

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life. Psalm 139:23-24 (NLT)

There needs to be a willingness on your part to forsake your sin of bitterness.

Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of malicious behavior. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ Forgave you. Ephesians 4:31-32 (NIV)

Confession of your own sin and repentance for that sin must take place in your heart first. Then you must seek for other relationships to be healed and restored. Forgiving others is not an option for the Christian; it's required, and it is step number one in removing bitterness.

Since God chose you to be the holy people whom he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. You must make allowance for each other's faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Colossians 3:12-13 (NLT)

Forgiveness is an act of faith, not a feeling. When you forgive someone you do so on the basis that God will avenge you if necessary; that He will right any wrong that has been done. You trust that He will exact justice on your behalf.

When you forgive, you are transferring your perceived or legitimate right or claim to justice over to God. This takes an act of faith.

In forgiving others, it is important to remember a few important rules: When I forgive, I resolve never to bring this circumstance or situation up again to the one I forgave, to anyone else, or even to myself. It is a closed book.

If you are going to pattern your forgiveness after that of the Lord, then you will choose to remember no more the sin committed against you.

Acceptance of hard things at the hand of a loving God is not easy. I encourage you to seek God in your circumstances and to trust that He is unfolding a divine plan that you cannot see right now, just as He did in the case of Naomi and Ruth. God's sovereignty is always balanced by His love, and He promises to bring good out of every tragedy and heartache.

And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn, with many brothers and sisters. Romans 8:28-29 (NLT)

Ganschow, Julie. Seeing Depression through the Eyes of Grace (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 2006).

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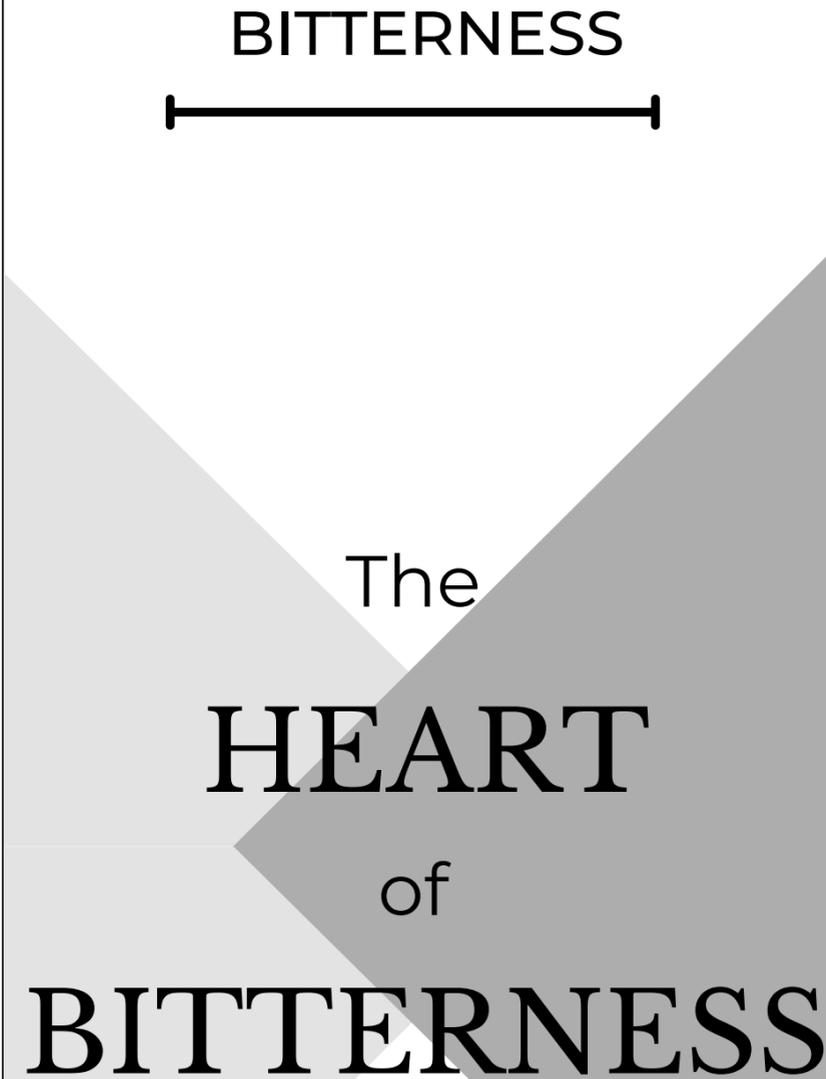
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The Heart of Bitterness

Bitterness is unresolved, unforgiven anger and resentment. It is the result of anger changing from an experience to a belief. Bitterness is seething and constant. Bitter people carry the same burdens as angry people, but to a greater extent.

