

When Clocks Stop Ticking

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Today's Truth *Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice (Ephesians 4:31 NIV).*

Friend to Friend I have a confession to make. When I was in high school, I never read the books we were supposed to have read in English class. I read the Cliffs Notes study guides and got by. But a decade later, I decided to go back and get that high school reading list and actually read the books! *Great Expectations* was one of my favorites. It showed me just what can happen with a heart that stays stuck on a solitary disappointment.

In the story, Miss Havisham is an elderly recluse who lives in a dilapidated mansion. When the main character, a young boy named Pip, is taken to her Gothic estate, he sees a dismal old brick structure with partially boarded-up windows, rusted iron gates, and an overgrown garden. But more startling than the rundown appearance of the outside of the house is what he finds inside.

Miss Havisham, the lady of the manor known as Satis House, sits in a tattered and yellowed wedding gown that hangs over her skeletal frame. Paper-thin skin wraps itself around her claw-like hands. A rotting veil rests upon her gray wispy hair. One shoe sits on a side table, as if waiting to be placed on her foot with the other. Bridal flowers, now long dead, adorn her head. To add to the oddities, Pip notices that every clock in the room has stopped at twenty minutes till nine. In fact, every clock in the house ticked its last at twenty minutes till nine.

Pip later learns that many years before, Miss Havisham had been dressing for her wedding day when she received the heart-rending news that her fiancé had run off with another woman. He would not be marrying her after all. From that moment on, life stopped for Miss Havisham. Every room was left as it was. Miss Havisham patted her heart, looked at Pip, and said, "Broken." She had sacrificed her future on the altar of her past, refusing to let it go.

The apostle Paul wrote, "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice" (Ephesians 4:31). The Greek word translated bitterness is *pikria*, which means bitterness or harshness.

As Paul uses the word, it conveys an embittered or resentful spirit. The root word *pik* sounds like what it means: pick, prick, or cut. It can refer to a sharp or pointed object or a bitter, sharp taste. Used figuratively, it describes "that angry and resentful state of mind that can develop when we undergo troubles."

When we keep picking at the scab of past pain, refusing to allow the wound to heal, we will become bitter. And bitterness spawns other undesirable emotions and actions. Look at the words Paul tethers to bitterness: rage, anger, brawling, slander, malice. A bitter root will produce bitter fruit. It has no choice.

This is what happens when we, like Miss Havisham, hold our fingers on the hands of the clock to stop life from moving on and thus invite bitterness to take root. Of course, life forges ahead,

clock or no clock. It is only the ticking clock of the heart that stays stuck as the world continues to spin.

So how do we break free of bitterness. Paul goes on to tell us in verse 32. "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, **forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.**" In the end, Miss Havisham set about to make everybody around her just as miserable as she was. And when it comes down to it, that's what a bitter heart does...and I don't want to be that person.

Let's Pray Heavenly Father, show me any roots of bitterness toward anyone that I have growing in my heart. Help me unearth the tap root so that it will be destroyed completely. And help me to move past the hurt and forward with healing. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Now It's Your Turn Do you know of any Miss Havishams in your life? Can you think of a non-spiritual book that you've read that taught you a spiritual lesson? If so, what was the book and what was the lesson? I'd love to hear it! Click "comment" and share.