

DISCIPLESHIP. LESSON 39

1	PRAYER
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Group leader. Pray for God's guidance through his Spirit, for awareness of his presence and for listening to his voice. Dedicate this lesson about disciple making to the Lord.

2	WORSHIP (20 minutes)	<i>[ATTITUDE EXPRESSED]</i> LISTENING TO GOD
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Meditation

Worship is expressing your attitude towards God by listening to God's voice.

Theme: Listening to God.

Read the Bible passages. Read or explain the following in your own words.

1. Try to hear the voice of God.

Worship is not just singing and praying, but also *listening to God's voice*.

Worship is deliberately and consciously becoming quiet in order to hear the voice of God.

- Listen with great concentration to God's Words when you read or hear it.
- Give attention to God's Spirit speaking in your conscience, intuition, mind and heart.
- Pay close attention to God's acts in your life, including circumstances.

Worship is therefore paying close attention and trying to understand what God wants to say to you.

2. Try to discern the truth.

One important aspect of listening is to discern between truths and lies. The devil and evil people will try to shoot fiery arrows at your mind and spirit (Ephesians 6:16). But the Spirit of God will only speak the truth to you and will never say anything to you that is against the Bible (John 16:13)! Therefore it is very important that you always test the voice in your spirit (the subjective voice) by comparing it to the words of God in the Bible (the objective voice). Only when the subjective voice of God in your spirit agrees completely with the objective words of God in the Bible can you be sure that this is God's voice (1 John 4:1-6).

Worship.

Let us worship God by silently listening to God's words as it is read.

(The group leader reads Luke 6:20-45 slowly with short pauses between paragraphs, so that the listeners have a chance to hear what God is saying).

3	SHARING (20 minutes)	<i>[QUIET TIMES]</i> RUTH 1 -4
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Take turns and **share (or read)** from your notes) in short what you have learned from one of your quiet times out of the assigned Bible passages (Ruth 1-4).

Listen to the person sharing, take him serious and accept him. Do not discuss what he shares.

4	TEACHING (70 minutes)	<i>[CHRISTIAN CHARACTER]</i> A FORGIVING SPIRIT
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A part of discipleship training is building Christian character. In this study we learn the importance of forgiving people who have done you wrong or hurt you. See also manual 4, supplement 17. Anger and self-control.

A. WHAT IS BITTERNESS?

Bitterness is the result of injured feelings that have not healed. It is feelings of anger and scorn about actual or supposed mistreatment or injustice. Bitterness is an attitude of the heart that says, "I do not want to forgive" Bitterness is an unforgiving spirit.

Bitterness constantly afflicts the mind and distorts the correct discernment and judgement of things. Bitterness is a tumour that makes you deadly ill and burns you up: it not only affects your relationships and friendships, but also your emotions, body and faith.

B. WHY DO PEOPLE GET BITTER?

Discuss. Why do people get bitter? In which situations can you become bitter? Here are some reasons:

When people treat you unfairly. Maybe your partner does not love you. Your child rejects you. Your friend forgets you. Your boss gives you no appreciation or promotion. Your teacher does not compliment you for your work. A government official refuses to take responsible action. A judge gives a false verdict. A doctor makes the wrong diagnosis.

When someone misused you. Perhaps another person violated your rights. He took advantage of your goodness. He took your services for granted. Or he misused your body or possessions.

When your trust has been violated. After you shared your problems and hurts with a trusted friend, this person betrayed your confidence and talked about your problems and hurts to others.

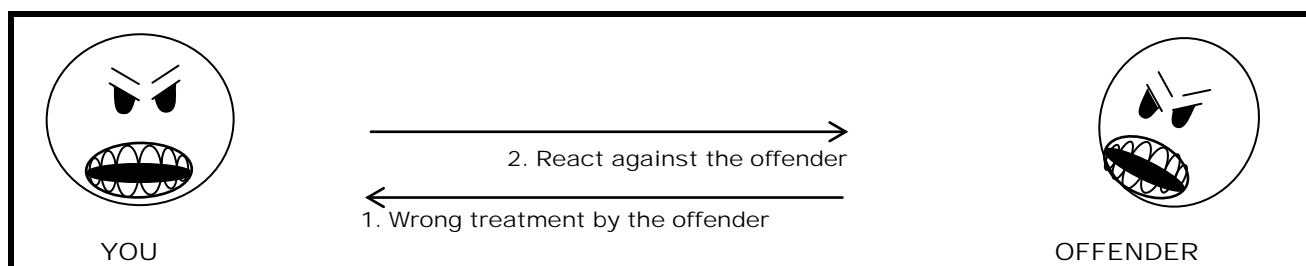
When you are misjudged. Perhaps you did your very best, but you failed to meet the high expectations or unreasonable demands of others. You are misunderstood, misjudged, undervalued and rejected.

