

LOVE THE LORD



Lesson Twenty-two - How can I break free from my bitter and jealous instincts?

August 2023

Summary of key points

- God's commandment to love includes not being jealous or responding to people and circumstances in bitter ways.
- This world and our experiences teach us to think bitterly about life.
- Bitterness grieves the Holy Spirit because it leads us to respond in ways that are opposite to Jesus' nature. Bitterness blocks us from God's grace.
- Bitter people are not aware that they are bitter, we need the Holy Spirit to show us the truth.
- Jealous ways of thinking begin with broken childhood experiences and drive selfish ambition.
- God's jealousy over us moves Him to protect us from Satan, our enemy. Our human jealousy moves us to protect our selfish interests.
- God's love cannot flow through a heart that is still filled with bitter jealousies. Therefore, we need to repent and allow the Holy Spirit to heal and renew us.

Watch the lesson online

<https://youtu.be/7mI38XCDDng>

Transcript

Welcome to lesson 22 of Love the Lord where we take time to reflect on the inner workings of our hearts. You may need an hour or more to go through today's lesson. We suggest that you please find a quiet place where you can spend time with the Lord without any distraction.

We will begin by inviting God to speak to us personally through this study. Please follow along as we pray together. Please click pause at any point if you need more time.

First, let's thank God for His perfect character and perfect will for us.

Next, please tell Him about the things that have been stressful and ask for His help and guidance.

Let us put down our burdens of sin and confess the ways we have sinned against God and against others, and ask for His forgiveness.

Please confess the ways others have sinned against us, and forgive them in Jesus' name.

Next, let us ask God to purify and open our hearts to receive His teaching.

Finally, please repeat these words, "In Jesus' name, I silence all distractions and voices that are not from God. Amen."

Let's begin the lesson for today. How can I break free from my bitter and jealous instincts?

God's greatest commandments are to love — to love God and love others.

Matthew 22:37-39 Jesus replied, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: "Love your neighbor as yourself." (NLT)

Love involves being patient and kind towards others, and not to compare and be jealous, not to draw attention to ourselves and boast, not to harden our hearts and be proud, and not to judge others and be rude. We will not demand that things be done our way, nor will we be easily irritated. We will not keep a record of how people have wronged us, or hold grudges and resent them.

1 Corinthians 13:4-5 Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. (NLT)

But humanly speaking, these qualities of love seem quite impossible to achieve.

How can we be loving to everyone, especially when there are people in this world who are unkind, unfair, and even cruel towards us?

The answer lies in first being filled with God's love. The Bible shows us that the Holy Spirit pours God's love into our hearts, and that the fruit of His presence in our lives includes love, joy, and peace. Thank God that we can love others with God's love and not have to rely on our own limited supply.

Romans 5:5 ... God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. (NIV)

If we desire to behave as true children of our Father in heaven, we need to follow Jesus' example to even love our enemies, even those who persecute us. Let's read Matthew chapter 5 verses 44 to 46 together, "But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true

children of your Father in heaven.... If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much.” (Matthew 5:44-46 NLT)

Truly, this is nothing short of a miracle because our instinctive sinful nature is to do just the opposite.

Our fleshly nature prefers to:

1. curse and condemn those who persecute us
2. protest against injustice
3. attack other first or attack them back
4. behave passive-aggressively
5. rejoice when bad things happen to them
6. and take revenge

Revenge does not always involve causing other people physical or material harm. Vengeance starts in the heart. We imagine bad things happening to our enemies or bad-mouth them behind their backs. Rather than confront difficult situations with the love of God, we allow our sinful nature to take the lead.

Mark 7:21 For from within, out of a person's heart, come evil thoughts... (NLT)

Therefore, the Bible instructs us that we need to “put to death the misdeeds of our bodies” through the power of the Holy Spirit and renew our thoughts and our hearts. Then we will be able to love others as God loves them.

Romans 8:13 For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live. (NIV)

Let's refer back to 1 Corinthians chapter 13 and see how our sinful nature opposes God's love.

