

### QUIET TIME

#### Theme: Bitterness and forgiveness

- Try to make a specific time every day to meet Jesus Christ through reading and meditating his Word.
- Pray, talk with Jesus Christ and make a few short notes about this Bible passage in your notebook.
- Record what you discover, what speaks to your mind and heart, what you find difficult or what you understand.

- Day 1 Matthew 5:38-42  
Reaction to unreasonable treatment (cf. 1 Peter 2:19-25)
- Day 2<sup>BS</sup> Matthew 18:21-35  
Heartily forgive
- Day 3 Romans 12:17-21  
Conquer evil by doing good
- Day 4 Genesis 37:1-36  
Joseph suffers unreasonable treatment by his family
- Day 5 Genesis 39:1-23  
Joseph suffers unreasonable treatment by his employer
- Day 6 Genesis 40:1-23  
Joseph suffers unreasonable treatment by his friends
- Day 7 Genesis 41:25-57  
Joseph is appointed to a high position after 13 years of suffering
- Day 8 Genesis 45:1-11  
Joseph's response to his unreasonable treatment
- Day 9 Genesis 50:15-21  
Joseph does not take revenge
- Day 10 Psalm 38:1-23  
Dealing with hurt feelings
- Think about Luke 6:27-28.  
Pray for those people who treat you with contempt.
  - Pray this week for the restoration of broken relationships.
  - Pray every day for someone or something specific and wait in expectation for what God is going to do (Psalm 5:3).

### STUDY

#### Theme: Bitterness and forgiveness

Read study 8 carefully before the next meeting. If you have questions, write them down and mail them to one of your group leaders. We will seek an answer together.

### BIBLE STUDY

#### Theme: The parable of the unmerciful servant

If you like, you may already prepare the Bible Study for the coming meeting by reading through the Bible passage. Make use of the 5-step Bible Study method. The Bible passage is: **Matthew 18:21-35**

### MEMORISATION

#### 1. Motivation

Jesus memorised Bible verses (Luke 4:4-13). Are you doing that?

#### 2. Memorisation

Memorise this verse in the Bible version of your choice.

#### FORGIVENESS

##### Luke 17:3

So watch yourselves.  
If your brother sins, rebuke him,  
and if he repents, forgive him.

##### Luke 17:3 (NIV)

#### 3. Review and back-review

*Review* the last 5 memorised verses once every day and back-review all other memorised verses once every three weeks.

#### 4. Memorisation of the Bible books

*The 5 books of the law:*

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.

*The 12 historical books:*

Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1&2 Samuel, 1&2 Kings, 1&2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther.

## 8. Bitterness and forgiveness

**Developing a Christian character is part of discipleship training. In this study we will consider the importance of learning to forgive people who wrong you.**

### A. What is bitterness?

Bitterness is the result of hurt feelings and painful memories that have not yet healed. It is feelings of anger and contempt for unjust treatment you received or think you received. Bitterness is an attitude of your heart which says: "I will not or cannot forgive".

Bitterness continuously afflicts your thoughts and feelings. It distorts your view of the world and your judgement of people and events around you. Bitterness is a cancer that consumes and wastes away your life in every aspect: it not only attacks your relationships and friendships, but also your emotions, body and faith.

### B. Why do people become bitter?

In which situations can you become embittered? Here are a few examples:

*When your trust is violated.*

Someone you tell something in confidence goes and talks to others about your problems and hurts.

*When you are judged unfairly.*

You do your best, but do not succeed to meet another person's high expectations and demands. You do not feel understood.

*When you are being disappointed.*

Another person does not meet your high expectations.

*When someone misuses you.*

Maybe someone misuses your goodness, possessions or even your body. Or he takes your services for granted or violates your rights.

*When you are treated with injustice.*

Maybe your friend forgets you; or your boss never gives you recognition or a promotion; or your teacher does not give you a compliment.

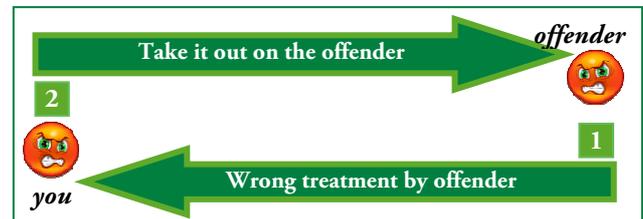
*When you become rebellious.*

Maybe you are angry with God for bringing you into difficult circumstances. Maybe you question his plans and decisions.

How should you react when you become aware that you are bitter? You can react in different ways. You could become physically violent or verbally violent. You could hurt yourself or others. You could scream and curse or attack a non-suspecting person. You could suppress your

anger and become depressive and sick. Or you could damage yourself by indulging in alcohol, drugs, sex, crime or any other dangerous lifestyle.

### C. The wrong reaction towards injustice: you react in the direction of the offender



#### 1. The wrong reaction: take it out on the offender (the person who wronged you)

When you are treated unfairly, you automatically view the situation from a purely human point of view – a horizontal point of view. You can *only* see the offender and so you download your negative feelings on him. You feel hurt, are angry, and even scold or beat him. Your purpose is revenge, to get him back.

