

Living a Chocolate Life

SESSION 6 *B*ITTERSWEET

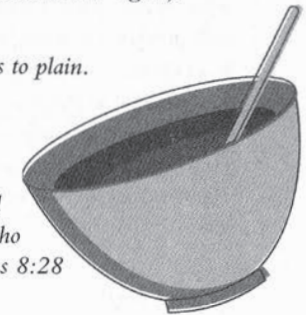
A CHOCOLATE SAMPLER

Check all that apply to you, and then discuss as a group:

- You live a chocolate life from scratch, in the one true faith! (Share a sample that really spoke to you from the last session, and have a Memory Morsel moment too.)*
- You have been tricked into trying bitter baking chocolate (100 percent cacao)!*
- You prefer really dark chocolate (70 percent cacao or higher).*
- You have made molded chocolates.*
- You prefer nut- or cream-filled chocolates to plain.*

MEMORY MORSEL

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose.” Romans 8:28



*B*itter

My love for chocolate was already strong when I was quite young. And I knew there was a big box of baking bars in my mother's cupboard. Would she even notice if I snuck just one bar from the box? Doubtful. So I climbed the cabinets one day, grabbed the box, and stole a bar. *Mmm!* It sure smelled

like the real thing. Ever so sneakily, I popped it into my mouth and began chewing. *Ugh! Yuck! Eww!* I was old enough to know that chocolate was a good thing, but young enough that I didn't understand the meaning of "Unsweetened Baking Chocolate." My naïve expectation of something rich and sweet was dashed by a blast of bitter, unsweetened nastiness—100 percent pure cacao! My happy chocolate-sneaking smile was replaced with an unhappy puckering grimace as I attempted to rinse my mouth out to erase the bitter taste.

Where I had hoped for something sweet, I received something bitter instead. Life is kind of like that sometimes too. Where we hope for sweet morsels of happiness, we sometimes receive bitter nuggets of pain and suffering. In our sin, we allow ourselves to become embittered by the circumstances into which we are often dipped, to be disappointed by the effects of the world that threaten to change our taste and leave a bitter aftertaste.

How can we maintain a sweet outlook on life when there is so much bitterness, so much anger, hurt, and heartache? Bitter feelings are often packaged in unsweetened circumstances. One woman struggles with anger against her malicious co-workers who ridicule her for her faith. Another cannot let go of her hurt to reconcile with her loved ones. Another lives with chronic pain and the fear of news she suspects her doctor has for her. Still another woman aches from the heartache of losing the person she held most dear.

How do we survive these circumstances and so many more like them? What do we do when we're crushed under the weight of sorrow or pain? How can we not become embittered when we're brokenhearted or angry? To what may we resort in our attempt to erase the bitter taste of our troubles?

 **TAKE A BITE**

Into what bitter circumstances or suffering have you been *dipped* lately? Has it left a bitter taste in your mouth?

Many of us turn to something we think will remove the bitter taste: food, sleeping pills, alcohol, fantasy escape, gambling, extramarital affairs, gossip, binge shopping, and more. We find something that we've convinced ourselves will numb the emotional pain, sweeten the flavor of our dark days, or at least offer a distraction from our misery. But that something never delivers real relief from our troubles; it cannot heal our broken heart; and it often causes an even nastier taste. We may have rationalized the distractions we've chosen, and maybe we've tried to find a solution on our own, seeking help through self-talk, to no avail.

Can our sweetness be restored? Is there a real solution, a true answer? Yes. And our Savior, Jesus, has that answer. He says, "**Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest**" (**Matthew 11:28**). We can take our pain and sorrow to the One who went to the cross, tasting the bitter pain, suffering, and death that should have been ours. **Hebrews 2:9** reminds us that Christ tasted death for everyone. He knows our anger, hurt, and heartache. Our compassionate Lord feels our pain. His blood covered our sins and the sins of the whole world; sweet salvation is ours in Christ! Jesus rescues and gives *real* rest. When we lean into His strong arms instead of striving to earn grace and attempting to restore sweetness on our own, we receive His forgiveness, healing, and hope.

#1 dig in!

Are you brokenhearted? facing troubles? crushed in spirit? Cry out to your Rescuer, who says, "Come to Me." Read **Psalm 34:15–18** and see what happens when you do! How can you respond in faith when it doesn't seem that you're being delivered out of your troubles?

#2 dig in!

In the middle of every circumstance, you can turn to the Bible and cling to your Savior's words, trusting that His loving grip is upon you. Turn to His comforting Word now. In these verses, how does God reveal His constant

care over you, on the days that are light and smooth and on those that are dark and lumpy, and especially at the center of every trial and difficulty? Write key words as reminders from each verse and post them where you will see them every day.

- Deuteronomy 31:8

- Psalm 73:23

- Isaiah 43:1

- Zephaniah 3:17

Overcome!

