

Biblical Psychology 101

Resentment

Lesson Five

INTRODUCTION:

- I. All of us have felt the sting of being wrongly accused or of being unfairly treated.
 - A. And for some of us, those memories were very painful. They've left us with the vicious scars of deep-seated resentment.
 1. Someone once said, "Many of our hearts are swollen with the poison of years-old resentment because we've refused to allow Christ to pull the thorns."
 - a. In other words, we're like children who cry loud and long about the pain we're feeling, but we won't let anyone touch the sore.
 - B. This morning as we continue our studies we've entitled "Biblical Psychology 101" we're going to talk about the subject of "Resentment."
 1. The premise for this entire series of lessons has been to show that the Bible offers the best and most practical advice for dealing with a whole range of issues that challenge us.

- a. Essentially, the Bible is the best book on psychology ever written – and it should be. These wonderful teachings are given to us by the God who created the mind of man.
 - b. Who would better know how to ease the emotional burdens and heal the mental wounds we've suffered than God Himself.
- II. When we look for the source of the deep-seated resentment that poisons our souls, we might be surprised to discover that it all comes down to an improper way of responding to past injuries.
- A. Rather than respond vertically to God, we've chosen to respond horizontally.
 1. We've chosen to focus all our attention on ourselves and on the wrong that was done against us by others. But we do have another option.
 2. We can deliberately choose to shift our focus vertically by setting our eyes on God the healer of our souls, and not the wrong we've suffered that is poisoning our souls.
 3. However, for most of us, our first reaction to this kind of solution is that it really won't work to heal years and years of built-up bitterness and resentment.

- a. These simple solutions sound nice coming from some idealistic, visionary preacher – but we live in the real world.
 - b. Out here in the trenches, it's a whole different story of hurt feelings and ruptured relationships.
 - c. And so we convince ourselves that we're doomed to suffer a lifetime of hurt and resentment!
- B. Well, let me say – not only from my personal experience but also from what I read in the Scriptures – there is a cure for resentment!
- 1. In fact, a man by the name of Joseph found the cure for this problem in his own life.
 - a. Although his story is familiar to most of us, let's look at it once again.
 - b. Only this time, let's don't approach the life of Joseph from the childhood stories we heard growing up, let's look at Joseph as he struggled in the real world of mistreatment and tough choices.

BODY:

- I. The account of Joseph's life shows us that while those around him were focused on their own lives, Joseph was focused on God. He had learned to

be a "vertical thinker" – even when circumstances in his life tried to force his attention to the "horizontal."

A. In Genesis chapter 37, Joseph is seen as the favorite son of his father.

1. Out of bitterness, resentment and jealousy, his brothers turned against him.
 - a. At first some wanted to kill Joseph to get rid of their father's favorite son forever.
 - b. But cooler heads prevailed, and they sold him into slavery to a caravan on its way to Egypt.
 - c. To cover up their crime, they lied to their father Jacob telling him that his favorite son had been killed by some wild beast – they even produced Joseph's bloody "coat of many colors" as proof.
2. This is the first injustice Joseph suffers – an injustice that will trigger a whole series of other injustices that will plague the life of this God-fearing young man.

B. In Genesis chapter 39, young Joseph became the personal servant of an Egyptian official named Potiphar.

1. But Potiphar's wife became attracted to Joseph, and when he refused to yield to her advances, she screamed "rape," and accused Joseph of trying to force himself upon her.

2. Unfortunately, Potiphar – whether or not he completely believed his wife – did the only thing he could do to protect his reputation.
 - a. He threw Joseph in jail on trumped up charges.
- C. In Genesis chapter 40, Joseph interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh's chief baker and chief cup bearer – they had apparently landed in the same prison for displeasing their boss, Pharaoh.
1. Joseph told Pharaoh's cup bearer that he would soon be serving wine to his master once again.
 2. The fate of the baker was another story – Joseph told him he would soon be put to death.
 3. Obviously, the cup bearer was overwhelmed with joy, knowing that he would be out of prison soon.
 - a. So Joseph asked him to put in a good word for him to Pharaoh when he got out.
 4. But once the cup bearer was released, he quickly forgot about this Hebrew slave.
- D. According to Genesis chapter 41, Joseph spent two more years in jail, until a miraculous event took place. Joseph was called to interpret a dream of Pharaoh.
1. This not only got Joseph released from prison, but after he told Pharaoh the dream meant there was a great famine coming,

Joseph was immediately put in charge of overseeing preparations for the coming famine.