You do not look at God and his purpose with you, but look only at the wrong treatment you received. The painful experience becomes all important to you.

#### 2. What are the consequences when you become bitter and react horizontally towards the offender?

Read Matthew 6:15; Hebrews 12:14-15.

*Bitterness affects your relationship with God.*

When you deny God's grace to forgive and love the offender, you drift more and more away from God. And you miss a great opportunity to grow in a holy character and fruitful ministry.

*Bitterness affects your relationship with other people.*

You distance yourself from people, lose the friends you have and become lonelier. Bitterness causes confusion among people and eventually infects more and more people. You become a troublemaker who puts the offender in a bad light with others in order to win them to your point of view. In their turn they spread your bitterness and gossiping to more and more people. Bitterness is often the cause of breaking up relationships between people and splitting communities and even churches apart.

*Bitterness affects your relationship to yourself.*

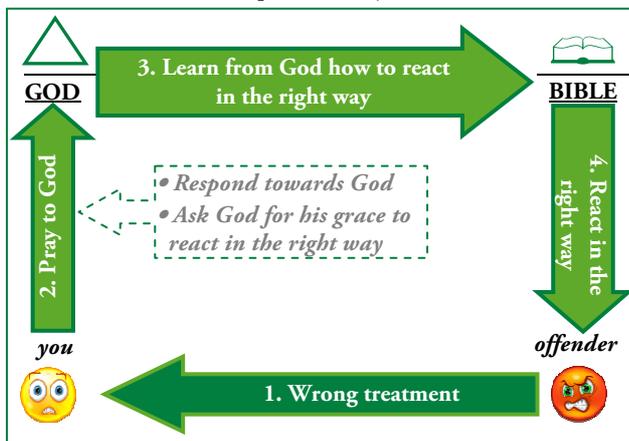
Bitterness works like poison in your mind, spirit and body. Bitterness contaminates your whole being. It distorts your judgment of everything, spoils your humour, tears your feelings apart and hardens your heart. Bitterness makes you hard, critical, depressive, unfriendly, unattractive, unwanted and unloved.

## D. The right response to injustice: you react in the direction of God

When you are treated unfairly, you deliberately decide to view the situation from God's point of view – a vertical point of view. You first look at God, who certainly has a purpose with this event; otherwise he would not have allowed it. You react towards God instead of towards the offender. You pour your feelings and thought out to God in prayer (Psalm 38:1-23; 62:9). You ask God for grace to respond to the offender in the right way.

Then you read the Bible to discover how God would want you to respond (e.g. Matthew 18:21-35). You expect to learn positive things from this experience. By looking to God and his purpose with you, the painful experience in a way becomes unimportant.

This enables you to respond to the offender in a self-controlled, rational and pleasant way.



## E. The example of Joseph

### 1. Joseph is treated unfairly

*Read Genesis 37:1-36. His own family treated Joseph with injustice.* His brothers were jealous, threw him in a well and then sold him as a slave. They told a lie to their father Jacob and said that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal. Joseph did not deserve such a treatment. He became the victim of the injustice of his own family!  
*Read Genesis 39:1-23. His own employer treated Joseph with injustice.* The wife of his employer tried to seduce Joseph, but he refused time and again. Finally she grabbed him, but he fled. Then she accused him falsely and he was thrown into prison without a trial. Joseph was righteous and yet he became the victim of the injustice of his employer!

*Read Genesis 40:1-23. His own friends treated Joseph with injustice.* While they were in prison, Joseph helped them by explaining their dreams. They promised to speak on his behalf to the king Pharaoh. But the cupbearer forgot Joseph for many years. Joseph became the victim of the injustice of his friends!

### 2. Joseph suffers for a long time

*Read Genesis 37:2 and Genesis 41:25-57.*

Joseph was 17 years old when his brothers sold him as a slave. And he was 30 years old when he became the second-in-command of Egypt. Joseph suffered for 13 long years as a slave and as a prisoner in a foreign country! This happened because he was treated with injustice by other people.

### 3. How Joseph responded to his ill treatment and suffering

*Read Genesis 42:1-3,8; Genesis 45:1-11.*

During a period of prosperity, Joseph as the second-in-command in Egypt bought much grain and stored it away. When there was a great drought and hunger in the whole region, his brothers came from Canaan to Egypt to buy grain. Without realizing it, Joseph's brothers stood in front of Joseph. He recognized them, but they did not recognize him.

After some time Joseph revealed himself to his brothers. He asked them not to fear him. Joseph did not react horizontally (picture 1) towards his brothers with anger or threats. On the contrary, Joseph deliberately responded vertically (picture 2) towards God by saying that it was not they, but God who had brought him to Egypt. God had sent him ahead in order to save his whole family! Joseph repeated this three times in succession (Genesis 45:4-8).