We can rest assured even in the middle of our trials that we have a Savior who is bigger than every tribulation we will ever face. As Jesus was comforting His disciples just before His arrest and crucifixion, He told them that *because* they were His followers, they would face persecution, sorrow, and trials. (See **John 15:20**.) But with these words He included a promise: **“In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world”** (John 16:33).

#3 dig in!

a. Bitter circumstances will be a part of every believer’s walk and may sometimes be the direct result, as we are mocked and even persecuted for our faith. As His followers today, we shouldn’t be surprised when we suffer because of Christ. What does the Lord say through Peter in **1 Peter 2:19–23** and **4:12–14** about suffering as a Christian?

b. What example did Christ leave us for how to respond when suffering for our faith (**1 Peter 2:23**)? How can we possibly *rejoice* and even be *blessed* when we suffer in this way? (See **1 Peter 4:14**.)

Today, Christ comes to us in His Word and the Sacraments, providing His strength to not only *endure* our trials, struggles, and suffering, but even more, to ultimately *overcome* them victoriously through Him who has overcome the world at the cross and the empty tomb!

Mixed and Moldable

Sometimes all we see of our circumstances is the place of suffering in which we live; we cannot see the future result in the midst of our trials. But God can. From our limited taste, we may know only the bitter moments, and they are nasty by themselves.

Similarly, unsweetened chocolate, sugar, butter, and vanilla—basic candy ingredients—are not delectable delights on their own. In fact, separately, each is hardly palatable. (Have you tried swallowing several cups of sugar? or consuming an entire stick of butter? or sipping straight vanilla? None is a tasty treat by itself.) However, when a chocolatier *mixes* these ingredients together in the correct quantities, at the precise time, and heats them to the perfect temperature, all the unpalatable ingredients work together to form a *chocolate candy sensation*. (A sensational candy recipe awaits you at the end of this session too.)

God allows a variety of circumstances, some bitter and some sweet, to *mix* together in our lives, in His order and according to His timing (big chunks of one thing, little sprinklings of another).



CHOCOLATE FUN FACT

Melting chocolate is a delicate process. If it is overheated or if moisture is accidentally added during the melting process, the chocolate *seizes*. It suddenly becomes stiff, lumpy, thick, and unworkable. Why? Too much heat or water causes the cocoa solids to separate from the cocoa butter and creates a stiff, unyielding paste.

As He works in us, making us moldable, we can ask Him to give us eyes to see beyond our circumstances and the similar situations of others. Instead of asking, “Why?” we can pray for discernment by asking, “How will You use this?” We ask for greater trust to believe that He has a purpose beyond our limited view of this distasteful moment. We don’t deny our bitter realities and present suffering, but by the Spirit’s strength, we can trust that His plans include much more than what meets the eye.

#4 dig in!

Go ahead! Ask, “How will You use this, Lord?” Approach God’s throne of grace with confidence (see **Hebrews 4:16**). While He may not reveal that answer to you now, you can ask for greater trust and obedience to follow His lead, according to His Word. What do the following verses have to say about God’s plans and purpose for you? How might they guide you in your prayer now?

- Psalm 57:2

Chocolate is beautifully moldable, able to take on whatever shape a chocolatier chooses. To create his moldable masterpiece, however, the chocolatier must use just the right amount of heat to melt the hard block of chocolate. Too much heat causes chocolate to seize and become even stiffer. Too little heat leaves chocolate too firm and unyielding.

In a similar way, God, our “great chocolatier,” has a special shape in mind for each of us. He uses the heat in our lives to soften our hardened, bitter hearts, unyielding pride, and stubborn attitudes. In His perfect wisdom, He allows just the right amount of heat—pain or discomfort—to soften us, to lead us to see our need for our Savior, who died to save us from these stubborn sins and so many more.

- Proverbs 19:21

- Isaiah 55:8–9

- Jeremiah 29:11

#5 dig in!

a. **Romans 5:3–5** and **James 1:2–4** speak to our sufferings and trials, which can test our faith. Both passages begin with a call to respond in what way? Through these verses, we learn that our suffering and trials produce many Christlike qualities in us, as He helps us in our suffering and molds and transforms us through our trials. Make a list of these Christlike qualities. By God’s grace, where have you seen some of these being produced and growing in you? As a result of what trials?

b. According to **Romans 5:5**, what is significant about the hope that is produced as a result? In **James 1:3**, what is meant by “steadfastness”? If it “has its full effect” (v. 4), does that mean we will achieve perfection this side of heaven?

Through our trials and sufferings, our faith grows stronger. “**And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you**” (1 Peter 5:10). We yield to His touch as He transforms us and then makes us stronger than we were before; we are confirmed and established in Him. Our sweetness is restored!

