

OUT of the **PRISON** of **BITTERNESS**



 **LHBC**
community
groups



LIVINGHOPE

baptist church

*Blessed be the God and Father
of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who according to
His abundant mercy
has begotten us again to a
Living Hope
through the resurrection of
Jesus Christ from the dead.*

1 Peter 1:3

Community Group Purpose Statement

We, as smaller gatherings of one family, will practice with our lives the gospel truths that we confess with our mouths. Together, we will allow our lives to be challenged by the gospel and one another; we will live lives of boldness and purpose. As we walk in the light of the gospel, we will point to the grace of God and its power to set lives free from sin and death. We will continue praying, teaching, making disciples, and bearing one another's burdens. Following the pattern set before us by Jesus, we will bring joy to our family (the church) and glory to his name.

What is a Community Group?

Community groups are small gatherings of people that meet regularly for friendship, accountability, study and prayer, laughter, and occasionally tears. Community groups are an essential expression of the mission of Living Hope Baptist Church. They're a place where we learn more about Jesus and life together. They're the place where we wrestle with the truths of the Bible and encourage one another toward the life that God intends for us.

Each community group is unique, shaped by its neighborhood and the people who attend. However, you can expect a weekly gathering in a residence that involves food, conversation, prayer, discussion for applying the Bible to practical living, and service in the neighborhood. At the heart of each community group is the desire to see an authentic community marked by love for Jesus, one another, and the neighborhood.

Why Should I Join a Community Group?

The God of the Bible is a Trinitarian God who is one and three persons: Father, Son, and Spirit. God has made us in his image, which means we are made for community and friendship. And when we are not living in community we suffer because life in a sinful world is too complex and tempting to journey alone. Therefore, community groups are a place where we can live in relationship with one another through the ups and downs of life.

OUT of the PRISON of BITTERNESS

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Out of the Prison of Bitterness

INTRODUCTION

One of the privileges I have as a minister is to go to the jail and preach and teach to those who have been incarcerated. The inmates are there for various reasons; some are awaiting trial while others have had their trial and are fulfilling their sentence or waiting to be transferred to another jail or prison. Even with all the different circumstances represented one thing is true – they are all confined in prison. The dictionary says that the word “prison” means a place of confinement and restraint. The freedoms that were once enjoyed are now gone. The work that was once bringing in income is now gone. Relationships are greatly hindered as separation from loved ones is a hard fact of prison. They cannot leave, choose their own favorite foods, have privacy, hug their children, kiss their wife, and are forced to live with others whether they like them or not. Doors are locked and time outside is limited. It truly is a horrible place to be. When I leave after preaching, I am always glad that I get to walk through the many doors that the correctional officers open for me.

I have discovered that there is another prison that many people, even believers in Jesus Christ, are living in on a daily basis. It is the prison of bitterness. We live in a cursed and fallen world and everyone is sinned against and everyone deals with the failures of others. Oh, and by the way, we sin against others and fail others also! Sometimes this sin against us is fairly minor, but at other times it may truly be a life changing and heart breaking event in our lives. We are tempted to say, “If only they had not _____, then I wouldn't be here today.” Bitterness and hardness can then make a home in our heart and soon we find ourselves trapped in prison. We are consumed with the hurt and pain and our heart can turn ugly with a desire to attack and fight back and sin against God in so many ways. Our joy is quickly gone and we begin to believe that our lives are in the hands of the one who sinned against us rather than in the hands of our loving God who is sovereign over all.

You are about to embark on a journey into the depths of your heart – a journey that may reveal to you some things about yourself that you do not want to see. This study will examine bit-

terness from God's point of view which always brings hope, joy, and a release from prison to the freedom of joy and peace. May God release us all as we humbly set out on this journey "Out of the Prison of Bitterness."

"Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." **Ephesians 4:31,32**

The Prison of Bitterness

chapter 1

SUMMARY

This lesson is designed to be an introduction to the topic of bitterness. It will examine some scriptural instances where people dealt with bitterness. Remember that hatred, anger, discontentment, and holding a grudge always accompanies bitterness. You will often see these things together or are least implied.