2. Overnight, Joseph was propelled from a Hebrew slave in prison to become the Prime Minister of Egypt – second in command to Pharaoh himself.
 3. After seven years of great prosperity in the land of Egypt, the famine struck – just as Joseph prophesied.
 - a. Fortunately, the Egyptians were prepared – thanks to Joseph.
 - b. However, people in other lands were not prepared, and felt the effects of the famine full force – including Joseph's own family back in the land of Canaan.
 4. So, in Genesis 42 Joseph's father Jacob sent his sons (Joseph's brothers) to Egypt in search for food.
 - a. The brothers of Joseph were brought before Pharaoh's representative to make their requests for grain.
 - b. What they didn't realize was the man before whom they stood was Joseph – the brother they sold into slavery years earlier.
- E. In chapters 43 and 44, the brothers, without knowing Joseph's true identity, were put through a series of gut-wrenching tests to see if they were the same hateful, resentful men who had sold their own brother into slavery years earlier.

1. This brings us to Genesis chapter 45 where Joseph's guilt finally got the best of him over the way he had been treating his clueless brothers.
 - a. **Genesis 45:1-3** – *Then Joseph could not restrain himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, "Make everyone go out from me!" So no one stood with him while Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept aloud, and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard it. Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph; does my father still live?" But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed in his presence.*
2. Here was Joseph's golden opportunity!
 - a. Joseph had these wicked, rebellious, self-centered brothers of his right in the palm of his hands.
 - b. With one simple command, Joseph could have had their heads – or at least could have thrown them into the very prison where he had spent much of his youth.
 - c. But he didn't.
3. Instead, Joseph extended complete forgiveness.
 - a. **Genesis 45:5-8** – *"But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent*

me before you to preserve life. For these two years the famine has been in the land, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt."

- F. Did you hear what Joseph said. Three times he said it was really God who sent him to Egypt! **(vs. 5, 7, 8)**
1. Instead of striking back at his brothers with bitterness and resentment, Joseph responded with love and compassion.
 - a. That's a "vertical" type of response!
 - b. That's the kind of response that can only come from someone who has their eyes fixed on God.
 2. Joseph's forgiveness didn't stop there. He then proceeded to weave the threads of a torn family back together again.
 - a. **Genesis 45:9-11** – *"Hurry and go up to my father, and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph: "God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not tarry. You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near to me, you and your*

children, your children's children, your flocks and your herds, and all that you have. There I will provide for you, lest you and your household, and all that you have, come to poverty; for there are still five years of famine."

b. **Genesis 45:14-15** – *Then he fell on his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck. Moreover he kissed all his brothers and wept over them, and after that his brothers talked with him.*

3. Just in case you're thinking that Joseph's head was in the clouds, and that he didn't really see his brothers for what and who they really were, look further.

a. **Genesis 45:22-24** – *Then the sons of Israel did so; and Joseph gave them carts, according to the command of Pharaoh, and he gave them provisions for the journey. He gave to all of them, to each man, changes of garments; but to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver and five changes of garments. And he sent to his father these things: ten donkeys loaded with the good things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain, bread, and food for his father for the journey. So he sent his brothers away, and they*

departed; and he said to them, "See that you do not become troubled along the way."

- b. Joseph knew his brothers better than they realized – he knew they were the quarreling kind.
 - c. He also knew they would probably argue over what belonged to who, and end up becoming embroiled in some heated argument.
 - d. So he made sure each one had the same amount as the other – except for his brother Benjamin, of course.
4. In the following chapters we read where Jacob finally learned that Joseph was still alive and well in Egypt.
- a. In fact, Joseph insisted that the whole family move to Egypt where he could care for them.
 - b. After all, Joseph was second-in-command over the entire land of Egypt, right behind Pharaoh.
- G. As the story of Joseph continues, we learn his father Jacob died years later while living with the rest of the family in Egypt.
- 1. However, the death of Jacob caused Joseph's brothers to become a little apprehensive – they felt as long as Dad was alive, Joseph wouldn't take out his revenge.

- a. **Genesis 50:15** – *When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "Perhaps Joseph will hate us, and may actually repay us for all the evil which we did to him."*
2. Worried that they are now about to receive their "just deserts," they began begging for mercy.
 - a. **Genesis 50:16-18** – *So they sent messengers to Joseph, saying, "Before your father died he commanded, saying, 'Thus you shall say to Joseph: "I beg you, please forgive the trespass of your brothers and their sin; for they did evil to you."' Now, please, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of your father." And Joseph wept when they spoke to him. Then his brothers also went and fell down before his face, and they said, "Behold, we are your servants."*
3. Here was another opportunity for Joseph to allow the seeds of bitterness to spring up.
 - a. For several years Joseph had provided his brothers with nothing but the best.
 - b. And now he learned they had doubted his sincerity all along!
4. But instead of responding with bitter resentment, Joseph responded with compassion and understanding – Joseph responded "vertically."

a. **Genesis 50:19-21** – *Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.*

5. Did you hear that!

a. *"As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive."*

b. **Genesis 50:20** – The 50-20 Principle – *"...You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good..."*

c. Joseph was saying, "God took the evil you intended to do against me and turned it into a blessing – because it had been His plan from the very beginning to send me to Egypt for your benefit."

II. Joseph is a shining example of how you and I should respond to injustice.

A. So, let's take a moment and look at five ways we can also avoid the temptation to respond out of bitter resentment toward those who have wronged us unjustly.

