

**Ephesians 4:31** "Get rid of all bitterness..."

### **1. Bitterness.**

a) To get rid of Onion Weed demands hard work, infinite patience, sensitive fingers, and gentleness of extraction from the ground. It is those little white bulbs that can be hidden away so deeply, that are the problem.

The link between onion weed and we humans is that both have buried lives. The annoyance, the criticism, the impatience, the anger, the backbiting, the self-justification, and the self-pity can be manifestations of something which is deep, and with which we have difficulty in dealing.

b) Jeremiah gives us a picture.<sup>1</sup> "Moab has been at ease from his youth and (like wine) has settled on his dregs;" We know that good wine doesn't have dregs in it. You must separate the good stuff from the sediment. If you don't, it will go sour, bitter. That was the problem with Moab, "not poured from one jar to another".

Moab was in a disastrous state, falling apart as a nation, "because you trusted in your works and your treasures, you also shall be taken...into exile..."<sup>2</sup> Moab had become arrogant, soft, not open to the discipline of getting rid of the dregs - like bitter wine, "his taste remains in him, and his scent is not changed."<sup>3</sup>

c) Such a picture can fit. It may even fit us! We can be left with a bad taste, or we leave others with a bad taste, of bitterness, with a smell. We have not been healed of the ache, the pain that results - it clings.

Of course terrible things happen to us. Hurts, broken relationships, divorce, accidents, financial hardship, sickness and disease, being unloved and abused, falsely accused, missing out on your inheritance, failure and much more.

Billy grew up with a father who always put him down - "here give it to me, you will only wreck it"! One Christmas Billy lovingly unwrapped what looked like a lovely present from his father - it was a house brick. He father sneered over his shoulder - "and that is all you are worth!" Right there and then Billy made a bitter vow never to trust anyone again. His subsequent marriage was a disaster - he could not trust.

Flicka's mother had not wanted her. She felt rejected, relationships were difficult, leading to screaming matches. Flicka left home as soon as she could, with great bitterness towards her father, because he didn't, wouldn't, protect her, and her mother, because of the rejection. She left home not honouring her mother and her father.

They are terrible, common, situations demanding to be healed of the wounds from broken relationships, and of the bitter dregs remaining. How do we handle such brokenness, without growing bitter? Do our lives have to taste of such pain?

### **2. The Biblical Background.**

a) There are many references to *roots*. Bildad the Shutite tells Job that for the wicked, "His roots dry up beneath, and his branches wither above."<sup>4</sup> From Isaiah, "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit."<sup>5</sup> For Jeremiah the person who trusts in the Lord "is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit."<sup>6</sup> Jesus tells us that "Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."<sup>7</sup> The writer to the Hebrews tells us: "See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;"<sup>8</sup>

The story of Naomi in the book of Ruth helps us. The widow Naomi tells her widowed daughters-in-law to go home and not to come with her to Bethlehem. "No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me...the hand of the Lord has gone out against me."<sup>9</sup>

How does Naomi handle this? We wonder, for when she gets home she tells friends and neighbours, "Do not call me Naomi (meaning *my joy*); call me Mara (meaning *bitterness*)..."<sup>10</sup> She has moved from joy to bitterness.

It worked out for a grandchild was born to Ruth, and "the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without a redeemer...!"<sup>11</sup> "Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse...They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David."<sup>12</sup> From bitterness to joy!

We have that same hope when the root of bitterness is replaced with Jesus who is the root that brings life, sustenance and fruit.

b) To remain healthy: "See to it... that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many."<sup>13</sup> Many self-sow their own root of bitterness. It breaks out in sinful behaviour, which must, and does, affect all around. It is easy to detect - "you will recognize them by their fruits."<sup>14</sup>

Most find bitter people very disagreeable. Some enjoy being bitter. They revel in their hurt, their self-pity, their troubles. God will have none of it.

