

**KAILUA CHRISTIAN CHURCH**  
**SUNDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2025**  
**SERMON SERIES PART 8: BACK TO THE BASICS**  
**SERMON: CHOOSING BETTER OVER BITTER**  
**SCRIPTURE: GENESIS 50:15-21**  
**PASTOR DALE VALLEJO-SANDERSON**

**GENESIS 50:15-21**

**15** “When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, “What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?” **16** So they sent word to Joseph, saying, “Your father left these instructions before he died: **17** ‘This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.’ Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father.” When their message came to him, Joseph wept. **18** His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. “We are your slaves,” they said. **19** But Joseph said to them, “Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? **20** You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. **21** So then, don’t be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.” And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.”

**SERMON: CHOOSING BETTER OVER BITTER**

I am thankful to be here today with you. I celebrate with you and with Pastor Irene, Hamza, Aisha, Adam and new baby Jumana. . I have been asked to speak these next few weeks, I am grateful.

Today we come to the end of Genesis with the amazing story of Joseph, who faced the absolute worst of family, friends and leaders’ betrayal, false accusations, petty jealousy, and isolation of prison and broken family ties. Yet through all of this, Joseph found God’s presence and faithfulness in time, sometimes a long time, the meaningful good hope of the enduring love of God.

Today's message is entitled; “Choosing Better Over Bitter”

‘One of the most important choices of our lives.’

Joseph had more reasons than most of us to be swallowed up with bitterness. The relentless hurts, betrayals and pains he lived through, makes it easy for us to understand how tempting it can be to remain hurt, angry, resentful and allow bitterness to take deep roots in our hearts and minds.

Many of us, if not all of us, have had moments or seasons of mistreatment, betrayal, hurt and abandonment. We know life is hard at times. It falls on us and wounds our soul and shapes our thoughts, leading us into private places of deep shame, guilt and blame. We understand to some degree Joseph and

others in our lives when we are honest with our own lives. Sometimes we are the ones who have hurt and betrayed others. Most certainly the way we are with others will reveal the degree and depth of choice that we have turned to God to free us from bitterness with God's goodness of forgiveness, healing and faithful presence in our darkest moments day by day of life, through the challenges and the blessings.

So I pray that today's message speaks to each of us, reminds and empowers each of us to make one of the most important choices of our lives with God, Choosing His Good over our Bitterness. God understands and walks with us always to help us live into our way of Good over Bitter.

***I Choose Better Over Bitter by...***

**I. Realizing that in Bitterness I imagine the worst in others.**

*“When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, “What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs, we did to him?” Gen. 50:15*

Some years ago, while I was the lead pastor, a season of tension emerged in our leadership team. One person in particular, whom I had spent time talking with about his life and his past, on his journey of growing in his faith was a challenge. We had dinner a number of times and enjoyed a closeness as families together. Somehow as he progressed in leadership in the church, he became more angry, frustrated and distant from me. I tried reaching out and he acted cordial, yet a bit holding off. In time, a small few began gathering and criticizing me, taking in some of the insinuations of one leader and spreading it to others. Trusted people came to me and shared their concerns over the situation. I tried to find a way of openness.

I was hurt and found resentment and anger growing in me. My mind began to think of him in negative ways, away from the good I had known, and we shared in caring conversations before. His rejection of invitations to talk stirred my hurt and fueled my judgement of him.

Thankfully one day, he asked if we could talk. He had left the church and had been meeting with a few others who were equally distant now. I thought and imagined the worst possible ways this conversation could go. I began loading up my mind with defensive comments and challenges and ways of guarding myself.

To his credit, he came to acknowledge his hurtful ways and words. He acknowledged he was taking out on me the hurt he lived with unresolved with his own father. That day he chose openness of Better over continuing in Bitterness. He imagined more against me than I had given him reason for. I was so touched and humbled. I asked for forgiveness for ways I hurt him and could have been better and more understanding. He didn't require that yet humbly received it. He had been getting counseling and owning his choices and the influences in his life. He helped me to release the choices of my own imagination of his worst. Rather, I could come back to mercy for him and the pain he lived with, embrace the good we shared and celebrate the courage he showed to heal our relationship with God.

**Question for reflection:**

- A. Who is someone you hold in resentment, hurt, and unforgiveness?
- B. How does this affect you?

### *I Choose Better Over Bitter by...*

## **II. Cooperating with God's way of turning brokenness into blessings.**

*"But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? 20 You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives." Gen.50:19-20*

I want to share a story from my high school days, because it has continued to inform and shape my mind, my heart and my relationship with God, myself and with people on a regular basis.