Joseph saw God's hand in this unpleasant event. Throughout all these difficult years Joseph had not looked at his difficult circumstances in life, but had directed his thoughts on God and God's purpose with his life! God had taught him to be a conqueror over ill treatment instead of being a victim of hurt feelings and bitterness. Joseph's problems literally became God's possibilities!

### 4. Joseph's response to his offenders

*Read Genesis 45:13-15,21-24; Genesis 50:15-21.*

Joseph forgave his brothers. His reunion with his brothers was characterised by hugs, tears and much talking. They were probably tears of genuine remorse and tears of joy. Joseph did not reckon the injustice of his brothers against them. He did not keep a list of all the wrongs other people had committed against him (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:5).

A long time before he was able to reconcile himself to his brothers, he had already forgiven them and had allowed God to remove all bitterness from his heart. Even when after his father's death his brothers feared that he might revenge himself on them, he calmed them and reassured them that God had used this event to save the nation (Genesis 50:19-21).

Instead of bitterness and revenge Joseph showed forgiveness and love. His hurt feelings had healed a long time ago!

## F. What does the Bible teach about trials?

Unjust treatment can turn into a trial which has many faces: opposition, rejection, contempt, mocking, injustice, mistreatment, persecution, destruction and death.

### 1. How should Christians view trials?

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

When someone treats you wrong, you could view the wrong treatment as something God allowed in order to do something good to you and to others.

### 2. How should Christians react towards trials?

*Read* Ephesians 4:26-27,29,31-32.

Sometimes Christians must become indignant, that is, angry with a holy and righteous anger against injustice and sin. But a Christian may not give vent to his anger by shouting, cursing or any form of violence. His righteous anger may not cause him to sin, that is, to do things that miss God's goal.

His anger may also not last longer than the same day (Ephesians 4:26). Before he goes to sleep, his anger must subside and he must have done everything to restore the relationship with the person with whom he was angry. Only in this way a Christian can avoid giving the devil a foothold in his life.

*Read* Matthew 18:15-17; Luke 17:3-4.

You may and should correct the person who treated you wrongly, but you must do it in a self-controlled, rational and pleasant way. But you may not remain angry with the other person. If you do, he becomes your constant focus in life and begins to determine all your other relationships. You must forgive him. (Sometimes this takes a long time and you need to forgive him again and again.)

*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 (e.g. "An eye for an eye", etc.) do not refer to personal revenge. They were judicial and social laws of the people of Israel and express that there must be a correspondence between the crime and the punishment (Exodus 21:12-36; Leviticus 24:10-23; Deuteronomy 19:14-21).

During the New Testament period, punishment for injustice in the society must be punished by the instituted authorities (judges and courts) (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 the Old Testament are now replaced by the culture of the kingdom of God in the New Testament (which is explained in the Sermon on the Mount and the parables of Jesus Christ). Instead of taking revenge a Christian must entrust the case to God who will judge with absolute

fairness (1 Peter 2:21-23)! Thus, instead of reacting towards the offender, the Christian reacts towards God.

How do you react in a biblical way to an offender?

Ask God to give you grace:

- not to resist a person doing evil to you (Matthew 5:39),
- to love the enemy (the offender),
- to do good to the person who hates you,
- to bless the person who curses you (Luke 6:27-28),
- to pray for the person who ill-treats you,
- to bear the trial (1 Peter 2:19),
- to conquer evil by doing good (Romans 12:21),
- and as far as it depends on you, to live at peace with the offender (Romans 12:18).

Instead of spending money and energy on acts of revenge, Christians are commanded and challenged to do to the offender things he never expects. Give him more than he asks and conquer his evil by doing good to him. This will cause him to feel ashamed of himself and he may change his attitude towards you.

### 3. What do you do with your hurt feelings?

*Read* Psalm 38:1-23; Psalm 62:9.

Be genuine and honest towards yourself, towards the offender and towards God about your feelings and thoughts. Express your anger, bitterness, pain and hurt feelings to God.

Sometimes your hurt feelings heal quickly. But sometimes it takes a long time to heal. In that case you should continue to pray and forgive the offender.

If you sinned in being bitter, you only need to confess your sins to God and to the person against whom you have sinned (James 5:16). However, you may ask another believer to help you in your struggle against bitterness (Matthew 18:19).

### 4. What is the value of trials?

*Read* Romans 5:3-5; Hebrews 12:10-11; James 1:2-4.

Trials develop perseverance and character. They make your life fruitful and influential!

## G. Assignments

Think about the injustice you have done towards other people and have not yet put things right. Take the initiative and set things right again.

Think about some injustice which you suffered in the past. If you still harbour bitter thoughts and hurt feelings about this event, go and get reconciled to this offender. Allow God to heal your hurt feelings and to remove your painful memories.

The next time someone treats you unfairly, respond immediately towards God. Allow God to develop your perseverance and character and make your life fruitful and influential.

Help and teach other Christians what the Bible teaches about bitterness and forgiveness.