

***Six Bible Studies on the
“Better > Bitter” Principle***



BETTER > BITTER

**WE DON'T ALWAYS CHOOSE OUR TRIALS,
BUT WE CAN ALWAYS CHOOSE OUR RESPONSES.**

Injuries, losses, lack of playing time, poor performances—you don't have to be in sports long to realize these challenges are part of the game. But how we respond to these hardships? That's where the real growth happens.

What does it look like to honor God in the face of adversity, both in sports and in life? How do we confront our struggles head-on and choose to grow better instead of growing bitter?

Better > Bitter (Bitter over Better) is designed to help you see that God has a purpose in your pain and suffering. Using the word suffering can feel heavy, but it's important to recognize that whether your pain comes from something major—like a serious injury—or something that seems “smaller,” like a tough loss or lack of playing time, it's still suffering and it matters. Don't minimize what you're going through by comparing it to others' struggles or dismissing it because it doesn't seem as big. Everyone faces trials, pain, and setbacks in different ways and at different levels.

Athlete, no matter what you're facing, remember this: God is good. He can be trusted.

Are you ready to see your trials and suffering as opportunities to glorify God?

The Six Studies Include:

1. Approval of others
2. Blindsided
3. Undeserved
4. Can't Catch a Break
5. Forgotten and Alone
6. Seeing the Light

The Approval of Others



You win or play well and people like you. You lose or play poorly and those same people turn their back on you. Sound familiar? One of the tragic realities of sport is that while we play for championships and trophies, we also play for the approval of others. And when that approval falls short of what we hoped for, we are left exasperated. This is one of the ways we experience suffering in sports: through the disapproval of others. Who are the “others”? It’s different for each athlete, but the common ones are fans, coaches, teammates, friends and family. Family, ouch. Few things are worse than hearing your parents or siblings tell you “you’re not good enough” or “you can do better than that.” This six week study follows the life and many sufferings of Joseph. Today’s study focuses on him being an outcast within his own family.

Read Genesis 37:1-11

What did Joseph’s brothers think of him? Why did they think this way?

How do you think Joseph felt knowing that he would never gain approval from his brothers?

Why do you think Joseph chose to tell his brothers about the dreams? Was it smart of him?

How do we try to gain the approval of others through sports today? Does it work? Why or why not?

Read John 5:18

Context: The Jews were God’s chosen people. Of all people groups, they should have embraced and celebrated Jesus.

What connections do you see between Jesus/Jewish people and Joseph/his brothers?

Put yourself in Jesus’ shoes. How would you feel if the very people you came to save wanted to kill you?

APPLICATION FOR THE ATHLETE



Maybe your immediate family doesn't hate you. I'm guessing nobody wants to kill you right now either. But have you ever experienced what it's like to expect someone to show you love, kindness, or compassion, and instead, you receive shame, disapproval, or rejection? If so, you are more similar to Joseph and Jesus than you think.

Have you ever experienced the struggle of trying to live up to your parents or siblings standard? If so, explain what that has been like.

Why is approval from others so attractive to us?

Can you share a time in your sport when you have experienced the disapproval of others because of your performance?

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-4

Context: This is the Apostle Paul writing a letter to the Thessalonian church.

According to verse 2, what happened to Paul and his friends?

Who have we been approved by (v. 4) and why is that significant?

What was Paul's motivation to speak in verse 4?

What if we adopted a similar mentality when it came to our sport? In what ways does this verse give us a framework for breaking our incessant need for others approval?

Blindsided



Review of previous study:

1. Joseph's brothers hated and were jealous of him
2. Jesus was rejected by God's chosen people, the Jews
3. Athletes often experience suffering through the disapproval of others

There is a good reason why the NFL decided to outlaw blindsided blocks: they're dangerous. This type of block generally occurs when a player is not looking and gets drilled (blindsided) by an opponent coming from another direction. Maybe you don't play football, but I'm guessing you have been blindsided at some point in your life. Being blindsided in life is hard for the same reasons that it is on the field. You don't see it coming. Nobody expects to get injured or to lose their starting spot. Nobody expects a family member to get cancer or a friend to die in a car accident. This study focuses on the suffering that happens as a result of being blindsided in our sport—and in our life.

Read Genesis 37:12-36

What stands out to you in this passage?

How was Joseph blindsided? How was Reuben blindsided? How was the father blindsided?

How would you respond if you were Joseph? Do we have a modern day equivalent of what happened to Joseph?

Can you share an example in your life (not your sport) of a time when you were blindsided? How did you process that with the Lord?

Read Luke 22:3-6 and Luke 22:47-54

Context: Let's start with this: Jesus cannot be blindsided. He is God and nothing surprises him. Judas was one of his 12 disciples.

