
A PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY
THE BATTLE
with Bitterness
Bringing our hurt to God
and learning to live without revenge
Bible study based on the preaching of Cortt Chavis.

BEGIN HERE

Introduction

We can love God sincerely and still struggle with what someone has done to us. Years of prayer, faithful service and knowledge of the Bible do not make betrayal easy. Sometimes the people who hurt us are people we trusted deeply. Sometimes the hardest part is watching life continue as though nothing happened. We carry a memory that others seem to have forgotten, and we wonder what we are supposed to do with the pain that remains.

This study asks how we can bring that pain before God without allowing bitterness to guide the rest of our lives. The question is personal. We may recognize the problem quickly in someone else while giving our own resentment a different name. We may call it being careful, being realistic or simply remembering what happened. Sometimes those descriptions are fair. At other times, we are protecting a desire to see someone suffer. We need enough honesty to notice the difference and enough humility to let the Word correct us.

Pastor Chavis builds his message around the warning in Hebrews 12 about a root of bitterness. He then gives five practical responses: refuse to let another person's actions decide our own, leave vengeance with God, remember the mercy we have received, look for growth rather than revenge, and keep praying while we are hurting. These responses do not ask us to pretend that wrong was right. They ask us to consider what we are allowing that wrong to produce within us.

We should be clear from the beginning that forgiveness does not require us to remain in danger, excuse abuse or abandon proper accountability. God can help us grow after suffering without making the suffering itself good. Pain is not proof that He caused or approved what someone did. Some situations require protection, truthful reporting and help from people able to respond wisely. We can seek those things while also asking God to free us from hatred and the desire for personal revenge.

Let us take time with the passages and keep our own lives in view. We are not trying to prove that we have never been bitter or that we can recover from every wound quickly. We are asking what faithfulness looks like in the life we actually have. There may be something we need to confess, a response we need to change or a burden we need help carrying. We can begin before our feelings are settled. Hannah's example will remind us that a hurting soul can still turn toward the Lord.

Main Scripture

Hebrews 12 verses 14 and 15 KJV

14 Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:

15 Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;

01 When trouble comes to people who love God

The sermon begins by challenging an expectation we may carry without saying it aloud. We can believe that giving our lives to God should protect us from the kinds of trouble other people experience. We know the right answer when someone asks whether Christians suffer. Yet when trouble reaches our own family, ministry or friendships, we may feel that something has gone wrong with the arrangement. We have prayed, obeyed and tried to be faithful. Why are we still facing something so painful?

We need to notice what that question assumes. Have we begun to think of obedience as a way to make certain that life goes as we prefer? Have we quietly expected God to prevent anyone from disappointing us? When those expectations remain unexamined, each hardship can feel like evidence that He has failed us. We may still speak respectfully about Him in church while carrying an accusation in our private thoughts. The first honest step may be admitting that we expected a kind of protection He did not promise in the passages before us.

Pastor Chavis reminds us that trouble is present even in the lives of people who are trying to please God. Receiving the Holy Ghost, being baptized in Jesus' name and serving faithfully do not make us untouched by human weakness or wrongdoing. The message does not begin by asking us to become less committed. It asks us to understand that commitment does not remove every painful circumstance. We need a faith that can bring trouble to God rather than a faith that depends on trouble never coming.

This also means we should be careful about the conclusions we draw from someone else's suffering. A difficult season does not give us permission to decide that the person must have been careless or unfaithful. We may know very little about what happened. Even when we know some of the facts, we cannot explain everything God is doing. If we turn every wound into a judgment about the wounded person, we make it harder for people to seek help honestly. We also prepare a harsh answer for ourselves when our own difficult season comes.

01

The message encourages us to believe that growth remains possible. We can become more patient, more truthful and more willing to depend on God as we respond to hardship. But we should not turn that hope into a claim that every harmful act was sent by God to improve us. Someone else's cruelty remains that person's responsibility. We can ask what God will help us do now without calling the cruelty necessary. His ability to bring good into our lives does not require us to rename evil as kindness.

We may also need to release the pressure to find a lesson immediately. When pain is fresh, we may not be ready to explain it. We can tell God that we do not understand and still remain willing to follow Him. Sometimes the next faithful response is quite ordinary. We need to tell the truth, seek safety, ask for support or refuse a message meant to hurt someone. We do not need a complete explanation of the past before we can obey in the present. The absence of an explanation does not make every response equally wise.

Let us consider how we usually respond when life becomes difficult. Do we first assume that God has forgotten us? Do we compare our trouble with the easier life we imagine someone else has? Do we become ashamed because experienced Christians are supposed to cope better? These responses deserve patient attention. We can bring them into prayer rather than allowing them to become settled beliefs. The Lord does not need us to protect a polished version of our faith. We can admit that we are disappointed and ask Him to help us remain teachable.

The question at the beginning of this study is therefore not whether we can avoid every wound. We cannot build our lives around that hope. The question is how we will respond when a wound comes. We may not be able to change another person's decision or recover what was lost. We can still seek God's direction for what happens within us and through us. That brings us to the image in Hebrews 12. Trouble may reach our lives, but we need to watch carefully what we allow to take root.

> *We can tell God that we do not understand and still remain willing to follow Him.*

02 What we allow to take root

Hebrews 12:15 asks us to be diligent. The warning deserves more than an occasional glance at our attitudes when something has already gone badly wrong. A root is usually hidden before its growth becomes obvious above the ground. Pastor Chavis uses that picture to help us think about bitterness. We may be managing our public behavior while resentment is quietly shaping the way we interpret people, remember events and prepare for the next disappointment. What remains out of sight can still influence the life everyone sees.

