

# LESSON ESSENTIALS

## FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

### LESSON 5: LIVING AT PEACE

“I am now a changed person. If God had not guided me, I would not be able to forgive my husband.”

-- Ruth, from China

Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled. (Hebrews 12: 14-15)

Bitterness of heart does not dissipate simply because circumstances improve. In fact, without proper reconciliation, and without the grace of God in a person's life, there is no hope for peace no matter how 'easy' one's life seems to be.

Bitterness is an all too common poison in the hearts, minds, and homes of people today. These people will defend their status saying that if only their lives improved, they could be at peace. If only their offender got what they deserved; if only their employer was more fair and considerate; if only their spouse was kind or attentive to their needs; if only they had the material resources they needed to change their circumstances, then they would have peace. However, bitterness of heart does not dissipate simply because circumstances improve. In fact, without proper reconciliation, and without the grace of God in a person's life, there is no hope for peace no matter how 'easy' one's life seems to be.

On the contrary, there is a way to peace even in the midst of difficult and painful circumstances. There is a path by which we can pursue peace even if our circumstances do not change.

Ruth, a new believer, was living in a very difficult marriage. Her husband was a compulsive gambler and wasted the family's finances. Additionally, he was physically abusive to Ruth. They were on the verge of divorce as the situation seemed hopeless. As is to be expected, Ruth was living with a lot of bitterness and resentment towards her husband and towards the Lord for allowing her to be in this situation.

What would you say to Ruth to encourage her in her difficulty? What would you offer to her as the remedy to her hopeless life?

What Ruth discovered was the saving grace of Jesus. While she had already experienced God's grace for salvation, she had not yet seen it to be also sufficient for her present difficulties. She learned to trust in the Lord for all that she needed to be at peace with her husband and her circumstances. Through the power of the Word of God, she found peace with God first. Out of that she could forgive her husband and seek peace with him. Ruth is now experiencing freedom from past hurts and is working hard to save her marriage.

"I am now a changed person," Ruth says. "If God had not guided me, I would not be able to forgive my husband. I stopped being resentful toward him. He still gambles, but he is slowly trying to change. He has already changed in other areas, for example, helping my parents and picking up our child after school. We have stopped quarreling and our relationship has improved."

It is interesting to note that while her situation has improved greatly, it is still not perfect. Ruth began to forgive her husband and to treat him with

respect before he changed his ways. And he is still gambling, yet, Ruth has grace for him and is choosing to not fight with him, but to fight for him and for their marriage.

There is peace to be had, even in the middle of the worst trial. Even when the Lord does not completely fix a difficult situation, He does show Himself to be sufficient through the situation and will grant peace during it.

Looking towards the future, Ruth says, “I do not harbor anger and bitterness anymore. Amazingly, my overall health has also improved! My life is significantly more joyful now. I am very thankful to God.”

By pursuing peace with God first it is easier to pursue peace with man and circumstances. In fact, once you are truly at peace with God, trusting in His loving sovereignty over your life, peace with man and circumstances is the most logical next step. When I truly believe that the Lord has a good plan for my life, and that the details of my life are for my good, then I can look at those details – even the difficult ones – with joy and gratitude because I see the Lord’s loving purposes in them.

When I live at peace with God, His Spirit of peace dwells in me and extends through me to those around me. Christians ought not to be characterized by being argumentative or bitter. We ought to be known as people who live at peace with God and with man. We ought to “smile at the future” as the writer of the Proverbs says (Proverbs 31) and to “count it all joy” when life gets difficult (James 1:2).

Look at your current circumstances: what are the chances that they improve? If they never improve will be able to endure them with joy, living at peace in the midst of them? If that person who wounded you never seeks reconciliation and forgiveness, will you be able to extend the grace of Jesus to them, seeking peace with them? If not, start pursuing peace with God. It is the foundation of all peace and will free you from the bitter root that will prohibit you from seeing God. Seek peace with Him today!

Looking towards the future, Ruth says, “I do not harbor anger and bitterness anymore. Amazingly, my overall health has also improved! My life is significantly more joyful now. I am very thankful to God.”

## IN REVIEW

- There is a line of thinking that says, “if only my life were better, then I would be at peace.” However, that is a lie, as true peace comes from within us, not from the circumstances outside of us.
- Even if circumstances never improve, or even if they get worse, peace with God will enable you to live at peace in the difficulty.
- When you live at peace with God, and then extend His grace to others, hearts are changed (both yours and theirs).

## HAVE YOUR SAY

- Think of your most trying relationship or circumstance. Where do you need peace? Pray and ask the Lord to give you the peace to endure it. Ask Him to help you to pursue peace with Him in the middle of the difficulty. Pray for heart change more than circumstance change.
  
- Consider a trial you are enduring. What if this trial is the thing that the Lord intends to use in your life to make you more like Him and to give Him the greatest glory? Seek peace with Him in the middle of it, surrendering to His good purpose in your life rather than seeking to get out from underneath it.

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