

# Root of Bitterness

by Chuck Smith

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*The sermon explores the destructive effects of bitterness and the necessity of forgiveness in our lives.*

**Duration:** 40:57

**Scripture:** Psalm 55:1

**Topics:** "Bitterness"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the dangers of harboring hatred in one's heart. He explains that hatred is deceptive and can blind individuals to their true relationship with God. The preacher also highlights that hatred is equivalent to murder and that it is impossible to truly love God while hating others. He further discusses the importance of forgiveness, citing Jesus' teachings on the subject and emphasizing the need for Christians to forgive others as God has forgiven them. The sermon also mentions the biblical passage of 2 Samuel 16-18, which will be discussed in more detail in the sermon.

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## Transcript

Let's turn now in our Bibles to Psalm 55 for the Scripture reading this morning. I'll read the first, the outnumbered verses. Pastor Brian will lead the congregation in the even verses and shall we stand as we read the Word of God.

This Psalm is a prayer of David and it is thought that he wrote this at the time of Ahithophel's defection over to Absalom and his counsel to Absalom concerning David. And to hear that this once close friend had turned against him and had joined in the rebellion was very disconcerting to David and it was at that time that he wrote this Psalm. Give ear to my prayer, O Lord.

Hide not thyself from my supplication. Attend unto me and hear me. I mourn in my complaint and make a noise.

Because of the voice of the enemy. Because of the oppression of the wicked. For they cast iniquity upon me and in wrath they hate me.

My heart is sore pain within me and the terrors of death are fallen upon me. Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me and horror hath overwhelmed me. And I said, O that I had wings like a dove.

For then would I fly away and be at rest. Lo, then would I wander far off and remain in the wilderness. I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest.

Destroy, O Lord, and divide their tongues. For I have seen violence and strife in the city. Day and night they go about it upon the walls thereof.

Mischief also and sorrow are in the midst of it. Wickedness is in the midst thereof. Deceit and guile depart not from her streets.

For it was not an enemy that reproached me, then I could have borne it. Neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me. Then I would have hid myself from him.

But it was you, a man my equal, my guide and my acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together and walked unto the house of God in company. Let death seize upon them and let them go down quick into hell.

For wickedness is in their dwelling and among them. As for me, I will call upon God and the Lord shall save me. Evening and morning and at noon will I pray and cry aloud and he shall hear my voice.

He hath delivered my soul in peace from the battle that was against me. For there were many with me. God shall hear and afflict them, even he that abideth of old.

Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God. He hath put forth his hands against such as to be at peace with him. He hath broken his covenant.

The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart. His words were softer than oil, yet were they like drawn swords. Cast thy burden upon the Lord and he shall sustain thee.

He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved. But thou, O God, shall bring them down to the pit of destruction. Bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days, but I will trust in thee.

Let's pray. Father, there are times in our lives when we're disheartened because of the actions of those that we loved. And we thought that they were close to us, but somehow, some way they've turned.

And we find, Lord, that the bitterness that is in their heart manifests itself in many different ways. And we're alarmed, we're amazed. We cannot understand Lord.

But we ask that you would instruct our hearts today. Lord, help us that we might indeed cast all of our cares upon you. And just find your help, your strength, your comfort.

In Jesus' name, Amen. You may be seated. We continue our journey through the Bible.

This week, 2 Samuel 16-18. And that's the area that we'll be discussing and looking at tonight. 2 Samuel 16-18.

This morning, I'd like to draw your attention to chapter 16 and the first four verses of chapter 17. Absalom has rebelled against his father. He has come to Jerusalem with his army.

David has fled. And he is called Ahithophel. To counsel him in his war against David.

Ahithophel had once been David's counselor, close friend, a confidant. But now he is counseling Absalom for the purpose of destroying David. And we read here the counsel in verse 17.

Moreover, Ahithophel said unto Absalom, Let me now choose out twelve thousand men. I will arise and pursue after David this night. And I will come upon him while he is weary and weak.

And I will make him afraid. And all of the people that are with him shall flee. And I will smite the king only.

And I will bring back all of the people unto thee, the men who you are seeking, as if all had returned. And so the people shall be in peace. And the saying pleased Absalom well and the elders of Israel.

Here Absalom, who was once David's friend, is suggesting that he lead a group of twelve thousand men against David. He will terrify those that are with David. And so he will kill only David.

But he desires to be the one who kills David himself. What do you suppose could cause Ahithophel, once David's close friend, to desire now to kill him? Where did the bitterness begin? The bitterness that now wants to express itself by murdering his once close friend. In chapter fifteen, verse twelve, we're told that Ahithophel had once been David's counselor.