We should begin by distinguishing hurt from the settled desire to hold on to resentment. Feeling pain after betrayal does not by itself tell us that we are refusing God. Tears are not evidence of spiritual failure. Anger can make us aware that something serious has happened. The question becomes what we do with those responses. Do we bring them honestly to the Lord and seek help where we need it? Or do we keep returning to them because we want the wrong to justify whatever we decide to do next?

A memory can become a place where we rehearse a case against someone. Each time we return to it, we add the words we wish we had said, imagine the embarrassment we hope they will feel and explain why they do not deserve peace. We may not act on those thoughts immediately. Still, we are giving them attention and making room for them. This is one way the root picture can help us examine ourselves. We are asking what our repeated attention is feeding, not merely whether we have behaved badly in public.

The verse says that the root springs up and troubles us. Bitterness does not remain a harmless possession that we can store until we are ready to use it. It can become part of the way we meet ordinary life. A small disagreement feels like another betrayal. A harmless question sounds like an accusation. Someone else's success feels offensive because the person who hurt us once succeeded too. We should not assume every difficult reaction has the same cause, but we can ask whether an old grievance is speaking more loudly than the present facts.

02

The warning then reaches beyond one person: "thereby many be defiled." Our inner life affects the people around us. We may bring suspicion from one relationship into another. We may teach our children to expect the worst of people they have never met. We may make a church conversation revolve around an old dispute until others begin carrying our anger as their own. The sermon asks us to see that bitterness can spread. What we call our private issue may already be shaping the atmosphere in our home or ministry.

This deserves particular attention when others trust our judgment. A person with influence can pass resentment along in the form of advice. We may think we are protecting someone when we are actually inviting that person to share our hostility. Wise warnings should be truthful and aimed at protection. They should not depend on exaggeration, selective details or a desire to turn everyone against someone. Before speaking, we can ask what the listener truly needs to know and whether our purpose would remain the same if no one admired us for telling the story.

Hebrews also warns us against failing of the grace of God. Pastor Chavis understands this as a failure to receive and respond to the grace available to us, rather than a failure in God's grace itself. That distinction keeps our attention on our response. We can know the language of grace while holding our hurt outside its reach. We may welcome mercy when we need forgiveness, then resist it when it challenges our wish to punish someone else. The warning calls us to receive God's help where we most want to remain in control.

Let us look beneath the reaction that is easiest to notice. What expectation, fear or grievance is helping that reaction grow? When we speak sharply, what have we been telling ourselves beforehand? When we withdraw, are we taking a needed boundary or trying to make someone pay? Honest answers may take time. We can ask God to make us attentive without becoming suspicious of every feeling. The aim is a heart that welcomes His care, including His correction, before hidden resentment becomes the pattern by which we live.

> *What remains out of sight can still influence the life everyone sees.*

03 A gifted life still needs an honest heart

The story of Ahithophel gives the sermon its searching example. Second Samuel 16:23 describes how highly his counsel was regarded. People received it "as if a man had enquired at the oracle of God." This tells us that his advice carried remarkable weight with David and Absalom. It does not mean that every decision Ahithophel made had God's approval. We need to keep that distinction clear. Being respected for wisdom does not remove a person's need to submit his own choices to the Lord.

Second Samuel 17:23 then records Ahithophel's death by suicide after his counsel was not followed. Pastor Chavis is struck by the contrast between these passages. A man whose advice was deeply respected came to a tragic end. The fact that these verses appear one chapter apart does not tell us that his inner struggle developed overnight. It does, however, ask us to look beyond the confidence we place in someone's public usefulness. A respected voice may belong to a person who is carrying pain that others do not understand.

The sermon connects Ahithophel with Bathsheba through the family details in 2 Samuel 23:34 and 2 Samuel 11:3. Eliam is named as Ahithophel's son, and Bathsheba is identified as Eliam's daughter. Pastor Chavis reads that family connection alongside David's wrongdoing and suggests that a personal grievance helps explain Ahithophel's later actions. We should recognize this as the sermon's interpretation. The cited passages do not give us a direct account of Ahithophel's private thoughts or explicitly say that resentment over Bathsheba was his motive.

Keeping that limit does not remove the lesson the preacher wants us to consider. We can still ask what happens when a painful experience remains unaddressed beneath a respected role. Other people may continue to seek our advice because our knowledge is useful. We may continue to speak well, make good plans or understand a difficult situation. None of those abilities proves that our own hearts are at peace. We can help someone else recognize a danger while avoiding the same kind of honest attention in our own lives.

03

For those of us who have served for years, being needed can make this especially difficult. We may feel responsible to remain steady for everyone else. We may worry that admitting hurt will weaken people's confidence in us. We might even treat continued usefulness as evidence that nothing serious needs attention. Yet the people we help cannot carry out our personal response to God. A role may give us a place to serve, but it should not become a place to hide. We need someone trustworthy with whom we can speak truthfully.

We must also handle Ahithophel's death with care. This account does not give us a complete explanation of why people die by suicide, and we should not use it to judge every person who has suffered in that way. We cannot determine another person's eternal condition from this passage. If our pain includes thoughts of ending our own lives, we need to tell a trusted person and seek urgent professional help. If there is immediate danger, we should contact emergency services. Seeking help is a necessary response to danger, not a reason to feel ashamed before God.