OBSERVATION

1. Read Genesis 27:30-41. What was Esau's response to Jacob in his heart and in his thinking even though he never told another soul? Why was he so upset and angry and bitter?

2. Read 1 Samuel 30:1-6. What did the people talk about amongst themselves concerning David? What do you think was controlling their heart that caused them to take this course of action?

3. Read Psalm 64:2-4. What is a powerful weapon that bitterness uses as seen in these verses? Where do you see an innocent party in these verses? Do you think it is common for the bitterness of others to attack the innocent? Why is that so common? (See Romans 3:13,14)

4. Read 1 Samuel 22:2. The word bitterness here means discontented. How in this verse is being discontented or dissatisfied related to bitterness? In general, why do discontentment and bitterness go together so easily?

5. Read Hebrews 12:15 (Deuteronomy 29:18). How in this verse does bitterness relate to rejecting the Gospel of Jesus and what does this verse say about bitterness being contagious?

APPLICATION

1. As you look back at your life, can you think of anyone who has wronged you where you have struggled with bitterness? Would you be willing to share with your group some of that struggle? (Please keep in mind that this is not designed to express bitterness to your group or to take a “jab” at another person). Here are some thoughts to guide your thinking:

- What dominated your thoughts about this person / group / company / etc....
- What emotions entered your mind and body when you thought of the wrong done to you?
- Did you ever lash out?
- Did you do anything to get even?
- Did you allow the wrong to take your joy?
- Did you ever wish something bad would happen to them or that they would fail?
- Did you ever desire God's best for their life?

2. Try to memorize **Ephesians 4:31,32.**

“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

PRAYER

It would be good at the start of this study to examine your life and confess any sin of bitterness, anger, holding a grudge, or discontentment to Jesus. Seek his forgiveness in prayer and ask Him for strength and grace to obey His words related to bitterness. Bitterness grows deep and may take some time to completely remove and it will probably rear its ugly head again and again. Pray that you will be humble and continue to grow as you learn more of God's will in this study. Thank Him for His grace and forgiveness for those times where bitterness has ruled your heart.

NOTES

The Sovereignty of God and Bitterness

chapter 2

SUMMARY

This lesson will examine that bitterness comes from the refusal to acknowledge God's sovereign control in our lives and a dissatisfaction of God's sovereign control of our lives.

We will see that our lives are not in the control of any person, company, group, or government. We will see that God works all things for our good, even those things which are done that are evil against us. We will see that we never have a right to be bitter, and when we are bitter, it is really bitterness against God.

OBSERVATION

1. Read Genesis 37:1-4. What things do you see in these verses that led to Joseph's brothers being bitter against him and hating him? How did this bitterness affect the speech of the brothers toward Joseph?

2. Read Genesis 37:5-11. What things are going on in these verses that increased the hate and the bitterness? Do you see another sin that is related to bitterness? What is that sin?

3. Read Genesis 37:17-20, 23-28. What did the bitterness lead the brothers to do?

4. Read Genesis 39:19,20. Joseph didn't do anything wrong and was in fact respectful and honoring of his master. What wrong was done to Joseph here?

5. Read Genesis 40:21-23. Joseph is in prison under the blessing of God and he interprets two dreams. He asks to be remembered by the cupbearer so that he may get out of prison. What wrong does the cup bearer do to Joseph?

6. Read Genesis 50:20. What was the bedrock truth that enabled Joseph to guard against bitterness in all the wrong doing that he faced? What did God accomplish through all the wrong doing?

7. Read Hebrews 12:2. Why did Jesus endure the wrong that was done to Him?

APPLICATION

1. Where have you failed to see the sovereignty of God in the difficult times of your life?

(Look for times when you worry; complain; are discontent; lash out at others; believe you can't go on)

2. Why should you never get bitter against anyone as you understand the sovereignty of God in your life?

3. Confess your sin of bitterness if God has convicted you concerning someone.

PRAYER

Jesus, I have seen from this study that when I am bitter I am really bitter against you and your plan for my life. I know the hurt and the pain is real, but I thank you that you have a purpose to bring you glory and to always do good for me in my life. Forgive me and help me live for your glory.

