

Chapter 2: The Bitter Root

"Work at living in peace with everyone, and work at living a holy life, for those who are not holy will not see the Lord. Look after each other so that none of you fails to receive the grace of God. Watch out that no poisonous root of bitterness grows up to trouble you, corrupting many."

Hebrews 12:14-15 NLT

Why was Jonah so against the mission that God called him to do? The people of Nineveh were Assyrians, and the Assyrians were enemies of the Jewish people. Theologians and scholars believe that the Assyrians killed Jonah's family and friends. I believe this is confirmed as truth because we see that when God showed mercy to the people of Nineveh, Jonah was angry about it.

"So he complained to the Lord about it: 'Didn't I say before I left home that you would do this, Lord? That is why I ran away to Tarshish! I knew that you are a merciful and compassionate God, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. You are eager to turn back from destroying people.'"

Jonah 4:2 NLT

The root of the problem was bitterness; he allowed a bitter root to set in his heart. I guess he had a good reason to be bitter. What do I mean? Think about the modern day terrorists that go by the name ISIS. This terrorist group targets Christians and they are very cruel to the people they fight against; they are known for amputating their victim's body parts and cutting their heads off and parading their victim's dead bodies in the streets and for killing men, women, and children without remorse or regret. Many of the ISIS terrorists are from Assyria!

The Assyrians in Jonah's day were the modern day ISIS. They were very cruel to the Jewish people and they had no mercy for anyone; they brought terror and destruction wherever they went. I'm sure Jonah thought about all this when God told him to help the very people that were hurting Jonah's family and friends, and because of this he ran from his calling.

So the reason why Jonah was so against what God wanted him to do is because he was bitter. One of the biggest problems in the world in general and even in the church is bitterness. A bitter root doesn't just develop in a person's life over night; it all starts with a person being offended. Jesus even told us in the end times many people will be offended.

"And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another."

Matthew 24:10 KJV

I read a book called "The Bait of Satan" by John Bevere. In this book the author explains the dangers of being offended and allowing the enemy to instill bitterness in a person's heart. The word for "offense" found in

Matthew 24:10 is the greek word *skandalon*. It is where we get our English word for scandal. The word *skandalon* was also the name of a lever that sets off a trap and catches the victim in its claws because they fell for the bait that was connected to the lever.

People today don't realize that the enemy is trapping them in offense, which leads to bitterness because they keep falling for the bait of Satan. This comes in many forms, like maybe God didn't answer your prayer so now you're bitter at God. Or like a certain person didn't acknowledge you or didn't show you the affection you thought they should—like a pastor that didn't do what you expected him to do, or a family member that didn't come through, or a friend that let you down. It might even be someone who hurt you or someone close to you, and what they did was their fault and you were truly an innocent victim of circumstance. Whatever it is that offended you it then becomes a scandal! You start complaining about it and telling others how you were done wrong. The people that you tell don't know both sides of the story fully, so they side with you and then that makes you feel justified as if you are in the right about the wrong that was done to you.

Then the hurt sets in and you start having a pity party. How they did you wrong and how you don't deserve this treatment, and because of this you start getting angry. You're angry because it's not resolved and they haven't said they are sorry, and they feel that they're right and you're wrong. Anger then gives a foothold to the enemy: *"for anger gives a foothold to the devil"* (Ephesians 4:27 NLT). Always remember, if someone is controlling your feet they are also controlling your direction! Think about Cain and Abel. Cain got so angry because he was offended that God didn't receive his offering, and because of this he took it out on his brother because Abel's offering was accepted and his offering was rejected.

God warned Cain that the enemy was at the door and wanted to rule over him. God tried to get him to control his anger but Cain didn't listen. *"Why are you so angry?" the Lord asked Cain. "Why do you look so*

dejected? You will be accepted if you do what is right. But if you refuse to do what is right, then watch out! Sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you. But you must subdue it and be its master.””

Genesis 4:6-7 NLT

His anger controlled him, resulting in the first murder. Cain's anger became a bitterness in his heart, and like Hebrews says a bitter root will defile many around you. His bitterness killed his brother. Your bitterness will also spiritually kill you and those around you. You might say yes, but even though I have anger and bitterness God knows in my heart I still love Him? The Bible says other wise:

“If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.”

