

What are you doing about that Sycamine tree inside you?

In this passage, Jesus taught His disciples about bitterness and unforgiveness and how to remove these evil influences from one's life. As an illustration, Jesus compared these evil forces to the sycamine tree that was so well-known in that part of the world.

Keep in mind that Jesus was speaking of getting rid of unforgiveness with the implication that this includes its kissing cousin bitterness. This is so important because the struggles represented by the sycamine tree shape our identities to a certain extent. The tree serves as a metaphor for the emotional baggage we carry, influencing our mental well-being.

Forgiving even once is already a challenge for some people. But to forgive someone seven times in one day almost sounds impossible to many folks. It must have sounded preposterous to the disciples as well, for they said, "...*Lord, Increase our faith*" (Luke 17:5). This statement was the equivalent of their saying, "Lord, we don't know if we have enough faith to forgive so many times in one day. You'll have to increase our faith if we're going to do this seven times in one day!"

At this point, Jesus began to teach His disciples about speaking **to** their bitterness and unforgiveness. He said, "...*If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree....*" When Jesus used the word "this," it was the equivalent of Jesus' telling them, "Bitterness and unforgiveness are a metaphor just like the sycamine tree — and if you really want to be free of these attitudes, you can speak to this menacing growth in your life and command it to be planted in the sea!"

1. The sycamine tree had a very large and deep root structure. Because its roots went down as much as 100' into the ground, it was very difficult to kill. Hot weather and blistering temperatures had little effect on this tree because it was tapped into a water source down deep under the earth's surface. In other words, this tree was very difficult to eradicate.

Like the sycamine tree, bitterness and unforgiveness must be dealt with clear down to the roots, or they will keep springing up again and again. The roots of bitterness and unforgiveness go down deep into the human soul, fed by any offense that lies hidden in the soil of the heart. That hidden source of offense will cause these evil forces to resurface in a person's life over and over again. It will take a serious decision for that person to rip those roots of bitterness and offense out of his heart once and for all so they can't grow back in the future. **Cf. Heb. 12:15**

2. The wood from the sycamine tree was the preferred wood for building caskets. Bitterness and unforgiveness are spiritually very *deadly*. Just as the sycamine tree grew very quickly, so does bitterness and unforgiveness. In fact, it doesn't take too long at all for these evil forces to get out of control and start taking over the whole heart! When these fast-growing and ugly attitudes are allowed to grow freely, they not only spoil the condition of your own heart, but they can ruin your relationships with other people. These negative attitudes flourish where spiritually dry conditions exist. You can almost count on finding bitterness and unforgiveness growing and blossoming where there is no repentance, no joy, and no desire to please and glorify the Lord. Harboring bitterness will spiritually bury you more quickly than almost anything else!

Let me stress this point to you because it's so important: Unforgiveness, bitterness and resentment block the flow of God's blessings in your life. If you permit bitterness and unforgiveness to grow in your life, it won't be long until these attitudes have killed your joy, stolen your peace, and retarded your spiritual life!

3. The sycamine tree produced a fig that was very bitter to eat. It is extremely bitter. Its fruit looked luscious and delicious, but when a person tasted the sycamine fig, he discovered that it was horribly bitter. Jesus lets us know that like the sycamine fruit, the fruit of bitterness and unforgiveness is bitter, tart, and pungent. Like the fig, most people who are bitter and filled with unforgiveness chew on their feelings for a long time. They nibble on bitterness for a while; then they pause to digest what they've eaten. After they have reflected deeply on their offense, they return to the memory table to start nibbling on bitterness again — taking one little bite, then another little bite, then another. As they continue to think and meditate on their offense, they internalize their bitter feelings toward those who have offended them. In the end, their perpetual nibbling on the poisonous fruit of bitterness makes them bitter, sour people.

Those who sit around and constantly meditate on every wrong that has ever been done to them are usually bound up with all kinds of spiritual poverty. Their bitter attitude not only makes them spiritually poor, but they are also frequently defeated, depressed, discouraged as well.

4. The sycamine tree was pollinated only by wasps. The pollination process was only initiated when a wasp stuck its stinger right into the heart of the fruit. Thus, the tree and its fruit had to be "stung" in order to be reproduced. How many times you have heard a bitter person say: "I've been stung by that person once, but I'm not going to be stung again! What he did hurt me so badly that I'll never let him get close enough to sting me again?"