NOTES

Anger and Bitterness

chapter 3

SUMMARY

Anger and bitterness are relatives. You will not find one without the other as well as many other related sins. This lesson will examine sinful anger and seek to give biblical answers to this monster that imprisons us.

OBSERVATION

1. Read Genesis 4:5-8. Cain's anger was seen in what two ways? Why do you think Cain was so angry?

2. Read James 1:20. What will sinful anger never produce?

3. Anger often explodes? What does **Proverbs 29:11** say about that?

4. What does **Proverbs 15:18** say about what sinful anger does to others? What does it say about the person who is slow to anger?

5. What does **Proverbs 19:9** say will be the continual life problem of an angry person?

6. Read Ephesians 4:26,27. There is an anger that is not sinful, though most of the time we probably sin in our anger as it is based on what we want and did not get rather than based on the glory of God and His Word. What do these verses say about anger and about who is watching to pounce and destroy when anger is not dealt with properly?

7. How is anger seen in Jesus life in **Mark 3:5**, yet without sin?

APPLICATION

1. Do you have any "little things" that get you angry? What are they? Why do you think you choose to be angry over these "little things"?

2. Read Ephesians 4:31. According to this verse, is anger something that a person is just "cursed" with, or is it something that can be repented of and removed from a life? Explain your reasoning?

3. Anger does not produce the righteousness of God but it does produce something. What things have you seen in your own life and in the lives of others that anger produces?

4. What makes you the angriest? According to **Ephesians 4:32**, what should replace that?

5. When you are angry, who are you focusing on? What are you focusing on? What does **Matthew 6:33** tell us to focus on?

PRAYER

Confess any sin of anger that has gained a foothold in your life. Thank God for His grace and mercy. Ask God for spiritual strength to understand that you deserve nothing in this world therefore you never have a right to be angry. Ask God to help you obey His Word in being kind and tenderhearted in the little things and the big things.

NOTES

Forgiveness and Bitterness

-part one

chapter 4

SUMMARY

Since bitterness and anger often come when we have been sinned against by another, the subject of forgiveness must be discussed when dealing with bitterness. It is of vital importance that we understand true biblical forgiveness and its purpose. In part one we will look at the biblical meaning of forgiveness. Without this understanding we will not be able to forgive others or be able to detect if we have or not. We will see that man's forgiveness to man is modeled after God's forgiveness of man.

OBSERVATION

1. 1 Corinthians 11: 17-34 gives instructions concerning the Lord's Supper. Why do you think Christ commanded the church to have a memorial service to remember His death? (Your answer should be related to the topic of forgiveness)

2. Read Nehemiah 9:17. What is God's great desire in this verse?

3. Read Psalm 103:3. According to this verse, is there a sin so great that God cannot forgive when He is asked to forgive?

4. Read Psalm 130:3,4. What would be the fate of all mankind if God were to mark our sins?

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5. Read Luke 7:41-43. Does forgiveness cost the forgiver or the one who is forgiven? Explain your answer. Can you think of one word that would describe this act of forgiveness?

6. Read Ephesians 1:7. Write down all your observations from this verse. In other words, what all do you see in this verse?

APPLICATION

1. Have you been forgiven by God? Do you believe that God, through His Son's death and resurrection has forgiven you sins – past, present, and future?

2. As a believer, do you struggle with God's forgiveness? Do you see God as always being upset with you, looking down on you because you don't measure up, feeling like you can never do enough to "earn" his love? If this is true, would you be willing to share with your group? How does **Nehemiah 9:17** show you that this view of God is wrong?

3. How does the cross of Jesus assure you of God's forgiveness for any and every sin that you can and will commit? See **1 John 4:10**.

4. In preparation for the next lesson, how does understanding God's forgiveness help us in learning what it means to forgive others? How come we cannot truly forgive if we don't understand the way God forgives?

PRAYER

A prayer of thanksgiving and worship is the proper response after considering the forgiveness of a Holy God to sinners like you and me. If God were to mark our sins, none of us would stand.

