

How to Be Free From Bitterness

by Jim Wilson

Bitterness is a negative emotion that can be caused by unconfessed sin, a lack of forgiveness, or a failure to recognize the root of the problem, but it can be overcome through confession, forgiveness, and a willingness to let go of the root of the problem.

Duration: 39:07

Scripture: Numbers 32:23, Proverbs 28:13, Matthew 12:34, Ephesians 4:31, James 3:14, James 3:16, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Bitterness"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker addresses the issue of bitterness and its negative impact on our lives. He refers to Ephesians 4:31, which instructs believers to get rid of all bitterness. The speaker shares personal examples of bitterness and how it can affect relationships. He also discusses the importance of forgiveness and being kind and compassionate towards others, just as Christ forgave us. The sermon emphasizes the need for repentance, restitution, and continued joy in our Christian walk.

Transcript

Very happy, very pleased to be able to bring on Jim Wilson to give this talk. I was a college student here almost 25 years ago and that was one of the first Bible studies I was in was on how to deal with bitterness and how that related to my parents and different things. And thankfully I can give God the glory that that was used to help transform my life and my walk with Christ.

And so I'm very pleased, very happy to be working with Jim now and to be able to introduce him tonight to be able to give this talk. So Jim, can you come on up? Just another comment. How to Be Free from Bitterness has several articles in it that will not be talked on.

They will be, which I encourage you to read, Forgiving Others, Man's Anger by Heather, Fitz or Rage by me, Taking Offense by our daughter Heather, Bradley and the Tongue by Chris Flacos, Introspection, Relationship with Parents, which we'll cover tomorrow, Saturation Love, How Does a Woman Become Secure? We had an edition of this with How Does a Woman Become Secure? And we began getting letters from people saying, why are you picking on the women? So we put it in this next one, The Responsible Man. And letters and questions from a woman becoming a Christian. And it was three months of her correspondence and she was converted at the end of those three months.

I'm going to pray again. Father, help us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

There are only two things a Christian can do in any 24-hour day. That's obey God or disobey God. Now, to obey God, it takes grace.

And when we disobey God, it takes grace. So everything I say has to do with grace. I may not use the word, but three of these talks will be sort of taking care of the sin part.

This one tonight, Repentance and Restitution and Continued Joy, has to do with the negative aspect, disobedience. And two on positive, one on loving your enemies, and on relationships with your parents. All bitterness, we talk about one aspect of it today, but there are other aspects of bitterness besides bitterness.

In other words, if you've got accumulated sin of some other nature in your life, whatever it is, stealing candy bars, lying, they set you up for the temptation of bitterness. In other words, if you're walking in the light, if you're walking in the joy of the Lord, and somebody pings on you, you're likely to get resentful or bitter. So you can set yourself up for being bitter by having a lot of other unconfessed things in your life, and they don't have to be big ones.

But we won't talk about that so much. Tonight, we'll talk about the more common causes. If you look with me at the book of Ruth, chapter one, you know the story.

Ruth, there's a famine in the land, and she left Israel to go to Moab with her husband Elimelech and her two sons, Malan and Kilian. While they were in Moab, they married Moabite women, and the next ten years, all three men died. Her husband died, and two sons.

She wanted to return home. The two daughters-in-law were going to go with her. She encouraged them to stay home in Moab.

She said, if I got married again and had sons, would you wait until they got old, old enough to marry? Well, one of them decided to turn around and go home, but Ruth went with her. You know that story. But in her argument with these two daughters-in-law, she said it is more bitter for me than for you because the Lord's hand has gone out against me.

I'm more bitter than you are. You've just lost a husband. I've lost a husband and two sons.

I'm more bitter, and I'm bitter because the Lord's hand has gone out against me. Then she got back to Israel. 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? The meaning of Naomi is the word pleasant. Can this be pleasant? Don't call me pleasant, she told them. Call me merry because the Almighty has made my life very bitter.

I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me pleasant? The Lord has afflicted me. The Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.

Notice what she says about being bitter. Because the Lord's hand has gone out against me, 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. Five times, who's at fault? God.

She's bitter toward God. Now I assume she got over it. The rest of the book is pretty good.

But the first chapter, she's living in it. She's extremely bitter and she's bitter toward God. The very nature of bitterness.

Well, let's look at another verse first. Let's look at Ephesians 4, last verse. Last two verses.

Verse 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 forgave you.

