

Overcoming Bitterness

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Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.
— Ephesians 4:31

See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled.
— Hebrews 12:15

COMPREHENDING BITTERNESS

1. Bitterness is an offense that is harbored (Gen. 4:6-7).

How long shall your evil thoughts lodge within you? (Jer. 4:14).

2. Bitterness is being constantly hurt by a memory that is like a splinter that constantly twists within the mind. Bitterness is holding onto a hurt until it has a hold on you.

THE CAUSES OF BITTERNESS

1. Hurtful words produce bitterness (Prov. 12:18; 15:1).

You have no troubles, and yet you make fun of me; you hit a man who is about to fall (Job 12:5).

The whole book of Job records the hurtful things his friends said to him. It hurts to be put down. It hurts to be made fun of. Especially in front of others and especially by those closest to you.

2. Hurtful attitudes produce bitterness.

And you fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4).

But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me" (Luke 10:40).

The attitude of rejection produces rebellion.

The attitude of perfectionism produces frustration.

The attitude of disregard produces low self-esteem.

The attitude of criticism produces fear.

3. Hurtful actions produce bitterness (Job 19:19).

He points with his fingers, he devises evil continually, and he sows discord (Prov. 6:13-14).

Joseph's brothers were embittered by the unjust actions of their father preferring Joseph above them.

An offended brother is more unyielding than a fortified city and disputes are like the barred gates of a citadel (Prov. 18:19).

THE CONSEQUENCES OF BITTERNESS

1. Bitterness makes us foolish.

It's foolish to harbor a grudge (Eccl. 7:9).

To worry yourself to death with resentment would be a foolish, senseless thing to do (Job 5:2).

Bitterness provokes people to do stupid things and to say stupid things. It is unreasonable.

Bitterness will never change the past...never correct the problem...never restore relationship...it will only make it worse.

2. Bitterness hurts us.

You are only hurting yourself with anger (Job 18:4).

Bitterness is emotional suicide. It is a very slow form of destroying one's peace of mind. It prolongs the hurt and it makes you miserable.

3. Bitterness makes everyday life miserable.

One dies in full strength being wholly at ease and secure. The marrow of his bones is moist. Another man dies in the bitterness of his soul, never having eaten with pleasure. They lay down alike in the dust and worms cover them (Job 21:23-25).

Bitterness is the most unhealthy emotion you can have. It causes fatigue, back ache, ulcers, headaches, and drains you of vitality.

4. Bitterness is pleasurable.

The heart knows its own bitterness, and a stranger does not share its joy (Prov. 14:10).

The evil deception of bitterness is that self-pity makes one feel inflated while destroying you. Bitterness is drinking poison while hoping the other person will die.

THE CURE FOR BITTERNESS

1. Unload it.

I will not restrain my mouth (Job 17:11).

Listen to my bitter complaint. Don't condemn me God (Job 10:1).

Confess your trespasses to another, and pray for one another that you may be healed (James 5:16).

The alternatives:

- Stuff it
- Repay it
- Rewarm it

2. Pray about it (Luke 6:27-28).

And the Lord restored Job's losses when he prayed for his friends. Indeed the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before (Job. 42:10).

Intercession for our enemies is being lovingly assertive. Returning love for hate, returning prayer for neglect — these are the keys to deliverance from bitterness.

3. Replace it.

If you would prepare your heart, and stretch out your hands towards him; if iniquity were in your hand, and you put it far away, and would not let wickedness dwell in your tents; then surely you could lift up your face without spot; yes, you could be steadfast, and not fear; because you would forget your misery (Job 11:13-16).

Job's three steps towards replacing bitterness:

- "Put your heart right" — That means forgive.
- "Reach out to God" — That means prayer that results in healing.
- "Put it far away" — That means don't make a truce with bitterness.

4. Remove it (Phil 3:2; Matt. 10:16).

Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm...you also must beware of him for he has greatly resisted our words (II Tim. 4:14-15).

Nehemiah is an example of removing himself from habitual abuse.

- He dealt with negative words with a positive confession (Neh. 2:20).
- He dealt with negative accusations with prayer (4:4).
- He dealt with verbal attack by announcing the truth (6:8-9).
- He dealt with a negative person by removing himself from him (6:10-14).

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