Watch out that no bitter root of unbelief rises up among you, for whenever it springs up, many are corrupted by its poison. Hebrews 12:15 (NLT)

Bitterness does not affect only you, it affects everyone with whom you come into contact. In the book of Ruth we read about Naomi (which means pleasant), the wife of Elimelech. Elimelech took his wife and two sons down from Bethlehem to the country of Moab because there was a famine in the land. While living in Moab, the sons took wives named Ruth and Orpah from among the native people. Elimelech and his two sons died in Moab and left Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah to fend for themselves.

When news came that the famine in the land of Judah had lifted, Naomi decided to return home to her own people. The three women set out together, but on the way, Naomi gave the young women the freedom to return home to their own people and find new husbands. She said,

“Things are far more bitter for me than for you, because the LORD himself has caused me to suffer.” Ruth 1:10-14 (NLT)

Orpah did turn back, but Ruth was committed to Naomi and to her God. When they came to Bethlehem, the entire town was stirred by their arrival.

“Is it really Naomi?” the women asked. “Don’t call me Naomi,” she told them. “Instead, call me Mara, [meaning bitter] for the Almighty has made life very bitter for me. I went away full, but the LORD has brought me home empty. Why should you call me Naomi when the LORD has caused me to suffer and the Almighty has sent such tragedy?” Ruth 1:19-21 (NLT)

What do you suppose it was that caused the whole town to stir? Could it have been Naomi’s appearance? Do you wonder if they could see the changes that had taken place inside her heart on her face? Note the things Naomi says in verses 19-21:

“Things are far more bitter for me than for you, because the LORD himself has caused me to suffer.” And “. . . Call me Mara, for the Almighty has made life very bitter for me. I went away full, but the LORD has brought me home empty. Why should you call me Naomi when the LORD has caused me to suffer and the Almighty has sent such tragedy?”

Naomi blamed God for making her life bitter and empty. All she could see was that she no longer had what she loved. Her bitterness reflected a heart of unbelief in the justice and sovereignty of God. She held on to the anger for what had been done to her and stood in judgment over God. In the entire text, we see nothing of Naomi’s quest to understand the purpose of God in her suffering. We only read that she was angry and bitter for what she had lost.

Perhaps you struggle with the same type of bitterness. Sometimes women and men who have lost children to illness or accident blame God for their loss. “God, how could you take my beloved child from me? Don’t You know how much I loved him? How could You do this to me?” An abandoned spouse may become bitter as they wonder, “God, don’t You see how much I am struggling to raise these kids while he is out living the high life? How can you let him get away with this? I am the one who was faithful, and now I am the one who is miserable while he has it made!

You become bitter out of a belief that God will not punish the people who hurt you, that God does not hear your plea, or that He does not care about your plight. Since God is apparently not going to intervene in your circumstances, you stand in as judge, jury, and executioner in the lives of other people.

It becomes a circular pattern. The more you dwell on what has been done to you, the injustice you have suffered, or the loss you have incurred, the deeper goes the root of bitterness. You already know that carrying around a load of bitterness is exhausting. Bitterness hardens your heart on the inside and your features on the outside. It also defiles those around you because it is contagious.

Curing The Bitter Heart

Do you want the cure for bitterness? You must understand that the only cure for bitterness and anger is forgiveness.

Bitterness is focused on what has been done to you. To break up bitterness, you must also be willing to look at what you have done to others. Your task is to admit what your responsibility is in the matter and go to those you have hurt, confess your sin to them and ask their forgiveness. You must be willing to get the log out of your own eye prior to examining your neighbor’s eye.

And why worry about a speck in your friend’s eye when you have a log in your own? How can you think of saying, ‘Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,’ when you can’t see past the log in your own eye? Hypocrite! First get rid of the log from your own eye; then perhaps you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend’s eye. Matthew 7:3-5 (NLT)

The examination process begins right here at home. Start with yourself and seek God’s help in revealing the contents of your heart in relation to how you have sinned against others.