The study's call is to honesty while help can be received. We do not need to wait until our distress becomes visible to everyone. We can tell God that we are struggling even if yesterday we encouraged someone else. We can ask for prayer without making our need sound small. We can accept practical support without treating it as a failure of spiritual strength. The person others see and the person God knows should not be kept apart by our effort to appear untouched by trouble.

Let us ask whether there is something we have been trying to carry under the cover of our ability. What would we say if a person we loved were facing the same struggle? Would we tell that person to keep helping everyone else and say nothing? Or would we encourage an honest conversation and appropriate help? We can receive the care we would offer. The warning in Ahithophel's story calls us to take the hidden life seriously, without assuming that a gift, a position or a good reputation can tend it for us.

> *A role may give us a place to serve, but it should not become a place to hide.*

04 Choosing our response to another person's actions

The first practical point in the message concerns responsibility. Another person may do something wrong, but that action does not make every response from us right. We can understand this clearly when we are watching an argument from the outside. It becomes harder when we are the ones who feel insulted, betrayed or dismissed. In that moment, revenge can sound like fairness. We may begin choosing words for their power to wound rather than their ability to tell the truth or move the situation toward what is right.

Pastor Chavis uses the example of answering an insulting public comment with another insult. The setting is familiar, but the lesson reaches beyond a screen. We can retaliate through silence, gossip, a harsh joke or a decision to withhold help. Sometimes we wait until an audience is present before correcting someone because we want the embarrassment to be part of the punishment. The outward action may look small. We need to examine the purpose behind it. Are we addressing a problem, or arranging a moment in which the other person will hurt as we hurt?

We cannot always stop a strong feeling from arriving. Nor can we erase the effects of serious harm simply by deciding that another person will no longer influence us. Pain can persist even when we are trying sincerely to respond well. Our responsibility is more practical than that. We can seek help with the effects we cannot manage alone and take care with the choices before us. We do not have to treat a painful feeling as an instruction that must be obeyed immediately.

A pause can make room for that care. We may need to leave an argument before it becomes cruel, wait before sending a message or ask someone wise to help us understand what happened. A pause should not become a way of avoiding every necessary conversation. Its purpose is to keep urgency from deciding our conduct. We can ask what is true, what belongs to us to address and what outcome we are seeking. Those questions can reveal that the response we first wanted would only add another wrong to the situation.

04

The sermon encourages us to speak to Jesus about what people have done. In prayer, we can describe the event without pretending we are already calm. We can admit that we want to answer harshly or make someone feel small. Bringing that desire into the open allows us to ask for help rather than dressing it in spiritual language. We might discover that we have been calling our anger a concern for truth while paying little attention to whether our words are truthful, necessary or fair.

There will also be times when a response is needed. Refusing retaliation does not mean refusing to report abuse, correct a false statement or establish a clear boundary. Silence is not always peaceful, and speaking is not always revenge. We need to look at the content and purpose of what we do. A truthful report can protect people. A direct conversation can address a real wrong. We can take those steps without adding invented motives, humiliating details or threats that serve only our desire to hurt.

It may help to separate the original wrong from the next decision. We do not become responsible for causing the harm simply because we are responsible for how we respond now. At the same time, being wronged does not remove our responsibility for harm we cause afterward. If we have answered cruelty with cruelty, we can acknowledge our part without pretending the first wrong never happened. This is difficult because we often want the whole story heard before admitting anything. God can help us tell the whole truth, including the part that challenges us.

Let us think about one response we are preparing. What do we hope the other person will feel when it reaches them? What would change if our aim were truth and protection rather than punishment? We may need to revise a message, choose a safer setting or decide not to answer at all. We may need to seek support before acting. Whatever the step, we can refuse to hand our conduct over to someone else's conduct. Their wrong does not need to become the pattern for our next choice.

> *Their wrong does not need to become the pattern for our next choice.*

05 Leaving vengeance with God

Romans 12 gives the sermon a clear direction for responding to people who have done wrong. We should read the whole passage slowly, because its instructions belong together. Peace, the refusal of personal vengeance and active goodness are parts of one response. We may want to keep the instruction that feels easiest and set aside the one that reaches our present struggle. The passage asks more of us than avoiding an obvious outburst. It speaks to the place we give revenge in our thoughts and plans.

Romans 12:18 KJV If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.

Romans 12:19 KJV Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

Romans 12:20 KJV Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.

Romans 12:21 KJV Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

The words "as much as lieth in you" help us understand our responsibility. We are to pursue peace with seriousness, but we cannot make another person become truthful, cooperative or safe. We may do what is right and still receive hostility. We may offer a fair conversation and find that the other person refuses it. Peace involves more than our wishes, and this verse recognizes a limit to what we can accomplish. We should neither abandon our own responsibility nor claim responsibility for another person's refusal.

Leaving vengeance with God asks us to release a different kind of control. We may want to decide how much suffering would count as enough payment for what happened. Perhaps we imagine an apology delivered publicly, a lost position or a moment when everyone finally sees that we were right. Even if one of those events occurs, the desire for revenge may ask for more. We need to notice when our hope for peace has become tied to arranging someone else's pain. That is a burden the passage does not give us to carry.

05

God's judgment is not ours to manage. We do not need to advise Him on how quickly someone should suffer or monitor each setback as proof that He is finally listening. A prayer that appears to surrender a person can still be full of instructions about punishment. We may say that we are leaving the matter with God while continuing to watch for the result we have chosen. Surrender reaches deeper when we admit that He knows what we do not know and that our anger does not qualify us to occupy His place.