When you have been disappointed. Perhaps the other person failed to meet your high expectation of him. He did not keep his promise or deliver the quality you expected. He is dishonest.

When you rebel. Sometimes God brings you into difficult circumstances in order to train your character or advance his kingdom. Maybe you resent God's dealings with you and question his character and plans.

How must you react when you notice that you have become bitter? You can react in different ways. You can vent your emotions on yourself or on others. You can scream, curse or attack an unsuspecting person. You can suppress your feelings, become depressive or even sick. Or you can hurt yourself seriously by the misuse of alcohol, drugs, sex, crime or a dangerous lifestyle.

C. THE WRONG REACTIONS TO INJUSTICE: REACT AGAINST THE OFFENDER



1. Wrong reaction: to react against the offender (the person who has treated you wrongly)

When you are wrongly treated, you often view it from a natural (human), horizontal perspective. You *only* see the offender who treated you with injustice. You feel hurt in your feelings; you are angry; you feel bitter towards him. So you react towards this offender. You even insult him or hurt him. Your motive is revenge, to repay him for the wrong he has done to you. This approach views *the wrong treatment* itself as the most important issue and God and his purpose is kept outside this event. The painful event dominates everything.

2. What are the consequences of bitterness against wrong treatment?

Read Matthew 6:15; Hebrews 12:5-6,10-11,14-15. "Bitterness" is the attitude that does not want to forgive or cannot forgive.

(1) Bitterness affects your relationship to God.

Most often you cannot forgive, because you do not want to forgive! You do not want to forgive, because you want the offender to be punished! But God will treat you as you treat the offender. When you refuse the grace of God to forgive and love the other, your relationship to God will become more and more distant. And you will miss a great opportunity to grow in holiness and fruitfulness.

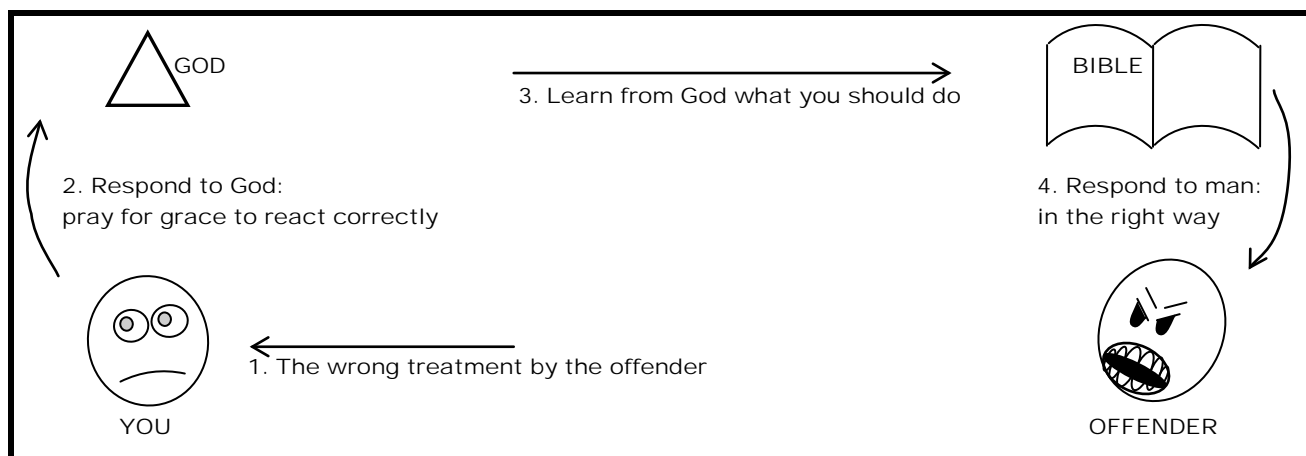
(2) Bitterness affects your relationship to other people.

You either withdraw from people and loose friends or you destroy relationships and become lonely. Your bitterness will "cause trouble and defile many". You become a troublemaker. You accuse and slander the offender and try to involve other people to take your side of the problem. People who only hear your side of the problem can spread your bitterness and quarrel everywhere. Bitterness lies at the root of many broken relationships and split congregations.

(3) Bitterness affects your relationship to yourself.

It is like poison in your mind, spirit and body. It pollutes your whole being, distorts your discernment and judgement, destroys your temper, tears your feelings apart and hardens your heart. It makes you harsh, critical, unfriendly, unattractive, depressed and unloved. You become a very lonely person!