King James says, tender hearted. I'm going to stop on that verse for a minute. Because one time I heard a tape of Douglas' preaching.

And in this talk, he said he had memorized five verses and he never attempted to memorize them. He just had them memorized. And he mentioned the five verses.

And this was one of them. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Another one was, be sure your sin will find you out.

Now he memorized these verses because his mother quoted them to him so many times that I was glad to know that. But she didn't quote the first part to it. It says, get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.

Then it says, be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other. Compassion is an interior thing. Bitterness is an interior thing.

Can I be bitter and compassionate at the same time? If I am both, I'm faking one of them. And it's not the bitterness I'm faking. This is what you are.

Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks. And it's going to come out your mouth. You're compassionate, it'll come out your mouth.

If you're bitter, it's going to come out your mouth. It'll show somewhere. Okay, here it says, get rid of it.

And it includes, it helped define the word bitterness by its associations. It's associated with rage and anger, brawling and slander, every form of malice. Those aren't good words.

Bitterness is not an innocent word. He says, get rid of it. I like those expressions.

One of the awful words in this English language is the word process. You ever heard the word process? A peace process means what? It goes on forever. One says, put to death these things in you.

Does that mean a slow, torturous death? It doesn't mean, no. It means, shoot it in the head. Put it to death.

Here it says, get rid of all bitterness. It doesn't say, in a process. Get rid of it.

Well, we say, I don't know how to get rid of it. Well, that may be true, but don't change the meaning of the word because you don't know how. Let's look over at James, the third chapter.

Most of the third chapter is talking about the mouth, I think, in verse 14 of chapter 3 of James. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such wisdom, quote, unquote, does not come down from heaven.

Got that? This bitter envy and selfish ambition didn't come from heaven. It's earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. Now, can you get any more clear than that? Bitterness is unspiritual, earthly, of the devil.

It didn't come from heaven. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder in every evil practice. But the wisdom that comes from heaven is, first of all, pure.

Oh, you want to know what comes from heaven? Purity. That's the wisdom that comes from heaven. Then, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial, sincere.

Okay? The wisdom that comes from heaven is pure. This bitter envy and selfish ambition does not come down from heaven. It's from the world, from the devil.

Okay, another verse of scripture in Hebrews chapter 12. My first point is to help us to realize how exceedingly sinful bitterness is. It can't be qualified with anything close to pure.

It didn't come from heaven. It's associated with rage and anger and malice. Hebrews 12, verse 15.

See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. First it's described as somehow missing the grace of God. Then it defines or describes bitterness as a root.

A root is by definition underground. You normally don't see it. And it has a certain character to it and it has a certain function.

It feeds, it drinks, and eventually it comes to service. When it comes to service, it's no longer a root. It's now a fruit bearer.

So if you have an apple root and it comes to service, it bears apples. If you have a wheat root, it comes to service, it bears wheat. If you have a bitter root and it comes to service, it bears bitter fruit.

And he says here, it's a failure. It misses the grace of God. It also says, don't let it come to the surface.

I know people who really work at their bitterness not coming to the surface. They don't succeed, but they really work at it. They try to keep it buried inside.

I said it doesn't work, but they're not as expressive as they would be if they didn't try. But what happens to them physically if they keep it buried? What does this bitterness do to your body? Makes you sick. All kinds of things.

Ulcers, arthritis, colitis, name it. Bitterness is kept in. He said, boy, boy, I don't want to get sick.

I want to keep it in. I'll let it out and get everybody else sick. Now, he says that's what happens here.

See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. Defile means to make filthy. To make dirty.

Many other people. Just because you let this bitter root comes up. You can keep it in and get sick or you can let it out and get everybody else sick.

Well, if you tie this in with Ephesians 4, it says get rid of it. You get rid of the root. You don't just suppress it and you don't just express it.

You get rid of the root. Before we can get rid of the root, it's hard to recognize. You say, well, if I thought I was bitter, oh, it's wonderful.

I don't know how many people have told me that they got this book because they knew some bitter person to give it to. And then they thought, well, maybe I better read it first and found out they were bitter. People don't recognize their own bitterness.

Let's suppose I, as a Christian, sin. Let's suppose I tell a proper, a big lie. Now, having told this lie, do I feel guilty? Or do I feel bitter? Now, it's not a trick question.

I feel guilty. I sinned against a holy God. And I know I may not want to confess my lie, but I know that's the only way out, is to confess it, to be forgiven.