In the sixteenth chapter, verse twenty-four, we read that the counsel of Ahithophel, which he counseled in those days, was as if a man had inquired at the oracle of God. He spoke with godly wisdom. And he had counseled David with this godly wisdom.

But now he is counseling against David. Counseling in how David might be killed. It must be that Absalom knew that this bitterness had been brewing in the heart of Ahithophel towards David.

The very fact that he calls for Ahithophel would indicate that he somehow knew that a breach had developed in the relationship between David and Ahithophel. And thus, he called for a freedom to call Ahithophel to come and to be his counselor to destroy David. As we mentioned in the reading of the Psalm, it is thought that Psalm fifty-five was composed by David during this season.

When David in the Psalm said, They cast iniquity upon me. In their wrath they hate me. My heart is pained.

I am gripped by fear of death. It was not an enemy that reproached me. I could have accepted that.

And neither was it he that hated me that magnified himself against me. I would have hid myself from him. But it was you, my friend, my equal, my guide.

We had sweet fellowship together as we walked into the house of God in company. Your words were as smooth as butter, but war was in your heart. They were as slick as oil, but they were like a drawn sword.

The counsel of Ahithophel certainly does indicate a very deep-seated bitterness and hatred that Ahithophel had for David. The first counsel that he gave to Absalom was to publicly shame his father. He counseled them to take the ten wives that David left in Jerusalem to take care of the palace and to go in in the sight of all of the people and lie with them.

Publicly disgrace your dad. Show a total kind of a disdain for him. Take his wives, lie with them.

And so we read that they put a tent on the top of the palace, which was a flat roof. And he went in unto David's wives in the sight of all of the people. Ahithophel said, when you do this, this kind of a disgracing of your father, so great that all of the people will know that there is no turning back for you, and thus they'll all gather with you and support you.

They'll not be worried about maybe you're vacillating and turning from this when you publicly disgrace him. In this, actually the fulfillment of the prophecy of Nathan, when David had sinned with Bathsheba, had this secret affair with her, God said to David that he would be publicly disgraced. Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of your own house.

I will take your wives before your eyes and give them unto your neighbor, and he will lie with your wives in the sight of this son. What you did secretly, David, will be done to you only openly was God's judgment, really, for David's sin. And we find this fulfilled now, the prophecy of Nathan to David.

But the next thing that Ahithophel counseled David was that David was to give him 12,000 men. He would pursue that night after David. He would catch him when he was weary, and he would terrify those that had gone with David.

They would flee from David, and he'll kill only David, and he will return the kingdom unto Absalom completely. Hear this once close friend of David wanting to be the one personally to kill him. Bitterness is a terrible thing, and it oftentimes does lead to murder.

As with Ahithophel, the bitterness led him to the desire to murder David. Jesus said, you have heard that it was said by those of old time that you're not to commit murder, and whoever commits murder is in danger of the judgment. But I say to you, whoever hates his brother is in danger of the judgment.

And whoever shall say to his brother, you idiot, is in danger of the counsel. And whoever says, you fool, is in danger of hellfire. You see the bitterness that brings forth hatred, that brings forth a total disdain of that person.

Jesus said that's equivalent to murder. That in your heart you've already wiped that person out. It's equivalent to murder.

In Proverbs we are exhorted to keep our hearts with all diligence, for out of it come the issues of life. Watch what is in your heart. You dare not allow a root of bitterness to remain in your heart.

Keep it with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life. Jesus said the things that come forth from your mouth, they're the things that defile a man. For out of the heart proceeds the evil thoughts, the murders, the adulteries, the fornications, the thefts, the false witness, the blasphemies.

And these are the things that defile a man, and out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. So oftentimes when we are speaking words that express our hatred and disdain for a person, they're revealing what's in our hearts. Those things that are there, the hatred and the murders and the adulteries, and these things that are in the heart are oftentimes expressed in the things that we say.

God is looking at our heart, and God sees our hearts. He sees the anger, the hatred, the bitterness that is there. It's interesting, there's a very close relationship between our emotions and our physical well-being.

We have in our body several different glands that are secreting into the bloodstream or into the special ducts. They are secreting these various chemicals. Your body has several chemical laboratories, and these glands are a chemical laboratory that are producing different types of chemicals.

Some of the chemicals are very beneficial. Some of them can be very destructive. Those chemicals that are produced by a happy spirit are very good for you.

In fact, in Proverbs he said, a merry heart does good like a medicine. And we do know that when a person is happy, when a person is laughing, there are these chemicals that are put into the bloodstream that are very beneficial for you. In fact, when you are at a mealtime, if you're laughing and all at mealtime, it helps the digestion of your food tremendously.

