

Battling Bitterness

Introduction. Ask yourself honestly, “When was the last time I truly felt overwhelmed with happiness, freedom, and gratitude?” If you can’t remember, then you may be holding on to bitterness or resentment.

“Bitterness” basically means “animosity, anger, resentment, or harshness.” It is a malignant, hostile, and discontented disposition either with another person or circumstances that have arisen in your life.

Buddha wrote, “Those who are free of resentful thoughts surely find peace.” Resentment is like swallowing poison and expecting the other person to die. Bitterness is like a cancer that eats away at time — time which could have been filled with love and joy. Life is short, and time spent feeling angry or resentful about something that happened or did not happen is time squandered.

I can tell you for sure that you shouldn’t do the following with feelings of bitterness or resentment: ignore them, fight through them, lock them in a closet, pretend you don’t feel them, or try and forget them. There is a better way which we will explore in this lesson.

I. Bitterness Affects The Wicked And The Righteous

- A. Esau when his blessing was given to Jacob (Genesis 27:34).
- B. Naomi when she lost her husband and two sons (Ruth 1:20).
- C. Hannah when she didn’t have a child (1 Samuel 1:7).
- D. Mordecai when he heard all Jews were to be killed (Esther 4:1).
- E. Job when he lost wealth, children, and health (Job 7:11; 10:1).
- F. Hezekiah when he was facing death (Isaiah 38:15, 17).

II. What Bitterness Does

- A. It grieves the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30-32).
- B. It is a spiritual poison which binds people in their iniquity (Acts 8:18-23).
- C. It is connected with cursing (Romans 3:9-18).
- D. It causes much trouble, and defiles the one affected by it (Hebrews 12:14-15).

III. How Can We Get Rid Of Bitterness And Resentment?

- A. Realize that it’s not God’s fault and put your trust in Him.
 - 1. It’s easy to blame God for every event in our lives that runs counter to expectations, but this is not fair nor correct (Luke 13:10-16).
 - 2. The devil causes human suffering and the only appropriate response is for us to put our trust in God (Psalm 4:5; 7:1; 16:1).
- B. Be grateful.
 - 1. A heart that is full of gratitude has little room for hate or resentment. Whenever you’re feeling stressed, resentful, or angry, pull out your phone and type ten blessings you’re grateful for in that particular moment.
 - 2. It’s difficult to resent what relationship problems or bad situations you’re living through when you’re focusing your energy on what you do have (Ephesians 5:20; Colossians 3:15; 1 Thessalonians 5:18).

- C. Forgive and love the person you resent.
1. What's the opposite of anger, hate, or resentment? It's love. By sending only love toward someone, praying that they receive the blessings you want for yourself in life, you're chiseling away at negative emotions that do you more harm than good (Matthew 5:44-45). Don't believe me? Try it.
 2. At first it will most likely feel awkward and meaningless, not to mention difficult. It may take weeks or months, but eventually you'll notice that where there were once ill feelings, now there is peace and love.
 3. Bitterness chokes the life out of us so much that we don't want to forgive others even if they repent and say, "I'm sorry" (Matthew 18:30-35). Don't hold a grudge. Why play the role of victim all your life? The ability to eliminate this sin comes by the grace of God (Ephesians 4:32) and the power of the gospel (Romans 1:16).
- D. Take responsibility for your part in the situation.
1. If you have committed sin with the other person, repent of it. If you have reacted badly, admit that you need to and can do better — and then do it. Be the kind of person who remedies sin (Psalm 38:18; 2 Corinthians 2:2).
 2. One person's ability to do this can change the dynamic of the entire relationship. Psychologists attest that one person's response will literally change the brain waves of the other person.
- E. Show empathy to your partner.
1. Expressing empathy will go a long way to smooth over hurt feelings. After he or she has shared their perception of the problem, say, "I understand, and it makes sense that you'd feel that way" (1 Peter 3:8-9; 4:8).
 2. Accept that people do the best they can and attempt to be more insightful. This does not mean that you condone the hurtful actions of others. You simply come to a more realistic view. As you take stock, you'll realize that people operate out of the same basic drives, including self-interest.
- F. Don't allow wounds to fester.
1. Don't allow the sun to go down on your wrath (Ephesians 4:26; 6:11). Challenge your beliefs and self-defeating thoughts about holding onto hurt feelings. When we listen to our partner's side of the story, we no longer need to hold onto hurt feelings.
 2. You can't control the past but you can make better choices today — such as letting go of hurt feelings. We all have the ability to manage expectations, change our state of mind, and ultimately be happy regardless of how we expect everything to unfold (Proverbs 23:7).

Conclusion. Do you have bitterness in your heart? Be willing to forgive instead of harboring the poison of bitterness in your heart. Be willing to put your trust in God and not blame Him for hard circumstances. Come to Jesus and get rid of resentment so that you can have rest for your soul (Matthew 11:28-30; Acts 2:38, 41). He was not bitter that the Jews rejected Him but with joy died for them and for all people (Hebrews 12:2). Your guilty, burdened soul will only find liberty at Calvary.