Wonderful, merciful Savior
Precious Redeemer and Friend
Who would have thought that a Lamb
Could rescue the souls of men
Oh, You rescue the souls of men

You are the One that we praise
You are the One we adore
You give the healing and grace
Our hearts always hunger for
Oh, our hearts always hunger for

NOTES

Forgiveness and Bitterness

-part two

chapter 5

SUMMARY

This lesson will concentrate on our forgiveness to others, a key element in dealing biblically with forgiveness, anger, and holding a grudge. We will see that our forgiveness of others is to be modeled after God's forgiveness of us. It is a gift that is given that is undeserved and it is all of grace.

OBSERVATION

1. Who does **Ephesians 4:32** say our forgiveness is to be like?

2. There are three commands in **Luke 17:3**. List them

Command 1 _____

Command 2 _____

Command 3 _____

3. What is the only way you can forgive them according to **Luke 17:3**?

4. **Read Luke 17:4**. What do you think Jesus is saying in this verse about how many times we are to forgive a person if they ask us?

5. The question comes up: "How do I forgive someone who doesn't ask me?" The answer is simple – you can't and you don't. Forgiveness is a gift that must be asked for, that must be given, and that must be received. However, there is an answer that pleases God.

Read Luke 13:34

Read Mark 11:25,26

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In these verses, even though the other person is not there or unwilling, what is going on in the heart of the person who has been sinned against?

6. What do you see in Jesus' heart towards those who hated Him and killed Him. **Read Luke 23:34.**

APPLICATION

1. An unforgiving spirit toward someone is a sure sign that bitterness reigns in your heart. Is there anyone in your life that you have not forgiven or that you do not possess a heart of forgiveness?

2. Has anyone done anything as bad to you as you did to Jesus? Did Jesus forgive you? On the basis of that, can you think of any reason that you have the right to withhold forgiveness from someone else?

3. Why do you think it is so hard to forgive or possess a heart of forgiveness at times?

CHAPTER 5: FORGIVENESS AND BITTERNESS - PART TWO

4. Why is just saying "I'm sorry", fall short of Jesus teaching on forgiveness?

5. Why is giving someone a "gift of forgiveness", called a "gift"?

PRAYER

Examine your heart to see if you are harboring bitterness rather than a heart of forgiving love. Confess any sin you see and ask God to forgive you and help you be like Jesus.

NOTES

The Biblical Solution for Bitterness

chapter 6

SUMMARY

Breaking free from the prison of bitterness takes obedience, biblical love, and a disciplined heart and mind. It is not easy, but grace makes it possible. Obedience and faith in God's plan always works. Romans 12 gives us the biblical mandate in what to do when wrong has been done to us by others. It is the exact opposite of what our natural feelings desire to do, but it is the right way that pleases God, even if the one who wronged you never repents and never asks for your forgiveness. The following lesson will focus on God's mandate for overcoming evil with good.

OBSERVATION

1. What is God's command to His people in **Romans 12:21**?
2. How does **Romans 12:14** tell us to use our mouths towards those who have persecuted us?
Does this include when we are in front of them or when we are with others or both?
3. What does rejoicing and weeping with others in **Romans 12:15** have to do with bitterness and not being overcome with evil by others?
4. How does being wise in your sight fight against following God's plan? **Romans 12:16**

5. What two opposite things do you see in **Romans 12:17**?

6. Why does **verse 18** say "if possible, so far as it depends on you" – live at peace with everyone? Why did Paul word it this way?

7. For those who have wronged you in some way, what can you trust God to do? Look at **verse 19**

8. What is Jesus example in **1 Peter 2:22,23**?

APPLICATION

1. Can you think of a time when you paid back someone evil for evil....got even?

2. Have you ever desired to get even with someone?

3. Why is it so hard to speak well of someone after they have hurt you in a very deep way?

4. Why is meeting the need of an enemy a way to be like Jesus?
(Romans 12:17,20)

5. Can you say today that you have allowed an evil done to you to control your life in such a way that your life has suffered great damage because you have not followed God's mandate in Romans 12? What are you harboring inside that you just won't get rid of by using God's method for freedom from the prison of bitterness?

