

## **Never Bow To Bitterness!**

How do you react when you feel mistreated?

Let's say someone double crosses you or cheats you.

Maybe someone lies about you and your reputation is damaged.

Maybe your boss chews you out for something you know you didn't do or singles you out because he doesn't like what you stand for.

What is your typical response?

Do you...

Retreat into a depression?

Withdraw from human interaction and isolate yourself?

Look for a way to get even?

Vow that you'll never do anything nice for anyone again?

Cheat the next guy down the line because you decide that it's a dog-eat-dog world?

Become so cynical about the world that you can't enjoy life?

These responses are all pretty common.

As Christians, we are called by God to be different from the world...

And this is one area where that difference can really show.

Hebrews 12:14-15

14 Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

15 See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "ROOT OF BITTERNESS" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;

Bitterness is a deeply corrosive emotion, one that often lurks beneath the surface of our consciousness, masquerading as righteousness, self-protection, or justice.

Unlike fleeting emotions such as anger or sadness, bitterness is sustained and fed over time, growing like a slow-acting poison that seeps into our thoughts, relationships, and identity.

Left unchecked, bitterness can quietly but powerfully sabotage a person's emotional well-being, physical health, opportunities, and sense of purpose.

## **I. What Is Bitterness?**

Bitterness is not just a strong emotion—it is a condition of the soul.

Psychologically, it is a chronic state of resentment, often resulting from unresolved hurt, perceived injustice, betrayal, disappointment, or unmet expectations.

It is a combination of anger and helplessness, in which the person feels wronged but unable or unwilling to let go.

Unlike anger, which tends to be active and outward-facing, bitterness festers internally.

It becomes a mental script that replays grievances and cultivates hostility, even in silence.

It is often laced with cynicism, suspicion, and a deep-seated belief that life—or others—has been fundamentally unfair.

## **II. The roots of bitterness...**

To understand bitterness, we must explore its common origins:

### **1. Unresolved hurt or betrayal**

Bitterness often stems from emotional wounds that were never truly processed.

When someone experiences betrayal, abandonment, or chronic disrespect, and lacks tools or support to heal, bitterness can take root.

## **2. Perceived injustice**

When individuals believe they've been treated unfairly—whether by a partner, boss, society, or even fate—they may develop a sense of righteous resentment.

The sense that one deserved better can turn into long-term bitterness if there's no resolution or release.

## **3. Unmet expectations**

Idealism, especially when mixed with entitlement or unrealistic hopes, can lead to bitterness.

When life doesn't go "as planned," some may fixate on what should have been, rather than adapting and moving forward.

## **4. Suppressed emotions**

People often avoid dealing with painful emotions by suppressing them. But suppressed anger or grief doesn't disappear—it mutates.

Bitterness is the emotional residue left behind when expression and resolution are denied.

## **III. The destructive impact of bitterness...**

Bitterness is not just a "bad attitude." It is a psychological toxin with measurable effects on multiple areas of life:

### **1. Mental and emotional health**

**Chronic Stress:** just like with unthankfulness, bitterness activates the stress response system. Cortisol levels remain high, leading to emotional fatigue, anxiety, and burnout.

**Depression and Isolation:** Bitterness is often linked to depressive symptoms, hopelessness, and social withdrawal.

**Negative Thought Patterns:** It distorts perception, encouraging a cynical, distrusting, and pessimistic worldview. People may become hostile even to those who wish them well.

## **2. Physical health**

Bitterness affects the body through the mind-body connection:

Weakened immune system

Increased risk of heart disease

Gastrointestinal issues

Chronic inflammation

Studies show that long-term negative emotions like bitterness can have similar health impacts as chronic smoking or obesity.

## **3. Relationships and social life**

**Erosion of Trust:** Bitter individuals often expect the worst from others. This makes deep, authentic connection difficult.

**Contagious Negativity:** Bitterness, like a virus, can spread. It affects the emotional climate of families, workplaces, and communities.

**Cycle of Self-Sabotage:** Bitter people may push others away or sabotage opportunities for reconciliation or growth, reinforcing their loneliness and resentment.

## **4. Spiritual and moral stagnation**

Bitterness can harden the heart.

It dulls compassion, inhibits forgiveness, and fosters a victim mindset.

People may cling to a sense of moral superiority, using their hurt as justification to judge, punish, or withdraw.

Over time, it stunts personal and spiritual growth.

#### **IV. Why bitterness is so hard to let go?**

Letting go of bitterness is not as simple as deciding to “move on.”

It persists because it offers certain psychological payoffs:

**Moral Justification:** Bitterness can feel like a badge of victimhood.

It tells the sufferer, “You’re right to be angry.”

