

# Free From Bitterness

by Jim Wilson

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*Bitterness is a sin that we must confess and forgive in order to be free from its debilitating effects.*

**Duration:** 35:36

**Scripture:** Ruth 1:20-21, Ephesians 4:31

**Topics:** "Bitterness"

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## Description

In this sermon, Jim shares his personal testimony of how he found freedom from bitterness in his own life. He has been a Christian for 60 years and has spent much of his time ministering to others. Jim emphasizes the importance of recognizing bitterness, which can be seen in a person's face, eyes, and lines of their mouth. He also highlights that bitterness is often accompanied by a different timbre in a person's voice and can be detected through the details they remember. Jim encourages listeners to review and focus on the positive aspects of life rather than dwelling on negative experiences.

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## Transcript

Like the picture of the Canadian thistle on this CD, the word bitterness is so sharp and prickly that we rarely think about applying it to ourselves. More likely, this is something that we have seen affecting others or experienced when we've been pricked by their bitterness. Yet, if we are honest, we can recognize times or things in our lives that we continue to remember and resent as unfair or hurtful.

It is just these sorts of things that Jim so effectively identifies as a source of bitterness in this talk on how to be free from bitterness. More importantly, Jim applies biblical truths that can result in complete recovery from this ruthlessly debilitating spiritual cancer called bitterness. My own life and relationship with my parents is a testimony to this truth that resulted in my freedom from bitterness many years ago.

Jim has been a Christian for 60 years, and much of this time has been spent ministering to others. As an officer in the Navy, an international conference speaker, a pastor, teacher, and counselor with Community Christian Ministries, and a husband, father, and grandfather. This last year, Jim celebrated his 80th birthday with his wife, Bessie, and their 15 grandchildren and 13 great-grandchildren.

This CD and other life-changing talks have been produced by Community Christian Ministries. For more information, you can call us at 208-883-0997 or check us out at our webpage [www.freefrombitterness.com](http://www.freefrombitterness.com) You start out with the book of Ruth. The book of Ruth, we just look at part of the first chapter.

You know the story already of Ruth and how she said that she would go with Naomi, but that's not what I'd like to talk about. There's a famine in the land, and Naomi, with her husband, in Lamalech, and his two sons, Malan and Killian, left Israel because of the famine. They got into Moab, and the two sons married Moabite women, Ruth and Opah.

After they had lived there about 10 years, both Malan and Killian died, and her husband died. So there were three widows. So she decided to go home when she found there was food at home, and the two daughters-in-law were going to go with her, and she talked one of them out of it, but Ruth decided to stay with her.

Verse 11. But Naomi said, Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons who could become your husbands? Return home, my daughters.

I am too old to have another husband. Even I thought there was still hope for me. Even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons, would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters.

It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord's hand has gone out against me. Naomi said, I'm more bitter than you are. I'm really bitter.

I've lost a husband and two sons, and you just lost a husband. And I'm bitter, because the Lord's hand is against me. He's picking on me, and I'm bitter toward God.

The Lord's hand has gone out against me. And then in verse 18. Verse 19.

So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred, because of them. And the women exclaimed, can this be Naomi? Don't call me Naomi.

The word Naomi means pleasant. She told them, call me Mara. Call me bitter.

Because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me.

The Almighty has brought misfortune upon me. Back in verse 13. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord's hand has gone out against me.

The Lord's hand has gone out against me. And now she says, call me bitter, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. The Lord has brought me back empty.

The Lord has afflicted me. The Almighty has brought misfortune upon me. And guess whose fault it is.

She's very clear. Well, it's a wonderful story. I just listened to it on tape today.

It's a wonderful story, but it's a clear statement of how people feel when something goes wrong. That they didn't have anything to do with it. You can see it in other places.

I was reading it also in 1 Samuel on bitterness. But let's look over in Ephesians chapter 4. Normally, when I give this talk, I tell people that I'm going to lie to them sometime during the talk and straighten it out later. But I think I will just tell you when I lie, right at that time.

I don't want you to believe me too well, so I try to straighten it out. It's Ephesians 4.31. Get rid of all bitterness, rage, and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

It tells us to get rid of it. Before I can get rid of it, I've got to know what it is. And bitterness has a way of self-deception.

Do you know what it is to be hurt? I don't mean physically hurt, but hurt emotionally. Anybody? You know what it is to be hurt. Okay.

