

Bitterness: 7 Signs of Slavery: 3 Steps to Freedom

([Adapted from an article by Brenda Rodgers, published by iBelieve.com](#))

(Preached here at the S.A.L.T. on Wednesday, September 23, 2020)

“And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.”

(Ephesians 4:30-32)

Bitterness. Is it a sin that you've struggled with most of your life? Have you been bitter towards people, circumstances, and even God? If that's true about you, then don't you find it interesting that when any of *those* entities seem to change... whenever *those* people, circumstances, or etc. seem to change, don't you find it interesting that *still* your bitterness remains. For example, suppose your husband, wife, father or mother had passed away several years ago, but the unresolved bitterness that you had towards them did not? This happens. Bitterness can and yes, too too often does remain

and then, in some awful way, manifests itself in your life. Has this been true with any (one or more) of your circumstances? Perhaps for years you were in a situation that you very much wished was different. Now maybe things are more to your liking but still you struggle with bitterness - bitterness that is ultimately directed towards God (whether you want to admit it or not); yes, towards God.

Bitterness destroys our minds, souls, and bodies. According to writer Brenda Rodgers, John Ortberg Jr. wrote, "Bitterness is like drinking rat poison and waiting for the rat to die." Eventually, bitterness will kill us either physically - because it can contribute to physical sickness - or spiritually by not allowing us to experience the peace God wants for us. In fact, in the end, it will leave us utterly at odds, at "enmity with God." Yes, God! God who is "the Father of mercies" (2 Corinthians 1:3). "God [who] is love" (1 John 4:8). God who is *not* "the god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4:4).

"Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is **enmity with God**? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is **the enemy of God**." (James 4:4)

The most distinct example of bitterness in the Bible is the story of Naomi in the book of Ruth. Naomi's husband and two sons died, and all she had left were her two daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah. Naomi told Ruth and Orpah to go back to their homelands while Naomi went back to hers in Judah. Both

women refused and said they wanted to stay with Naomi. However, Naomi insisted they go saying, "Things are far more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord himself has raised his fist against me" (Ruth 1:13). Here Naomi shows her bitterness towards her circumstances and towards God.

Ruth did end up accompanying Naomi back to Judah while Orpah continued on to her homeland. When Naomi and Ruth arrived in Bethlehem everyone was excited to see them, but Naomi said, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, when the Lord has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?" (Ruth 1:20-21). Naomi's name meant "pleasant" whereas "Mara" meant "bitter."

Naomi's circumstances later changed. Ruth meets and marries Boaz, their kinsman-redeemer, and from Ruth and Boaz's family lineage came Jesus. However, despite God using Naomi's circumstances for good, I wonder if she remained bitter. Did she? Do you?

If you struggle with bitterness like Naomi did (and like many of us have), there is hope. The Bible makes very clear *what* the signs of bitterness are, and tells us exactly *how* to let go of it.

Hear what God says.

"Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."
(Ephesians 4:31-32, KJV).

Hear it in another translation.

"Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." (Ephesians 4:31-32, NASB)

Hear it in the Amplified Bible.

"Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor [perpetual animosity, resentment, strife, fault-finding] and slander be put away from you, along with every kind of malice [all spitefulness, verbal abuse, malevolence]. Be kind *and* helpful to one another, tender-hearted [compassionate, understanding], forgiving one another [readily and freely], just as God in Christ also forgave you."
(Ephesians 4:31-32, AMP)

Now, hear this expansion of God's great victorious helpful and *healing* truth.

Here Are Seven Signs that Bitterness Is Controlling You:

1. You have imaginary conversations in your mind with someone.

We're all familiar with the unending chatter, or clamor, that takes place in our minds when we're bitter towards someone. We rehearse what we want to say to them or what we wish we would have said to them. When you are having imaginary conversations that do not cease, it's a sign that you're bitter.

2. You feel the need to slander someone to other people.

Slandering someone who's hurt us makes us feel validated, doesn't it? You can be quick to go to friends and tell them about situations in hopes they'll tell you what you want to hear - that you're right, that "he" or "she" deserves it, and that "they" shouldn't blame you. Sometimes you can't get back at the person in a tangible way, so you hurt them indirectly by secretly slandering them. This is a red flag that you're holding on to bitterness.

3. You replay a conversation or experience over and over in your mind.

Whether it's a conversation or an experience, you make something that's in the past come into the present every time you replay it in your mind.

Jesus came to redeem our pasts, even the parts that are not a result of our sin. However, when we relive them we're not allowing Him to do that. We must do what the Apostle Paul tells us in Philippians 3:13, "Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead."

4. You're happy when someone else fails.

If you're honest, sometimes you get a smirk on your face when someone that you're bitter towards faces some type of hardship. Celebrating other people's misfortune is the "malice" that Paul mentions in Ephesians 4, and it is sinful. Malice shows that we are harboring bitterness in our hearts.

