filled words to tell the bitterness to leave. It's a beautiful circle – faith gets us free from bitterness, and when we get free from bitterness, we are free to operate in a higher level of faith.

How do we get rid of bitterness? Saying! If you had faith as a grain of mustard seed, you might say to this tree – this sycamine tree – this “coffin” tree, this tree with bitter fruit you can barely eat, this tree that can grow anywhere – and as you speak to it – it will be uprooted and cast into the sea and it will obey you! If the bitterness is still there you did not speak to it in faith!

YOU HAVE TO RISE UP IN FAITH – YOU HAVE TO START SPEAKING – YOU HAVE TO START DEMANDING WITH YOUR WORDS THAT BITTERNESS AND JEALOUSY AND ENVY AND STRIFE AND UNFORGIVENESS MOVE FROM YOUR HEART AND TAKE A FLYING LEAP. Everything in the last month has been building to this revelation: You are going to speak to that bitterness and unforgiveness and be totally free. Now, we are not going to wait until we feel like forgiving, we do not live by feelings – we live by faith.

If you depend on feelings, you will always be offended. Your feeling and emotions will say – you have a right to be offended, you have a right to feel that way. You have to **TURN OFF YOUR EMOTIONS AND DOMINATE YOUR EMOTIONS BY FAITH!** You have to think with a sound mind. Your first step is to stop denying and start accepting that you are the one personally responsible for your offended state. No one else has made you offended. What needs to change is not THEM, it's you. It's something inside you that needs to be **UPROOTED AND SPOKEN TO** – it's the sycamine tree.

You then need to speak to the tree. If you do not speak to the TREE, it will speak to YOU. If you do not speak to YOUR EMOTIONS, they will SPEAK TO YOU. If you do not take authority over your bitterness, it will take authority over you. If you do not dominate your feelings, they will dominate you. **SO TODAY – we are going to quit letting emotions tell us what to think and what to do, and we are going to tell them!**

It is time for change, and that change today is you are going TO DO THE TALKING – you are going to TAKE COMMAND OF YOUR THOUGHT LIFE.

You are going to speak to that bitterness, speak to that resentment, speak to that unforgiveness. You MUST MAKE A FIRM DECISION – these are enemies that hate you and want to destroy your mind. YOU ARE GOING TO SPEAK TO IT TODAY – but today's message has a HEALTH WARNING – you will have to repeat the medicine. You will have to speak to it AGAIN, and AGAIN, and AGAIN – until every root is out and it goes forever.

YOU HAVE TO GO FOR THE ROOTS – say it:

I AM GOING TO GO FOR THE ROOTS

I am going to rip this bitter tree out of my heart.

I am pull it out of my soul.

I am not stopping until I am free.

Sycamine trees are like any tree, they will not grow in salt water. SALT KILLS IT. When you throw something into SEAWATER it is dead. So whatever hatred, bitterness, resentment you throw into the sea today with your words – it is NOW DEAD. It is dead. You are not going to try and feed that TREE AGAIN – it is dead. No more coffin for you. You killed it before it killed you! You command that resentment to leave, you insist it goes – then you walk in victory. YOU are going to put them in salt water – and never let them take root in your mind and never bring them back again and THEY WILL BE DEAD FOREVER

Now your flesh will SCREAM AT YOU – bring it back, go over those old hurts again, go rescue that poor sycamine tree and bring it back to life and nurse it. NO – do what Corrie Ten Boom says “throw it into the sea of forgetfulness” – bury it so deeply in the sea so it will never GET INTO YOUR MIND AGAIN AND NEVER USE IT AS A PLAYGROUND AGAIN. But Jesus told us to COMMAND THE TREE and it should OBEY YOU

That word obey in Luke is the word “submit” – your emotions are like a little child having a tantrum – they want to rant all day, do what they want all day, they want to carry on all day – and you NEED TO BE THE ONE TO TELL YOUR EMOTIONS – hey, baby, enough. YOU NEED TO TELL YOUR EMOTIONS – ENOUGH IS ENOUGH. I am rising up today, I am going to speak to YOU and tell you what to do. You do not control me, I control you!

If we do not put our sycamine trees in the sea and kill them, they will kill us. But if we do, we will be free! Today, our flesh is no longer our master. The Spirit of God inside us is there for us to take charge and start calling the shots – bitterness and unforgiveness have no place in your life. None at all. So today we are uprooting them and removing them forever.