What similarities do you see between the two passages in Luke and what we read earlier in Genesis 37?

Put yourself in Jesus' shoes. How would you feel if one of the people you had invested in for three years betrayed you for a few pieces of silver?

APPLICATION FOR THE ATHLETE



It should go without saying, but it's worth pointing out: you can't prepare for a blindside moment in sports or in life. The only thing you can control is your response. And trusting in God's sovereignty is one of the best responses to suffering. God's sovereignty means He is in control of everything that happens in the world. When bad things happen, we can easily become bitter and discouraged because of what's happening. Or we can, in the midst of our pain and frustration, choose to trust that God is in control and pray that He would use the pain of the suffering to grow something new in us, to make us stronger, and to strengthen our faith.

What has been the biggest "blindside" moment in your athletic career up to this point?

How did you respond?

Read Romans 8:28

Is it easy or hard for you to believe the truth of this verse?

Think back to your blindside moment in sports. Can you think of anything good that happened from that experience?

Why do you think it's important to define "good" on God's terms instead of ours?

What do you think "good" means to God?

Undeserved



Review of previous study:

1. Joseph was blindsided when his brothers sold him into slavery
2. We can't predict or prepare for life's blindside moments
3. The best response to suffering is continuing to trust in God's sovereignty

Have you ever done everything right in your sport only to have the end result go so badly? You prepare to perfection. You eat right, sleep right, and even read your Bible a little extra. But your coach decides you're not traveling with the team. Or you get injured within the first minute. Or the official makes an awful call on you. What the heck. You did everything possible and disaster strikes. Joseph can resonate with you a little bit here. And not to minimize your sport, but the stakes were a bit higher for him. This study focuses on suffering and hardship that feels undeserved.

Read Genesis 39:1-23

Why do you think verse 2 is significant in light of what has been happening to Joseph? Why do we need to remember that as well in hard times?

In your own words, describe what happened with Joseph, Potiphar, and Potiphar's wife.

How would you feel if you were in Joseph's shoes?

Can you remember a time in your life when you felt like you did everything right and things still went poorly?

Notice that the scene ends with verse 21 saying again that the Lord was with Joseph. Why do you think the author brackets this story in the beginning and end with this statement?

Read Luke 23:18-25

Context: After being betrayed by Judas, Jesus stood before Pilate to receive his sentence.

What similarities do you see between what happened to Joseph in Genesis 39 and what happened to Jesus?

APPLICATION FOR THE ATHLETE



We need to be clear here. Our obedience to God does not put him in our debt.

We can't put God under a contractual obligation that says: if we obey, you will bless. He may choose to bless, but it will be because He chooses to, not because our obedience demands it. The fact is, none of us truly deserves anything.

Describe a time in your sport when you did everything "right" and things still didn't go your way. How did you view God in and through that experience?

Consider the following statement: God is not obligated to bless us in our sport based on our obedience to Him. Does that truth lessen your desire to be completely obedient to Him? Why or why not?

What if your sport was not the avenue through which God would reward you, but instead the means through which he would grow you more and more into the likeness of his Son? Discuss.

Can't Catch A Break



Review of previous study:

1. Joseph did everything right and still got a raw deal
2. Despite the hardships, God was always with Joseph
3. Our obedience to God does not make Him obligated to bless us

Ok, so we can all understand that hardships happen in life. We won't live up to others' expectations. We'll get blindsided. They even happen when we have done everything right. But what about the hardships that just seem to keep coming...and coming...and coming? What about the hardships that allow you just enough time to catch your breath before punching you in the gut just one more time? This study focuses on the relentless suffering that seemingly keeps piling on.

Read Genesis 40:1-23

In your own words, describe what happened in this narrative.

What was Joseph's one request to the cupbearer and baker?

What does it say about Joseph's character that he continued to show kindness and compassion instead of pouting and choosing a victim mentality?

Can you think of a season in your life when suffering and hardships compounded on each other? How did you respond?

Read Luke 23:32-43

What kinds of additional suffering did Jesus experience in these verses?

What similarities do you see between what happened to Joseph in Genesis 40 and Jesus?

APPLICATION FOR THE ATHLETE



Momentum: the strength or force gained by motion or by a series of events.

We usually view momentum, especially in sports, as a positive factor. We ride the momentum of a great play or winning streak and gain confidence for the next series of events. Momentum can be seen and felt, but it's ultimately, unmeasurable. Surely, all of us know what it's like to be on both ends of the momentum effect—in sports and in life.

Can you think of a time in your sport when it felt like nothing you did made any difference? Or a time when hardships compounded on one another?

Which of the following responses do you most often gravitate towards when you experience suffering?

