

A. PITFALLS WITH PEOPLE

- We are in danger of falling into the Pit of offense, unforgiveness and bitterness when our waiting involves other people.
- Toxic thoughts and emotions are a natural byproduct of relational differences which sometimes end in strife and division: Heb 12:14-15 JBP -- Let it be your ambition to live at peace with all men and to achieve holiness "without which no man shall see the Lord". Be careful that none of you fails to respond to the grace which God gives, for if he does there can very easily spring up in him a bitter spirit which is not only bad in itself but can also poison the lives of many others.
- In order to stay out of the Pit we must recognize what's truly going on in our inner selves and we must look to Jesus for a way of escape. (1 Cor 10:13)
- Our passage provides strategies for avoiding or overcoming the pitfall of bitterness when our relationships are integral to our waiting situations:
 - Pursue Peace and unbroken connection in all our relationships
 - Seek to Be Holy, allowing God to remove the weight of any sin on our part as well as any wrong thinking or fleshly desires
 - Exercise God's Grace by avoiding the strict confines of religion or legalism while also taking care not to tolerate sin in an effort to achieve peace
 - Beware of Bitterness that can creep into our hearts and spill out onto others
- Bitterness is often described as a root that is hidden below the surface. It begins with the negative thoughts and feelings that come when people hurt or offend us.
- God tells us to get rid of bitterness and other toxic emotions in order to make room for forgiveness. We must choose it, but He must do the work in our hearts: Eph 4:31-32 NLT -- Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.
- The life of Joseph demonstrates a long season of WOG that centers on people.
- He exemplifies the call to forgive some very undeserving people! His 10 older brothers hated, mocked, and abandoned him in a literal Pit. (Gen 37:4, 19, 23-24)
- Their actions cost Joseph 13 years of hardship as a slave and a prisoner in Egypt. He also lost 22 years of time with his father, Jacob.
- Joseph knew great loss and betrayal, but he also experienced the goodness of God. The Lord strengthened Joseph in his trials and then honored his faithfulness.
- God was with Joseph in the Pit, the prison and in his promotion: Gen 41:38 -- Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find *such a one* as this, a man in whom *is* the Spirit of God?"
- When reunited with his brothers, there was no evidence of anger, resentment or bitterness in Joseph. He was filled with awe at God's sovereignty and supremacy: Gen 45:4-5 NIV -- Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! ⁵ And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you.
- Joseph waited well. He knew and trusted God so deeply that he could, by faith, submit to God's plan that was far greater than the offenses perpetrated against him.
- Insights:

B. ESCAPING THE PIT

- God will provide the desire, the power, and the guidance you need to rid your life of any bitterness or unforgiveness: Phil 2:13 AMP -- [Not in your own strength] for it is God Who is all the while effectually at work in you [energizing and creating in you the power and desire], both to will and to work for His good pleasure *and* satisfaction *and* delight.
- The uprooting process begins by identifying toxic thoughts and feelings toward people. Let the Spirit reveal anything inside that lets bitterness grow.
- The handout “Tools & Techniques: Practicing Forgiveness” sets forth the biblical principles for each of these aspects of dealing with relational differences:
 1. The Call to Forgive
 - Joseph did not have the written Word of God to guide him, but we’re blessed to have clear instructions from the Lord. Let’s not neglect to put them into practice!
 - Joseph had his godly ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to imitate. They all experienced God’s mercy and grace and extended the same to other people.
 - Likewise, we forgive others because God forgave us first and He asks us to!
 - The first step is to process with the Lord what happened in your relationship and how it has impacted you. Then you will be free to choose to forgive by His power.
 2. To Go or Not to Go
 - Scripture tells us to relate to others with love and peace in our hearts. If these fruits flow freely within us, there may not be a need to confront. (1 Pt 4:8, Col 3:15)
 - Joseph had a tender heart toward his brothers even though their sin against him was great. He wept when he saw them and their changed hearts. (Gen 43:30, 45:2)
 - It’s important to consider previous interactions with the person(s) involved. It may be unwise to go if your kind intentions have been “trampled underfoot.” (Mt 7:6)
 - We see this principle at play in Joseph’s relational issues with his brothers. He tested them to see if they were like they were 20 years ago:
 - He accused them of being spies and required them to return with Benjamin (Gen 42:14ff)
 - Their payment for the grain they bought was returned to their bags. (Gen 42:35)
 - When the brothers ate with Joseph, he showed favoritism to Benjamin. (Gen 43:4)
 - Joseph’s silver cup was planted in Benjamin’s bag along with the threat of making him a slave for this “theft.” (Gen 44:1-33)
 - The brothers passed every test, making way for restored relationship.
 - Joseph did not have to discuss their offenses with the brothers. He easily saw that God had been at work in them to accomplish remorse over their sin (Gen 44:16)
 - He cleared the air by simply acknowledging what had passed between them and reassured them that they were free to draw near without fear. (Gen 45:4)
 - Let’s go to God with willing hearts, ready to go or not to go based on His counsel.
 3. When You Go
 - Wait until you have dealt with any sinful response that the Spirit reveals.
 - Ask God to accomplish for you a) vulnerability, b) a readiness to reconcile, and c) the humility needed to put the other person’s interests ahead of your own. (Phil 2:3-4)
 - Pray for both parties that the Spirit will grant repentance to see from His view.
 4. How to Go
 - Keep the matter private and go without delay. Be ready to listen and to own anything you have done to contribute to the relational issue. (Mt 7:3)
 - Ask God to guard your lips! Speak in love, not judgment, and only the truth.

- Let's listen to God about your specific relational situation. In summary, we will:
 - Describe any precipitating events that have exposed a bitter root. Journaling about them with the Lord allows Him to uncover all the ways you've been affected.
 - Release to God everything this situation has cost you including mental or emotional pain and any losses incurred such as time, resources, relationships, or opportunities.
 - Extend forgiveness to anyone who has hurt you (other people, God, yourself). Do this by faith knowing that, over time, there may be a need to forgive more deeply or specifically.
 - Surrender the desire to take vengeance or retaliate.

- LISTENING EXERCISE

Lord, today I come before You, asking that You begin the work of uprooting bitterness or any other toxic thoughts and feelings that I have inside.

-- Where has offense, unforgiveness or bitterness entered my relationships?

-- Help me see all the ways this relational strife has affected me:

-- God, I ask for the desire and the power to release all the hurt & loss to You:

-- By faith (not by feelings) I choose to forgive the person(s) who hurt me:

-- Please give me Your tenderness and love for them in place of my bitterness:

-- Lord, I surrender my desire to retaliate or seek vengeance on them:

Lord, continue this work to completion. Show me next steps as I wait on You in the days to come. Help me to keep my heart open to Your work of peace, holiness, and grace.

C. PERSONAL APPLICATION

- ONE THING

- The One Thing that I'd like to take away from today's class and believe God to accomplish in my life is:

- PONDER THE TRUTH

Which verse or principle stood out to you this week? Write it below taking some time to review it often. Be still in God's presence, alert for new insights. Record them here.

- PROCESSING THE TRUTH

Prayerfully consider the Listening Exercises from this lesson. Ask the Spirit to guide you into a deeper understanding of the truth and to reveal any specific faith steps He is calling you to take. Write down your insights.