1. Bitter roots bring negative thinking and speaking, moaning, whingeing, delighting in gossip. It fragments families, affects relationships.
2. Bitter roots trigger hatred, cruelty, antagonism, self-pity, uncharitableness, judgement, vindictiveness, and pride.
3. Bitter roots refuse to forgive others, and do not look for, nor receive, forgiveness, when it is given.
4. Bitter roots, if fed long enough, will infiltrate others, by re-planting that same root of bitterness into their lives.
5. Bitter roots are a defence against the power of God breaking in, preventing the destruction of that stronghold, that inner vow, that controls.

Peter and John went to pray in Samaria, "that they might receive the Holy Spirit...they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit."<sup>15</sup> Simon Magus (the Magician) got in on the act - he had been clearly impressed by what he saw and heard. No, he was told, you cannot buy God's gift of the Holy Spirit<sup>16</sup> and you also need to "Repent...For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." Simon answered, "Pray...nothing of what you have said may come upon me."<sup>17</sup>

c) Our task in this ministry is to: "the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing."<sup>18</sup>

When a person comes to Jesus, is healed of such a bitter root, is comforted by the Holy Spirit, then there can only be this aroma, which "spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere...to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life."<sup>19</sup> Christians are life-givers, not death-dealers.

### **3. Digging out Bitter Roots.**

Bitterness is a parasite, like mistletoe - it sucks the life out of a tree, sucks the love and joy out of living in Christ. Remember that authentic Christianity always sets you free.

How do we "get rid of all bitterness..."? How do we get rid of "that harsh disagreeable taste"?<sup>20</sup> Dig it out!

- The biggest hurdle is acknowledging that it is there. Holy Spirit, show me, convict me, of any bitter root in my life.
- Recognise that the Lord wants these bitter roots dug out, so that we will have better health.
- Do not even attempt to justify your situation, even though it may be unfair, not your fault, or carelessness. None of such things is the issue, because it is you who has taken a root of bitterness into your spirit.
- Therefore confess the sin, forgive any who may have caused the grievance, and repent of the decision to plant that root in your life. You have dug well!
- Make a new decision to live in the joy and freedom of Jesus Christ.

"Father God, we thank you for your great love in healing us through the saving work of Jesus. Stir our hearts to co-operate with you tonight, so that there may be no bitter roots left in any of us. We give you the authority to root them out of our lives. "Father, send your Holy Spirit upon us and show us, convict us, of any bitter root that is within us. Father, we refuse to justify ourselves in any way for this situation, and acknowledge this root of bitterness. We confess this root of bitterness in our lives. Father, we decide to forgive anyone who we see as contributing to any such bitter root. We forgive them and love them in the name of Jesus. We thank you for your forgiveness and renounce the hold of that root in our lives. We dig it out and lay it at the foot of the Cross to be dealt with by Jesus in His Cross and resurrection - by His wounds we are healed. There is nothing left, not a trace. All gone. Thank you Jesus. It cannot grow again. We praise and bless you Jesus for this new freedom. Amen"

<sup>1</sup> See Jeremiah 48:11-13

<sup>2</sup> Jeremiah 48:7 (ESV)

<sup>3</sup> Jeremiah 48:11c (ESV)

<sup>4</sup> Job 18:16 (ESV)

<sup>5</sup> Isaiah 11:1 (ESV)

<sup>6</sup> Jeremiah 17:8 (ESV)

<sup>7</sup> Luke 3:9 (ESV)

<sup>8</sup> Hebrews 12:15 (ESV)

<sup>9</sup> Ruth 1:13b (ESV)

<sup>10</sup> Ruth 1:20 (ESV)

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- <sup>11</sup> Ruth 4:14 (ESV)  
<sup>12</sup> Ruth 4:16-17 (ESV)  
<sup>13</sup> Hebrews 12:15  
<sup>14</sup> Matthew 7:20 (ESV)  
<sup>15</sup> Acts 8:15,15 (ESV)  
<sup>16</sup> cf Acts 8:20  
<sup>17</sup> Acts 8:22-24 (ESV)  
<sup>18</sup> 2 Corinthians 2:15 (ESV)  
<sup>19</sup> 2 Corinthians 2:14b,16a (ESV)  
<sup>20</sup> Macquarie Dictionary