When you're hurt, you're thinking about yourself. But how long a time is it between hurt and resentment? Not much time, right? When I'm hurting, I'm thinking about me. And then I think, who hurt me? And that's for the resentment.

Resentment means I'm thinking about you. Well, I'm just going to make a statement here and say that bitterness is prolonged resentment. Resentment that's held on to.

Resentment that's kept. He said to get rid of it. Now, it's already progressed.

It's gone through hurt and resentment before it gets to be bitter. He said, you get rid of it. He doesn't tell how to get rid of it, he said, but you get rid of it.

I'm going to make a comment here. There's hardly a concert today that will say you can get rid of it. The concerts I know of, including some of the Christian study books on this subject, say you probably never will get rid of it.

It's only a process. And you'll probably stay with it the rest of your life. And you just work at it as a process.

Well, that's not the way the Bible speaks. It says get rid of it. If it's a process, I can never be kind and compassionate.

Because I'm always hanging on to it. So it's got to be gone. Suppose I, I'll tell you right now, I'm going to get into the falsehood shortly.

Suppose I tell a lie and I am a Christian and I tell this lie. Do I feel guilty or do I feel bitter? Guilty. That could happen.

That's right. That could also happen. Normally, I feel more how wrong I am when I tell a lie, even though I may have come up with reasons why I told it.

Now, let's suppose you tell a lie and spread it all over town and you tell it about me. Now, do I feel guilty or bitter? Bitter. So here's the lie.

Guilt is when I sin and bitterness is when you sin. And that seems very right. Doesn't seem like a lie, does it? But when I do something wrong, I know it's wrong, I feel guilty.

And when you do something wrong about me, I feel bitter. So it sounds true, but it isn't. Because bitterness is never because somebody else sinned.

I'll jump right into that right now. Because bitterness is sin in itself. Amy Carmichael has this little note in, I think, the book If.

It says, if a cup brimming full of sweet water, a cup brimming full of sweet water will not spill one drop of bitter water regardless how hard it's jolted. Is that right? So if you give it a harder jolt, what comes out? More sweet water. If you kick it over, what comes out? Sweet water.

So if I get jolted by one of you and bitter water comes out, does that prove that getting jolted turns sweetness and light into darkness or honey into vinegar? No. All it does is bring out what was in there all the time. So, but I want to say, no, he made me bitter because he kicked me or lied about me or said something to me.

No, he just brought out what was in. Now, in case I don't get any farther, I want you to remember this. You get rid of bitterness like you get rid of any other sin that you commit.

But the lie that the enemy says, when he quits lying about you, you'll feel better. Suppose he doesn't quit. Suppose he just keeps on lying.

Are you going to be bitter? Am I going to be bitter the rest of my life because somebody else insists on sinning? That doesn't make any sense at all. So the other person is never the cause of my sin. I sin volitionally because of different kinds of temptations.

In a lot of cases, in bitterness, I was already in some sort of trouble when I got the jolt. I'll give you some examples. Many years ago, almost 40 years ago, maybe quite 30 some anyhow, in the fall of 58, whenever that was, we moved to Annapolis, Maryland in October or November and the house needed storm windows and it didn't have storm windows and I kept delaying and delaying and delaying until one cold day I thought I better put up the storm windows.

Well, we didn't have storm windows. We had this plastic stuff that you put over the windows. And so I got out there with the stepladder and the plastic and the hammer and the tacks and started on the kitchen windows.

Well, I had several problems. Number one, the stepladder wasn't even. The stepladder kept wobbling.

Two, the plastic was big. Three, my fingers were cold. Four, the tacks were tiny.

And between cold fingers, tiny tacks, big plastic and a wobbling stepladder, more tacks were falling on the ground than were getting put in the plastic. Well, being a godly Christian man, I thought I was being patient until my dear wife walked around the corner of the house and wondered what in the world was taking me so long. A mistake she wondered out loud.

And I said something unchristian to her and she turned around and went back in the house. All she did was kick the jar. She didn't cause me to be bitter, but I was bitter.

She shouldn't have said it. If she'd stayed in the kitchen where she belonged, this wouldn't have happened. And I was bitter, but I knew that sooner or later I was going to confess my sin.