1. Do we desire to be kind and loving, only to find that we lose our patience with some people, usually those closest to us?
2. Do we have a tendency to compare ourselves with others and envy what they have?
3. Do we feel anxious that people may overlook us and therefore feel the need to draw attention to ourselves?
4. Do we instinctively harden our hearts against certain people and resist loving them?
5. Are we frustrated when people don't seem to listen to and honour our desires?
6. Do we find that we are easily agitated by certain people or situations?
7. Do resentful thoughts replay like a broken record in our minds?

How many of these can you relate to? All these behaviours are opposite to what God describes as love. What's striking about all this is that this behaviour is very common and seen as normal. But are we truly loving one another as God commands us to?

If we struggle to love as God loves, the Bible shows us that it is probably because our hearts are not right with Him. We are still held captive to our sinful nature in some way. God's love cannot flow through a heart that is still filled with bitter jealousies.

Acts 8:21-23 You can have no part in this, for your heart is not right with God. Repent of your wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive your evil thoughts, for I can see that you are full of bitter jealousy and are held captive by sin.” (NLT)

What are bitter jealousies? Let's look at bitterness and jealousy, one by one.

Bitter ways of thinking are usually cynical, judgemental, resentful, and isolating. They only bring misery, and never peace — and they certainly never point people to Jesus as our good and loving Saviour who teaches us how to overcome all things and love our enemies.

Romans 3:14,16-18 “Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.” Destruction and misery always follow them. They don't know where to find peace.” “They have no fear of God at all.” (NLT)

Here are some examples of bitter thoughts and imaginations.

1. “I can't trust anyone.”
2. “Men are unfaithful. Women are controlling.”
3. “Most marriages end in divorce anyway.”
4. “No one will understand me, so why bother trying?”
5. “Speaking up only gets me into more trouble.”
6. “People will always take advantage of me.”

Do you recognise any of these ways of thinking? Do they sound like facts of life to you? Perhaps we need to pause and reflect — are they really true for us as God's children? Do they sound bitter?

Bitter thoughts may seem true because they are often reinforced by worldly patterns, such as our own hurtful life experiences, what we observe in our families, the ways people seem to think and behave towards one another, as well as the messages that come through the media. Bitter thoughts give more power to the things of this world than to God's salvation. As a result, we have difficulty trusting God and obeying His commands. This is essentially why many struggle with unbelief and sin, and why many are robbed of love, hope, joy, and peace.

Did you know that bitterness grieves the Holy Spirit and brings Him sorrow? Bitterness often leads to rage, anger, harsh words, slander and all types of evil behaviour. This is the opposite to His very nature. The Holy Spirit is kind, gentle, tenderhearted, forgiving, and full of grace.

Ephesians 4:30-31 And do not bring sorrow to God's Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. (NLT)

We are all subject to the behavioural patterns and customs of this world but we are also warned to not copy them. Instead, we ought to let God “transform us into a new person by changing the way we think.”

Romans 12:2 Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. (NLT)

This is because the patterns of this world are governed by Satan, whom the Bible calls “the god of this world”. The devil is the main force behind this way of thinking and behaving. Satan encourages us to think bitter thoughts because our enemy is aware that bitterness will grieve the Holy Spirit and blind our minds to God's goodness. We will not be able to understand God and His good news. The question is, are you and I aware of this too?

2 Corinthians 4:4 Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe. They are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News. They don't understand this message about the glory of Christ, who is the exact likeness of God. (NLT)

Bitter people are often not aware that they are bitter, because they feel justified to hold onto such feelings. Maybe someone attacked us, our families, our race, our position, our reputation, our communities, or even our nation. Instead of going to God to find rest and comfort, and trusting Him to be our place of safety, we allow a poisonous root of bitterness to grow in our hearts and corrupt our ability to love God and love others.

Psalms 91:1-2 Those who live in the shelter of the Most High will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty. This I declare about the Lord: He alone is my refuge, my place of safety; he is my God, and I trust him. (NLT)

Bitterness also stops us from being able to receive love because of our cynical, judgmental, resentful and self-isolating ways of thinking. Have you noticed how bitter people seldom have warm, loving, joyful relationships? Let's read Hebrews chapter 12 verse 15 together, “*Look after each other so that none of you fails to receive the grace of God. Watch out that no poisonous root of bitterness grows up to trouble you,*

corrupting many." (Hebrews 12:15 NLT) We can fail to receive the grace of God. This is a serious warning.