Under the care of the Great Chocolatier, “We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28).

#6 dig in!

How could you gently share **Romans 8:28** (*this session’s Memory Morsel*) in your own words with someone who is seeking guidance and reassurance from the Lord in the middle of a sour circumstance? What might you humbly add from your own past experiences, while also recognizing that no two trials are the same?

#7 dig in!

In God’s revelation of heaven to John, our Lord gives us a glimpse of eternity before His throne. How can **Revelation 21:3–4** bring you great comfort in the midst of every unsavory circumstance you may face now or in the days to come? (See also **2 Corinthians 4:16–18** for Paul’s perspective concerning his present suffering in light of eternity.)

With certainty of eternal life, where we will be gathered around His throne of grace, we are given the strength and joy to live to the fullest through each circumstance, no matter what it contains! We can “**give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for [us]**” (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

✦ TAKE A BITE

Have you been ridiculed, insulted, or persecuted for your faith? Explain your situation(s).

✦ TAKE ANOTHER BITE

Recall a painful or uncomfortable time when the heat was turned up in your life. Has it served to make you moldable? Are you able to see another purpose in it?

Molded Masterpieces

Although heat and change can be painful and difficult, God is molding and shaping us into the masterpieces He called us to become. We were made in the image of God (**Genesis 1:27**). And our Great Chocolatier, through the work of the Holy Spirit, continues to lovingly mold us into Christ’s likeness, by His glory, shaping us and transforming us to become more like Him (**2 Corinthians 3:18**).

The most exquisite molded chocolates are also cleverly and uniquely marked by a specific swirl or stamp on top. Connoisseurs know the inside by the outside. As we are molded into Christ’s image, we are recognized by His specific imprint upon us. In our Baptism, each of us was marked by Christ as His own child, unique and recognizable. We are His molded masterpieces. Connoisseurs or not, others recognize those who are molded and marked by Christ. Our words and actions show that the Spirit dwells inside us. And when we melt in failure, He forgives, reshapes, and strengthens us to start anew. Oh, that the world would be drawn to Christ through us the way one is drawn to a particularly fine molded chocolate!

Whatever the flavor of our days, we trust God's care over all the details of our lives, knowing that He can make something sweet out of our bitter circumstances. The sweet love of Christ permeates us and enables us to *live a chocolate life*. The Holy Spirit transforms us and shapes us, making us more like Christ. **"He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6).** Our Redeemer lavishes His rich, sweet grace upon us as He continues His good work in us until the day of His return.

*Living a Chocolate Life, we are
sweet in bitter circumstances,
by the grace of God!*

PRAYER

Sweet Supplication

Lord, forgive me for my faulty focus on bitter circumstances instead of on You, who works all things together for good. Help me trust You to make something sweet out of the bitter circumstances in my life. Thank You for sweet salvation in Christ, for choosing me and forgiving me, a hardened and unyielding sinner. Continue to soften me, shape me, and mold me into Your image as Your masterpiece! In Jesus' name. Amen.

Chocolate Candy Sensation: Fudge!

1½ oz. unsweetened chocolate	½ c. milk
⅓ c. light corn syrup	2 c. sugar
2 tbsp. butter	1 tsp. vanilla extract

Mix all ingredients except vanilla in saucepan and bring quickly to a boil. Turn fire very low and boil for exactly 5 minutes. Remove from heat and stir in vanilla. Cool and beat with wooden spoon until right consistency. (The secret to this chocolate candy sensation is allowing it to cool before beating, which will give it a creamy, not grainy, texture.) Drop by teaspoonfuls onto waxed paper; cool completely, and store at room temperature in airtight container.



✦ TAKE A BITE

How are you able to recognize another "molded masterpiece" in the making? What is it about that person that makes him or her unique and recognizable?

CHOCOTIVITY

Making Molded Chocolates

Enjoy this wonderful opportunity to continue group discussion about becoming moldable and shaped in the Lord's image. You'll find **candy molds** and **melting chocolate** in the candy-making section of many hobby and variety stores.

Directions: Melt chocolate according to package directions until smooth and *moldable*. Spoon chocolate into each mold until level full; lightly tap on counter to eliminate air bubbles in chocolate. Place in refrigerator or freezer until candy is set. Unmold by inverting mold just above waxed-paper-covered surface. Gently tap mold; shaped and molded chocolate masterpieces will appear. (You can create additional shapes, colors, and flavors using a variety of molds, **candy melts**, and **flavoring extract oils**.) Arrange molded chocolates in small containers or gift boxes to display, share, and give away. Create a gift tag with Scripture, or create miniature notes to tuck with each chocolate, using phrases like the following: "You are molded in Christ!" "Filled with the sweet love of Christ!" "You are God's molded masterpiece!" *Additional idea:* Invite a chocolatier to give a candy-making demonstration.