



Bitterness and Forgiveness

Authentic Fellowship Conference March 10, 2018

Presented by FBC Women's Biblical Counselor Kathy Budnie

1. Why are you here?
 - You feel bitter, and you want to get over it in a godly way.
 - You are close to a person who is bitter, and you want to respond in a Christlike way.
 - You want to biblically counsel someone who is bitter.

2. In my experience, there are two main kinds of bitter people—quietly bitter and openly bitter people.
 - a. Quietly bitter people (example: Naomi in the book of Ruth)
 - Can come across as kind, gentle, good-humored, and friendly.
 - You discover their bitterness, grudges, and anger after they come to like and trust you; then evidence of their bitterness appears frequently in conversations with you.
 - Bitterness negatively affects their attitudes about other, often unrelated things.
 - Evidence of bitterness can take the form of sarcasm, complaining, worry, impatience, a negative outlook on life, not giving people the benefit of the doubt, and often referring to how someone has ruined the bitter person's life, dreams, or ambitions,
 - Bitterness tends to be focused: "I would be fine, if only ____ hadn't happened; if only ____ would ask my forgiveness sincerely (which demands payment for the debt); if only..."
 - Self-righteously justify their bitterness. Have a victim attitude.

 - b. Openly bitter people (example: the older brother in Luke 15:25-30)
 - Tone of voice is usually irritable, scornful, sarcastic, disrespectful, and condescending.
 - Stubbornly hold to their own opinions; critical or intolerant of others' ideas.
 - Impatient and easily-angered; express anger rudely, abusively, and vengefully.
 - Easily offended by what others do and say—or don't do.
 - Demand control of others, with no questions or suggestions allowed.
 - Self-centered—their lives revolve around what they think they're entitled to.
 - Have a martyr attitude; service to others is done for self-centered reasons.
 - Begruddge the good things others have, resulting in envy and back-stabbing.
 - Self-righteous; excuse and justify their own behavior; blame others for problems.
 - Complain about, mock, and slander the people who have angered them.
 - Cut others out of their lives; resume contact with no apology when they need them again.
 - Keep an "offense account"—they remember and can list grievances against others.

Kathy Budnie and her husband Mike have attended Fellowship Bible Church since 1982. Kathy has been counseling FBC women since the mid-1990s. She became the Women's Biblical Counselor in 2012 and has been a certified biblical counselor since 2015.

3. What is bitterness?

- Anger that has lasted far too long, with no Christlike forgiveness or biblical resolution.
- Accumulation of unexpressed anger at hurts, offenses, and/or sins.
- Combination of anger, hatred, pride, and self-pity.
- Unfulfilled revenge.
- Lack of trust in God—His goodness, love, sovereignty, holiness, and forgiveness.
- See the “Bitterness Self-Test” in the Appendix.

4. **Christlike, forgiving, self-sacrificing love is the remedy to healing bitterness in ourselves and relating to bitter people in a God-pleasing way.**

5. A suggested way to deal with bitterness in yourself or in someone who wants to change:

- a. Ask God to give you wisdom and insight into the events of your past (James 1:5-7).
- b. Examine your life and your bitterness. Steve Viars’s *Putting Your Past in its Place* can guide you with this step. He advises that you divide the difficult times of your past into four categories:
 - When you were sinned against, and you responded in a God-pleasing way.
 - When you were sinned against, but you responded in a sinful, worldly way.
 - When you sinned against someone else, but then you repented, asked forgiveness, and reconciled with others in a God-pleasing way.
 - When you sinned against someone else, and you continued in a sinful, worldly way.
- c. Consider whether the things you feel bitter about were actual sins against you.
 - If events were sins against you, then you must repent of your bitterness, forgive those you who sinned against you, and find ways to seek their good and bless them.
 - If events were not sins against you (the person did nothing to you that Scripture says is wrong), then your long-term anger is unjustified, because you were offended by something that did not offend God. You must repent of your pride as well as your bitterness. Then you must forgive those you offended you, and find ways to seek their good and bless them.
- d. See Appendix for Scripture on:
 - Offenses and hurts
 - The Dangers of Bitterness
 - God’s commands about love and forgiveness
- e. The ways we have been sinned against are miniscule, compared to the millions of sins that our totally holy and righteous God has forgiven each one of us through Christ (Isaiah 53).
- f. With the Holy Spirit’s power, forgive and show love to people who have sinned against you.
 - They might never ask you for forgiveness. They might feel justified in acting as they did. However, you can forgive them in your heart before God.
 - Forgiveness does not mean you must trust offenders again in the ways they sinned.
 - Forgiveness is a decision and a promise that you will not (a) think about past offenses; (b) bring up past offenses to use against people who have hurt you; (c) talk to others about others’ past offenses to you; or (d) allow past offenses to hinder future relationships.