And I wanted it to be later, but I knew that I had no guarantee that Bessie would confess hers because I just may have kicked her cup. And she would be in there saying he shouldn't have said it. Very bitter toward me.

So with the anticipation that I knew that eventually I'd confess my sin, what hurried it up was I had no guarantee that Bessie would confess hers. And I might find myself in a cold house and not because of no

storm windows. So I confessed on a stepladder, went into the kitchen.

She was not in the kitchen. Went into the living room and she was sitting on the couch looking the other direction. And I thought, well, I'm in for it now.

I sat down and told her that I'd confessed to God and he'd forgive me and would she forgive me? And she turned around and smiled and she said, I know you have a sensitive conscience so I've been in here praying for you. Now, you'd think you'd learn from that but this sort of thing kept on happening. I won't say daily, but I remember two other instances.

Ten years later, now 68, and we were now leaving Annapolis and we had all kinds of decisions to make. Had to do with this stuff, this stuff, give it away, sell it. So I was driving along making things and I had to talk over with Bessie.

And I thought about this and I said, okay, we'll talk it over, make a decision. This one, we'll make a decision. This one, we'll make a decision.

I kept going, yeah, we'll talk about it, make a decision. I came to this one. Boy, if I even mention this, she's going to go through the overhead.

So we got home. We talked about it. Decision, decision, decision, decision.

I mentioned this one. Why? Why does she react? Why can't she think like a man? Why can't she talk and be sensible? And I was just, I'm just bitter. How we couldn't come to a sensible decision, I don't even know what it was about.

And I just steamed for the next 24 hours. That's all I could think about for 24 hours. Pulled into the yard, in the driveway the next day, in the car, and I'd made up my mind I was going to go in and square her away and tell her how to think and talk and carry on a conversation.

But I didn't do it. But that was my decision. And my point was, why does she react? And the Lord said to me, the Lord really said to me, Oh, who's reacting? It looks to me like you're reacting to her reacting.

Well, I knew that was right, that it was my sin and my sin only. And I confessed it and have no idea what it was about. No idea what it was about.

Well, I was going to say, how do we recognize sin? I jumped ahead of myself. How do we recognize its bitterness? Well, there's several ways we can recognize it. One of them is, you can see it in a person's face.

You can see it in their eyes. You can see it in the lines of their mouth, even when they're smiling, even when they're laughing. You can see it in little kids who don't even have any lines in their face.

You can see things like this in people. Now, you might get led astray once or twice, but we all know when somebody's sad, we all know when somebody's mad, we all know when somebody, you know, they have different expressions. There's something common.

Or you can see it in bitterness too. So you can see it. You can also hear it in people's voices.

There's a different timbre, different sound in their voice, like they've been crying all night or they've drunk whiskey for 30 years. There's a difference, you know, a different sound. But you also can tell by what they say.

They'll say things like, I'm not bitter. Or, of course I'm bitter, you know. But you can pick it up.

But the surest way that I think of recognizing bitterness in yourself is bitterness remembers details. You say, well, can't you remember details of wonderful things? You know, happy things, everything? Yeah, you can remember anything. But what makes your memory so sharp is review, review, review.

And you don't review, review, review the wonderful things. You review the things that hurt you. And that's why, it's not just the detailed memory, it's a detailed memory where the other person is guilty.

But you have accusative thoughts towards somebody else and you've had a thousand conversations in your life and one of them took place and you've forgotten most of those. But one took place six years ago and he said this, you said this, he said this, you said this. You're bitter.

Now there may be an exception to that. But on the whole, that's what bitterness does. I don't remember who these people were, but in Dallas, Texas, quite a few years ago, I was speaking in a house group with some old friends from different parts of the country.

They all gathered together. I talked to the subject. And one couple was there that I'd known at Washington State University several years before.

And she spoke up and she said, I've been bitter toward my mother for years. And she said, I practiced this, I learned this years ago at Washington State, and I practiced it and the bitterness left toward my mother. And then she said, I got here, I ran into a woman who was very bitter toward her mother.

I said, I can help her. So I went to tell her about my experience, and she said, I couldn't remember anything I was bitter about toward my mother. It was gone.

And before, I had it all recorded, engraved in my... She said, I couldn't come up with the details. Well, that's why. I couldn't, can't remember what this is about except that it happened.

And another several years went by, and we're in Ann Arbor, Michigan. And we had a great big bedroom, about half the size of this room. So we... It was a good place to hide out from the television and the kids and stuff like that.