What about you? Have you allowed bitter thoughts to grow in your heart? What are they? We will now slow down and take time to reflect. Ask the Holy Spirit to help point out any bitter ways of thinking and write them all down in a list. You are welcome to click "pause" now.

Welcome back. We hope that you have found this exercise helpful. How many bitter statements were you able to list? 20? 30?

Praise God for this good start. We certainly need to recognise and get rid of all poisonous roots of bitterness, so that our hearts can be pure to receive the fullness of God's love. When we begin to identify our subconscious bitter thoughts, we can finally go to God in prayer and ask the Holy Spirit to renew our minds and heal us of the bitter poison in our hearts. This is something we will do together at the end of this lesson.

Now, let's move on to jealousy. Jealousy is another common sinful trait that we find in this world. We become jealous and bitter when we are not satisfied with what God has given us and subconsciously believe that He hasn't been fair to us. We want what others have. The more we compare ourselves with other people, the more unhappy we become and the more we are tempted to turn our hearts away from God.

1 Corinthians 3:3 for you are still controlled by your sinful nature. You are jealous of one another and quarrel with each other. Doesn't that prove you are controlled by your sinful nature? Aren't you living like people of the world? (NLT)

Just as bitter roots grow deep to defile many, so does jealousy. The Bible shows us that it is earthly, unspiritual, and demonic, and is behind evil of every kind. Jealousy drives selfish ambition and self-entitlement. Jealous ways of thinking lead us to become self-centred and self-absorbed, to pity and victimise ourselves, to quarrel with others, and fight for what we believe we deserve.

James 3:15-16 For jealousy and selfishness are not God's kind of wisdom. Such things are earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and evil of every kind. (NLT)

This world calls jealousy good and even necessary, in order to promote competition and progress. That is why many of us don't recognise it when we harbour jealousy in our hearts, but we need to remember that God's eternal Word calls jealousy, evil.

1 Peter 2:1 So get rid of all evil behavior. Be done with all deceit, hypocrisy, jealousy, and all unkind speech. (NLT)

God is a jealous God but His jealousy, however, is different from the world's jealousy. God's jealousy is based on His immense love for us and His protective nature over His relationship with us. It moves Him to protect us from Satan, the god of this world, because we belong to Him. Our human jealousy, on the other hand, moves us to protect our own selfish interests. It is not based on love for others or about protecting them.

Exodus 34:14 You must worship no other gods, for the Lord, whose very name is Jealous, is a God who is jealous about his relationship with you. (NLT)

Jealousy poisons our hearts. It also often leads to self-pitying, self-victimising, and self-defeating thoughts that become self-fulfilling, because we act out what we believe.

Here are a few examples.

1. "Other people have better lives than me."
2. "I always have to work harder to be recognised."
3. "I'm always left out."
4. "I'm never good enough."
5. "I never get the nice things."
6. "God is so unfair."

What do we notice about our jealous thoughts? They all revolve around some anxiety about our position, value, and acceptance.

Such conclusions usually start young. Children pick up vital cues about their position, value, and acceptance by how adults behave around them. What do their words, body language, and choices say about us? Are we worthy of their time, care, protection, and affection? Children are anxious about such things because these are a child's instinctual needs. When these needs are met, we will grow up feeling loved and valued. When these needs are not met, we will be tempted to become bitter and jealous.

No wonder God's Word demonstrates that parents ought to give their children love, compassion, forgiveness, and affection as well as spend time teaching and guiding them, not only by what they say but also by how they live. Parents should not aggravate their children or discourage them. Rather, they should acknowledge and encourage them and set clear boundaries and instructions, as well as lovingly correct and discipline them. Last but not least, parents should give their children good gifts.

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1. Love, compassion, forgiveness, affection | *Luke 15:20 ... Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him. (NLT)*
 2. Quality time and teaching | *Deuteronomy 6:6-7 And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today. Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up. (NLT)*
 3. Loving encouragement | *Colossians 3:21 Fathers, do not aggravate your children, or they will become discouraged. (NLT)*
 4. Clear boundaries and instructions | *Ephesians 6:4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord. (NLT)*
 5. Correction and discipline | *Proverbs 13:24 ... Those who love their children care enough to discipline them. (NLT)*
 6. Good gifts | *Matthew 7:11 So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him. (NLT)*

This certainly is a tall order that no parent can fulfil at all times. No parent is perfect and can love us perfectly at all times, as Abba Father can.