Holding onto that sycamine tree of unforgiveness and not letting go of it will bring that poisonous fruit into your life – that bitter fruit – it will make it hard to pray, hard to relax, hard to have fun, hard to stay healthy. Meditating and holding onto bitterness – it makes it hard to operate in amazing faith. It makes it hard to fellowship with the Lord – not on HIS HALF, He loves you no matter what – but on your half, it makes your heart hard.

You must realize that YOUR FLESH IS NOT YOUR FRIEND. Your flesh will side with the devil at the drop of a hat. Your flesh will grab your emotions and lead – even drive -them

into anger, rage, bitterness, strife, envy. YOU HAVE TO DOMINATE YOUR EMOTIONS AND YOU DO IT THE SAME WAY YOU DOMINATE SICKNESS AND POVERTY – WITH STRONG WORDS. And you are going to stay free!

Now as well as helping you get free, I want to help you stay free. Often minor issues that are blown out of proportion and by the time we realize the pettiness of the issues, it's too late. BAD WORDS HAVE BEEN SPOKEN, you are hurt, you are offended and you are back at the same place – kicking that rooted tree out of your heart AGAIN!

I am going to give you some keys, which aren't deep or special, but practical and powerful. They are simple keys.

I. IF YOU THINK YOU ARE IN STRIFE, TAKE A TIME OUT.

- a. If you are weak, tired, and someone is pushing at you, take a time out. Rest. Ever been in a conversation with someone and you both know it is going to end in a war. But you just keep walking down the path. Why? STOP! You tried getting their point of view, but now you just want to smack them in the nose. PAUSE! You know you are not flowing in the sweetness of the spirit, you are a volcano of flesh about to explode!
- b. So take a few minutes out. "Excuse me, I need a few minutes to compose myself, this conversation is important to me" – I had one of my deacons install an app on their phone that made them wait 30 seconds after typing a text and then asked "ARE YOU SURE".
- c. It could be you, you could just be too tired to grasp what you are being told, it could just be a stressful situation, it could be satan trying to break up a forward friendship, a precious relationship. So put on the brakes, press pause and go and take a time out. Just a few minutes on your own.
- d. Satan loves to attack you when you are tired, they are tired, it's all vulnerable.
- e. So, go for a walk, go and read a chapter of the Word, pray in tongues. Take your mind away from the issue and come back relaxed. Take a power nap.
- f. Calm yourself, be still and know God is God, and then continue with a new perspective and a new freshness. It might change everything!

2. GET A THIRD PARTY INVOLVED

- a. Amanda and I do this for a lot of marriages. We don't do much counsel, we just sit there and be there when they talk to each other. People don't get as outrageous when Pastor and Mrs Pastor are sitting in the room. You don't get your feathers as ruffled, and you can talk about the real issues.
- b. Get the right person. You need someone wise, unbiased and unlikely to get in the mud with you and get offended on your behalf!

3. IF the person has authority over you, BE RESPECTFUL.

- a. Often the person offending you could be your boss, your pastor, your husband, your parents, your lecturer – someone who has under certain jurisdictions – authority. Remind yourself the Lord put that person in that position, not you. You must treat that person as someone the Lord has given authority too. Even if they are saying things you do not like, show some respect. Never forget who is the boss when you speak to the boss.
- b. But pastor "you don't know how hard it is to work for them" – I have had some strange bosses, I used to work for head teachers, I used to work in the city. Your boss might be strange but dealing with them is your job. Your

job is not just your job description, your job is to submit to that person. Now if it is unbearable, pray about looking for another job, no one is making you stay there – unless Jesus is. No one is making you stay in a job, a church until it is Jesus. Now if it is marriage, you made a covenant, you said until death do us part, keep your word and stay, but if it is a job or church, and it's that bad, go, but before you do – is it that bad, really? Is it you that needs to change? Is it possible God gave you that job to help reveal to you something you need to do?

- c. If Jesus says stay, you stay with a smile. Be happy. If you need to get up an hour earlier and pray in tongues for an hour every day to get right with God before going in, do it. Do whatever it takes to STOP
- d. Do what it takes to honour Jesus and serve Jesus. Hebrews 13.17 says “Obey your leaders” – the word obey is a military term – honour and respond appropriately to your immediate authority. It is never the job of a private to correct the captain! They can advise and help, but they are there to obey. Now, if you cannot obey – if you are asked to do something ungodly – then find a new job, learn how to set boundaries if you can. How can I know – get alone with the Lord and pray. You are having carnal, fleshly, offended feelings – you need to go and change your time table to put more Jesus in there so you can know!
 - i. Paul told Titus “exhort the servants to obey their masters and please them and not answer them back” – that's what the apostle Paul told the pastor Titus to teach! That is Titus 2.9. Let it sink in your heart until you are free from all rebellion and strife.