This does not mean wrongdoing should have no earthly consequences. A person may need to face truthful correction, lose a responsibility that has been misused or answer to proper authorities. Seeking a fair response through appropriate channels is different from appointing ourselves to inflict suffering. The difference deserves honest attention rather than a quick slogan. We can ask whether we are presenting facts accurately, seeking protection where it is needed and accepting a process that does not exist merely to satisfy our anger.

The sermon warns that a life organized around revenge remains attached to the original wound. Our days become full of plans about someone we wish had no influence over us. We may miss present relationships because we are rehearsing a future confrontation. We may fail to notice an opportunity to serve because we are watching for the other person's failure. Giving up personal vengeance makes room for a different use of our attention. We can begin considering what faithfulness requires today instead of making every day an extension of the old dispute.

Let us name the outcome we have been demanding. Are we asking for something necessary to protect people and tell the truth, or are we insisting that someone hurt before we will allow ourselves to live? We can bring that distinction before God without pretending it is easy. We may need to surrender the same desire more than once. Each time we refuse to feed a plan of revenge, we can return to the responsibility the passage gives us: pursue peace as far as it depends on us, and leave God's judgment with Him.

> *Giving up personal vengeance makes room for a different use of our attention.*

06 Overcoming evil with good

Romans 12:20 moves from refusing revenge to responding to an enemy's need. Hunger and thirst are practical matters. The instruction does not remain at the level of saying that we have a kind heart. It asks what we will do when we can offer something useful to a person who has not treated us well. This can reveal how carefully we have limited our goodness. We may be generous toward people who appreciate us while feeling that an enemy's need is an opportunity to watch that person suffer.

We should pay attention to the kind of response the passage describes. Feeding someone who is hungry addresses the person's need. It does not make the help a reward for agreeing with us or acknowledging our importance. We are not asked to write a flattering account of the person's conduct. We are asked to refuse the idea that wrongdoing gives us permission to enjoy another person's suffering. That can be a demanding form of obedience when we believe we finally have the advantage.

The reference to coals of fire can tempt us to turn kindness into another form of revenge. We may become interested in how deeply our goodness will embarrass the other person. But verse 21 directs us to overcome evil with good. If our hidden purpose is still to cause pain, we have not really left the work of punishment with God. We should not use a helpful action as a clever way to continue the same hostility. The passage calls us toward good that remains good in its purpose as well as its appearance.

> *We are asked to refuse the idea that wrongdoing gives us permission to enjoy another person's suffering.*

PERSONAL RESPONSE

06

There are ordinary opportunities to examine this. We may hear an unfair accusation against someone who has treated us unfairly. Will we correct it? We may be able to share information that allows the person to avoid a needless difficulty. Will we withhold it simply because we can? We may have no duty to become closely involved, yet still have a choice about whether to add to the harm. Refusing to spread a lie about an enemy is one way to practice goodness without pretending that trust has been restored.

We also need wisdom about what help is safe and appropriate. Goodness does not require giving a harmful person unrestricted access to our home, finances or private life. Where contact is unsafe, help may need to come through another person or may not be ours to provide directly. The passage's call to peace must be read with its recognition of what is possible. We can maintain a necessary boundary without turning that boundary into an excuse for cruelty. We can also refuse a demand that uses spiritual language to pressure us into danger.

Sometimes the most searching question is what we want to happen after we do good. Do we expect immediate gratitude? Are we waiting for the other person to admit that we are the better Christian? Will we become angry again if our kindness goes unnoticed? These expectations show how easily a good action can become a bargain. We can obey without controlling the response. The value of doing what is right does not disappear because someone receives it badly or fails to recognize what it cost us.

Let us consider one situation in which we have been waiting for an enemy's difficulty. What would a good response look like there? It may be something visible, such as meeting a real need through a safe arrangement. It may be less visible, such as refusing to celebrate misfortune or correcting our own exaggerated account. We do not need to create an unnecessary encounter to prove our forgiveness. We can begin with the opportunity already before us and ask whether our next action will add to the evil or answer it with good.

PERSONAL RESPONSE

07 Remembering the mercy we have received

The third practical point in the sermon turns our attention toward our own need for mercy. Pastor Chavis reads from 1 Corinthians 6:9–11 and pauses over the words, "And such were some of you." Paul has named wrongdoing that should not be treated lightly. Then he reminds the believers that some of those descriptions belong to their own past. Remembering this keeps us from speaking as though we have always stood above the people whose failures we can easily recognize.

The message also recalls the words of Romans 3:23: "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." This truth reaches us personally. We may agree with it in general while making an exception in the dispute that occupies us most. We can become so focused on someone else's conduct that our own need for forgiveness fades from view. Remembering mercy does not settle every fact of that dispute. It changes the position from which we approach it. We come as people who have needed grace ourselves.

We may remember a time when we wanted someone to understand more than the worst thing we had done. We wanted the chance to tell the truth, repent and live differently. We did not want a single failure to become the only account anyone would accept of us. That memory can soften the pride with which we describe another person. We can still name the wrong clearly. But we should be careful about deciding that the person is forever incapable of repentance or that every good thing in that person's life must be false.

