



how to

have a better



relationship



with



anybody



A BIBLICAL APPROACH



James Hilt





Dig Out the Root of Bitterness

If we came across a large venomous snake in our path, most of us would go to great lengths to avoid it. Yet, we so often do just the opposite when we meet bitterness, although its venom poisons a person's system. We allow large injections to penetrate us, setting into motion raw forces that can ruin our health and relationships.

It distresses me that so many people have been struck by it. Some Christians are the most bitter people I know. Bitterness is presently poisoning the body of Christ, providing our common enemy with strategic strongholds from which to stir up division and strife.

Thus, the body of Christ desperately needs a mass healing of bitterness. I contend that such an event could ignite another great awakening comparable to the one that was witnessed during

Edwards, Wesley, and Whitefield's time. Without bitterness, fresh torrents of love would gush forth among believers, offering the world a clearer picture of what Christ-centered love and fellowship are all about.

Are you bitter? Has any bitterness taken root toward others, God, or yourself? List on a sheet of paper the names of those people toward whom you are bitter.

Perhaps bitterness has bound you for years. You think that time has taken care of it. But, instead, like a ball that has been forced underwater, the bitterness has merely been pushed down deep inside your life. In other words, it was buried alive and still needs true liquidation.

If you are embittered, dig out that "bitter root" (Heb. 12:15). Heed Paul's words: "Get rid of all bitterness" (Eph. 4:31). Here are four steps that, followed closely, will bring the needed healing.

1. CONFESS THE BITTERNESS AS SIN TO CHRIST.

Perhaps you have suffered a great loss or been deeply wounded by another person. Nevertheless, do not try to justify your reaction or explain it away. First, you must recognize that a bitter reaction is always a sinful reaction and can never be rationalized away. Bitterness always needs to be confessed to God, regardless of its cause. When you have confessed the sin, be sure to breathe in God's forgiveness, which He promised (see 1 John 1:9).

2. ASK GOD FOR THE POWER TO FULLY ACCEPT THE SOURCE OF THE BITTERNESS. ASK HIM TO HELP YOU REMOVE THE MENTAL REVOLT, THE INWARD STEWING IN CONNECTION WITH IT.

Often our minds fixate on what has hurt or offended us. Its memory is replayed incessantly. But that only narrows the field of consciousness, driving away positive, wholesome thoughts. So instead of mentally replaying the offense like a record, take the needle off.

Sound difficult, or even impossible? I understand. Sometimes we are truly powerless to accept certain blows or setbacks in life. That is why only God is able to grant the power to accept them. And the only way for us to receive that power is to ask Him for it.

By acceptance, however, I do not mean to suggest that we must somehow relish our hurt or count it as good. Many of our afflictions result from evil forces in the world and should never be seen as anything less than evil. Acceptance is not the same as approval.

Nor should God be thanked for the offense. Sometimes we are told to praise God for everything. I strongly disagree with this statement. How can we praise Him for evil itself such as adultery, cheating, or mental or physical brutality? To do so accuses God of being the culprit and severely distorts His image! As seen throughout Scripture, God detests and is angered by all evil. And we must detest it, too. He should never be praised for anything of a fallen or evil nature.

Christ can be thanked, however, for the way He can work even through evil to bring about good in our lives (Rom. 8:28). For example, young Joe's parents constantly fought. The fighting led to divorce, something never intended by God. Instead, this deeply grieved Him.

God, however, worked through Joe's tragic home life to make him sensitive and understanding toward the struggles of others, thereby bringing good out of a raw situation. Thus, there is a big difference between praising God for evil and thanking Him for faithfully bearing fruit through it.

Paul Tournier, the noted Christian counselor and writer, put it this way: “Accepting suffering, bereavement, and disease does not mean taking pleasure in them, steeling oneself against them, or hoping that distractions or the passage of time will make us forget them. It means offering them to God so that He can make them bring forth fruit.”¹

Furthermore, acceptance is not synonymous with indifference or mental resignation. Sometimes Christ directs us to eliminate the trouble spot, as Paul did with the accusations leveled at him from Corinth. At other times, we are told to keep still, as Christ did before Pilate. Whatever direction we might receive, we must patiently endure. But such an endurance is active, not passive.

Acceptance of our suffering frees us up to tap into God’s best resources to go on and initiate change when we’re told to do so. Christ then has more to work with to restore us and to bring about any needed resolution. Our pains can be used to advance the kingdom.

Consider the apostle Paul. His sufferings were great. His mental state of acceptance, however, allowed him to endure and serve instead of reacting with bitterness. God could then sustain him and work through his pains to shake the Roman Empire.