Now, let's suppose I don't lie. Let's suppose you lie about me and spread it all over Moscow. Now, do I feel guilty or bitter? Well, you're laughing, especially if you think you know the answer.

But you feel bitter. And so you could draw a conclusion. And I'm going to tell you right now, I'm telling a whopper in my next sentence.

And here's the lie. Generally, I don't tell people the end of the message, but I'll tell you in advance I'm lying. Guilt is when I sin, and bitterness is when you sin.

That's not true. Guilt is when I sin, and bitterness is when I sin. Guilt is when I sin, and bitterness is when I sin.

Bitterness is never caused by the other person, but we think so. And we think so, and I will say, there is a relationship. This other person that, quote, made you bitter, it was a temptation to you, but it didn't make you bitter.

You say, well, when I married this guy, I didn't think he was going to leave his socks on the floor. Was I going to get bitter? About 30 years of socks on the floor. People say, I'm not, one of the ways I can tell people are bitter, they say things like, I'm not bitter.

Or they'll say, of course I'm bitter. Somehow, like it's a legit, even if they know what it is, like it's a legitimate, justified position. Let's suppose you've got a friend, a roommate, husband, wife, who, what's the word, knows what buttons to push, or something like that.

Knows your number, and knows how to get you bitter and keep you bitter. I'll give you a couple examples. First, my own life.

Been out of the Navy a couple years. We're moving our evangelistic work from Washington, D.C. to Annapolis, Maryland. Moved into this house, and I put off, and put off, and put off, putting it on the storm windows.

Finally I realized, I couldn't put it out a thing longer. But I didn't have storm windows, I had this plastic stuff. You know what I'm talking about? And so one day, and it was in November, I went outside to start this little project.

I had a stepladder, I had the hammer, I had the tacks, and the plastic. But I had several problems with those four things. The stepladder was on uneven ground.

It was wobbly. Second, the plastic was big. And third, my fingers were cold.

And fourth, the tacks were tiny. And between big plastic, wobbling stepladder, tiny tacks, and cold fingers, more tacks were falling on the ground than were getting put in the plastic. Well, being a godly man, I thought I was safe from any problems with this.

It had just taken me longer. Well, my dear wife walked around the corner of the house and wondered what in the world was taking me so long. Her mistake was, she wondered out loud.

And I said something unchristian to her. And she turned around and went back in the house. I stood there in the stepladder saying, she shouldn't have said it, she shouldn't have said it, she stayed in the kitchen where she belonged.

This wouldn't have happened. But I already knew this truth, but I was enjoying being bitter for a while. But I realized that I couldn't be bitter forever because for all I knew, I could confess my sin, I knew I would eventually do that.

But I also realized that she might be in the house saying he shouldn't have said it, he shouldn't have said it. Even though I knew how to get rid of my bitterness, I wasn't sure she could get rid of hers. I confessed my sin, my sin only.

Went into the house, she was not in the kitchen, went in the living room, she's sitting on the couch looking the other direction. I said, boy, I'm in the cold house now, unrelated to no storm windows. I sat down beside her and I said, Bessie, I've sinned against God, I've confessed it, and he's forgiven me.

She turned around and smiled. She said, I know you have a sensitive conscience, so I've been in here praying for you. Now, it doesn't always happen that way.

Sometimes it can be a temptation to her. What's the solution? I suppose, don't get married. Because the nature of bitterness is not the magnitude of the other person's sin.

It's the proximity of the other person to you. There can be great evils taking place in Afghanistan and Iraq and California and Bangladesh and we can read about them, we may be appalled and we may be... but we don't feel bitter and we don't feel guilty. We just wonder this great evil.

But something that's not a great evil, that's minor by somebody who's close to you, makes you bitter. Here are the people you can be bitter toward. Your father, your mother, your brother, your sister, your husband, your wife, your best friend, your roommate, your boss, your immediate subordinate, the people you work with, you say, no, you didn't mention everybody.

Uncles. But I'll tell you, whoever it is, it's somebody that's close to you. And it's not the magnitude of the sin.

If it was some great gross evil, you'd be feeling sorry for that person instead of yourself. What keeps me confessing my bitterness as my sin, I don't think it's mine. I think it's this person that did this, said this.

And as long as I think it's the other person, and I think if the other person said he was sorry or she was sorry, then I'd be over my bitterness. Not true. They'll say they're sorry, and you'll still be bitter.