> *The mercy we have received should remain present in the way we seek truth and respond to wrong.*

PERSONAL RESPONSE

07

At the same time, shared need for mercy does not make every harmful act equal. A careless remark and a repeated pattern of abuse do not become the same thing because everyone has sinned. We should never use our own imperfections to explain away serious wrongdoing or to tell an injured person that asking for protection is pride. Mercy calls us away from self-righteousness, not away from truth. The seriousness of an action and the need for appropriate consequences remain important even when forgiveness is being sincerely offered.

This distinction helps us hear the sermon's discussion of David. Pastor Chavis reminds us that David's wrongdoing was serious and that repentance was part of his story. The message asks whether we have made room for the possibility that someone we resent has come honestly before God. We may not know what has taken place in that person's private prayer. We should not invent repentance where there is no evidence, but neither should we claim to know that God cannot work in a life we no longer understand. Our knowledge has limits.

Remembering mercy should also bring us toward responsibility for harm we have caused. We can spend years wishing someone would acknowledge our pain while refusing to acknowledge the pain caused by our words. Perhaps we have repeated a cruel story, involved people who did not belong in the dispute or treated a present relationship as though it were guilty of an old betrayal. We can confess those choices directly. An honest apology does not need to begin by proving how much more wrong the other person was. We can take responsibility for our part without rearranging the whole history.

Let us remember one specific way God has shown us mercy. What did we need at that time? What did we hope others would understand? Now let us consider whether that memory changes how we speak about a person who has failed. We may still need a boundary. We may still need a serious matter addressed. Yet we can do those things without enjoying the thought that another human being is beyond hope. The mercy we have received should remain present in the way we seek truth and respond to wrong.

PERSONAL RESPONSE

08 Forgiveness without hiding the truth

The sermon moves from remembering mercy toward an active response. It is possible to say that we believe in forgiveness while refusing to consider what forgiving a particular person would mean. We may prefer to keep the subject general because a real decision would cost us something. We might have to stop bringing up an old failure to win every new argument. We might have to give up a story that has made us feel morally superior. We might have to admit that we no longer need to supervise another person's punishment.

Forgiveness asks us to release personal revenge. It does not ask us to deny the event, change the facts or accept blame that belongs to someone else. We should be able to name what happened truthfully while asking God to keep hatred from guiding us. Some wounds continue to hurt after we have begun that response. We may need time, prayer and support as we learn to live differently. Returning pain does not automatically mean that our earlier prayer was dishonest. It may show us another place where care is still needed.

The message refers to Jesus' instruction in Matthew 5:23–24 about remembering at the altar that a brother has something against us. We need to hear that instruction carefully. The situation concerns a complaint against the person bringing the gift. Jesus directs that person to seek reconciliation. The passage does not tell us to assume that the injured person caused the wrong, nor does it require us to confess an offense we did not commit. It presses us to take another person's grievance seriously instead of using worship to avoid addressing it.

This can be uncomfortable for experienced Christians. We may be preparing a lesson, leading prayer or carrying a trusted responsibility while leaving an honest apology undone. We may hope that continued service will show that our intentions were good. But useful work cannot speak the words we owe someone. If we know we have acted wrongly, we can acknowledge the action plainly. We can listen without immediately correcting the injured person's feelings. We can ask what needs to be put right and accept that trust may require more than a sincere conversation.

08

When we are the injured person, seeking peace may take a different form. We may be able to have a direct, honest conversation in which we describe the wrong and state that we are giving up revenge. In another situation, direct contact may expose us to further manipulation or harm. Pastor Chavis encourages people to communicate forgiveness, but we should apply that encouragement with care. We do not need an unsafe meeting, call or message to make forgiveness real. A trustworthy counselor or other appropriate support can help us decide what contact, if any, is wise.

Forgiveness and restored trust should not be treated as the same decision. Trust concerns what we can responsibly rely on in the future. It may grow as a person becomes honest, accepts consequences and demonstrates change. Where those things are absent, the relationship may remain limited. Reconciliation also requires more than one person's willingness. We can stop seeking revenge without claiming that a relationship has been repaired. Romans 12:18 helps us hold these truths together by asking for peace as far as it depends on us, while recognizing what is possible.

We should also be careful not to make forgiveness a demand we place on someone we have hurt. If we are responsible for wrongdoing, our task is to acknowledge it and accept appropriate accountability. We do not get to decide how quickly the other person should feel safe, resume contact or speak warmly about us. Religious language can become another way of avoiding responsibility if we use it to hurry someone past the effects of our actions. Remembering mercy should make us humbler about what we ask from others, not more entitled to their trust.

Let us ask what an honest step toward peace would look like in our situation. Perhaps we need to apologize without defending ourselves. Perhaps we need to stop rehearsing a plan to punish. Perhaps we need help establishing a boundary that allows truth to be spoken safely. We may not be able to restore the whole relationship. We can still respond faithfully within the responsibility we actually have. Forgiveness becomes practical when we stop asking it to hide reality and allow it to change our purpose within that reality.

> *We can still respond faithfully within the responsibility we actually have.*

09 Caring for the heart every day

Pastor Chavis uses his yard as an illustration of the difference between allowing unwanted growth and tending what is good. Weeds can spread while the owner is busy elsewhere. A healthy lawn takes attention. We do not need to press every detail of the comparison into a spiritual rule. Its useful point is that neglect does not leave a garden unchanged. In the same way, avoiding an old resentment does not necessarily keep it small. Time passing and healing taking place are not always the same thing.

We may mistake quietness for progress. A particular person has not contacted us, so we have not felt angry recently. A difficult subject has not come up, so we assume it no longer troubles us. Then one conversation brings back the same sharp desire to retaliate. That moment need not become a reason for despair. It can show us that something still needs attention. We can return to prayer and honest reflection rather than deciding that we either must be completely healed or have made no progress at all.