But if there is anger, if there is bitterness, if your heart is filled with these kinds of things and you're constantly feeling that tension and that bitterness, it is actually producing detrimental chemicals into your body, chemicals that tear you down, chemicals that are destroying you and aging you prematurely. Our emotions are important because of the chemicals that they produce in our bodies. Paul lumps bitterness with wrath and anger and malice.

To the Ephesians Paul said, let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and evil speaking be put away from you with malice. You see, bitterness is the root from which the fruit comes. The fruit of wrath and anger, evil speaking, malice, these come from the bitter root that is in our hearts.

We're exhorted by Paul to get rid of these things. In Hebrews, we are told to watch carefully that we do not miss the grace of God by allowing a root of bitterness to spring up. Hebrews 12:15, looking diligently, lest any man fail of the grace of God, lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you and thereby many are defiled.

First of all, that root of bitterness will trouble you, but then it will bring defilement to many because it is comes out and you infect others with the fruit of that bitterness in your heart. Ahithophel. Here's Ahithophel.

He's ready to murder David. Once a very close friend. Once they had gone into the house of God in sweet company, and now Ahithophel wants to kill him.

What do you suppose it could have been where the root of bitterness began in Ahithophel towards his once close friend David. Actually, it goes back to David's sin with Bathsheba. Some 10 years, 11 years prior to the chapter that we have taken our text from this morning, where Ahithophel expresses his desire to murder David.

Some 10 or 11 years earlier, David had watched Bathsheba as she was bathing and he invited her to the palace where he had a one-night affair with her. However, she became pregnant and so David tried to cover it by bringing her husband home from the battlefield, and so he invited her to the palace. But the husband didn't really cooperate.

He didn't go and spend the night with his wife, and so David ordered the husband to be put into the place of battle where he would be sure to be killed. And after his death, David took Bathsheba as one of his many wives. And that's where the bitterness began.

You say, why? Well, in 2nd Samuel 23-34, we will read that Eliam was the son of Ahithophel. And in 2nd Samuel 11-3, we read that Bathsheba was the daughter of Eliam, which would mean that Bathsheba was actually the granddaughter of Ahithophel. And for David to compromise his granddaughter created a bitterness in Ahithophel.

And that bitterness grew until Ahithophel was ready now to kill David. Some 11 years later, it had grown from the root into the desire to murder him. Ultimately, what you have buried in your heart is going to surface.

You say, but Ahithophel really then had good cause for hating David, didn't he? Yes, he did. Acknowledged. Peter once said to Jesus, how often shall I forgive my brother the same offense? Seven times? And I think that Peter in his mind was stretching.

I think that he was looking for approval from, he was gonna hear, I think he expected Jesus to say, great Peter, you're growing, you're understanding now what forgiveness, seven, great, good boy, Peter. But instead, Jesus shocked Peter. He said, no, Peter, not seven times, 70 times seven.

Aye, aye, aye. 480 times. So that you realize that forgiveness is not a matter of mathematics.

It's really a spirit. There are two major things that Jesus taught should be primary in our Christian walk. One is forgiveness.

And Jesus gives different parables by which he expresses the need of our being forgiving. And basically the parables stress how much God has forgiven us. And because of the great debt that we have been forgiven, surely we shouldn't hold minor obligations against people who owe us small things.

In the model prayer that Jesus gave, there is one part of the prayer that he stops to emphasize at the end. That is that little part that says, forgive us our debts or our trespasses, even as we forgive those who trespass against us. And at the end of the prayer, Jesus emphasized that one point.

He said, for if you do not forgive men their trespasses against you, neither will your father in heaven forgive your trespasses against him. The importance of forgiveness. 70 times seven.

Think of the things that God has forgiven you for doing. The second thing that the scripture emphasizes that we as Christians should have as a part of our characteristic is that of love. We're to forgive as God has forgiven.

Paul said, be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you. The second thing is that we are to love one another. Jesus said, even as I have loved you, a new commandment I give unto you that you love one another, even as I have loved you.

It doesn't matter how much I profess to love the Lord. If I hate my brother, all of my professions of love for God are meaningless. They are only an empty profession.

Here is what God's word teaches us about love. He that says he's in the light and hates his brother is in darkness until now. He that hates his brother is in darkness and he walks in darkness and he knows not where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

So many people are blind to their own condition because they listen to the words that they say, which are false professions. Here the person is saying the right thing, but in his heart it's totally different. He says he's in the light, but he hates his brother.

Who so hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. And if a man says, I love God, and yet he hates his brother, he is a liar. For he that loves not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? What do we learn from these verses? Hatred is deceptive.

