
Words of Truth

Don't Allow Your Good To Turn Into Bitterness

By: Brian A. Yeager

According to Strong's dictionary the name "Naomi" means "pleasant" (Strong's # 5281). According to Strong's dictionary the name "Mara" means "bitter" (Strong's # 4755). Naomi was a woman who had a husband and two sons (Ruth 1:1-2). Her husband died and she was left with her two sons (Ruth 1:3). Her two sons died and she was then left with her two daughters in-law (Ruth 1:4-6). Naomi decided to go back to her homeland in Bethlehem. One of her daughters in-law (Ruth) opted to go back with her (Ruth 1:18).

When they went to Bethlehem, this is what is written: *"So they two went until they came to Beth-lehem. And it came to pass, when they were come to Beth-lehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi? And she said unto them, **Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me.** I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the LORD hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me? So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter in law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab: and they came to Beth-lehem in the beginning of barley harvest"* (Ruth 1:19-22).

Naomi obviously led a life wherein she was a good example to Ruth. This is a good thing (Proverbs 4:18). When Ruth's husband died she was free to move on. However, Ruth insisted to stay with Naomi even though there was nothing to gain from this. Ruth ended up following Naomi back to Israel even though she was a Moabite (Ruth 2:6). This shows us that Ruth saw good things in Naomi. From the relationship of Naomi and Ruth we can be thankful that Jesse, David, and ultimately our Savior came into the world (Ruth 4:16-17 and Matthew 1:5-17).

Consider how much of a teacher Naomi was to Ruth when you read the following statements: *"And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: **thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me"*** (Ruth 1:16-17). How in the world could Naomi have been bitter? She should have just stepped back and saw the good she and her family had done to promote the name of God? That is what we all want to say, right? Well, bitterness can arise when we lose sight of what's really important.

Bitterness Can Creep In

Most of us are busy people. Time is valuable in our lives (James 4:13-16). Thus, I am going to use time as an illustration for a moment. I know that, personally, my days are long and full of work. So,

say that I just finished my duties for the day and I am going to try and relax. Then, the phone rings. A brother or sister in Christ needs someone to talk to. I take a deep breath and talk with he or she knowing that this is my duty as a brother in Christ (Galatians 6:2, Colossians 4:11, I Thessalonians 5:11, and I Thessalonians 5:14). After that long conversation, I get an email from someone asking a Bible question. This person presses the need for a quick answer. I know that I need to do my duty as a preacher here (Acts 20:26-27, Colossians 4:6, II Timothy 2:24-26, and II Timothy 4:2). Thus, I spend the time answering the question. Then, I get another call with something else. Before you know it, the night is gone and everyone in my house is in bed. Personally, I begin to get frustrated. Where is "me time" in these scenarios? What should I do?

Before I allow my good works to turn into bitterness, I need to remember some Scriptural points. I need to remember that, while I am permitted by God to enjoy life in this world (Ecclesiastes 5:18-19 and I Timothy 6:17), there is still the greater work of pleasing others rather than myself (Romans 15:1-3, I Corinthians 9:19, I Corinthians 10:24, Galatians 5:13-14, and Philippians 2:3-9). Wouldn't it be a shame to edify brethren, teach others, and comfort someone in need just to sin and lose my soul because I allowed bitterness to creep in?

Let's use another situation we may all face and thus can relate to. Stupid abounds in this world. Thus, people will often test our ability to be longsuffering. Even God, who is certainly longsuffering (Psalms 86:15 and II Peter 3:9), has a point wherein He has had enough (II Chronicles 36:14-16 and Proverbs 29:1).

Let's say someone has talked to you about how to obey the Gospel. You are now in the fifth discussion with this person. You have shown them the Scriptures that teach about how to obey the Gospel the four previous times (Matthew 13:19, Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-16, Luke 13:3; 5, Luke 14:25-33, John 3:1-5, John 8:23-24, John 8:32, Acts 2:14-47, Acts 3:19, Acts 8:12-39, Acts 9:1-20, Acts 10:44-48, Acts 16:13-15, Acts 16:25-34, Acts 18:8, Acts 19:1-9, Romans 1:16, Romans 8:24, Romans 10:10, Romans 10:14-17, I Corinthians 15:1-4, Galatians 3:27, Colossians 1:23, Colossians 2:12, Hebrews 11:1; 6, James 1:21-25, James 2:10-26, I Peter 2:1-2, etc.).

Now, for the fifth time, they ask you the SAME questions. It is almost like you have never told them any of this before. Do you become bitter about this? That is, do you resent this person for not learning fast enough (note: we're not talking about someone who is not listening, but rather someone who is SLOW in learning)? No, you remind yourself how you need to be longsuffering (Galatians 5:22-23 and Colossians 3:12). You remind yourself that God has been longsuffering with your stupidity (II Peter 3:15). You thank God that you've been given the privilege of teaching someone how to obtain salvation (Psalms 51:13). Don't allow the good work of teaching to turn to bitterness.

Conclusion

There are endless situations to which our lesson applies. Make some of those lessons part of your studies. These lessons even apply to our relationships. Even a good marriage can turn into a matter that causes bitterness (cf. Colossians 3:19). Therefore, take heed to these inspired words: *"Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and there by many be defiled"* (Hebrews 12:15).