4. NEVER JUDGE SOMEONE ELSE'S INWARD MOTIVATION

- a. JUDGE NOT – that you not be judged. Matthew 7.1 THAT'S NOT GOD judging you – that's others. You want to be judged by people – start dishing it out, it will always come back to you! But you want to walk above being judged, decide not to judge.
- b. Don't judge the inside. You can judge actions – they are right there. But you cannot decide why someone did something, that way leads to bitterness. Never draw the dots when you don't know the picture!
- c. When you find yourself judging someone else's motivation, you have to stop that. You do not want to go in that direction. You need to refuse that direction. If you want to judge someone's heart, USE THE MIRROR.
- d. You are not always right, and others are not always wrong. I don't care how amazing you are or what your pedigree is.

5. REALIZE OPINIONS ARE JUST THAT – EVEN YOURS

- a. Some things are not open to debate – do not lie, that's an absolute – a moral absolute. There are also doctrinal absolutes – JESUS IS GOD. There's a lot of those, but other things are just PREFERENCE.
- b. Never let a preference dominate a relationship – if there are 10 people reading this study right now – there are 10 different favourite songs, a 100 different choices about where to eat, 10 different opinions about politics and worship and church styles and what to do next.
- c. IF IT IS JUST AN OPINION – if it is not MORAL and DOCTRINE and ABSOLUTE, it's really not important. Don't get bent out of shape about opinions. Some things are not worth getting upset about, not worth fighting for, not worth causing division over. Mark 7.7 says don't take

men's traditions for men's commandments – don't take an opinion for an absolute. OUR FLESH gets really offended by people doing things slightly different than us – get out of it. Just grow up and put it in the minor category. Don't get upset about it.

- i. One of the things that I deal with is people getting upset about minor things. Just drop it. If it is minor, it is minor.

6. ADAPT

- a. Conflicts most often come when change comes because some people cannot change their schedule, change is unavoidable in life. You need to learn how to handle change – I teach 3 hours on how to handle change, you cannot be a leader if you cannot do that.
- b. If you cannot handle change you will end up a very stressed person. One of the prayers we see a lot, it's attributed to St Francis, it's actually Reinhold Niebuhr:
 - i. God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
 - ii. courage to change the things I can,
 - iii. and wisdom to know the difference
- c. One thing that has changed my life over the time I have been pastoring is – I cannot change what I cannot change. So why get fussed about it. I cannot end the lockdown, I am not the government, so just what can I do – I can sit here and get the WORD TO YOU. I can pray for you and I do for hours a day. I can feed the WORD and get ready to preach in person. I know what I can do, and I do that.
- d. In Tree of Life I thought I could change anything – but I can't. I have to be at peace at things I cannot do. I work for Andrew's ministry, can change nothing – I just have to do what I can. And everything else – ADAPT. You see, without being crass, Tree of Life Church is going to keep growing – so we will keep changing – whether you like it or not. But if you do not adapt, we will outgrow you – there are churches happy to stay where there are, but that's not us.

7. JUST BE KIND

- a. When people act bad, give them the benefit of the doubt. Very few people who rub you up the wrong way are trying to. They are trying to do something else. Remember how patient God has had to be with your flaws.
- b. If you are not being kind, start SPEAKING TO THAT TREE!
- c. Romans 15.7 say RECEIVE EACH OTHER LIKE CHRIST RECEIVED YOU
 - i. You ever disappointed Christ – ever? Ever had an attitude with Jesus? Ever been inconsistent as a Christian? Ever acted in a way that really is not Christ-like? BUT CHRIST RECEIVED YOU 100% – with grace, sweetness and kindness. Jesus has never been disgusted with you – Jesus has never disowned you, He has never cast you away, and He never ever kicked you out of your throne in heaven.
 - ii. We need to receive each other like Jesus received us – that's a lot of kindness, that's a lot of overlooking, that's a lot of forgiving!
 - iii. STOP looking at the flaws of OTHERS and look at you and work out HOW YOU CAN RECEIVE OTHERS LIKE CHRIST. You want that harvest!
 - iv. Ask yourself is this how I want Christ to receive me? Is it? When your flesh wants to rant at someone and deal with that injustice,

because I have a right to be upset – MOAN MOAN – is that how you want Christ to receive you. No! Is that even how you want someone else to treat you?