**Sense of Control:** Replaying past wounds can give an illusion of control over events that felt uncontrollable.

**Emotional Armor:** Bitterness may serve as protection against further disappointment or vulnerability.

**Identity Fusion:** Some people begin to identify with their bitterness. It becomes part of who they are—the betrayed spouse, the overlooked employee, the child of injustice.

Breaking free requires more than surface positivity; it demands deep emotional and mainly spiritual work.

Now let’s look at some...

#### **V. Helpful things to remember when you’re tempted to bow to bitterness...**

The first thing to remember when you’re tempted to bow to bitterness is...

## 1. God never said that life would be fair!

I'm not aware of any Bible verse that teaches such a thing.

What we do see in the Bible though is Jesus saying in...

John 16:33 (ESV) - I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation (KJV-trouble). But take heart; I have overcome the world."

Tribulation/trouble = thlípsis – properly, pressure (what constricts or rubs together), used of a narrow place that "hems someone in".

In other words, He's saying the world and its problems will squeeze you!

But He also said in...

John 14:1 (ESV) - "Let not your HEARTS be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.

And also...

John 14:27 (ESV) - Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

You will feel squeezed with extreme pressure, but keep your heart in God's hands...

He will bring you through without bitterness!

Of course, God will ultimately even things out at the judgment...

But in the here-and-now, there are no guarantees!

In fact, in a fallen world like ours...

With mankind corrupted by a sinful nature and God allowing freedom of choice...

It only follows that things are not going to be fair all the time.

Yet, it bugs us real bad when we see something that doesn't seem fair.

Sometimes the bad guy sometimes seems to win.

The criminal gets off Scot-free.

The ladder climber who steps on everyone in his path gets the promotion.

The politician lies and gets away with it because they did the right people some favors.

Now listen... I'm not suggesting here that we shouldn't do whatever we can, when we can, to make things right...

But what I AM saying is that sometimes making things even is beyond what we can do.

At that point, so that we don't get bound up in bitterness...

We need to remember that we live in a fallen world and until God redeems this place from the curse and removes sin...

Life is not always going to be fair!

Listen... in this life, no matter how you live or what you do, life isn't always going to be fair.

And the truth is... We should be thanking God that life isn't always fair...

Because if it were...

We'd be in trouble!

The truth is that because of the grace of God, we have NOT gotten what we REALLY deserved!

The truth is that we have done things in this life at times that if life had been fair...

There would have much greater consequences than we got!

Never Bow To Bitterness!

The second thing to remember when you're tempted to bow to bitterness is...

## **2. What happens in you is more important than what happens to you!**

Things are going to happen in this life that we are powerless to change.

We usually cannot make someone treat us right, nor can we go back in time and undo the things that have hurt us.

Maybe it can be prevented next time, but once it has happened, it has happened...

There is no backing up.

If we keep reliving that hurt and devoting endless hours to rehearsing the pain of a wrongdoing in our minds,

We will be left spent and miserable!

Though it is sometimes hard to see...

That time passed in the courtroom of our mind trying the case over and over is really time wasted!

Even though we're sure the verdict is guilty...

There is usually no way to bring about justice in this life without becoming guilty ourselves!

Our best (and sometimes only) recourse is to ask the Lord to change us!

To use this "wrong" to make something "RIGHT" in us!

We know the story of Joseph in the Bible...

It's found in Genesis

For all that was done to him by his brothers, he could have died a bitter, resentful and miserable man.

He didn't do that though.

At some point along the way he decided he would concentrate his energies on being the best person that he could be for God in whatever circumstance he found himself.

Over the process of a lifetime, because of this attitude, God could take him from a pit to a palace.

I wonder how different it might have been had Joseph chosen to spend endless hours licking his wounds and rehearsing his hurts.

After 13 years of living with this choice of "betterness" instead of "bitterness",

As his brothers stood before him in a position where revenge could have been a snap-of-the-fingers away,

His verdict was this: "...you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good..."

All of us need to set some standards for ourselves.

We need to draw the line in the sand and say, "Beyond this point I will not go..."

Not for comfort...

Not for security...

Not for revenge...

Not for anything!

Paul wrote to the Ephesians...

Eph. 4:31 (ESV) - Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

You see there is no part of "all" that allows for an exception.

God wants all the bitterness out of you and me!

ILLU: A doctor told a old woman that she had rabies. Upon hearing the diagnosis, she took out a piece of paper and started writing on it. The doctor thought, "Oh, she must be making up her will," so he asked, "What are you doing, making up your will?" The Old woman said, "No, I'm just writing down every person I'm going to bite before I die!"