The Bible shows us that no one is truly wise or seeks God in all their ways. We are all sinners. This means that our parents will do some very unwise things and sin against us, and we will do the same to them.

Romans 3:10-11 As the Scriptures say, "No one is righteous— not even one. No one is truly wise; no one is seeking God. (NLT)

When children are not nurtured or counselled according to God's will and Word, they will come to unwise conclusions when they feel disappointed, afraid, frustrated, stifled, stuck, sad, hopeless, abused, rejected, overlooked, neglected, condemned, humiliated, and so on. This is because young brains do not have the mental capacity to fully process our own emotions or understand our parents's feelings or thoughts. So when our parents acted out of their own stress, anger, fatigue, bitterness, or fears, we would have come to childish conclusions about ourselves, conclusions that God never intended.

This is how most jealous thoughts first develop. Do you remember ever thinking any of these thoughts as a child? When such views are reinforced by various life experiences, we can develop such a self-centred, self-absorbed way of thinking that we no longer question whether such statements are really true or not. We are still stuck in the ways we used to think as little children.

1. "Other people have better lives than me."

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2. “I always have to work harder to be recognised.”
 3. “I’m always left out.”
 4. “I’m never good enough.”
 5. “I never get the nice things.”
 6. “God is so unfair.”

Thankfully, we do not have to remain in bondage to our childish ways of thinking and reasoning. Now that we have been accepted as God’s children, we can move away from our earthly family’s shadow into God’s light — and forsake the ways we used to think and reason as children. It is God Himself who now defines our position, our value, and our acceptance.

1 Corinthians 13:11 When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child. But when I grew up, I put away childish things. (NLT)

If we allow anyone else to define those things for us, even if they are our parents whom we love or have the best intentions for us, we make them more important than God and therefore, make them our idols. How do we repent of such idolatry?

Matthew 10:37 “If you love your father or mother more than you love me, you are not worthy of being mine... (NLT)

Firstly, we ought to recognise that our parents, siblings, and other family members are sinners just like us. They have done unwise and sinful things, but so have we. God’s Word reminds us that if we claim we have never sinned against our own family, we would only be fooling ourselves.

1 John 1:8 If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. (NLT)

Therefore, we need to turn away from:

1. Making their words, attitudes, and actions more important than God’s
2. Allowing their ways to determine ours, rather than follow God
3. Seeking their approval or acceptance more than God’s

Secondly, we will need to uproot our bitter jealousies so that they will no longer poison our relationships with God and with others.

Please refer back to your list of bitter thoughts and ask the Holy Spirit to help you identify how and when these ways of thinking started. Some memories or names are likely to surface at this point. These are the areas that the Holy Spirit is leading you to address first. Click pause here and take as much time as you need to sit in His presence and allow Him to minister to you.

Welcome back. For this next part of our prayer time, we will need to be very intentional and deliberate in humbling ourselves to follow God's will, because most of us have operated in our bitter jealousies for so long that we have come to see them as normal and acceptable. This may be true for our sinful nature and the rest of this world — but not for anyone who wants to be renewed and behave as God's child.

As we take the time to go through some confession and repentance, one step at a time, please feel free to click pause again whenever you need to slow down, and take as much time as you need.

Let's begin.