Hebrews 12:14 gives us positive direction: "Follow peace with all men, and holiness." We are not only trying to remove an unwanted feeling. We are learning to pursue a way of life that pleases the Lord. Peace concerns how we respond to others. Holiness brings our choices before God. Holding them together keeps us from calling every quiet arrangement peaceful or every harsh response righteous. We need truth in our relationships and a heart willing to be corrected in the way we pursue that truth.

> *Prayer belongs in this daily care even when there is no dramatic moment.*

PERSONAL RESPONSE

09

Daily attention can begin with the words we repeat. How do we tell the story of the hurt when someone asks? Do we add details that make the other person appear worse? Do we leave out something that would make the account more accurate? Do we use a new conversation as another opportunity to collect sympathy? We may need to tell the story to obtain help, and we should not be ashamed of doing so. The question is whether the telling is serving truth and care or keeping our desire for revenge supplied with fresh attention.

We can also notice what happens after ordinary disappointments. A delayed reply, a change in plans or a correction at church may awaken an older fear of being dismissed. Before deciding that the present person has repeated the old wrong, we can ask what we actually know. This is not a demand to ignore warning signs. It is an invitation to judge the present situation fairly. People who did not cause the original injury should not automatically inherit responsibility for it. Fairness toward them may require patience with ourselves as we learn a different response.

Prayer belongs in this daily care even when there is no dramatic moment. We can tell God what we noticed that day, where we resisted revenge and where we failed. We can return to the passages in this study rather than relying only on our memory of a sermon. We may need a regular conversation with someone trustworthy who will neither flatter our resentment nor minimize our hurt. Such attention helps us respond before a small choice becomes another settled habit. We are learning to be diligent rather than merely relieved when tension passes.

Let us choose a point in our ordinary day when we can examine how we are responding. We might consider a conversation before it begins or review our words before the day ends. What did we feed with our attention? Where did we pursue peace honestly? What needs confession or help? A brief, truthful response is more useful than a long promise to never struggle again. We care for the heart by returning to God with what is actually growing there and remaining willing for Him to change the way we live.

PERSONAL RESPONSE

10 Learning from Joseph's response

Joseph's story gives the sermon an extended picture of someone who had repeated opportunities to become bitter. His brothers turned against him, and he was sold into slavery. In Potiphar's house, a false accusation led to imprisonment. Later, someone he had helped failed to remember him when that help might have changed his circumstances. Pastor Chavis walks through these events to show that one painful experience was followed by another. Joseph did not face a single disappointment that could be neatly left behind before the next part of his life began.

We should let the seriousness of those events remain clear. Betrayal by family, loss of freedom and false accusation are not small inconveniences. Calling them opportunities for growth must not make them sound harmless. The sermon asks what Joseph did within those circumstances, not whether his brothers and others were right to mistreat him. We can hold wrongdoing and a faithful response in the same account. We do not have to reduce the wrong in order to appreciate the character shown by the person who suffered it.

One important feature of the story is that Joseph continued responding to responsibilities and people before his circumstances became fair. In the prison account, the sermon draws attention to his concern for two troubled men and his response to their dreams. He had needs of his own, yet he noticed that someone else was distressed. This gives us a question worth considering carefully. Have we become so occupied with the person who hurt us that we no longer notice anyone who might need our help? Pain deserves care, but it need not become the only reality we can see.

We should not turn Joseph's example into pressure to serve beyond our strength or to ignore the need for rest and protection. The point is that another person's wrong does not have to determine the whole purpose of our lives. We may still have something good to offer within the limits of our present situation. It may be a thoughtful conversation, a responsibility carried honestly or a refusal to treat someone else with the disregard we experienced. Faithfulness can begin before the larger problem has been resolved.

10

The sermon then brings us to Joseph's changed position. He eventually received authority in Egypt, and his brothers came within the reach of that authority. This is a different kind of test. Earlier, he had little power over what happened to him. Now he had the means to affect the lives of the people who had harmed him. We may imagine that bitterness is only a danger when we feel weak. But gaining influence can reveal what we have been protecting in our hearts. Power creates opportunities to carry out the revenge we once could only imagine.

Joseph's care for his family gives the message its hopeful direction. He used his position to preserve the people who had wronged him rather than making their need an excuse for destruction. The sermon calls us to look for growth in the place where bitterness might have grown. For us, that may mean becoming more careful with the influence we have. Have our painful experiences taught us to protect others from similar harm, or have they made us eager to make someone else feel powerless? The answer will be seen in how we use the opportunities before us.

We must also avoid making Joseph's eventual position a promise about our own future. Faithfulness does not guarantee that we will receive public promotion, financial success or a moment when everyone recognizes our innocence. The growth we need may be less visible. We may become more honest about our limits, more patient with another person's pain or less willing to use authority selfishly. Those changes matter even when the outward situation remains difficult. We can seek them without demanding that our story follow every turn of Joseph's story.

Let us consider what kind of person we are becoming as we respond to the wrong we experienced. What have we learned that could help us care for someone else? What habit would show that revenge is losing its place in our decisions? We cannot make the original event good by finding a lesson in it. We can ask God to help us live well after it. The better response the sermon encourages is a real choice toward faithfulness, made with God's help, rather than a cheerful explanation that makes the pain disappear.

