

CHARACTER: A DISCIPLE DEVELOPS THE CHRISTIAN CHARACTER OF A FORGIVING SPIRIT

Copyright Dota

T = teacher 1 S = teacher 2

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series you may learn to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. Two teachers will teach from the Bible what is a disciple of Jesus Christ. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme. Today's teaching is: A DISCIPLE DEVELOPS THE CHRISTIAN CHARACTER OF A FORGIVING SPIRIT. The teaching is about how to deal with an unforgiving spirit or bitterness. What are some reasons why people become unforgiving or bitter? What are some harmful consequences of an unforgiving spirit or bitterness? What are the two possible ways of reacting when other people do wrong against you? Finally, what should a Christian disciple do when other people do wrong against him or her?

(S) POINT 1. WHAT IS BITTERNESS?

Bitterness is injured feelings that have not healed. Bitterness is feelings of anger and scorn about actual or supposed mistreatment or injustice. Bitterness constantly afflicts the mind and distorts the correct discernment and judgement of things. Bitterness is an unforgiving spirit.

(T) POINT 2. WHAT ARE THE CAUSES OF BITTERNESS?

Some reasons why you can become unforgiving or bitter are the following:

First. Broken trust. You can become unforgiving or bitter when someone else broke a trust. You shared your problems and hurts with a trusted friend and he or she betrays your confidence by talking about your problems and hurts to others.

Second. Misjudgement. You can become unforgiving or bitter when another person misjudged you. Perhaps you did your very best, but nevertheless you failed to meet his or her high expectation or unreasonable demand. You feel misunderstood, misjudged, devaluated and rejected.

Third. Disappointment. You can become unforgiving or bitter when another person failed to meet your high expectation of him or her. She did not keep her promise. Or he did not deliver the quality you expected. You feel cheated.

Fourth. Misuse. You can become unforgiving or bitter when another person violated your rights, took advantage of your goodness, took your services for granted or misused your body or possessions. You feel misused.

Fifth. Injustice. You can become unforgiving or bitter when another person treats you unfairly. Examples. Your life partner does not love you. Your child does not respect you. Your employer does not give you a deserved promotion. Your teacher does not give you credit for your work. You feel wronged.

Sixth. Rebellion. You can become unforgiving or bitter when 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. You no longer feel loved by God.

(S) POINT 3. WHAT IS THE NORMAL MANWARD REACTION TO WRONG TREATMENT?

When you are wrongly treated, you often view the wrong treatment from a natural, horizontal perspective. You only see the offender, who treated you with injustice, and you react only towards this offender. You feel hurt in your feelings, you are angry, you even insult him or you hurt him back. Your motive is *revenge*, to repay him for the wrong he has done to you. This manward response views "*the wrong treatment*" itself as the most important issue and keeps God completely out of the picture.

(T) POINT 4. WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF BITTERNESS?

In Hebrews 12:5-6,10-11,14-15 some of the most important words in the Bible about bitterness are written: "You have forgotten the word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: 'My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son'. ... Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. ... Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many."

Bitterness against wrong treatment against you affects the three most important relationships you have:

First. Bitterness affects your relationship to God. In Matthew 6:15, Jesus warns, "If you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." Your relationship with God will become more and more distant.

When you refuse the grace, which God gives to you to forgive and love the offender, then you will miss a great opportunity to grow in holiness and fruitfulness.

Second. Bitterness affects your relationship to other people. You either withdraw from people and loose friends or you destroy relationships. As Hebrews 12:15 says, “Your bitterness will cause trouble and defile many”. You become a troublemaker. You accuse and slander the offender. And you try to involve all other people to take your side of the problem. The people, who only hear your side of the problem, spread your bitterness and quarrel everywhere. Bitterness lies at the root of many broken relationships and split churches.

Third. Bitterness affects your relationship to yourself. Bitterness is like poison in your spirit, mind and body. Bitterness pollutes your whole being, distorts your discernment and judgement, destroys your temper, tears your feelings apart and hardens your heart. Bitterness makes you harsh, critical, unfriendly, unattractive and depressed. Bitterness breaks up your relationships and makes you an unloving person.

(S) POINT 5. WHAT SHOULD BE YOUR GODWARD RESPONSE TO WRONG TREATMENT?

When you are wrongly treated by another person you can choose to view the wrong treatment as a Christian should view it from the super-natural, vertical perspective. First. You believe that God is in complete control in what is happening and you try to see God’s hand in what is happening. You look to God for grace to react correctly. And you expect to draw benefit from the painful experience. Second. This results in prayer to God and in studying the Bible about what you should do. Third. You are able to reconcile yourself with the offender. This Godward response views the wrong treatment as the least important, but God and his purpose as the most important! God allowed the wrong treatment against you in order to train your character!

(T) POINT 6. HOW DID JOSEPH DEAL WITH BITTERNESS FOR WRONG TREATMENT?

First. In Genesis 37 we read how his own family wrongly treated Joseph. 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 became the innocent victim of his family’s injustice!

(S) Second. In Genesis 39 we read how his employer wrongly treated Joseph. His employer’s wife tried to seduce him several times. Because Joseph consistently refused her advances, she falsely accused him. Joseph was thrown into jail without trial. Joseph was completely righteous. Yet, he became the innocent victim of his employer’s injustice!

(T) Third. In Genesis 40 we read how his friends wrongly treated Joseph. He had helped his friends while they were with him in jail and had asked them to speak for him to the king. But his friends forgot completely about him. He remained forgotten and alone in jail for many years! Joseph became the innocent victim of his friend’s injustice!