D. THE RIGHT REACTION TO INJUSTICE: REACT IN THE DIRECTION OF GOD



When you are wrongly treated, you can view it deliberately as a Christian should view it, from the super-natural divine vertical perspective. You see God's hand and purpose in what is happening, otherwise he would not have allowed it! You respond towards God, pray and pour out your heart and feelings to God (Psalm 38:1-22; Psalm 62:8). You look to God for grace to react correctly towards the offender.

Then you study the Bible to discover how God wants you to respond to the offender (Matthew 18:21-35). You expect to draw benefit from the painful experience. By focussing on God and his purpose, the event becomes less painful and bearable.

This approach views the wrong treatment as the least important, but God and his purpose as the most important! In this way you will be able to respond to the offender in a self-controlled, rational and pleasant way.

E. THE EXAMPLE OF JOSEPH.

1. Joseph mistreated.

(1) His own family treated Joseph wrongly (Genesis 37:1-36).

His brothers were jealous, mistreated him and finally sold him as a slave. They lied to their father that a wild beast had killed him. Joseph did not deserve this treatment. He was the innocent victim of his family's injustice!

(2) His employer treated Joseph wrongly (Genesis 39:1-20).

His employer's wife tried to seduce him several times. Because he consistently refused, she falsely accused him and he was thrown into jail without a fair trial. Joseph was completely righteous. Yet, he became the innocent victim of his employer's injustice!

(3) His friends treated Joseph wrongly (Genesis 40:1-23).

He had helped them while they were with him in jail, but later they completely forgot about him. He remained forgotten and alone in jail for many years!

2. Joseph suffered a long time.

Joseph was 17 years old when he was sold as a slave to Egypt (Genesis 37:2). And he was 30 years old when he was finally released and became the prime minister of Egypt (Genesis 41:25-57). He had spent 13 long years as a slave and a prisoner in a foreign country! This happened because of the wrong treatment by other people!

3. Joseph's reaction to the mistreatment.

When treated with injustice, Joseph reacted towards God. During a period of prosperity, Joseph as under-king had stored up much grain in Egypt (Genesis 41:47-49). When a great drought and famine struck the region, Joseph's family in Canaan were threatened with starvation. So his father sent his brothers to Egypt to buy grain. Thus, without realising it, his brothers stood before him asking for food. Joseph knew them, but they did not recognise him (Genesis 42:1-3,8).

After some time, Joseph revealed himself to his brothers and asked them not to fear him. Joseph did not react horizontally with anger and threats (picture 1). Instead, he reacted deliberately vertically towards God (picture 2). He

said that it was not his brothers who sent him to Egypt, but God sent him ahead to Egypt to save his whole family! Joseph emphasized this three times (Genesis 45:1-11).

Joseph saw God's hand in this bad experience. Throughout all these difficult experiences, Joseph had not focussed on his troubles, but on God and God's plan with his life! God taught him to triumph over maltreatment instead of becoming a victim of hurt feelings and bitterness.

(4) Joseph's reaction to the offenders.

Read Genesis 45:13-15,21-24; Genesis 50:15-21. Joseph finally made the correct manward response. He forgave his brothers. The reunion with his brothers must have been a touching scene: there was hugging, kissing, weeping and talking together. Probably tears of repentance and of joy. He did not keep a record of their past wrongs against them (1 Corinthians 13:5).

A long time before he was able to be reconciled to his brothers, Joseph had forgiven them. He allowed God to take away all bitterness in his heart. Even after their father's death, his brothers again became anxious that he might now revenge himself against them. However, Joseph reassured them and affirmed his acceptance of them. God used this event to save a whole nation.

Instead of bitterness and revenge, Joseph only showed kindness and comfort. His injured feelings had healed many years before (Genesis 50:15-21)!

Joseph's difficulties became God's possibilities!

F. WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TEACH ABOUT TRIALS?

(1) How must Christians view trials?

Read Romans 8:28; Philippians 1:12-14.

When someone maltreats you, you could view it as something God in his sovereignty allows either for your own good or for the good of others.

(2) How to react to trials.

(1) Indignation.

Read Ephesians 4:26-27,29,31-32. Sometimes a Christian should become angry with holy and righteous indignation against injustice and sin. But a Christian may not vent his anger with screaming, cursing or any form of violence. His anger may not lead to "sin" (things that miss God's purpose).

Also anger may not continue longer than the same day (Ephesians 4:26). Before he goes to bed, his surge of anger should be over and he should have reconciled himself to the offender. Only in this way does a Christian give no foothold to the devil in his life.