5. You feel anger every time you hear a particular person's name.

We've probably all experienced our muscles tighten and teeth clench when we hear certain people's names. Although that is expected when we've been hurt in a substantial way, it is a sign that we have not fully forgiven the person.

6. You don't behave naturally around a person.

When you're bitter towards a person it's hard to behave towards them as you normally would someone else. In fact, either often or always, you're not friendly towards them or don't engage them in conversation at all.

Not only does this let you know that you're bitter, but the other person knows it as well.

7. You complain often.

The first sign that you are bitter towards God is when you complain often about your circumstances. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 says, "Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." But what are we supposed to give thanks for? We can give thanks for the truth that God will use the circumstance for good. Nothing is wasted on God. Just because we may not see the good come to fruition in our lifetime, does not take away from the eternal good that is coming. Yes, by faith we can and should thank God for using it for His glory in some way (Romans 8:28).

How to Let Go and Find Healing:

According to Ephesians 4:32, God tells us what we can do to let go and find healing from bitterness: "Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you."

★ Be kind.

There's a saying, "fake it until you make it," that is what we need to do to start letting go and healing from bitterness. Being kind is not

always easy. But being kind to someone who doesn't deserve it makes the biggest statement for Jesus. The world is used to living by "an eye for an eye", so when we show undeserved kindness we're displaying the grace and mercy of God.

★ **Be tenderhearted.**

Being tenderhearted means being empathetic, showing compassion and mercy. Changing your thoughts from bitterness to tenderness can have the biggest impact on you as you heal from bitterness against someone else (whether they are alive *or* dead). Often, people who were bitter find themselves more sympathetic when, in life, they find *themselves* in similar situations that the person they were bitter against were in.

One example of this comes from the son of a man who hated his father, who was a World War II veteran with an evident case of PTSD. After returning from the war, his father turned to alcoholism and then gradually destroyed his family. Naturally, the son grew up hating his father, and continued to despise his father for the rest of his adult life. That is, at least, until after reading Linda Hillenbrand's famous book about the life of Louis Zamperini. By gaining empathy from that book into the soul of a man with similar issues as his father, that grown son was at last freed from the corrupting twistings of bitterness. Practicing

tenderheartedness can give you a new perspective and help you to grow in thankfulness for what you have experienced. Yes, you can be freed from dysfunctionality to living a productive loving Christ-centered life.

★ **Forgive one another.**

We all deserve bitterness. All of us have hurt people, even if it was unintentional; worse yet: according to Ephesians 4:30, we have "grieved "the holy Spirit of God." Forgiveness is central to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Without forgiveness, there would be no salvation. So if Jesus forgave us, shouldn't we forgive other people?

I think we have mistaken forgiveness as a "once and done" act, but typically this is not the case. Forgiveness is more often a process that requires a continual laying down of thoughts *and* emotions at the Cross. Sometimes we have to forgive again every day and make the repeated declaration, "No, I will not be bitter. I forgive this person."

Write it down! Make it a daily affirmation and live it everyday.

Here are three final added suggestions that could help:

I. Accept the sovereignty of God.

When we're bitter towards God because of our circumstances, we have to admit that we are questioning His sovereignty. Naomi in the story of Ruth doubted God's sovereignty. She could not understand how taking her husband and sons, and her livelihood could possibly turn out for good. To be honest - can you blame her? She had a lot of heartache to come to terms with. However, we may, and we must - we *must* work to get to a place where we say, along with our Savior, "your will be done" (Matthew 6:10). On this earth, we have such a limited view of "the end." We think that our end is the end when it's really just God's story unfolding to show His lavish love on us when the true end comes. That day *will* come when we will all look back and understand all He did, but... why wait until *then* to be grateful?

II. Pray into the circumstance and for the person.

An active way to let go and find healing is to pray into the circumstance by

1. Asking God to use the circumstance both for good *and* to help you to see that it *is* for your good (Romans 8:28), and to
2. Pray for the person you're resentful towards. Prayer has a way of softening our hearts and of helping us to be kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving. Louis Zamperini learned to *continue* a life of freedom from bitterness towards the men (and especially their leader, "the bird")

who tortured him in a Japanese concentration camp. He states his secret for this very plainly.

- "I began praying for them."

III. Seek professional, Christian counseling.

Many of us experience horrific circumstances and events in our lives, events that we cannot overcome *alone*. Professional, *Christ*-centered counseling can help us when bitterness continues to control our lives. God did not mean for us to do this life alone. He makes qualified people available to you with God-given talents to help you when you need it. In fact, why not begin by "confessing your fault" to a close Christian friend, and asking them to begin praying with you for God to do one of the many miracles that he so biblically and evidently delights to do - *free you* and *help* you to be immediately freed from being a *slave* to... bitterness.

Conclusion

We, here at the S.A.L.T., will now conclude this message by sharing a very helpful portion an interview with Louis Zamperini.