> *Faithfulness can begin before the larger problem has been resolved.*

11 Praying while the soul is hurting

The final practical point in the sermon is simple enough to remember and deep enough to keep practicing: pray anyway. Pastor Chavis brings us to Hannah in 1 Samuel 1. She was distressed over not having children, and Peninnah's cruel treatment added to her sorrow. Her difficulty was not only an unanswered desire within her own heart. Another person's behavior was making the pain harder to bear. This setting matters because her prayer did not begin after the situation had become gentle or the hurt had been explained.

First Samuel 1:10 says, "And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the LORD, and wept sore." The verse places anguish and prayer in the same moment. Hannah did not first become untroubled and then approach God. She came while she was weeping. The phrase "bitterness of soul" describes her deep distress. We should not assume that it means she had chosen hatred or was planning revenge. Her example helps us understand that a hurting heart can turn toward God before the hurt has settled.

This challenges the belief that we must feel better before we can pray properly. We may put prayer off because we are angry, confused or tired of repeating the same concern. We may think that God expects a calm explanation when all we can offer is a broken account of what happened. Hannah's prayer gives us permission to come honestly. We can tell the Lord that the pain is still present, that we do not know how to handle the next conversation or that we need help with the resentment we have begun to notice.

PERSONAL RESPONSE

11

Honesty in prayer does not mean that every desire we bring should be acted on. We may tell God that we want revenge without treating that wish as His direction. We may confess that we hope someone fails and ask Him to change our purpose. Prayer allows us to bring the heart we actually have rather than presenting the heart we think we should already have. If we hide the desire until we have corrected it alone, we avoid the very place where we are being invited to seek help.

Sometimes we use familiar spiritual language to stay a safe distance from a real concern. We ask God to bless everyone while refusing to name the person we resent. We pray for strength without admitting what we are tempted to do. We speak about peace while continuing to plan a humiliating reply. A more honest prayer may be much simpler. We can describe the event, name the feeling and ask for help with the choice before us. We are not giving God information He lacks. We are allowing our own response to become truthful before Him.

Pastor Chavis emphasizes that Hannah's prayer became part of a story in which God answered her deeply held desire. We can receive encouragement from that without promising that every painful prayer will produce the same kind of visible miracle. Prayer is not a method for making God follow a schedule we have chosen. We may continue praying while an answer remains unclear. We may need strength to take a difficult step rather than an immediate change in the other person. The invitation to pray remains valuable even when we cannot predict what will happen next.

> *While we are hurting, we can still turn toward the Lord.*

PERSONAL RESPONSE

11

We should also allow prayer and appropriate help to belong together. A person carrying deep grief, trauma or danger may need more support than a private moment of prayer can provide. Seeking a trustworthy pastor, qualified counselor or another appropriate source of help does not make the prayer less sincere. We can ask God for wisdom while accepting the care available to us. The sermon's encouragement to keep praying should never become a reason to shame someone for needing ongoing support or to leave a person alone with a serious struggle.

The message also urges us not to let hurt cut us off from worship and fellowship. When people have wounded us, we may begin to associate every expression of faith with the people responsible. We need care in separating the Lord from the wrongdoing of those who claim to serve Him. This does not require remaining in an unsafe congregation or returning to a harmful leader. It means we can seek a safe place to pray, receive the Word and share life with trustworthy believers rather than assuming that every spiritual relationship must repeat the same harm.

Let us pray before we feel ready to explain everything. We can begin with what we know: we are hurting, we need help and we do not want resentment to decide our conduct. We can ask for the courage to tell the truth and the patience to take the next step without demanding that every feeling disappear. Hannah wept and prayed. We can bring our tears, too. The choice before us is not whether to hurt or pray. While we are hurting, we can still turn toward the Lord.

PERSONAL RESPONSE

12 Keeping our future open to God

The closing appeal of the sermon looks toward the life still before the listener. Pastor Chavis warns that old hurt can interfere with relationships, service and the willingness to respond to God. We may continue attending church while allowing one painful chapter to decide what we believe about every new person and opportunity. The question reaches beyond whether we have left a congregation or stopped doing visible work. We need to ask whether our hearts have become closed in places where God is still calling us to trust and obey.

This can happen gradually. We decide never to become close to anyone again. We refuse every responsibility because a previous leader treated us unfairly. We assume that correction always hides rejection. These decisions may have begun as efforts to protect ourselves. Some boundaries are necessary and should remain. But we need help distinguishing wise protection from a rule that excludes every possibility of good. A boundary should address a real risk, not automatically condemn people and situations we have not yet fairly considered.

Keeping our future open to God does not mean returning to the same role or relationship. The next faithful step may look different from the life we expected before the injury. We may need time away from a particular responsibility, a different setting for fellowship or patient work rebuilding confidence. We should not measure restoration only by whether everything returns to its former arrangement. What matters is that we remain willing to follow the Lord honestly rather than making bitterness the final authority over what we will receive from Him.

> *We need a willing heart, ready to receive direction and take the next faithful step.*

12

We also need to avoid making our usefulness the reason our lives matter. The sermon speaks urgently about gifts and ministry because hurt can affect the good a person might do. Yet we should not hear that as pressure to produce something impressive before we deserve care. We need care as people, including during seasons when our ability to serve is limited. Receiving help may itself be a faithful response. We can stop treating our wounds as an inconvenience that must be hidden so that everyone else's work can continue.