6. Suggestions for living with bitter people who won't see their bitterness. It's suffering!

- a. Choose to suffer in a Christlike way.
 - Read the epistle of First Peter for insight on godly suffering.
 - Pray for God's power through His Holy Spirit, who lives in you, to resist the temptation to sin in response to being sinned against (I Corinthians 10:13).
 - Remember that learning to persevere is one of the benefits of suffering (Romans 5:1-5; Galatians 6:9; James 1:2-4, 12)
 - Trust God and His loving sovereignty; look for His blessings in your life circumstances.
- b. Show them practical, unselfish (agape) love.
 - Agape love is a commitment to seek the highest good for another person.
 - Serve and bless them, not to win their favor, but in order to please God.
 - Overcome evil with good (Romans 12:14, 17). Model for them God's goodness, mercy, kindness, and love, which they have either forgotten or have never known.
 - Pray for them in specific ways, as you would want someone to pray for you.
 - Do not expect support or sympathy from them, but thank them when you do receive it.
 - Take care to not become bitter about another person's bitterness.
 - Stay very close to God—pray and spend quality time in His word.

7. Christlike, forgiving, self-sacrificing love is the remedy to healing bitterness in ourselves and relating to bitter people in a God-pleasing way.

...And by the way...

When believers understand God's perspective on our trials, we can find hope in the midst of suffering. God sovereignly uses our suffering for His long-term good, constructive, beneficial, and loving purposes.

1. 2 Corinthians 5:9 – Our goal in life is to please God.
2. Hebrews 11:1, 6 – We please God by having faith in Him, by trusting Him to do what He has promised to do. He will reward us for our faithful obedience now and in the future.
3. Romans 8:28-29 – God's good goal for our lives here on earth is to know Him and to become more and more like His Son (and our brother) Jesus Christ.
4. Romans 8:31-39 – God did the biggest thing that God could do: He sent His Son Jesus Christ to take the punishment for all our sins by dying on the cross, and then to defeat sin and death by rising from the dead. We are free from guilt. God loves us; nothing can keep us from His love.
5. Galatians 5:22-23 – The "fruit of the Spirit" is a list of Christlike qualities that God wants to develop in us. What qualities are God is developing in you through the trial you are in now?
6. Ephesians 1:1-10 – Because of Christ, we are saints (holy people consecrated for God's work) in God's eyes—holy, blameless, and chosen. This passage describes our identity in Christ.

Scripture verses (ESV) on offenses, bitterness, confession, and forgiveness:

Offenses and hurts:

Proverbs 12:18 - There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

Proverbs 15:28 - The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things.

John 15:18-19 - "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

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

Ephesians 4:26b-27 - Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.

The epistle of First Peter addresses living with offensive people, including:

I Peter 2:19-24a - For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.

I Peter 3:8-18 - Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. ...Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit...

Bitterness:

Leviticus 19:17-18 - You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

Proverbs 10:12 – Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses.

Proverbs 28:14 - Blessed is the one who fears the LORD always, but whoever hardens his heart will fall into calamity.

Luke 15:15-30 [Example of the older brother's bitterness in Jesus' parable of the Prodigal son] - "Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!'

Romans 12:17-19 - Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," says the Lord."

Romans 14:4, 10 - Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls.... Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God...

Ephesians 4:26-27, 30-31 - Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil....And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

Hebrews 12:14-15 - Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. 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...

James 3:14-16 - But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.

Confession of Bitterness:

Proverbs 28:13 - Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.

Hebrews 12:1-2 - Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

1 John 1:8-2:2 - If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

Forgiveness and Love:

Psalms 103:2-3, 11-13 - ...Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases,..._For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.

Proverbs 10:12 – Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses.

Proverbs 19:11 – Good sense makes one slow to anger...it is his glory to overlook an offense.

Micah 7:18-19 - Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love. He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.

Matthew 5:43-45 - You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

Matthew 6:14-15 - If you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Mark 11:25 - And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.”

Luke 17:3-4 – Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive him.

Luke 23:34 - While dying on the cross, Jesus prayed for the Roman soldiers who crucified Him and cast lots for His clothing, saying, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

John 13:34-35 - A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

Romans 5:8 - God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

I Corinthians 13:4-8a - Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.

Galatians 6:1-2, 9-10 – Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ....Let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up....As we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

Ephesians 4:32 - Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Colossians 3:12-14 - Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.
I Thessalonians 5:15 - See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.

I Peter 3:9 - Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.

I Peter 4:8 - Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

I John 3:16 - By this we know love, that [Jesus Christ] laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.

Common Signs of Bitterness

From Pastor Brad Bigney, Grace Fellowship Church, Florence Ky.

Rate yourself on a scale of 1-5 (one being the lowest score and 5 being the best)

Make note of the ones you scored the lowest on and write down specific ways you can improve in that area. Make changing a matter of specific prayer and ask someone to hold you accountable.

1. Gossip and Slander

In the process of complaining about someone, you gossip about them and slander them, thereby defiling others. You have either nothing or very little that is good to say about them.

"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 12:14-15

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2. Ungrateful and Complaining

You murmur to yourself and complain to others about certain people.