Because it wasn't their sin. It was your sin. You get forgiven your sin by confessing your sins, not by them confessing theirs.

Many years ago, Jim Corcoran and I went down to Walla Walla State Penitentiary before Christmas to minister to the prisoners there. And we went from maximum security, minimum security, protective custody, and back in the evening, we were back in maximum security. And I thought I'd teach on this subject, figuring there might be some bitter people there.

And during the talk, one fellow raised his hand, and he'd been in the audience in the morning when I was there before, where we were talking about evangelism, and he was wanting to know how to win people to Jesus. But now he asked the question, he said, how do you get rid of bitterness toward a man who beat up your three-year-old little boy unmercifully? So I told him how to get rid of the bitterness. And I said, when you do, you'll be able to minister to him so you don't want to do that to other people.

You can help him if you're free from your bitterness. He said, no, this guy can't be helped. I said, why can't he? He said, he's not with us anymore.

He'd murdered him. That's why he's here. But, having murdered him didn't get rid of his bitterness.

If the man had resurrected, he'd have killed him again. Expressing bitterness doesn't get rid of it. It hurts other people.

Another fellow, at the same time, he'd murdered somebody because somebody had lied about him on a felony. And he'd say, he lied about me, I killed him. But he was still bitter.

Expressing bitterness doesn't get rid of it. It reinforces it. Many years ago, a couple that Bessie and I had been responsible for me getting him back to the Lord and Bessie for her becoming a Christian.

They seemed to go on with the Lord for a long time. He got out of the Navy, went to seminary, came back, was ordained, and pastored a church. He began this new pastorate in the fall and fell in love with the secretary of the church in the winter.

And committed adultery. And confessed it in February, I think. And was defrocked in March.

And divorced after that. I heard about it. And since years before, we had been responsible for them, that I gotta get to them.

They were in St. Louis. And finally, I found a, I think, Eastern Airlines. You could go every place in the country for \$700.

So I picked out every place in the country, including St. Louis, and went to all these places to minister. But I looked up the... I saw him, and I saw her. And I said to her, what have you been doing the last six months? Because it had been six months.

She said, I've been going to group therapy. You know what group therapy is? It's where all the fouled up people tell their fouled up stories to each other. That's a little prejudice statement.

But anyhow. She said, I've been going to group therapy. I said, what's happening in group therapy? She said, I'm getting rid of all my anger.

I'm getting rid of all my bitterness. Oh, I said, is it gone? Or are you always getting rid of it? I said, I want it gone tonight, before you get up in the morning. It better be gone.

None of this getting rid of it gradually. Well, she did. She was free of it the next day.

I found out she was still going to group therapy. I said, what's happening? She said, well, I don't have anything to say anymore. And I said, well, what's happening? Well, everybody thinks I'm suppressing it.

No, it's gone. Not suppressed. Not expressed.

Gone. Get rid of it. Ten years later, after this little incident of the storm windows, we were living in Annapolis, Maryland, about ready to move to Michigan.

And having lived in a place for ten years, you have any idea how much stuff you can collect in ten years? It breeds. It breeds. And I was driving around, thinking about the different things we had to make a decision on, whether you get rid of it or what we do with it.

And so I thought of, I think, five things that we'd talk to Bessie about and we'd make a decision. So I thought of this one. We'd talk about it, make a decision.

Talk about this, and I said, boy, if I even mention this one, she's going to go through the overhead. Got home. This, made a decision.

This, made a decision. This, made a decision. This, made a decision.

This, and this. Why can't a woman think like a man? And I was bitter for 24 hours. And I couldn't come up with any solution.

It was just like this, eating at me. So I finally made the decision. I was driving up to the house and coming to the driveway.

I'm going to go in the house and straighten her out. And God, in his goodness, said, well, why are you going to straighten her out? I said, she reacts. Oh, he said, who's reacting? I knew I was reacting to her reaction.

And I confessed my 24 hours of bitterness. And I went in and never brought up the subject. The first thing, the first time she ever even knew about it was 10 years later.

I was speaking at Spring Canyon Lodge in Colorado, and she was in the audience. It was the first time she heard of it. Now, there's something else characteristic about that.

I have no idea what the subject was. But if I hadn't gotten rid of the bitterness, I'd know to this day what the subject was. I said this, she said this, the nature of bitterness is bitterness remembers details.

