



# Life Blueprints

Overcoming Bitterness  
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## **Table of Contents**

I. Introduction

II. Better.

III. Identify What Is Making You Bitter.

    Take The Initiative To Forgive.

    Thank The Lord.

VI. Eliminate Your Excuses.

VII. Release It.

VIII. Never Resort To Unkindness.

    Expect Disappointments And Set Backs.

    Satan Must Be Resisted.

XI. Sin Must Be Confessed.

XII. Endnotes

# I. Introduction

## Hebrews 12:15 NASV

*See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;*

## Ephesians 4:31-32 NASV

*Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. [32] And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.*

Marriage is the kind of thing that can start out very beautifully and then suddenly become very difficult. It can turn into open war. Oh, it's a different kind of war. In this kind of war, you sleep with your enemy. <sup>1</sup>

You may have heard about the guy who got up on the morning after his wedding and said sternly to his new bride, "I want a hot meal. Prepare one. My mother always fixed a hot meal for me." His bride snapped back, "You want a hot meal? Go set a bowl of corn flakes on fire." (Dr. Charles Lowery)

The unfortunate truth is that many of us, instead of offering total forgiveness, pray something like this Irish Prayer:

May those who love us, love us; And those who don't love us May God turn their hearts; And if He doesn't turn their hearts, May He turn their ankles, So we'll know them by their limping. <sup>2</sup>

Over my years in ministry there have been hundreds of times when I've experienced strained relationships. I have had people swear at me, tell me where to go, how to get there, and offer their assistance. But I have never knowingly let them walk out the door without telling them I love them. I don't hold any grudges or carry any resentment against anyone. I cannot stress this enough: if you don't have peace, it isn't because someone took it from you; you gave it away. You cannot always control what happens to you, but you can control what happens in you.

## 1. Bitterness Defined

Greek – It has the idea of being sharp. Also to press down.

Bitterness will stick you, press you down, weigh you down. You are carrying a weight that will destroy you.

Webster's New World Dictionary

"Sharp and disagreeable; harsh; severe; piercing." "Characterized by strong feelings of hatred, resentment, cynicism, etc.

## **2. Bitterness Described**

"Bitterness is the most dangerous of all attitudes to healthy Christian living...It is the cancer of the soul, claiming millions of victims each year. It spreads faster than the common cold and threatens the survival of many churches." ("When the Road Gets Rough" – Hindson & Byrd)

It's a spirit of getting even, carrying a grudge, directed resentment, harbored hurt.

Often the person feels he/she has a right to feel this way.

## **3. The Causes of Bitterness**

**Hebrews 12:15** refers to a "**root of bitterness.**" It's something below the ground. You only see the fruit of it. It's the source, the origin, the cause. You must deal with the underlying cause of bitterness. A root begins small. It is a seed that finds a place and begins to grow. Bitterness begins small, yet if it finds a place in your mind and heart, it will grow.

Let's identify five roots of bitterness:

### **a. Unresolved Anger**

Inward anger. You never got it resolved. You didn't let go of it.

### **b. Unresolved Conflicts**

A refusal to deal with and resolve a wrong. It festers. Perhaps a misunderstanding.

### **c. Unconfessed Sin**

Guilt leads to bitterness. Holding onto sin will embitter you. You often become critical of the things of God.

### **d. Unforgiving Spirit**

You start becoming like the person you refuse to forgive. He/she controls you.

#### **e. Unsatisfied with the Lord**

Blaming God, angry with God. “God, why didn’t you do something?” “God You seem unfair.”

### **4. The Consequences of Bitterness**

**Hebrews 12:15** “...*springing up*...” You can’t hide a bitter spirit. It spills out into your words, attitudes, countenance, reactions, relationships. There are five areas in which this bitterness shows up:

#### **a. Verbally**

Bitterness often comes out through the tongue. Poison comes out the mouth. Negative, critical, cynical, sarcastic words. Not encouraging words.

#### **b. Physically**

Bitterness can make you sick.

Psalm 32:3 NASV

When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away Through my groaning all day long.

#### **c. Emotionally**

Bitterness leads to loneliness, depression, discouragement. It zaps your joy. It robs you of peace of mind. It leaves you feeling hopeless.

#### **d. Spiritually**

It’s sin. It destroys your fellowship with God. It blinds you and binds you spiritually. It silences your praise. It hands God’s enemy an opportunity. Notice you start operating out from under grace. You get out of His will.

#### **e. Relationally**

**Hebrews 12:15** “...*and by it many be defiled*...” Bitterness affects other people. It drives a wedge and pushes people away. Defile means contaminated. Bitterness contaminates others. You infect them.

How can you overcome bitterness? There is a cure. Hebrews 12:15 “*Looking diligently*...” It means to guard against it; continually watch out. **Let’s Use The Acrostic B-I-T-T-E-R-N-E-S-S To Find That Overcoming Cure.**

## II. Better.

Whenever something happens to you or is said to you that hurts you, disappoints you, angers you, you immediately must make a choice.