If you feel comfortable sharing with your group to seek their prayer and support, you are encouraged to do so...even if you don't feel comfortable, you will be greatly benefited by the love and support and prayers of your fellow believers.

PRAYER

A prayer of confession may be in order as you examine your life concerning your choosing to allow evil to defeat you. Thank God for His forgiveness and His strength and mercy. Also, thank God for fellow believers to help you in prayer.

NOTES

Love and Bitterness

-part one

chapter 7

SUMMARY

Most of the time our love is based on feelings and whims. The Scriptures call for the child of God's love to go far beyond that. Biblical love is a key ingredient in the fight against bitterness and anger and grudge holding. These next two lessons will concentrate on biblical love.

OBSERVATION

1. Read **Matthew 22:36-40**. What two commands pertaining to love do you see in these verses?
2. In **John 3:16**, how is love expressed?
3. How did Jesus display His love as seen in **Galatians 1:4 & 2:20**?
4. How did Jesus display his love in **John 13:3-17**, even though He was the Master? He became the _____?
5. Read **Romans 5:7,8**. What does verse 7 say about loving and dying for good men and what does verse 8 say about who Jesus died for? Why did Paul use this comparison?

APPLICATION

1. How does God's love for sinners and for those who refuse Him encourage you to love others who sin against you and refuse you?

2. When someone has wronged us we tend to hold it against them for quite a long time. How many times have you failed God and how many times have you approached him to ask forgiveness and how many times did you expect Him to keep His promise to forgive you? Why is it so easy to expect God to love us and forgive us but yet we readily withhold it from others?

3. Loving others means being a servant to others, as Jesus showed us. Do you ever grow weary of being a servant? When we don't want to be a servant, we don't want to be like _____. Why is loving and being a servant so closely related.

4. How can the love of Jesus take bitterness out of your heart toward others?

PRAYER

Father, help me to love like Jesus, who was sinned against more than I will ever be sinned against. Help me to love to give rather than receive and help me by your grace love those who do not love me.

NOTES

Love and Bitterness

-part two

chapter 8

SUMMARY

Most of the time our love is based on feelings and whims. The Scriptures call for the child of God's love to go far beyond that. Biblical love is a key ingredient in the fight against bitterness and anger and grudge holding. This is part two of Love and Bitterness.

OBSERVATION

1. Read **John 13:34,35**. What is to be a dominant characteristic of a child of God?
2. In the same verses, what does love tell the world? Why wouldn't John say that it is the biggest church building, or the most church buses, or having a TV broadcast, or having a famous preacher, or a number of other things?
3. According to **1 Corinthians 13: 1-3**, what does the writer say we have if we do not have love?
4. What is so powerful about real biblical love? What is it that the world sees that causes them to take notice?
5. According to **Luke 6:27-38**, can we love even when we don't feel like it? If so, how do we love when our feelings are telling us to

do the opposite?

APPLICATION

1. Do you find it easier to show love and kindness to people you work with or even with strangers than you do your own family? Do you control your words and your expressions and your actions more closely at home or away? Why or why not is that true?

2. In what ways can you show love to someone who has wronged you? Remember, you don't have to "feel" like it to do it!

3. How can loving your enemy reach them with the gospel?

4. Will loving your enemy guarantee that every time they will respond back with love? Is this the reason for loving them? If not, what is the only reason for loving them?

5. 1 John 4:8 says that God is love. Why would it be wrong for you to say that love is God?

6. Would you say that you are actively engaged in true biblical love toward your church family?
What things are you doing to show that love in a tangible way?

PRAYER

A prayer for strength to love those who have wronged you and to do what you may not feel like doing may be in order. Remember Jesus is your example as He came in obedience to His Father and was willing to suffer and be wronged.

NOTES

Jesus and Bitterness

chapter 9

SUMMARY

This lesson is designed to look at the life of Jesus, especially the crucifixion, and to examine how He faced the wrong doing of others and how He loved and committed Himself to the sovereignty of His Father, and ended His life victoriously. We will see that, as followers of Jesus, we are called to do the same, and have been given grace to be like Jesus when others wrong us.