"Do all things without grumbling or disputing..." Philippians 2:14

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3. Judges Motives

Whatever the person you struggle with does is suspect in your eyes. Even if they do something nice, you think their motive must be off. For example, "They only did that to look good..." "I know it seemed like a nice gesture, but they didn't really mean it."

"Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to them from God." 1 Cor. 4:5

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4. Self-Centered

You spend a lot of time thinking about yourself. You are very self-absorbed. Your focus is fixed on yourself and the hurts done against you.

"... do not merely look out for your own personal interests..." Philippians 2:4

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5. Excessive Sorrow and Loss of Joy

Grief and hurt have crowded out any joy, peace, or love that you used to have. It has, in fact, filled up your heart. It may, at times, overwhelm you. Lately, you have little or no delight in your relationship with the Lord. Because of your sin, instead of God's peace and joy, you're experiencing intense emotional pain and misery. [Here we are not talking about right after a significant loss when grief and sorrow are common and appropriate. We are talking about down the road, when this has continued to characterize us after such time as we should really come to trust in the Lord's sovereignty and sufficiency.]

"... sorrow has filled your heart." John 16:6

"I shall delight in Thy commandments which I love." Psalm 119:47

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6. Vengeful

You look for ways to avoid them – not to be wise in avoiding conflict, but to reflect your scorn of them. Perhaps you leave when they are around, or you give them the cold shoulder. You're paying them back for what they've done to you.

"Never pay back evil for evil to anyone... Never take your own personal revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God..." Romans 12:17, 19

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7. Brooding

You brood about what they've done. You think about it and play it over and over in your mind. **"Love does not take into account a wrong suffered." I Corinthians 13:5**

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8. A Critical, Judgmental Attitude

It is difficult for you to take your focus off what they've done wrong and focus instead on what you are doing wrong.

"Before you can see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye, first take the beam out of your own eye." Matthew 7:1-5

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Jesus' words between His appearance to the Sanhedrin and His death on the cross (NIV)

Notice His lack of anger, resentment, and bitterness.

To the Sanhedrin, the teachers of the Law, and the high priest, Jesus said:

- *I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret. Why question Me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said.* After an official struck Him in the face, Jesus said, *"If I said something wrong, testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?"* (John 18:20-23)
- The leaders said, "If you are the Christ, tell us." Jesus replied, *"If I tell you, you will not believe me, and if I asked you, you would not answer. But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God."* Then they all asked, "Are you then the Son of God?" and Jesus replied, *"You are right in saying I am."* (Luke 22:67-70)
- The high priest put Jesus under oath to tell them if He was the Messiah, the Son of God. Jesus said, *"Yes, it is as you say. But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."* (Matthew 26:64; Mark 14:62)

To Pilate, Jesus said:

- Pilate asked, "Are you the king of the Jews?" Jesus replied, *"Is that your own idea, or did others talk to you about Me?"* and *"Yes, it is as you say."* (Matthew 27:11; Mark 15:2; Luke 23:3; John 18:34)
- Pilate asked Him if He was a king; Jesus answered, *"My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, My servants would fight to prevent My arrest by the Jews. But now My kingdom is from another place...."* *"You are right in saying that I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."* (John 18:36-37)
- *You would have no power over Me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed Me over to you is guilty of a greater sin."* (John 19:11)

As He carried His cross to Calvary, Jesus said to the women who wept and followed Him:

- *"Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed! Then they will say to the mountains, 'Fall on us' and to the hills, 'Cover us.' For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?"* (Luke 23:28-31)

From the cross, Jesus said:

- *Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.* (Luke 23:34)
- *I tell you the truth, today you will be with Me in Paradise.* (Luke 23:43)
- *Dear woman, here is your son. Here is your mother.* (John 19:26-27)
- *I am thirsty.* (John 19:28)
- *My God! My God! Why have You forsaken Me?* (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34)
- *Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.* (Luke 23:46)
- *It is finished.* (John 19:30)

Recommended Books on Bitterness and Forgiveness

Bitterness: The Root That Pollutes by Lou Priolo (booklet)

Bold Love, by Dan Allender

Caring Enough to Forgive / to Not Forgive, by David Augsburger

Choosing Forgiveness, by Nancy Leigh DeMoss

Counsel from the Cross, by Elyse Fitzpatrick and Dennis Johnson

Cultivating a Forgiving Heart, by Denise George

Forgiveness: The Freedom to Let Go by June Hunt

Freedom from Bitterness: Stopping Hurts from Turning Bitter, by Robert D. Jones (booklet)

Good and Angry, by David Powlison

Putting Your Past in its Place, by Stephen Viars

The Bait of Satan: Living Free from the Deadly Trap of Offense, by John Bevere

The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Conflict by Ken Sande

The Risk of Forgiveness: What it Means to Forgive, by Gary Inrig (booklet)

Total Forgiveness, by R.T. Kendall