As we move forward, progress may be seen in small changes. We tell the story more fairly. We pause before replying. We stop asking mutual friends to take sides. We notice a present person's kindness without comparing that person immediately with someone from the past. These changes do not erase what happened. They show that the old wrong is becoming less able to organize every new response. We can thank God for them without pretending that all the work is finished or that another difficult day would make them meaningless.

There may also be times when we need to begin again. An unexpected encounter or anniversary can bring back feelings we thought had settled. We can respond with the same practices this study has considered. We can pray honestly, refuse revenge, seek appropriate support and take care with the next decision. A renewed struggle is a reason for renewed attention. We do not need to turn it into a verdict against our entire relationship with God. The call to diligence leaves room for continued care rather than a single moment after which we never struggle.

Let us ask what we have been refusing because of an old hurt. Is the refusal protecting us from a real danger, or has it become an answer we give before considering the present situation? We can bring that question to God and to someone trustworthy who knows enough to help us think clearly. We do not need to rush into a new commitment to prove that we have changed. We need a willing heart, ready to receive direction and take the next faithful step. Our past deserves an honest account, but it does not have to supply every answer about our future.

PERSONAL RESPONSE

PERSONAL RESPONSE

Reflection

Let us return to the warning about the root of bitterness and keep our own lives in view. What event or relationship came to mind most often as we read? What do we believe we lost through that experience? Have we allowed ourselves to describe the loss honestly, or have we tried to sound stronger than we feel? We can write about it without adding an accusation we cannot support and without minimizing something that truly harmed us. A truthful account gives us a clearer place from which to pray.

Next, let us consider our present response. Where have we sought protection, and where have we sought revenge? Have we treated someone who did not cause the original wound as though that person were responsible for it? What do our repeated words reveal about what we are feeding? We can ask these questions without making ourselves responsible for another person's wrongdoing. We are examining the choices that belong to us now.

Finally, which part of the sermon's direction do we most need to practice? Do we need to pause before responding, release a plan for punishment, remember mercy, seek growth or pray while we are hurting? What help would make that step wiser and safer? We can name a person to speak with, a conversation that needs care or a habit we need to change. Let us ask for a response that can be lived, not merely written. What will obedience look like in the next ordinary moment when the hurt comes to mind?

Conclusion

The battle with bitterness calls us to care for the heart while taking wrongdoing seriously. Hebrews 12 asks us to pursue peace and holiness and to watch diligently for a root that can trouble us and affect others. Romans 12 directs us away from personal vengeance and toward good. Remembering mercy keeps us humble, Joseph's story challenges how we respond to opportunity and power, and Hannah shows us a hurting soul turning toward God. We do not need to deny our pain or surrender necessary protection. We can seek help, tell the truth and refuse to make revenge our purpose. The Lord can receive an honest prayer before we have an easy explanation. Let us bring Him the life we are actually living and remain willing to respond.

RECALL AND REMEMBER

Fill in the Blanks

Let us complete these statements from the study. Some use the quoted KJV words; others help us remember the practical lessons. We can return to a section when we need to consider the answer more carefully.

1. Hebrews 12:14 tells us to follow _____ with all men.
2. The same verse calls us to pursue _____.
3. Hebrews 12:15 begins its warning with the words, "Looking _____."
4. Bitterness is pictured as a _____ that can spring up.
5. The warning says that through this root _____ may be defiled.
6. Another person's wrong does not have to decide our _____.
7. Romans 12:19 says, "_____ is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord."
8. The instruction to live peaceably begins, "If it be _____."
9. Romans 12:20 says to feed our enemy if he is experiencing _____.
10. Romans 12:21 calls us to overcome evil with _____.
11. The sermon asks us to remember the _____ we have received.
12. Romans 3:23 reminds us that all have _____.
13. Forgiveness does not require us to hide the _____.
14. Forgiveness and restored _____ are not the same decision.
15. The sermon uses _____ as an example of responding faithfully after repeated wrongs.
16. Hannah was in bitterness of soul and _____ unto the Lord.
17. First Samuel 1:10 says that Hannah "wept _____."
18. Our next step should move beyond intention into _____.

Answers: 1. peace; 2. holiness; 3. diligently; 4. root; 5. many; 6. response; 7. Vengeance; 8. possible; 9. hunger; 10. good; 11. mercy; 12. sinned; 13. truth; 14. trust; 15. Joseph; 16. prayed; 17. sore; 18. action.

A FAITHFUL NEXT STEP

Invitation to Act

Let us begin by telling God the truth about one matter this study has brought to mind. We can admit the hurt without making excuses for the person who caused it. We can also admit where our own response has become cruel, dishonest or intent on revenge. We do not need to settle the whole history before we pray. We can ask for help with the responsibility that belongs to us today and for wisdom about the care we need.

Then let us choose one step that moves from intention into action. We may need to set aside a message meant to hurt someone, correct an exaggerated story, offer an honest apology or arrange a conversation with someone trustworthy. If the situation involves danger or serious harm, the step may be seeking protection and appropriate support. We should not create unsafe contact in order to prove forgiveness. We can pursue a truthful, wise response without demanding immediate agreement or restored trust.

Before we close, let us bring that decision to the Lord in prayer. We can ask Him to help us when the same memory returns and when the old response feels familiar. We can remain willing to receive correction and support along the way. We may still be hurting when we finish this study, but we do not have to wait for every feeling to change before turning toward Him. We can begin now, and we can keep praying as we learn to live differently.

> *We can begin now, and we can keep praying as we learn to live differently.*

PERSONAL RESPONSE