OBSERVATION

1. We have already seen these verses in another lesson, but it will be good to revisit them now. What is Peter's directive for us in **1 Peter 2:21-23**? According to these verses, is there any situation or circumstance where God gives us and "out" when we are wronged? Are there times when we can go on the attack?

2. **Read Matthew 26:56.** What did the disciples of Jesus do to Jesus in this pressure filled situation?

3. **Read Matthew 26:69-75.** What did Peter do when he was recognized as a follower of Jesus?

4. **Read Matthew 26:47-50.** What did Judas do to Jesus?

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5. Read Matthew 26:36-46. Did the disciples show Jesus that they were burdened about Him and what was about to happen? What did their actions say to Jesus?

6. Read Matthew 27:21-23. Who did the crowd choose to be set free and who did the crowd Jesus to be crucified? Did his innocence prevent wrong doing?

7. Read Matthew 27:27-50. Write down your observations of all the wrong doing that Jesus faced in these verses.

8. Read Matthew 28:16-20. Do you see any bitterness in Jesus towards His Father or towards His disciples? Explain your answer.

APPLICATION

1. How do you feel when someone betrays you?

2. What goes on in your mind when you are falsely accused or lied about or someone distorts an incident to make you look bad?

3. Have you ever been rejected by someone? What went on inside your mind and your emotions?

4. How did Jesus avoid being bitter when so much wrong doing was directed toward Him (Remember, He did nothing wrong). How Does Jesus example help you to remain joyful and loving towards God the Father when you face wrong doing? (See also **Hebrews 12:2-4**)

PRAYER

Forgive me Lord for the times I have been bitter for wrong doing against me. I am ashamed of myself and also humbled as I have seen Your Son and what He faced as He followed Your perfect plan. Help me to focus on the joy of your presence now and when I see you face to face. Thank you for enduring the cross for me, when I wronged you.

NOTES

Guidelines for Taking a Biblical Stand

chapter 10

SUMMARY

The question arises, if I am wronged, is there ever a time that I am to take a stand? And if there are times where I am supposed to take a stand, how do I do it? Are we allowed to speak to someone who has wronged us? Are we allowed to confront people? What if the law of our land goes against biblical directives? This lesson is not designed to cover every possible situation, but is rather designed as a basic guideline in helping us to be obedient to God when taking a stand, without sinning or becoming bitter. We will see several examples of people who took a stand but who did it in a way that pleased God.

OBSERVATION

1. In **Daniel 3:12**, what did these men do to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego?
2. As you read **Daniel 3:18**, did these men take a stand? How so?
3. What do you think was their motive in taking a stand? **Read Daniel 3:16-18.**
4. **Read Daniel 3:13-18.** What do these verses tell us about how they viewed themselves in taking this stand and what they were willing to face?

5. As you have read the account of this story, how do you picture the stand these three men took? In other words, describe their words, their attitudes, their spirit, their emotions, and their demeanor? Maybe this will help – If you saw this on the evening news, would they reflect crazy people screaming and shouting for their cause, or people in control, bravely standing up for their God and showing a deep love for their God and for others? Explain your answer.

APPLICATION

1. Do you think getting into shouting matches with people accomplishes anything? Why or why not?

2. What do you think unbelievers think of people who claim to know Christ when they see them out of control, yelling, making signs that are mean spirited, etc..... Do you think they would want their God? Explain your answer

3. How would you describe yourself when you take a stand and you are by yourself? What's going on inside your mind and emotions when it's you on the side of truth and a whole bunch of other people on the other side?

CHAPTER 10: GUIDELINES FOR TAKING A BIBLICAL STAND

4. When you take a stand against what is false or even a certain sin – how can you sin while taking that stand against other people?

5. How can you avoid looking down on others who don't believe like you and who don't hold the truths of God's Word as the only rule for faith and practice?

PRAYER

As we live in a world of evil, promised that we will face persecution, a prayer for grace to glorify God always when you take a stand is in order. Ask God to help you remove your desires to win an argument and elevate self. Ask Him for the grace and strength to stand alone and to suffer. Ask Him to help Jesus be seen in you. Commit your way to Him

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PRAYER NEEDS:

PRAYER NEEDS:



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