

Confronting bitterness

1. What is bitterness?

- a. Bitterness is a form of anger
- b. Bitterness is anger that stays
- c. Bitterness is anger that spreads

2. Why does bitterness develop?

- a. You don't think God has much to say about it
- b. You were deeply wronged
- c. You were betrayed
- d. You were misrepresented
- e. You were oppressed
- f. You suffered a deep loss

...look for the sin beneath the sin of bitterness
...look for the suffering beneath the sin
...notice that being wronged reveals the heart

3. How do we overcome bitterness?

- a. You *were* wronged
- b. God is always the *most* wronged
- c. God is the Judge
- d. We are all sinners
- e. Address with faith the sin or suffering *beneath* the sin

- i. God in Christ was betrayed
 - ii. God in Christ was misrepresented
 - iii. God in Christ suffered under oppressive authority
 - iv. God in Christ is yours in the midst of loss
 - v. God in Christ forgives you
- f. Encourage sweet fruit as the result of faith

4. Case study: an example of 'everyday' bitterness

You meet a friend, Lucy, for coffee. You haven't seen her for a few months and after chatting about general things for a time you ask about how plans for the new house extension are progressing. Lucy had shared before how they were hoping to make space for their young and growing family. But her face changes as you ask. "It's been a bit of a mess," she replies. "A neighbour objected...now we aren't speaking..."

Lucy goes on to explain how they had gone to their next-door neighbours with the plans to extend the back of the house. "Initially they were fine about it," explained Lucy. "Then we noticed they wouldn't acknowledge us the same way if we met on the drive-way. We didn't think a lot of it at the beginning, but then it became obvious. I spoke over one day to the wife and she barely said hello, looked away from me, and ushered the children into the house. We realised something was up and were getting ready to pop round when a solicitor's letter arrived. They were objecting to the extension claiming loss of privacy and blockage of light. We were devastated. We had really worked hard to build a relationship with these folks and done a lot of hospitality with them. They aren't Christians, but we had really developed a friendship to the point where they were asking about our faith. We have tried to go round and they refuse to talk, just saying it's in the hands of the solicitors. They've stopped their children playing with ours...I mean, how do you explain that to your kids?"

"I just feel so annoyed and hurt," Lucy continues. "I keep replaying the situation over and over in my head...I keep thinking why would they treat us like this? I bumped into another neighbour who said they were sorry for the trouble we were facing about the extension. What have they said??! I scour social media expecting to see them post something against Christianity – we have no idea what they might be thinking of us. They won't even send their children over to play anymore and ours keep asking questions. I hate this."

Lucy confides that she and her husband seem to always fall out every time they discuss it. "Why can I not just let go of it like he tells me?" she asks.

- a. **How will you understand Lucy?**
What good questions will you ask to understand her well?
How would you summarise in 1-2 sentences to Lucy what you are hearing?
- b. **How would you pray with Lucy?**
What scripture will you use? What themes and images from scripture? How will you connect the redeeming Lord and his word to this person in this situation?
What good fruit will you pray for?
Speak out your prayer with them.
- c. What **differences** are there between the bitterness caused by a situation like this and a case of victimisation by sexual abuse from a family member or in a church situation?