(2) Revenge.

Read Matthew 5:38-42; Luke 6:27-28; Romans 12:17-21; 1 Peter 2:21-23. A Christian may never take revenge. The retaliation laws in the Old Testament, like "an eye for an eye" do NOT refer to personal revenge or acts of reprisal. They were legal and social laws in Israel and express the fact that there should be complete agreement between the offence and the punishment (Exodus 21:12-36; Leviticus 4:10-23; Deuteronomium 16:18-20; 19:14-21).

(3) Punishment.

Now, during the New Testament period, the punishment of injustice in society has become the responsibility of the government and it's legally appointed judges (Romans 13:1-7). Jesus Christ came to fulfil the Law and the Prophets (the whole Old Testament) (Matthew 5:17). The judicial and social laws in Israel in the Old Testament have been replaced by "the culture of the kingdom of God" in the New Testament (see the Sermon on the Mount and the parables of Jesus Christ). Instead of taking revenge, a Christian must entrust himself to God who will judge justly (1 Peter 2:21-23)! Therefore, instead of reacting towards the offender, the Christian must react towards God.

(4) Forgiveness.

Read Matthew 18:15-17; Luke 17:3-4. You must rebuke the offender, but you must do it in a way that is self-controlled, rational and pleasant. You may not remain angry at the other person. If you do, the offender and the wrong treatment become most important in your life and will determine all your other relationships. You must forgive. (Sometimes this may take a very long time and you may have to forgive him again and again).

(5) Grace.

How do you respond in a biblical way to the offender? Ask God for grace to give you the following:

- Do not resist evil people (Matthew 5:39)
- Love your enemy (the offender); do good to people who hate you; bless people curse you (Luke 6:27-28)
- Pray for people who treat you with injustice
- Bear up under the pain of unjust suffering (1 Peter 2:19)

- Overcome evil by doing good (Romans 12:21)
- As far as it depends on you, live at peace with the offender (Romans 12:18).

Instead of spending all our energy and money on acts of revenge, Christians are commanded to do things which the offender does not expect. Give them more (e.g. love, mercy, forgiveness) than they ask and overcome their evil by doing good to them. In this way your enemy may change his attitude and feel ashamed and embarrassed.

3. How to deal with your hurt feelings.

Read Psalm 38:1-22; Psalm 62:8.

Be completely honest towards yourself, towards the offender and towards God about your feelings and thoughts. Openly express your anger, bitterness, pain and hurt feelings to God.

Sometimes God will heal your hurt feelings immediately. But sometimes it takes a longer time to heal and you need to keep on praying and forgiving. If you have sinned in your anger, you only need to confess your sin to God and to the person against whom you sinned (James 5:16). You may like to involve another Christian in your struggle against bitterness (Matthew 18:19).

4. What is the advantage of trials?

Read Romans 5:3-5; Hebrews 12:10-11; James 1:2-4. Trials develop perseverance and character and make your life fruitful and influential! God uses trials, hardships and even persecution to first change you and then to make you a person that changes others.

G. PRACTICAL EXERCISE

- Think of some injustice you have done towards another person and have not set it right yet.
- Take the initiative and set it right.
- Think of an injustice someone did to you in the past. If you still harbour bitter thoughts and feelings about this, take the initiative and set things right. Allow God to heal your hurt feelings and remove your painful memories.
- Next time someone does some injustice against you, react immediately towards God. Let God use it to develop your perseverance and character and make you fruitful and influential.
- Teach other Christians what the Bible teaches about bitterness and forgiveness.

5	PRAYER (8 minutes)	[REACTIONS] PRAYER IN RESPONSE TO GOD'S WORD
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Take turns in the group to pray short to God in response to what you have learned today.
Or divide the group into two's or three's and pray to God in response to what you have learned today.

6	PREPARATION (2 minutes)	[ASSIGNMENT] FOR NEXT LESSON
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(Group leader. Give the group members this preparation for at home in writing or let them copy it down).

1. **Commitment.** Be committed to make disciples.
Preach, teach or study the teaching of "A forgiving spirit" together with another person or group of people.
2. **Personal time with God.** Have a quiet time from half a chapter of 1 Samuel 9, 10, 12 and 14 each day.
Make use of the favourite truth method. Make notes.
3. **Bible study.** Prepare the next Bible study at home. (2) Matthew 4:1-11. Theme: Temptations in the world.
Make use of the five steps method of Bible study. Make notes.
4. **Prayer.** Pray for someone or something specific this week and see what God is doing (Psalm 5:3).
5. **Update your notebook** on making disciples. Include the worship notes and teaching notes and this preparation.