<i>BITTERNESS</i>	<i>REVENGE</i>	<i>MEDICATE</i>
<i>Self-centered</i>	<i>Hurting others</i>	<i>Abusing alcohol</i>
<i>Entitled</i>	<i>Hurting self</i>	<i>Abusing sex</i>
<i>Complain</i>	<i>Trash talk</i>	<i>Social media addiction</i>
<i>Make excuses</i>	<i>Hate speech</i>	<i>Over training</i>
<i>Pouting</i>	<i>Gossip</i>	<i>Overly competitive</i>
<i>Constantly judging</i>	<i>Passive revenge</i>	<i>Binge eating</i>
<i>Other</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Other</i>

Why is it easier to gravitate towards these than to run towards God and trust him?

Forgotten & Alone



Review of previous study:

1. Joseph's hardships continued to compound one another, despite his continued obedience
2. Our response to suffering matters

Anyone who has been injured in sport has likely experienced the three pain points that come with the injury. The first is physical pain. The second is the pain of lost goals. The third is the pain of a lost community. Now, it's not exactly lost in a sense that you cannot find it. You just don't get the benefits of it anymore. No more traveling with the team. While they're practicing together, you're in the training room rehabbing. You get the point. This third aspect of the injury is the catalyst for feeling forgotten and alone—and that feeling of suffering alone is the focus of this study.

Read Genesis 40:23-41:1-14

How long was Joseph left in prison?

Read the end of 40:23 once more and discuss how Joseph must have felt (recap all of his sufferings up to this point in the story as you discuss).

What emotions do you think Joseph felt when he was finally called out of the pit? Relief? Skepticism? A "here we go again" mentality?

Why does feeling forgotten and alone often feel like the final knockout blow for so many people dealing with suffering?

Can you think of a time in your life when you were going through a hardship and felt forgotten or alone?

Read Matthew 27:38-46

What similarities do you see between how Joseph must have felt in the prison and how Jesus felt on the cross?

Discuss the following statement: Jesus' suffering caused a break in the favor and fellowship he experienced with the Father (alone), so that we would never have to experience suffering apart from him.

APPLICATION FOR THE ATHLETE



If we have surrendered our lives to Christ, we are never alone. We are never forgotten. Even when suffering keeps piling on and it feels like the people closest to us are not able to give us what we need, we must trust that God can. It's easy to say that. It's harder to live it.

Can you think of a time in your life as an athlete when you experienced the feeling of being alone or forgotten by your teammates or coaches?

What do you think it looks like practically to run towards God when we feel abandoned?

What are some practical things you can do for your teammates who are injured or neglected for some other reason?

Write out the name of two teammates who may be feeling forgotten and alone. Commit to pray for them this week and find ways to encourage them.

Seeing The Light



Review of previous study:

1. Joseph was in prison and forgotten for two years after helping the chief cupbearer
2. Jesus experienced the feeling of being alone on the cross, for us

Read Genesis 50:15-21

Context: Joseph became 2nd in command, behind Pharaoh. There were 7 years of blessing, followed by 7 years of drought in the land. Because of Joseph, Egypt stockpiled resources during the 7 years of blessing. His wisdom and leadership saved an entire nation from starving. Joseph's brothers eventually had to go to Egypt to get food to survive. They had no idea that Joseph was still alive because they didn't recognize him at first. Eventually, his brothers and father (Jacob), move to Egypt and are provided for by Joseph.

Recap all you remember about Joseph's sufferings.

How did Joseph respond towards his brothers?

How was Joseph able to respond the way that he did towards his brothers? How would you have responded?

Joseph had to wait years and years to realize the purpose behind his suffering. Why do you think we have a tendency to want immediate answers from God when we suffer?

Read John 3:16,17

What similarities do you see between what Joseph's sufferings allowed him to accomplish for his people and what Jesus' sufferings allowed him to accomplish for his people (us)?

What did Jesus' suffering accomplish for you? Why do you think it is important to remind ourselves daily about this? Why is it important to remember this when we are going through hardships?

APPLICATION FOR THE ATHLETE



Joseph exemplifies a man who refused to be defined by his circumstances.

Despite countless hardships, he continued to trust in the Lord—and eventually he was able to see the purpose of his suffering. Athlete, his story is an encouragement to us to trust that whatever is happening in our lives, God is in control. His plans are good. We may not see it now (or in this lifetime), but God is calling us to trust him. Is he worthy of that trust? Look at what he sacrificed on the cross for you and me—there's your answer.

What lessons from Joseph and Jesus can you apply to your life as an athlete the next time you experience suffering?

Why do you think it's important to learn about what the Bible teaches about suffering and hardships before we actually experience them?

Share with the group one or two (or more!) things you learned from this 6-part study.