You think that you are in the light, but in reality you're in darkness if hatred fills your heart. Hatred is blinding. You're deceived to your own condition and relationship with God.

Hatred is equivalent to murder. You cannot truly love God and hate your brother. Sometimes, however, when we read these verses, we sort of assuage our consciences by saying, well, I really do love them.

Most of the bitter rotten letters I get from people begin with, I really love you, pastor, but. And then they pour out all the poison that's in their heart, and the things that they have, but you see, it's okay that they say these nasty mean things, because they prefaced it with, I really love you. Baloney.

Not so. Jesus said, you've made the law of no effect by your traditions. You've, because the law says you're not to curse your mother or father.

But you say, if a person says, hey, dad, I want to tell you this. This is for your own good. Then you can curse him, because you've prefaced it with a statement.

This is for your own good, dad. And Jesus said, you've really nullified. And, and in reality, the same thing, if you, if you preface and say, well, I really love them, but.

And you go on to destroy, to blast their character or, or say the horrible things about them. You're only deceiving yourself when you preface it by saying, I really love them. No, you don't.

You hate them. And the minute you wake up to that and will acknowledge that, then God can do something about the bitterness that's in your heart. Until then, it's just going to go on and fester and get worse all the time.

You're not being honest with yourself. You're deceiving yourself by prefacing your remarks with, I really love them. The problem with bitterness is that it doesn't just affect you.

It does. It has a bad effect upon you. It will create all kinds of, of physical problems ultimately when these chemicals are constantly poured into your system.

But it not only is detrimental to your own well-being, but the bitterness has a way of spreading from you and ultimately many people become defiled because of your bitterness. The scripture tells us, put away all bitterness. I know that there are things that have been done to you that are absolutely wrong.

Ahithophel had every reason to hate David because of what he did with Ahithophel's granddaughter. And yet, though there may be just cause for the bitterness, you can't afford it because of what it's doing to you and what it is doing to those around you. You can't afford it.

You can't keep it. You must not keep it. You've got to get rid of it.

And I know that there are those things that you need to do and should do but can't do and will not be able to do apart from the help of God. And only God can remove that bitterness that many times has lodged within our hearts because of wrongs that have been done to us. But no matter how wrong, you can't remain bitter.

It will destroy you. It's like murder in your heart. And so I would encourage you, don't hang on to bitterness.

You've got to be free. And only Jesus can do that for you. And who the Son sets free is free indeed.

He can remove the bitterness out of your heart. He can supplant it with forgiveness and with love. He wants to.

All he needs is just the permission from you to do so. You see, he won't work without your permission. And so you've got to be willing to be forgiving.

You've got to be willing to be loving. And you've got to say, Lord, help me. Help me to be loving.

Help me to be forgiving. Remove the bitterness. And he will.

Let's pray. Father, we see the terrible consequences of bitterness in a person's life. We see Ahithophel desiring to totally disgrace David, desiring to murder David, because he allowed that bitterness to fester for so many years.

Lord, there are those here today that have been harboring bitterness in their hearts over wrongs that have been done to them by certain individuals. It's been festering, Lord, in many cases for a long time. But Lord, we know that you've commanded that we put away bitterness.

And we can't do it, Lord, apart from you. And so we want to give you the permission, Lord, to work in us your work of love and grace, removing from our hearts bitterness, anger, wrath, malice. In Jesus' name, Lord, make us like you, loving and forgiving.

Amen. Shall we stand? The pastors are down here at the front to pray for you. As I said, I know that bitterness is something that we really can't control.

A lot of times we want to be free, but it just is there. And whenever we think about it, it just sends a new jolt of junk through our systems as the glands respond and react to that emotion. And we need help.

But thank God there is help. And God can do for us what we can't do for ourselves. All he needs is just permission.

And you can go from here today freed from bitterness. God can take that out of your heart. That anger, that bitterness that you feel, God can remove that today.

The pastors are down here at the front and they're here for the purpose of praying for you. If you will just give God the permission, God will work. They're here to pray for you, that God will help you, lest you be destroyed and many be defiled because of your bitterness.

Ultimately, when Ahithophel did not receive the permission to go out and murder David, bad sport, he went home, wrote his suicide note, hung himself. Destroyed him, destroyed him. Just like it will destroy you if you don't take measures to get rid of it.

So we would encourage you as soon as we're dismissed, make your way forward. These men are here to pray for you and God will help you and free you from that destructive force of bitterness that ultimately will destroy you if not taken care of. The Lord bless thee and keep thee.

The Lord make his face to shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee and be gracious unto thee. The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee and give thee peace.

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