I flunked 9th grade. I wasn't a particularly bad kid, no fights or drugs or even ditching school. I'm sure what I was thinking that year, I think I thought homework, studying and trying to learn was optional or something. So it was a rude awakening to me and my parents when I failed. One teacher, Mr. M, in particular had it out for me and my whole second 9th grade. He called me up in math class to solve the math equations on the board. Some I got, some I didn't. He took great delight in saying if I got it how it only took me two years to learn it. If I didn't solve it, he would remark to me and the class about how dumb I could be. I got through that year, keeping quiet, slowly hating brewing in me and just holding out to for the day to cross the street to begin high school with my friends who were now a year ahead, and leaving Mr. M behind.

On the first day of high school, I'm trying to lay low, not stick out and avoid having to explain where I was last year. Most didn't realize I had flunked; some even thought we had class in 10th grade last year. This was my 10th grade start, I heard my name being called out from down the hallway, Its Mr. M calling out about me to me. "There he is, it took him two years to get here." I didn't argue the point. My dread and embarrassment fueled burning hate and despair. He kept making fun of how slow of mind I was and how he couldn't believe I made it to high school. He called me over to him, I went in hopes he would stop telling of my failure out loud. He grabbed the back of my neck, pulled me painfully close and said, "You are a loser, always have been, always will be." Rather than mounting up in defense, something of my will and hope melted in me. It made me think he may be right. I was in the lowest class for math, kind of a dumping ground for the drugged out, lost souls. It hit me, I guess this is me. Fortunately, Mr. Rose, my teacher for that class, thought differently and worked with me to get over my aversion to math and moved me into a regular class. I had a few teachers who saw something and encouraged me.

This also began my first time hearing about Jesus Christ, through a Christian youth outreach called Young Life. The leader, Dick Powell had a remarkable way of sharing each week in 10-15 minutes more and more about the amazing Jesus Christ and His love and hope for each one of us. In an environment of acceptance, caring invitation and fun, I found myself drawn into bible studies and came to an open-hearted welcome of Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. I found myself inviting others and becoming part of the team of leaders in our school. I didn't know much but that Jesus loved me, saved me from being lost and He gave me His heart for everyone else.

In my senior year, I was class president. Every Friday, our class and others ran the concession stands under the bleachers, selling food and drinks. I worked there for many weeks. This one particular Friday, there was a whole team of classmates running the stand. So, I was in the announcer's box announcing the game. Afterwards my friends met up on the field, and we walked to our car. There were no lights in our small town beyond the football field. So, the bright lights focused on the field created a clear line once you stepped off the field. It was immediately dark. My friends and I were right at that line, just stepping into the dark, by the stands, when we heard Mr. M, call out and ask if we were seniors. My friends didn't like Mr. M, and so yelled back at him, yeah what of it. He replied "Well get your a...es over here and help, this is for you". "Who are you anyway?" That was his big mistake, when my friends realized he couldn't see who we were, they unleashed a whole thunderstorm of names, put downs and cuss words out of the veil of darkness. My friends said to me, "Come on, let's leave the loser."

I have never forgotten that moment to this day. I stood with one foot in the light and one foot in the dark. Here was the man I had hated for a number of years. And he was alone, abandoned, probably chased everyone off with his harsh words. I have been a Christian gratefully now for about a year and half. God found me and accepted me just as I am with His love. Who will I be? What will I be about? My friends kept calling me, part of me wanted to just let him suffer alone. Yet, it came to me, I didn't want to walk in the dark of hate, resentment, bitterness any longer. Jesus loved me and He loved Mr. M. I chose the light. So, I went over and helped him. Mr. M grumbled the whole time, about what a waste our class was, what a terrible class president I was, and on and on. That was ok, I cared about him. Mr. M helped me see the choices I must make to live in love and life with Jesus Christ. What Mr. M meant for harm, God used for good.

**Question for reflection:**

**C.** What might God be teaching you about yourself through a difficult person?

*I Choose Better Over Bitter by...*

**III. Freeing others from their fears and regrets with genuine care and kindness.**

"So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them." Gen. 50:21

One last moment with Mr. M. He never said thank you, that was ok, I was free already by Jesus love for me and for him. On graduation night, right after the ceremony was over, Mr. M. Came up to me, shook my hand and said, "You did good." And walked away.

I am still learning the tremendous importance of choosing Better in kindness and care, compassion and forgiveness Over bitterness and hate.

As God kept Joseph through all the worst of life, Joseph kept God close to heart, so may we be so led day by day.

**Question for reflection:**

**D.** Who is someone God could be asking you to free with genuine care and kindness?