(S) Fourth. In Genesis 41 we read how long Joseph suffered. He was 17 years old when he was sold as a slave to Egypt and he was 30 years old when he was finally released from prison. Through an interesting chain of events, Joseph was released and became the prime minister of Egypt. But before that, he had spent 13 long years as a slave and a prisoner in a foreign country, all because of the wrong treatment of other people!

(T) Fifth. In Genesis 45 we read how Joseph made a Godward response to his wrong treatment. During a great famine, he had stored up much grain in Egypt. His family in Canaan were threatened with starvation and his father sent his brothers to Egypt to buy grain. Thus, without realising it, his brothers stood before him asking for food. Joseph knew who they were, but they did not recognise who he was. Then Joseph revealed himself to his brothers, asked them to come close to him without fear. He did not react horizontally against the offenders with anger and threats, but vertically towards God. Four times he assured his brothers that it was *God* who had sent him ahead of his family to Egypt to save their lives (Genesis 45:5-9). Joseph saw God’s hand in the mistreatment he suffered. Throughout these difficult years, Joseph had focused his attention on God and not on his difficult circumstances or on his offenders! He focused his attention on what God was doing, not on what his enemies did to him! Joseph learned from God to be the victor over mistreatment, rather than the victim of injured feelings. Joseph believed that his difficulties had become God’s possibilities!

(S) Sixth. In Genesis 45 and 50 we read how Joseph finally made his manward response. Joseph 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. After his father’s death, his brothers again became anxious that Joseph might now revenge himself against them. However, in Genesis 50:19-21 Joseph reassured them and affirmed his acceptance of them. He said, “Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don’t be afraid. I will provide for you.” Thus he reassured them and spoke kindly to them. Instead of bitterness and revenge, Joseph only showed kindness and comfort. His injured feelings had healed many years before!

(T) POINT 7. WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TEACH ABOUT WRONG TREATMENT?

First. The Bible teaches how a Christian disciple should view all wrong treatment. Romans 8:28 says, “We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” We should view the wrong treatment as something God sovereignly allows for our own good and for the good of others. In Philippians 1:12-14 Paul writes from prison and says, “Now I want

you to know, brothers, that what has really happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.” Paul experienced how God can turn a wrong treatment like being imprisoned into advancing the kingdom of God. God can turn other people’s wrong treatment of you into your advantage!

(S) Second. The Bible teaches how a Christian disciple should react to wrong treatment.

1 Peter 2:21-23 says, “To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.” The Jews insulted Jesus and called him a madman and demon-possessed, and yet he did not retaliate! They beat him with fists in his face and struck his head crowned with a crown of thorns with a stick and yet he made no threats! Instead of retaliating and reacting negatively, Jesus prayed and left the outcome of his suffering for God to decide. He knew that there would be a judgement day in the future when God would judge all wrong doing that has ever been committed on earth. The Bible teaches that you should not retaliate or seek revenge, but rather entrust yourself to God who judges justly. Always respond towards God and not react towards the offender. Ask God to give you grace to think and feel positively. Ask God to give you strength to bear this trial and to give you love that would forgive the offender. Always fight against the tendency to develop a critical spirit, because a critical spirit usually develops into an unforgiving spirit!

(T) Third. The Bible teaches how a Christian disciple should respond to the wrongdoer.

Ephesians 4:31-32 says, “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” Do not rehearse the wrongdoing over and over in your mind or talk about it to everybody. Instead, you should try to clear up the problem between you, forgive the person who ill-treated you and be reconciled to him. Your forgiveness will prove to be genuine, when you refuse to be angry with him any longer and when you refuse to slander him before others.

But what should you do, when he refuses to be reconciled to you? Romans 12:17-21 teach, “Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, *as far as it depends on you*, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, but leave room for God’s wrath. ... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” Sometimes, you acknowledge your wrong and ask for forgiveness, but the other person does not want to forgive you. Instead, the other person seeks revenge. In such situations you should leave the matter in God’s sovereign hands. Leave room for God’s wrath. In his own time and way, God will punish the wrongdoer. Your responsibility is not to seek justice, but to seek to live in peace, even with your enemies. Devote yourself to overcome his evil, by continually forgiving him, by continually loving him and by continually doing good to him. Luke 6:27-28 says, “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.”

(S) Fourth. The Bible teaches how a Christian disciple should deal with lingering pain in his heart.

In Psalm 62:8 says, “Pour out your hearts to God.” Many Psalms teach you to bring your pain and hurt feelings to God in prayer. Tell God what you think and how you feel. Psalm 34:18 says, “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.” Only God can heal your hurt feelings and painful memories. He heals and causes you to no longer feel hurt about the wrong treatment of others against you.

(T) Fifth. The Bible teaches which benefits a Christian disciple may expect from his trials.

Romans 5:2-5 teach that God uses trials to develop perseverance and Christian character in his people. James 1:2-4 teach that God uses trials to develop perseverance and Christian maturity in his people. And Hebrews 12:10-11 teach that God uses trials to develop holiness and righteousness in his people and make their lives fruitful and influential! In the Christian faith, difficulties and trials have a meaning! In the Christian faith persecution and suffering has significance! God turns difficulties and trials into your advantage and makes you a far better person than what you could be without those difficulties and trials. God turns persecution and suffering into a great advantage for his Church and his kingdom and causes many former persecutors into his dedicated followers! That is why many Christians have learned not to resent difficulties and trials, but to welcome them!

(S) POINT 8. ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

First. Consider one wrong treatment against you in the past. Allow God to heal your hurt feelings and painful memories.

Second. See the workbooks “Go and make disciples” and Internet on www. Etc.

Third. Listen on short wave radio every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY to “Discipleship training on the air”.