Bessie was reading in bed, and I was working at the desk. And whatever was working at the desk was working about the same way the storm windows were working. And it wasn't working out right when Bessie said something to me from bed, and I turned around and let her have it again.

Well, she looked at me in amazement and got up and left the room. And I sat there and said, well, she shouldn't have said it. Well, I knew... I knew what I was doing.

I was saying the other person made me bitter. And I did that for a while, but I really knew what I had to do. So I got up, went over to my side of the bed, got on my knees, and told God that I was the only one at fault.

It was my sin and my sin only. Got up off my knees and said, but look what she said. And got back down on my knees.

Said, sorry, God, that slipped out. And I confessed it again. Got up on my knees and said, but God, you and I know who's really at fault.

Back on my knees. And I stayed on my knees about 40 minutes until I could get up and not say, look what she said. Look who's really at fault.

In other words, I confessed my sin until I wasn't having any little addendums to the confession. I'm not saying I haven't been bitter since then. I have been.

But I recognize it very fast. And recognize it as sin here very fast. And I'm not up to talking to all the people that I see.

Well, there are not many every day, but there are some just about every day who are up to here in problems. And I just can't go into that kind of situation bitter. I've got to take care of it.

I am useless to anybody else unless I take care of it. But I know the sin is here. Now, I get rid of it by confessing it like I confess any other kind of sin.

Except I may have to stay with it a little bit longer because the nature of bitterness is look, look, look, look, look what she did, look what she said. And people are very bitter. And it's generally not about something very evil.

We read and see the Oklahoma City bombing and we don't feel guilty and we don't feel bitter. We're just maybe appalled but we don't feel guilty and we don't feel bitter. But it was a massive murder.

Great, great sin. So it's not the magnitude of sin that somebody else commits. It's how close the other person is to us.

I don't get bitter toward murderers in other states. I get bitter toward my roommates. I get bitter toward here are the people you can be bitter toward.

Your father, your mother, your husband, your wife, your brother, your sister, your roommate, your best friend, your boyfriend, your girlfriend, your immediate superior, your immediate subordinate, the person who works alongside you. All the people that are close to you, that ping on you. They're not the cause but they're the ones that touch you.

And God. You say, well, you didn't name them all. I know somebody you didn't name.

Well, you know who it is. But I guarantee you whoever it is is somebody who has access to you. And you think it's the other person's fault.

It's not the other person's fault. It's your sin. Only your sin.

And that's the only way you can get rid of it. As soon as you think somebody else is sin, you cannot get rid of it and you're commanded to get rid of it. Because it's dependent upon the other person quitting.

But even then it won't do it. The devil says, well, he quits, you'll feel better. Well, let's suppose he comes up to you one day and says, I'm sorry.

Well, the devil promised you you'd forgive him when he said that. And you can't get it out of your mouth that you're forgiven. Because you're bitter right up to that time.

In order to forgive him when he says he's sorry, you've got to be forgiving before he says he's sorry so you're immediately able to do it when he says it. But if you're forgiving before he says he's sorry, then it's not necessary for him to say he's sorry. You've already taken care of it.

I mentioned hurt, resentment, bitterness, hatred, murder. You probably, there are a lot of teenage gang killings, but other than that, where have most murders taken place in this country? In the home. Why? To collect the insurance? No.

Bitterness. Only bitterness. 30 years of bitterness.

And they don't believe in divorce. So they do something else. This hurt, resentment, bitterness, hatred, murder, is great, great evil, and it's greater evil than whatever the other person said to you or you thought he said to you.

one of the parts of this lie that I said a while ago, that bitterness is based upon somebody else's sin, the other part of it is it's real or imagined sin. In other words, it doesn't have to be somebody's real sin to you. It can be imagined sin to you.

Years ago, and she's a very fine, sweet Christian woman, had no negative thoughts about her at all, but I occasionally had some about him. One day I went over to talk with him and I found out that she was very bitter toward me and had been for a couple of years. And I thought, well, maybe it's because of she's protecting your husband or something like that.

But it wasn't. I found out why she's bitter toward me and that was because I hated her. And I just told you I had nothing but the highest regard for this woman, nothing but positive thoughts, but she knew I hated her.