1 John 4:20-21 KJV

No matter what people have done to you and have done to the people around you, we have to forgive them no matter what. God is merciful with an everlasting love and He wants His people to display that same kind of mercy and love. Why should we love and forgive people no matter what?

“Then Peter came to him and asked, “Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?” “No, not seven times,” Jesus replied, “but seventy times seven! “Therefore, the Kingdom of Heaven can be compared to a king who decided to bring his accounts up to date with servants who had borrowed money from him. In the process, one of his debtors was brought in who owed him millions of dollars. He couldn’t pay, so his master ordered that he be sold—along with his wife, his children, and everything he owned—to pay the debt. “But the man fell down before his master and begged him, ‘Please, be patient with me, and I will pay it all.’ Then his master was filled with pity for him, and he released him and forgave his debt. “But when the man left the king, he went to a fellow servant who owed him a few thousand dollars. He grabbed him by the throat and demanded instant payment. “His fellow servant fell down before him and begged for a little more time. ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it,’ he pleaded. But his creditor wouldn’t wait. He had the man arrested and put in prison until the debt could be paid in full. “When some of the other servants saw this, they were very upset. They went to the king and told him everything that had happened. Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, ‘You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. Shouldn’t you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy

on you?' Then the angry king sent the man to prison to be tortured until he had paid his entire debt. ***"That's what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart."***

Matthew 18:21-35 NLT

"I tell you, you can pray for anything, and if you believe that you've received it, it will be yours. But when you are praying, first forgive anyone you are holding a grudge against, so that your Father in heaven will forgive your sins, too. "

Mark 11:24-25 NLT

I heard a quote before that said, "Un-forgiveness is a prison and when you forgive you let the prisoner go—and then you realize the prisoner was you!"

No matter how bad the people of Nineveh were, God wanted Jonah to minister His word so the people could repent and receive His love and mercy. Because of the bitter root Jonah had he was running from the very reason he was created and called to serve God. Maybe without realizing it you are running from God's call and purpose for your life because you have been hurt and you are not willing to resolve the problem by forgiving and forgetting? If that's the case it's time to let it go and release the person(s) that have hurt and hindered you from the call that is on your life. Don't let it happen; stop holding onto something Jesus died to forgive!

Jesus said: *"Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift."*

Matthew 5:23-24 KJV

Don't allow your un-forgiveness and bitterness to stop your worship and praise unto God.

Before Jesus died on the cross, He said: "Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots." Luke 23:34 KJV

One of the Greek definitions for the word for "forgive" means to be not guilty. If Jesus forgave and pronounced you and me not guilty we have to forgive them in such a way that when we see them or think of them we pronounce them not guilty even though they have hurt us!

Another Greek definition for the word for "forgive" means to be expired. Have you ever drunk expired milk? If so you would remember—milk that expires becomes bitter! When you hold on to something that Jesus died to forgive, you are holding on to something that has expired in the mind of God and this is why you will always be bitter until you let it go! I've seen so many people leave church and leave their call because of bitterness, offense, and un-forgiveness. Don't fall for the bait of Satan and the bitter root that comes with holding on to hurts, hindrances, and offenses Jesus died to forgive.

Think about all that you just read about un-forgiveness and bitterness. Basically, when you hold on to bitterness it will stop your prayers from being answered, stop your gift of worship for Jesus, give the enemy control of your life, and allow demonic tormentors to hinder you. Also, you won't be forgiven by Jesus which results in a broken relationship with you and your Heavenly Father! NO ONE IS WORTH LOSING

ALL THAT! LET IT GO!

About two years before I answered the call to become a minister, one of the hardest things in my life happened to me. That was the enemy's way to try to make me become offended at God, angry at a person, and bitter because of what happened.

My mother was murdered and it was her husband, my stepfather that did it! He was a cruel, evil man that had accusations against him of murdering others in the past before he ever murdered my mother. I tried to tell my mother not to marry him and I even tried to tell her to leave him weeks before she was murdered by him, but she wouldn't listen. One day I got a phone call that she was on life support from a head injury. I took the next flight out from Chicago to New York. When I finally got to the hospital, I thought I was going to fight with this man that did this to my mother. I entered the hospital room and I saw my mother, who was only forty-one years old at the time, filled with hoses and connected to machines. There were scars on her arms and neck from what looked like a fight she was in from a few weeks before when I spoke to her about leaving him.