So, what's the solution to overcoming bitterness, unforgiving attitude? Jesus said that in order to rid this nuisance from one's life, a

person must have faith the size of “a grain of mustard seed.” The word “grain” describes a seed, a grain, or a very small kernel. Jesus uses the illustration of a “mustard” seed which refers to the small mustard plant that grows from a very tiny seed. By using this word, Jesus was telling His disciples that a great amount of faith is not needed to deal with bitterness and unforgiveness.

“Bitterness/unforgiveness are the most common sins in our Bible-believing church.” Do you genuinely wish to be free from the bitterness, unforgiveness, and offense that has festered in your soul for so long? Are you ready to rip those destructive roots clear out of your heart so they won’t be able to resurface in your life again? Are you tired of those detrimental attitudes killing your joy, stealing your peace, and nullifying your spiritual life?

Jesus specifically said that you must literally **speak** to the sycamine tree. Yes, God will do His part to give you victory over these entrenched sins, but we must do our part too. The word “say” used in Luke 17:6 means to speak, but the tense that is used depicts a strong, stern, serious, deeply felt kind of speaking. In other words, this isn’t a person who mutters thoughtless nonsense; this is a person who has made an inward resolution and now speaks authoritatively and with great conviction.

Your voice represents your authority; therefore, when you lift your voice, you release your authority. That is why you must speak to these attitudes and not just think about them. You can think all you want about removing those poisonous roots in your life, but your thoughts will not remove them. But when you get so tired of living under the stress and strain of bitterness, unforgiveness, you lift your voice and command these foul forces to go, they will finally begin to obey you!

****If you don’t speak to your emotions, they will speak to you.**

****If you don’t take authority over your emotions, they will take authority over you.**

****If you don’t rise up and conquer your flesh, it will rise up and conquer you!**

So quit letting your emotions tell you what to think, what to do, and how to react. It’s time for YOU to do the talking and to take command of your own thought life! You have to treat bitterness, resentment, and unforgiveness like they are enemies that have come to corrupt your soul. You must see them as bandits that have come to steal your joy, your peace, and your relationships.

Likewise, you must decide not to tolerate this spiritual pestilence any longer, not even for a second. It’s time for you to raise your voice of authority and declare to these attitudes that they will no longer dominate you. You have to go for the roots! If you want to be free, it’s going to take an attitude that says, “I’m going to get to the roots of this beast and yank them clear out of my soul, and I’m not going to stop until I’m totally free!”

In Luke 17:6, the word “plucked” = “to rip out.” If you’re going to be serious about this, you won’t be a person who hopes the plant will be removed but does nothing to make it happen. Quite the contrary! This is the picture of a person who wraps his hands around the base of that plant, pulls with all his might, and rips the roots of that plant right out of the ground. He has determined that he is not going to stop until the ground he stands on is totally free from the roots of that nasty plant so that it will never produce life there again!

At this point, the only way they are going to be ripped out of your soul is by your determined choice to do whatever is necessary to rip them out. If your heart is to be liberated, it will only happen as you choose to be liberated and then do something about it!

The sea is made of salt water. Salt water won’t allow a plant to grow because the salt would kill the roots. So once a plant or tree is thrown into the seawater, it becomes a dead issue. No matter how hard you try, that plant will never grow again. Its life is gone forever! If you planted it in the garbage pile, it could reestablish its roots and grow again. But by throwing it into the salty sea, you have plunged those wrong attitudes into a place where they will never grow, never re-root, and never produce life again. Once in the sea, they are dead forever!

Jesus doesn’t want us to be just temporarily relieved of these destructive attitudes; He wants us to be *permanently* freed of them. He wants them to become dead issues that never stalk or hound us again. Once you’ve told bitterness and unforgiveness to leave, don’t ever allow them to take root in your life again! Even if your flesh would like to dwell on those old hurts again, don’t allow that bitter tree to come back to life! Bury it in the sea of forgetfulness so its roots can *never* regain a foothold in your soul.

- *If you don’t take authority over your flesh and emotions, they will continue to dominate and hound you.*
- *If you’ll stand up to your emotions and plant them in the sea forever, they will obey you!*

The Holy Spirit is here right now to help you choose to forgive, forget, and permanently walk free of the past wrongs that others have committed against you — or the wrongs you *think* they committed against you. Right now, it doesn’t matter who is right or wrong. What matters is that you uproot that tree of bitterness before it begins producing more deadly fruit in your life. So, by faith, reach out and grab hold of the base of that ugly growth. Grip it tightly; pull with all your might; and *rip* those roots right out of your heart. Then dump that gnarly tree of bitterness and unforgiveness permanently in the sea where it will never bother you again! Will you do it right now?