

# Bible Studies for Life: February 20

*The Pitfall of Bitterness • Genesis 45: 1-5, 9-11*

*By Paula Smith*

*She left and left him everything – the kids, the house, the pain*

*Reminders of their happy years pour out on him like rain.*

*The pictures crash like waves against the windows of his mind*

*He'll have to learn to handle them one memory at a time.*

*One memory at a time –*

*Each moment he relives is the one that he forgives*

*But he will live when he forgives one memory at a time.*

*He's working at forgiving her each step along the way*

*But seventy times seven barely gets him through one day*

*This anger that torments him is the reoccurring kind*

*He's learning how to set her free one memory at a time*

*He made up his mind to pardon her once for all*

*But that didn't change his power to recall*

*One memory at a time –*

*Each moment he relives is the one that he forgives*

*But he will live when he forgives one memory at a time.*

– One Memory at a Time from the album, Every Single Day, by Nancy Honeytree (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5hJr-AAppqo>)



Smith

*Bitterness...*

Bitterness is usually the result of betrayal.  
Someone hurts us,  
Someone abandons us,  
Someone breaks our trust –  
And bitterness takes root.

It starts with anger or frustration. If there is no resolution, it only grows worse. Years are wasted, consumed with bitterness and resentment which, of course, gives way to regret. It hinders our ability to enjoy the supernatural satisfaction of God's presence in our lives.

Joseph experienced constant betrayal. It seems he had found a way to deal with his bitterness and move on but consider this: Joseph named one of his sons Manasseh. It means "God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house" (Genesis 41:51 ESV).

It appears that Joseph took all the bitterness he felt and put it on the shoulders of his son, who had no understanding of what his father had experienced. He made his son's name a reminder, even though the meaning of the name itself indicated he had forgotten. Every time he said, "Manasseh," it was a reminder of his bitter past.

Bitterness had impacted Joseph's life despite his claims that he had forgotten all and moved on. Why would we think that? Consider he had been running Egypt for fourteen years. He was a powerful man.

If he had wanted to reconcile with his brothers, he could have sent for them at any time. He had all the resources to make that happen, but he didn't. It seems he had grown comfortable living in bitterness, anger, resentment, and denial.

When his brothers showed up in Egypt to buy grain, it was clear Joseph hadn't forgotten. Despite all his success, the bitterness ate at him and robbed him of joy.

*So, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift (Matthew 5: 23-24 ESV).*

When Joseph saw his brothers bowing down, he remembered his dream.

*He said to them, "Hear this dream that I have dreamed: Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. And behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf." His brothers said to him, "Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?" So, they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words" (Genesis 37: 6-8 ESV).*

This flashback helped Joseph see God at work. This dream had come true only by God's supernatural intervention! There was no denying the incredible circumstances surrounding how God had orchestrated the whole scene. For the first time since his betrayal, Joseph was forced to process the spiritual, emotional, and personal toll his bitterness had taken on him.

*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 ESV).*

As children of God, we must work for reconciliation. As we see from Joseph's experience, reconciliation requires humility. Through humility we recognize how desperate we are for God's mercy toward our own sinfulness. This is when the healing from bitterness begins.

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