Sadly, that is how some people handle injustice.

They are so bitter that they bite everyone else around them!

Maybe not with their teeth, but maybe with their words!

And maybe just with their attitude!

Or maybe even with violent action!

We must NEVER bow to bitterness!

If I hold a glass of water as you walk towards me.

And I carelessly (or even deliberately) bump into you,

Whatever you have in the glass is probably spill out.

That is the way our lives are.

When we are bumped, whatever is inside comes out!

And listen... if you live long enough, you're gonna get bumped!

In fact... you're gonna get bumped many times...

And usually when you least expect it!

In fact... you could get bumped before you leave here tonight!

How are you gonna respond?!

Sadly, it is disgraceful sometimes the things that spill out!

God wants the things inside the glass cleaned up!

From time to time, He will allow us to be bumped, sometimes very forcefully and unjustly, to reveal what is there!

According to Galatians 5:20, A life where the work of the Holy Spirit has been neglected will reveal a cup full of hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissention, factions, and envy.

God wants all of that to change!

Because He says in...

Gal. 5:21b - I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

According to Gal. 5:22-23, what should be spilling out?

Gal. 5:22-25

22. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

23. gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

24. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.

25. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

What happens IN you is far more important than what happens TO you!

Never Bow To Bitterness!

The third thing to remember when you're tempted to bow to bitterness is...

### **3. God is with you throughout the process working on your development!**

There's much more happening when we're treated wrongly than just the pain of the moment.

God is using the opportunity to continually reshape you into His image.

As the Scripture clearly reveals, He is testing us.

Our response should also be WATCHING to SEE what HE WILL SAY in the midst of the trial!

And our response to His direction in those times will shape our lives from there on out.

Illus: One tribe of native Americans had a unique practice for training young braves. On the night of a boy's thirteenth birthday, he was placed in a dense forest to spend the entire night alone. Until then he had never been away from the security of his family and tribe. But on this night he was blindfolded and taken miles away. When he took off the blindfold, he was in the middle of thick woods. By himself. All night long. Every time a twig snapped, he visualized a wild animal ready to pounce. Every time an animal howled, he imagined a wolf leaping out of the darkness. Every time the wind blew, he wondered what more sinister sound it masked. No doubt it was a terrifying night. But when fear or resentment for being put in that situation would try to rise up, the young brave would continually ask, "What would my father do or say if he were here? After what seemed like an eternity, the first rays of sunlight entered the interior of the forest. Looking around, the boy saw flowers, trees, and the outline of the path. Then, to his utter astonishment, as he turned around to look behind him, he beheld the figure of a man standing just a few feet away, armed with a bow and arrow. It was the boy's father. He had been there all night long!

God is always present with us!

God's presence is may be unseen, but it is more real than life itself.

God is using those times to teach us how to handle trials, unjust suffering and troubles of all kinds while tuning our spiritual ears to His voice as we learn to depend on Him.

1 Pet. 2:19-20 - "For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God."

So, what does God want us to do when we are mistreated or going through a trial to keep from being bitter?

These verses tell us that we find favor with God when we "suffer for doing good and you endure it".

When we suffer, may we not let any of our suffering be in vain!

May we use it to help propel us into our God given destinies!

And may we never forget that God is with us through it all!

Never Bow To Bitterness!

The fourth thing to remember when you're tempted to bow to bitterness is...

#### **4. What you do is more important than how you feel!**

God has spelled out what we should do when we've been mistreated in many places in Scripture.

I'll give a few...

Matthew 5:44 - "But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you..."

Luke 6:27-28 - "But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you..."

Romans 12:20 - "But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink."

It's not hard to figure out what these verses say we must do.

The hard part is our feelings!

Why is it so hard to pray for that person whose carelessness or neglect caused us so much pain?

To say something that blesses them rather than cursing them under our breath?

The answer is simple...

Every hurt feeling is screaming, "THAT AIN'T RIGHT!"

So... in Christianity, this is where the rubber meets the road...

We've come to the place where we learn whether we're serious about our faith or not.

The true Christian will obey God and do what is right even if his/her feelings aren't in favor of it!

Many of us, even if we've been a Christian for man years, still need to learn how to practice this extremely important part of our walk with God...

And listen, until we learn how to do this...

God sees us and says' "I guess they need some more practice!"

And He unfortunately, lots of people in your life are more than glad to help us get that practice!

And like Pastor Mike Mille' says, "Some people will stay up all night sharpening their needle just so that can bust your bubble!"

Listen... Doing the right thing isn't always the thing that makes us feel good at the moment!

Many of the things God has called us to do demand that we go against our feelings for the moment...