I soon began to pray and ask God to help my mother and take her out of the coma she was in. After I finished praying I sat down and began to read the Bible. As I was reading the Bible, moments later the man that put my mother in a coma and murdered her walked in! I got off my chair and stood up thinking I'm gonna fight with this man, but something happened—God filled me with peace and love; I couldn't believe it! I began to tell him about Jesus and how only Jesus could help my mother,

because he told me he prays to a saint called Guadalupe. I told him how Jesus was the one true God.

You might be thinking why wasn't he arrested? He covered her murder up by getting rid of the evidence that he hit her in the head with, then washed her body after she was knocked out to make it look like she fell getting out of the shower and after that he liquified pills and made her ingest it to make it look like the reason she fell was because she took too many sleeping pills. After this he put her in bed and called the ambulance twenty hours later. He then told the ambulance that she fell getting out of the shower, hitting her head, then she laid down after to get some rest but the next day wouldn't get up.

Why do I know all this? My wife Gina, her aunt was married to the man's son that murdered my mother. They told my wife's aunt that if she ever told anyone they would do the same to her. Also, this man had connections with the police in the district he lived in; this man was an organized crime criminal. No matter what, though, God has all control over every government official (Rom 13). The point is, when God wants him to go to jail he will do it on his time and his way. Revenge is The LORD's not ours!

The day I had to sign the papers to pull the plug on the life support that was keeping my mother in a comatose state, I was in the room with my mother and he walked in. When I saw him I began to argue with him and told him I wasn't crazy and told him to get out of the room. As soon as he left the room, God began to minister to me to go and tell him I was sorry! I said, "God, why would you want me to do this? You know what he did." God told me, "I'm going to use you to display my love through your forgiveness and obedience." I shook my head in amazement; I then walked out of the room, went up to him, and said I'm sorry! I prayed, Lord maybe you're not allowing him to get locked up because you want him to become a Saul, someone that was a Christian killer but then became a mighty man of God. Who knows God's plan for him? I leave him in God's hands because He knows best.

He's still not in jail, but I did hear that he began to go to church. What's the point? Vengeance is the Lord's. It's our responsibility to forgive and it's God's responsibility to serve justice in His time and in His way. If God gave me the strength to forgive and show love in a tragedy I believe He can give you the same strength as well. Ask and you will receive!

I can relate with Jonah's feeling of anger and hurt, but when you're a

servant and a Christ follower you do what the Master wants. He will always want us to be the better person in the midst of a bitter situation! Besides, Jesus didn't only take our sin, sickness, sorrow, and shame—He also took our bitterness!

*"They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with **gall**: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink."*

Matthew 27:34 KJV

The Greek word here for "gall" is *chole*; it translates to bitterness! It's a word that means to greedily devour. Basically, Jesus ate bitterness so bitterness won't eat away at you!

Jesus taking bitterness on the cross is a picture of prophetic fulfillment of Exodus chapter fifteen:

"And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter: therefore the name of it was called Marah. And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink? And he cried unto the Lord; and the Lord shewed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet: there he made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there he proved them, And said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the Lord that healeth thee."

Exodus 15:23-26 KJV

Think about this. The first time God ever reveals His character as a healer—"I am The Lord that healeth"—he is not opening deaf ears or blind eyes or even raising up a lame man or any other form of physical sickness. Nope, it was a representation that He wants to heal you from your bitterness because bitterness is a cancer to the soul! Doctors are even reporting that a person that holds on to grudges and has bitterness actually is more likely to develop cancer! It's not worth it; it's time to let it GO! He wants to heal you spiritually first. The tree they threw in the water was a representation of the cross and the bitterness Jesus took! It's time to start putting Jesus in your life again and then the bitterness will be gone and life will be sweet again.

Jonah went through a lot of discipline because of the bitterness he had for the Assyrians. But when he finally came to his senses he got mercy from God that he didn't want them to get. See the problem is when people do us wrong we want justice, but when we do wrong we want mercy! It's time to apply what Jesus said: *"Blessed are the merciful: for*

they shall obtain mercy." Matthew 5:7 KJV