Louis Zamperini is a World War 2 hero who also gaine fame *on many other different levels*. He life has been popularly portrayed in the still best selling book, [*Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption*](#) by Linda Hillendbrand, a televised documentary, *and* two

major motion pictures: *Unbroken* (poorly produced, in our opinion, by Angelina Jolie), and [Unbroken: Path to Redemption](#). This [interview. that we now quote from for you, was conducted by John Meroney, and published in The Atlantic](#), on September 11, 2014.

Meroney: *After the war, you had nightmares about being a prisoner of war. Hillenbrand discloses that these dreams were so extreme, you almost strangled your pregnant wife to death in your sleep thinking she was the "Bird," the man who tortured you.*

Zamperini: *Those nightmares came every night. I looked good, had my weight back, but I had nightmares. I'd always wake up wringing wet. I thought I was strangling the Bird. I honestly wanted to go back to Japan and secretly find and kill him before I'd be satisfied.*

Meroney: *And your life was never the same after Billy Graham.*

Zamperini: *Well, that night I went back to his prayer room and made my profession of faith in Christ. I asked God to forgive me for not being conscious that He answered my prayer requests. While I was still on my knees, I knew there was a change. It happened within seconds.*

Meroney: *What was it?*

Zamperini: *I felt this perfect calm, a peace. The Bible calls it the peace that passeth all understanding. I knew then that I was through getting drunk, smoking, and chasing around. I also knew I'd forgiven all my prison guards, including the Bird. Boy, that's something. So I got up, went home, and that was the first night in four years that I didn't have a nightmare. And I haven't had one since.*

Meroney: *How did forgiving your captors change your life?*

Zamperini: *Well, when you hate somebody, you don't hurt them in the least. All you're doing is hurting yourself. But if you can forgive—and if it's true—you'll feel good. It's chemical. White corpuscles flood your immune system, and that's a secret to good health.*

Meroney: *What kind of response are you receiving from Unbroken?*

Zamperini: *Ninety percent of the letters I get are from people who've been hurting, and they contact me for advice or counseling. I had one this morning—a woman with three little children, divorced. She goes to church, says she's a Christian. She can't forgive her former husband. She said, "I read your book and what it says about forgiveness and I broke down and cried." I quoted Mark Twain for her: "Forgiveness is the fragrance that the violet sheds on the heel that has crushed it."*

Meroney: *What else did you tell her?*

Zamperini: *That forgiveness has to be complete. If you hate somebody, it's like a boomerang that misses its target and comes back and hits you in the head. The one who hates is the one who hurts. I talked to girls at a school in Palos Verdes and I said, "If you want to age quickly, then hate somebody." After that, I got a letter from one of them, she was probably 15. "I went to a girl whom I'd hated for two years and I asked her to forgive me," she wrote. "Now we're the best of friends." So forgiving someone is healing. To hate somebody hurts you physically, mentally, and spiritually.*

ACKNOWLEDGMENT:

Again, we here at the S.A.L.T. wish to thank Ms. Rodgers for allowing God to use her to both inspire the above message, and for continuing to obey our Lord's command to "love your neighbor as yourself" through books, articles and blog.

"Brenda Rodgers [as stated in her article published by iBelieve.com, and entitled, "[Z Signes that Bitterness is Controlling You \(and How to Let God and Find Healing\)](#)", considers herself a "recovering single" after years as a single woman chasing after marriage instead of chasing after Jesus. Now her passion is to mentor young women to live purposefully and grow in their relationship with God and others. Brenda has been married for five years to a heart transplant hero and is the mom

of a toddler girl miracle. She is also the author of the eBook *Fall for Him: [25 Challenges from a Recovering Single](#)*. You can also read more on Brenda's blog, www.TripleBraidedLife.com and follow her on Twitter and Facebook."

OUTLINE:

7 Signs that Bitterness is Controlling You (and How to Let Go and Find Healing)

Seven Signs that Bitterness is Controlling You:

- 1. You have imaginary conversations in your mind with someone.**
- 2. You feel the need to slander someone to other people.**
- 3. You replay a conversation or experience over and over in your mind.**
- 4. You're happy when someone else fails.**
- 5. You feel anger every time you hear a particular person's name.**
- 6. You don't behave naturally around a person.**
- 7. You complain often.**

How to Let Go and Find Healing:

- **Be kind.**
- **Be tenderhearted.**
- **Forgive one another.**

There are three other suggestions that are not found in Ephesians 4:32, but that might be helpful and I want to add here:

- 1. Accept the sovereignty of God.**
- 2. Pray into the circumstance and for the person.**
- 3. Seek professional, Christian counseling.**

WORSHIP:

[Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior \(311\)](#)

Opening:

[Safe In the Arms of Jesus](#)

[God Will Take Care of You \(393\)](#)

Message:

[Nearer My God to Thee \(426\)](#)

Prayer:

["Be Grateful" \(Original\)\(1978\) Walter Hawkins](#)