*"Love your enemies?"*

Who *feels* like doing that?

But you see... the Christian knows that actions lead and feelings follow!

Let me give you an example...

John 3:16 - "For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son...."

God loved us so much that He gave His Son.

How do you think that made God feel?

Was He jumping for joy when His Son hung suffering on the cross?

In fact, He had to turn His face away!

What do you think would have happened if God had acted on His feelings that day instead of making a way for the world to be saved?

The right thing isn't always the thing that feels good at the moment!

Actions lead and feelings follow!

Hebrews 12:2 - "fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross..."

It doesn't say, "He enjoyed the cross!"

It says "He endured the cross!"

His joy was in the finished product that would come AFTER He endured the cross!

In the same way, the good feelings that result from our doing right usually come after the act, not before!

If we wait around in the beginning, hoping to get our feelings to go along with our actions...

We'll NEVER do what's right!

So let's make it personal...

Are you returning good for evil?

Are you turning the other cheek when it is appropriate?

Are you walking the second mile?

Are you praying for that person who has hurt you so much?

Are you blessing rather than cursing?

(The word "bless" in this case means literally, "to speak well of.")

"But I don't feel like it!"

Welcome to the God's world!

It's that way for all of us!

Never Bow To Bitterness!

The fifth thing to remember when you're tempted to bow to bitterness is...

## **5. You owe God more than any person owes you!**

In (Matthew 18), Jesus tells the story of a man who owed a king ten million dollars. There was no way he could pay his debt and in that day, there was no bankruptcy - only debtor's prison or slavery.

As he was about to be thrown into prison, he begged the King to give him another chance and more time to pay.

The King listened to his pleading and felt mercy for him.

He didn't just give him more time to pay.

He completely forgave the debt.

The man walked away free.

You probably know the rest of the story.

As soon as he got home he found someone who owed him a few hundred dollars.

The man didn't have the money, so this man who had just been forgiven a debt of millions of dollars had his own debtor thrown into prison.

After all, it's only just. "It's what the man had coming for what he did to me.

He should learn to pay his debts on time! It's his fault. Fair is fair, right?"

Then the King got word of the whole thing.

He was angry and summoned the man he had forgiven just a short time before.

To make the long story short, he called the unforgiving man "wicked" and put him in prison until he would pay his new debt.

What debt was that?

The debt of forgiveness to the man who owed him!

That's the debt that He owed the king!

The King had forgiven him, so he owed it to the King to forgive his own debtor!

He would stay prison for the rest of his tortured life until he chose to forgive the much smaller debt owed to him!

Why? Because everything that was owed to the formerly forgiven man, who was now in prison, was actually owed to the King who chose to forgive it.

So, the original forgiven man now could not receive forgiveness because he would not repent of his unforgiveness toward the one who owed him...

Not realizing that whatever was owed to him was really owed to the king who had already wiped that debt out on his account!

Illus: If I borrow money from a bank to buy a house, I may call it "my house"...

But the reality of it is that it's really the bank's house until the loan is paid back!

Don't believe me?

Try not paying the loan and see who ends up with the house!

Then Jesus said, "So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."

Listen, no matter whom might wrong us, we are still the bigger debtor!

We always will be!

God has forgiven a huge debt that we could never pay on our own!

Because of that, we literally have NO right to hold anything against anyone!

Are you one who feels you've got to even the score here?

Then expect God to even the score on you not only in this life, but also in the one to come!

Everyone is hurt at some point.

Betrayal, disappointment, and injustice are inescapable features of the human journey.

But what distinguishes the bitter from the healed is not the pain itself—but what they do with it.

Bitterness is a natural flesh response, but not a permanent condition!

It is a crossroads, not a conclusion!

And while bitterness whispers, “You have the right to be angry forever,” wisdom replies, “You have the power to be free!”

To hold on to bitterness is to chain yourself to the hurts of the past...

To let go of it is to reclaim your future!

You were not made to live in bitterness...

You were made to grow beyond it!

Phil. 4:4-9 (ESV)

4 REJOICE in the Lord always; AGAIN I will say, REJOICE.

5 Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand;

6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

7 And the PEACE OF GOD, which surpasses all understanding, will GUARD your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

8 Finally, brothers, whatever is TRUE, whatever is HONORABLE, whatever is JUST (not fair), whatever is PURE, whatever is LOVELY, whatever is COMMENDABLE, if there is any EXCELLENCE, if there is anything worthy of PRAISE, think about THESE THINGS.

9 What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—PRACTICE these things, and the GOD OF PEACE will be with you.

**NEVER BOW TO BITTERNESS!**

It's part of the unregenerated soul!

It must be renewed!

It must be transformed!