1. As you wrote down your list of bitter thoughts, what memories or names did the Holy Spirit bring to your attention? How was your spirit crushed or corrupted at that time? What were your feelings? Please describe them out loud and give your burdens to our Heavenly Father. He wants to listen to and share your burdens, and tenderly care for you. If you find it hard to describe how you felt at the time, just try quieting your heart and ask the Holy Spirit to bring up the truth and help you express yourself.
2. Next, ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart and show you what childish conclusions did you make about those who disappointed or hurt you? And what childish conclusions you came to about yourself? Please write them down so you can refer to them later.
3. Now, kindly examine your list. Who did you judge and condemn? Do we have the right to do so when Jesus is their rightful Judge? Take this time to repent of your judgments, curses, accusations, slander, and condemnations, because all this grieves the Holy Spirit. Also, He doesn't want us to continue to sin against Jesus. God will not ignore our pain and suffering, but He cannot turn a blind eye when we sin. He wants to first heal us and lift our burdens off us.
4. Next, ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart and show you what other ways you responded with your sinful nature. Did you respond with contempt, jealousy, bitterness, or hatred? Have we become proud and selfish, and insist that things must always be done our way? Have we complained and talked about people behind their backs? Have we been resentful and kept a record of wrongs? In what ways have we become unloving? What else do we need to repent of? Please allow the Holy Spirit to show you the poison that has grown in your heart and repent in Jesus' name, so that we can be purified vessels for the Holy Spirit once again.
5. One very important step to take is to ask the Holy Spirit who He wants us to forgive. Do we also need to forgive ourselves? Forgiveness is the key that unlocks the prison of bitterness and jealousy that we have lived in for so long. Please pray in Jesus' name to forgive yourself or forgive others for their sins against us.

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6. Finally, please bless everyone that you have prayed about today. You can bless them with God's love, joy, peace, good health, and good family relations. You can even pray for their salvation.

Now, the last step is to restore our relationship with God and be reconciled with Him. Remember, the poisonous roots of bitterness and jealousy block us from receiving the fullness of God's grace and love.

1. Let us start by asking God for forgiveness for the ways we have grieved the Holy Spirit each time we obeyed our sinful nature, rather than obey Him.
2. We may also have judged God for giving us our families and called Him unfair, uncaring, or even cruel. We may have blamed Him for our bitter experiences. If this is the case, let us please repent and ask God to cleanse and renew our hearts, minds, and souls. It is sinful people who sin against us. Our perfect God will never sin against us.
3. Next, let us ask God to show us our eternal position, value, and acceptance through Jesus Christ. Please wait on the Holy Spirit for the answer. You may find that He responds immediately or sometime later in your week.

Thank God that He will restore, support, and strengthen His children when we go to Him in humble repentance. He will place us on His firm foundation. As we humble ourselves and pray before God this way, we will find that His fruit of love, joy, and peace will begin to fill us more and more, and that invisible weights are lifted off us. This is not a one-off exercise. Repentance and being made right with God is a daily practice. Do continue to practise what you have learnt today every day of your life.

1 Peter 5:10 In his kindness God called you to share in his eternal glory by means of Christ Jesus. So after you have suffered a little while, he will restore, support, and strengthen you, and he will place you on a firm foundation. (NLT)

Later in the Love the Lord series, we will also discuss how broken parenting styles get passed down from one generation to the next. This means that our parents are products of our grandparents' imperfections, as well as the previous generations' imperfections.

But if we are not careful to forgive them and repent for judging them, we will repeat our family's sinful patterns down the generations, no matter how much we try to do good on our own strength. This is the biblical principle of reaping what we sow. If we live to only satisfy our sinful nature, we will harvest death and decay, and quench the Holy Spirit. Let us be careful not to do that, because the Holy Spirit is the guarantee of our salvation.

Galatians 6:8 Those who live only to satisfy their own sinful nature will harvest decay and death from that sinful nature. But those who live to please the Spirit will harvest everlasting life from the Spirit. (NLT)

We hope today's lesson has helped us recognise the inner workings of our hearts and how they developed, so that we stay alert and be clear headed, and choose not to sin against God. May we all grow closer to the Father as we understand His heart for us as well as understand our own hearts better. Abba Father wants to restore our hearts to become more and more like Jesus'.

1 Thessalonians 5:5-6 For you are all children of the light and of the day; we don't belong to darkness and night. So be on your guard, not asleep like the others. Stay alert and be clearheaded. (NLT)

We have come to the close of today's lesson. Here are the reflection questions for your small group discussion. Please prepare your answers before you meet with them and watch the following testimony. We pray you will be blessed. See you next time.

Time for reflection

1. What has the Holy Spirit revealed to you about your heart? Are there bitter jealousies?
2. Please pray for and encourage one another.

Watch the testimony for this lesson



Personal notes