- v. Read Php. 2.3. ESTEEM OTHERS BETTER THAN YOURSELVES –
 - I. No one else is better than you – but you should ESTEEM THEM THAT WAY, PREFER THEM OVER YOU. Man, church would be heaven on earth if we all did that.

8. STAY CLOSE TO THE HOLY SPIRIT.

- a. The Holy Spirit loves you and can help you in all situations – and also let him do the defending of your dreams. You can prefer everyone else and exalt them, and let the Holy Spirit exalt you – promotion comes from the Lord. Realize that, stop self-promoting. I have people around me – Ben, you promote others too much, You do this and that. I don't think I do enough – promoting others is what we all should be doing all the time. Lifting up others, and letting HIM lift us up!
- b. And the Holy Spirit will also be very honest with you. He never condemns but He doesn't lie – He will tell you "that's bitterness", that's resentment, that's foolish, don't get upset about that.
 - i. Hey that's the devil there, that's satan trying to get you to leave this company, this church, walk out on your wife – because he hates you and wants to destroy you. Satan will show you how to destroy your friendships, and the Holy Spirit will show you how to build them and strengthen them and deepen them. He will show you how to walk above bitterness.
 - ii. Do not let satan hook you in – follow Jesus, follow the Spirit and live above it!

RIGHT – what are you going to do? I don't really care about the hurt or offense you have had in the past, it is your refusal to forgive that is important. I want you to stop living a life of pain, a life of bitterness – I want to stop the pain in your life and that is why I am teaching on this – I want you to have amazing faith – and I want you free from torment, free to develop that faith.

God wants you to have an awesome future, and let go of the pain.

And resist it every time it comes. He wants grace to be more than a doctrine that you embrace to judge others for not being "grace enough" – I get so fed up of that "this isn't grace, that isn't grace" – no you judging everyone else isn't grace you muppet!

NOTHING ANYONE ELSE HAS EVER DONE IS WORTH HOLDING ONTO SO TIGHTLY YOU KILL YOUR FAITH AND KILL YOUR DESTINY

The devil wants you to stay in the flesh, but HE CANNOT MAKE YOU. You can dominate him, dominate the flesh, dominate the bitterness, dominate your own mind and WALK IN VICTORY.

Offense is a trap – but we can ALWAYS AVOID IT – and be free. TODAY FREEDOM IS YOURS.

Now walk away from this service and STAY FREE – the HOLY SPIRIT IS HERE RIGHT NOW _ and HE IS HELPING YOU CHOOSE TO FORGIVE AND FORGET! You can be free from what they did to you and from what they didn't do but you think they did too!

Ultimately right now – whether they were right or you were isn't the point – what is the point is that the sycamine tree is thrown into the sea. And if someone else offends against you, you walk in love.

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you today.

Command that tree to leave.

Look to Jesus – keep your eyes on JESUS!

ASK HOLY SPIRIT FOR HELP TO LEAN ON HIM AND HIS LOVE

Thank FATHER for TOTAL FORGIVENESS DUE TO THE BLOOD OF JESUS!



Tree of Life Church
where dreams come true

FAITH MOVES FORWARD 04 THE SYCAMINE TREE STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS

- I. 1. Why did Jesus choose the sycamine tree to represent a heart attitude of bitterness?
2. Which of the aspects of the sycamine tree spoke most to you about your life in terms of dealing with bitterness?
3. How according to Luke 17.1-6 are we supposed to remove the tree of bitterness from our hearts?
4. How have you successfully dealt with bitterness in your life?
5. Ben says "if you think you are heading to strife, take a time out". When do you most need a time out and what is the best way for you to take one?
6. What kind of situation might need a third-party involved to avoid strife and bitterness, and what kind of people would make a good third-party?
7. Why is it important we should proper respect and honour to those in any form of authority?
8. What is Titus 2.9 saying specifically to you?
9. Why must we never judge someone else's inward motivation?
10. What kind of opinions can cause strife when in reality they just do not matter?
- II. Is there any bitterness you need to speak to right now, and the group can then help you walk free and check up on you that you are walking in your freedom?
This is a safe space to admit your need help and receive prayer!
12. What about this message inspired, encouraged or challenged you the most?



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