And when you get rid of bitterness, you forget them. You don't even try to forget them, they just disappear. They're not important.

You say, well, can good things be remembered? Yes. But if you know the secret of memory, it's what? Repeat, repeat, repeat. Repetition makes memory.

And we don't repeat the good things. We just go over and over the bad things. So bitterness remembers details, and if the details are all at all accusatory to anybody else, you're bitter.

I was speaking just to a small house group in Texas. People didn't know each other. I just wrote to everybody I knew in Texas to show up at this house.

These people didn't know each other. I was speaking on this subject, and one of the couples said, I heard this at Washington State University. I'd been bitter toward my mother for 10 years.

And I got rid of my bitterness. And I came down here to Texas and met somebody who was very bitter toward their mother. And I said, boy, I can help her.

So I went to help her and realized I couldn't remember anything I'd been bitter about for those 10 years. Gone. So, first we want to know that bitterness is your sin and your sin only.

Oh, I started to say, 10 years after thinking about we moved to Annapolis and oh, something else had happened. Oh, after we got to Michigan, we had a house with a very big bedroom where you had a double bed and a chaise lounge and a desk and all kinds of space. And Bessie and I could go up there and the kids could be left out of the box and we'd be Bessie could read in bed and I'd be working at the desk and just a nice, tranquil home.

Except whatever I was doing at the desk wasn't doing any better than the storm windows was working. And I was getting steamed at this desk when my dear, sweet wife said something to me and I turned around and let her have it. She's in bed.

She looked at me in amazement, got up and left the room. And again I said, she shouldn't have said it. Well, I knew I knew it was my sin and my sin only.

Amy Carmichael in a little book called *If* has a little sub-thing at the bottom says a cup brimming full of sweet water will not spill one drop of bitter water regardless how hard it's jolted. That might not be a direct quotation. If you're filled with honey, you don't spill vinegar.

It doesn't turn sweet water into bitter water when you get jolted. All the jolt does is bring out what's on the inside. And when my Bessie said this to me when I was in the storm windows, she just kicked the cup.

And what was on the inside? The cup came out. In bed, she just jolted the cup. And what was on my inside came out.

Well, I knew again I had to confess my sin. I got up from the desk, went over to my side of the bed, got on my knees and confessed God it was my sin and my sin only. Got up off my knees and said, but look what she said.

I got back on my knees and said, sorry God, that slipped out. Got back on my knees and said, God, I'm the only one in fault and I'm confessing my sin. Got up off my knees and said, but you and I know who's really in fault.

Back on my knees. Well, I probably stayed on my knees 40 minutes before I could get up and say and not say something accusing about my wife. Listen, you stay with it until the bitterness is gone.

Tomorrow morning we're going to talk about having continual joy, so I'm not telling you much. I really want you to define it that you've got it. It's extremely evil.

It's of the devil. And what makes it much worse is you think you're innocent. And you will not get back to the joy of the Lord even if the other person confesses.

You won't do it until you confess your sin. Well, we'll go into detail tomorrow morning on confessing sin and I'm going to mention this one, how to maintain joy in your life. That will be what the talk will be about.

There are three other booklets for sale that helped me back before we were married. One is called The Calvary Road and I read that in I think March of 51 and Clean House. Another one called Continuous Revival.

These are booklets, small booklets. And I think I read that in 56. Same truth about confession of sin but the second one had a sense of immediacy.

No process. God's grace is instantly available. It forgives bitterness but you have to know you're better.

the other person may be guilty. The other person may be guilty but whether she stays guilty or he stays guilty or gets rid of it, it doesn't change you. The only way you can be free from, oh I mentioned earlier, compassion and bitterness don't go together.

The scripture says rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say rejoice. It's impossible for a bitter person to rejoice in the Lord always or at all.

So before we get into the positive aspects of Christian life, you've got to get rid of the negative ones and you've got to recognize what they are. Just a little postscript on I always thought it was something else that somebody did. But in recent recent years I found something else that was a temptation for me to be bitter.

Not a cause but a temptation. And it's taken care of by the fruit of the spirit. The fruit of the spirit is patience.

Impatience precedes bitterness. Impatience precedes bitterness. And all kinds of things can make you impatient.

You may not be other people at all. But when you're impatient not very long until you're bitter. So you have to take care of that one too.

And there'd be many other things but I wanted to throw in that impatience. Largely because I get impatient. And I recognize it.

I think we'll call it unless I want to hear some repetition.

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