And how she knew is that one time she'd been in the bookstore and I hadn't spoken to her. And she knew why I hadn't spoken to her because I hated her. I don't remember the incident, but I suppose that was either I thought she wanted to look at books or I was preoccupied or something like that.

But I can guarantee it because it wasn't because I had any negative attitude toward her at all. She'd been bitter toward me for two years waiting for me to confess so she could forgive me. Okay? She was the only one in sin.

She had believed a lie about this projected thing. Now, this is one of the reasons that husbands and wives get bitter toward each other. They come up with the motive why the other person said something.

On the whole, if I make it simplistic, there are people who get bitter and people who make other people bitter. Now, people who are on the melancholy side of things are more likely to get bitter than other people. Some sanguine types, they take offense and just punch you in the nose and forget about it.

But you offend a melancholic and he'll just hate you for life. So, there's that kind of temptation. Let's suppose the husband comes into the house and says something to his wife and walks out of the door and she is hurt by what he said.

She's appalled by what he said and she's hurt and then she's resentful and then she's bitter because she could never ever say anything awful to anybody without having this motive. So, she comes up with the

kind of motive that she'd have to have to say something that gross to somebody else. So, she has her private grand jury and finds her husband indicted and then convicted and hanged by the neck until dead for this awful... Then he comes back in the room and he finds out that he's in big trouble.

Has no clue what is it. And he finally finds out this awful motive that he had. He didn't have it.

He didn't have any motive. He's just dumb. In the meantime, she's committed murder toward this man who... He's not malicious.

He's just inept. Now, this happens all the time. Well, when she comes out with this, then he responds with a similar bitterness toward her.

Just gets worse and worse. And it starts out largely on imaginary things. Let's look at James 3.14. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not boast about it or deny the truth.

Such wisdom, quote wisdom, does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder in every evil practice. Bitter envy.

If you harbor bitter envy, get this idea of harboring it? A harbor is a place of protection. You are protecting this bitter envy, this bitter jealousy and selfish ambition. I remember when I was a midshipman at the Naval Academy, I could see bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in the midshipmen.

I said, boy, it'll be great to get out in the fleet where all the people grow out of this and they won't be there anymore. This is just obviously a problem with college students who ought to be number one. It just gets worse and worse all the way up to admiral.

You harbor it, you don't change. It doesn't come from heaven, it's earthly, unspiritual, and of the devil. I'm saying this to get an idea, get you the idea that this is gross, gross, evil.

And you're the one that has it, not the person who, quote, made you bitter. Many years ago, I was invited to a luncheon group at the K-House in WSU and it was called the Nosebag Group. Everybody brought their sack lunch and they had a discussion.

At this time, it was what to do with bitterness between husband and wife or in the family and they had two PhD candidates in counseling at WSU and I was the third panelist in this Nosebag Group. And the solutions they gave was, I said, well, do you want to hurt people with pouring out this bitterness? Oh, no, we wouldn't do that. But we'd just tell them to pretend their father, that that chair is their father and this pillow is a club and then go beat your father with this club.

Doesn't hurt your father at all, but it gets this all expended out of you. It doesn't. It doesn't.

It just expresses it. One time years ago, a couple that I knew, in fact, she had become a Christian probably as a result of Bessie's semi-school class and he had gotten right with the Lord and went on, spent the rest of her life in the Navy, went to seminary, got ordained and took a church in St. Louis in the fall. Ended up having an affair with the secretary of the church in November, confessing it in February, getting defrocked in March.

And there went his church. Well, I heard about it and I didn't know how I was going to get to St. Louis, but I found a ticket that you go any place in the country for three weeks for \$700. So I went every place including St. Louis.

And I went to see her. This was about six months after this happened. I saw her in the evening and saw him the next morning.

And I said to her, I said, what have you been doing the last six months? She said, I've been going to group therapy. I said, what's happening in group therapy? She said, I've been getting rid of a lot of anger. Oh? I said, is it gone? No, you just forever get rid of it.

You're always getting rid of it. What are you doing? You're just expressing it to other sick people who are also venting theirs. It doesn't go away.

It just gets expressed. I said, I'll give you overnight to get rid of it. This is to be held on to.

You get rid of it to God. Don't lay it out on all these other people who are expressing their stuff. Well, she did.

She got rid of it. She kept going to the group therapy, happy as a lark, and all the other people accused her of suppressing because she wasn't unloading the stuff.

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