Not only does God want us to accept the pains of the past and present, but future ones as well. In the garden of Gethsemane, Christ foresaw the soon-to-come fist blows to the face from burly Roman soldiers, the crown of thorns, the burning nails, and the heartless mockings. Worse still was the prospect of His Father’s separation from Him. And, as seen through His blood-like sweat, everything inside of Him recoiled at it all. But Christ accepted His hour of darkness in advance, knowing that it would unleash awesome spiritual forces for good in the world. Upheld by God’s grace, we can do the same.

3. ASK CHRIST FOR THE POWER TO FORGIVE EVERYONE WHO HAS OFFENDED YOU—THOSE WHOSE ACTIONS PRECIPITATED THE BITTERNESS.

Notice in Ephesians 4 that, following the command in verse 31 to “get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger,” Paul proceeded to add in verse 32: “Be kind and compassionate to one another, *forgiving each other*, just as in Christ God forgave you” (italics added).

Before we can show compassion and kindness to our offenders, we must exercise forgiveness. But relying solely on our own human resources, we are powerless to do this according to God’s specifications. That is why we must ask Christ for the power to forgive. He alone holds the key.

“But the person who hurt me doesn’t deserve to be forgiven,” you might say. “He hasn’t even said he’s sorry.” Forgive him in your mind, anyway. If he has truly wronged you and not yet repented, he still bears his guilt. He is still accountable to God.

We must remember that forgiveness releases the pressure of steam that can otherwise build up, causing great mental stress. It is a wonderful therapeutic device, which cleanses, heals, and brings increased love, peace, and strength to the mind. Forgiveness is therefore not a grudging burden, but an experience of relief and joy.

So forgive each person by name. If self-directed bitterness exists, do not hold a grudge against yourself. Forgive yourself as well.

Following forgiveness, the question is usually asked: Should I tell my offender they’ve been forgiven? It all depends on Christ’s specific will. In prayer ask Him to reveal it to you. In response, Christ might direct you to approach this person and verbally make amends, knowing this would maximize healing and reconciliation. On the other hand, He might lead you to remain

silent, knowing that speaking up would do more harm than good. Whatever direction you receive, trust that it will serve the greatest good.

4. ASK CHRIST TO HEAL YOU OF ALL THE BITTERNESS HELD TOWARD OTHERS, GOD, OR YOURSELF FROM YOUR PAST AND PRESENT.

Allow Him to dig up all of the bitterness that has perhaps been growing and entangling your life like a root for years. The entire “bitter root” must be removed, if complete healing is to occur. Only Christ can remove all of your bitterness—past and present—and give you a new attitude and outlook.

Confession, acceptance, forgiveness, and healing—obviously, those are simple steps. But used by the Spirit of God, they are power-packed! For years I have led many individuals, married couples, and groups through those four steps in prayer, which often resulted in remarkable transformations of minds and relationships. Sometimes during prayer, people discover an immediate and total release from bitterness. They describe a newfound freedom from bondage—something that had bound them for days, months, or years.

Such was the experience of several people already mentioned, including Ben. After asking God to release him from the bitterness he held toward his parents, God, and himself, Ben sensed an immediate release from his bondage. Before long, his vengeful feelings and acts leveled at his parents gave way to a new compassion for them. Ben began to see his father in a new light, which compelled him to open up lines of communication with him.

Along with this, Ben stopped reacting bitterly against God and began to build a new image of and relationship with Him. Instead of viewing Christ as an oppressive tyrant, he began to see Him as a trusted Friend.

As a result of being healed of self-directed bitterness, Ben no longer sought revenge against himself. No longer did he set himself up for personal failure. Rather, he pursued godly self-acceptance (as described in chapter 1), replacing the self-directed harshness with self-directed kindness.

Although the feeling of release is immediate for some, others may require more time. Some people may need days or weeks before they can acknowledge all of the names of those toward whom they hold bitterness. In such cases, they must undergo the four steps more than once.

Whether the release is immediate or slow in coming, I have great confidence in God's response to the honest prayer for healing. Surely, God "heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds" (Ps. 147:3).

Following your prayer and Christ's response of healing, be on guard against temptations to pick up the bitterness again. To prevent this, deal quickly and wisely with your anger. Paul stressed this when he wrote "Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry" (Eph. 4:26). Remember that unresolved anger, whether righteous or unrighteous, can turn into bitterness. Then over time you will cultivate an accepting, forgiving spirit that will help prevent you from becoming embittered by the pains of this world.

Periodically throughout this book, bitterness will be examined. If at any point you identify a bitter root in your life, be sure to undergo the four described steps. As you do so, your mind and your relationships will be healed.

Interested in the whole book?
Select your preferred book seller:

MOODY PUBLISHERS 

AMAZON 

APPLE BOOKS 

GOOGLE PLAY 

BARNES & NOBLE 

CHRISTIANBOOK.COM 