1. First, accept that your circumstances may be directly from God – maybe what's happening to you is God's plan.
 - a. This is a critical step that starts us moving in the direction of responding vertically rather than horizontally.
 - b. If you can trust God to use those times when you're unjustly treated for your good, then you'll be well on your way to vertical thinker.
2. Second, think offensively, not defensively.
 - a. You can't help but be jolted when a close friend or relative turns against you – that's understandable.
 - b. But you can guard against becoming defensive.
 - (1). If all your energy is focused on defending yourself, or in thinking up all the reasons why you don't deserve this kind of treatment, you're acting from a horizontal point of view.
 - c. However, when you begin thinking offensively, seeking God to strengthen you to forgive and forget, then you're thinking becomes vertical.
3. Third, consider the other person's point of view.
 - a. Do your best to put yourself in the other person's shoes.

- b. You may discover that some of their behavior was well-founded.
 - c. If it is, then go to them and ask for forgiveness.
 - d. But even if you didn't do anything wrong, perhaps you'll gain some insights that will help you have compassion on them.
4. Fourth, stay positive and search for God's lessons.
- a. It's easy to let circumstances cause bitterness in our lives – to give into negative reactions – to become cynical and walk around with a "chip on our shoulder."
 - b. Although we can't always be happy, we can have joy.
 - (1). There is a difference between being happy and having joy.
 - (2). Joy is possible because God is involved in our lives – even when things don't go well and bring sorrow into our hearts.
 - (3). We may not be happy, but our hearts can always be filled with the joy of knowing we're a child of God – nobody can take that from us.
5. Finally, discover ways to show kindness to the other person.

- a. Like it or not, we're going to spend eternity with some of the same folks who have wronged us on earth! The Lord is going to give them opportunities to repent too!
- b. And don't forget, all of us have offended someone in our life. We've all hurt someone's feelings – either intentionally or unintentionally.
 - (1). So none of us can cast self-righteous stones at others.
- c. The apostle Paul actually said it best.
 - (1). **Romans 12:17-21** – *Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. Therefore, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

CONCLUSION:

- I. Unfortunately, some Christians seem to carry around a mental diary to chronicle every hurt they've ever experienced.
 - A. They can give you the date, the time of day, the people involved, and practically every word that was said.
 1. Their whole world has turned bitter with resentment, and they've become increasingly negative, critical, easily offended and friendless.
 2. That's just the opposite of what the Christian should be.
 - B. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus made this very challenging statement.
 1. In **Matthew 5:43-48** He said, *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more*

than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect."

2. There is simply no way we can remain resentful toward anyone when we deliberately choose to love our enemies; to bless those who curse us; to do good to those who hate us; and to pray for those who spitefully use us and persecute us.
- C. Alexander Pope was the one who said, "To err is human, to forgive is divine."
1. How true.
 2. If Jesus could look down from the cross into the faces of His murderers and say, "*Father, forgive them for they know not what they do,*" (**Luke 23:34**) who do we think we are that we can refuse to say the same thing to those who have hurt or wronged us?
- II. Is your life filled with the poison of resentment from thorns of bitterness that are still deeply lodged in your soul?
- A. Someone once said, "Resentment is like drinking poison and then hoping someone else will die."
1. How true! When our heart is filled with the poison of bitterness we're the ones who are slowly being destroyed – from the inside out.

2. Isn't it time to let the Lord gently remove those thorns so you can begin to heal?
- B. Sadly, the people who have the most difficulty forgiving others are those who have never known forgiveness themselves.
1. If you want to experience real, genuine forgiveness for everything you've ever done in your life then come to Jesus Christ and find the forgiveness you've been seeking at the foot of the cross.
 - a. Come to Him in faith, truly believing Him to be the Christ, the Son of the Living God who died for you.
 - b. Repent by turning away from your past life of bitterness and resentment and let yourself truly grieve over the way you've felt about others.
 - c. Joyfully and openly confess your faith in Jesus Christ to others.
 - d. And finally, be baptized into Christ for the remission of all your past sins – allow the waters of baptism to wash away your sins.
- C. But there may be some here this morning who have experienced the grace and mercy of a forgiving God by your obedience to the gospel, but for some reason you have refused to forgive others for the hurt they have caused you.

1. You are still feeling the pain they caused, and forgiveness is the last thing you want to give them.
2. If I've just described you, then listen to what Jesus told His disciples during His *Sermon on the Mount*:
 - a. **Matthew 6:9-13** – *"In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen."*
3. Then Jesus added this caveat:
 - a. **Matthew 6:14-15** – *"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."*
4. To put it simply, we cannot be forgiven if we're not willing to forgive.
5. How sad it will be for some – perhaps even some here – to lose their souls over such a senseless sin as bitterness and resentment.

6. If Jesus can forgive you for all you've done in life by sinning against Him, don't you think it's time you forgave others for the things they've done to you?