Am I going to let this make me bitter and resentful, or am I going to let this be an opportunity for me to become better? Can I see this as an on the job training in being like Christ? You can use the occasion to determine to do better.

“Lord, teach me something through this.” “Lord, help me learn from this experience.” Use this hurt to drive you to your knees. Determine, if nothing else, that you will jerk-proof your life. “God, help me to never lower myself to be a jerk in my attitude or words.” Remember Joseph after he had been sold into slavery and lied about by his brother? He had been wronged. But listen to the end of the story:

### **Genesis 50:20 NASV**

*"And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.*

Just confess, “Lord, I’ve been hurt. Lord, I’m angry. Lord, I’m about to be bitter, but some way somehow use this to make me a better Christian, a more effective servant of Yours.” Only God can do that.

### **III. Identify What Is Making You Bitter.**

Get to the cause, not the symptom, the root and not just the fruit of bitterness. What is it that's making you bitter? Is there a person who has hurt you, disappointed you, offended you? Has something happened to you that is causing your bitter spirit?

Is there a broken relationship, a divorce, the loss of someone you loved? Were you passed over for a promotion or treated unfairly? Maybe it's the way you were raised and now you are bitter at a parent or parents. Are you angry with someone? Are you angry with God? Do you feel God has wronged you?

Be honest with God about how you feel. Don't hold back. Identify it. Face it. Admit it. Find out what's eating at you.

## IV. Take The Initiative To Forgive.

It's not a matter of feelings, it's a matter of choice, a matter of the will. Right choices equal right feelings, however, making choices based on your feelings will never get you beyond your bitterness. Don't wait for someone to seek your forgiveness, take the initiative.

**Ephesians 4:32** “...*forgiving each other...*” This means a continuous process. Keep on forgiving. Here's the attitude: “I don't like what you did, I don't approve of what you did, but I choose to let you go by forgiving you.”

Don't nurse it, quit rehearsing it, take the initiative and forgive. You may need to forgive God. It's not that God has done anything wrong, but if you think He has, you need to forgive Him. Perhaps you feel God has been unfair.

## **V. Thank The Lord.**

Again you don't have to feel it, you choose it.

### **I Thessalonians 5:18 NASV**

*in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*

You may ask, "How can I thank God or feel grateful for what has happened to me?" You aren't thanking Him for the event. "Oh thank you that I just got my feelings hurt." "Thank you that I just got cut off by that driver." "I'm so thankful I just hit my finger with this big hammer."

When you thank God you aren't feeling grateful, you are making a transfer. You are transferring what has happened to you over to God. Thanking God is your passbook to blessing.

When you thank God and praise Him, you release Him to work in your life. You take away the devil's opportunity. You thank Him that He can bring something good out of a bad situation.

## **VI. Eliminate Your Excuses.**

“You just don’t understand, it’s the way I was raised.” “You don’t understand what he did or she said.” “I just can’t help it, I was born this way.” “That’s just the way I am.” “It’s not my fault.” “I can’t forgive, besides, he/she doesn’t deserve my forgiveness.”

That’s just the kind of things you would expect to hear on TV talk shows, and it’s not the kind of thing you should expect from a Christian.

That famous “gospel group” the Eagles, has a very relevant song, which says it all—“Get Over It.” Stop making excuses for wrong feelings and wrong attitudes.

Take responsibility for your life. If you have “Ring around the collar” quit blaming your wife and start washing your neck.

“If it’s ever to be, it’s up to me.” A Christian must never make excuses for a wrong spirit.

### **Best Alibi**

When the Police League of Indiana sponsored a Best Speeding Alibi contest, one honorable mention award went to an exasperated father who was stopped with a load of fighting, squalling children in his back seat. He told the officer, “I was trying to get away from all the noise behind me.”

### **Worst Alibi**

This story comes from the Pittsburgh Press: “George Shamblin insisted to police that he was trying to save his wife from drowning when he threw rocks at her as she struggled in the Kanawaha River. ‘I was trying to drive her back to shore,’ he said.”<sup>3</sup>

## **VII. Release It.**

### **Hebrews 10:30 NASV**

*For we know Him who said, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY." And again, "THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE."*

Release it by realizing it is not up to you to get even. Leave that up to God. Give Him the freedom to deal with the person or people who have hurt you. You aren't a one-person hit squad for God.

Let go of it. That bitterness will destroy you. Release it and let God handle it.

## **VIII. Never Resort To Unkindness.**

### **Ephesians 4:32 NASV**

*And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.*

Develop a kind and gracious spirit. Don't be unkind. In fact, do something nice even for those who have made you feel bitter. Show genuine love. Yes, stand up for what you believe. Yes, be firm, but also be kind. You can do both.

You never know what that person is going through. You may have just been at the right place at the wrong time. You keep on smiling, keep on speaking, keep on reaching out, keep on being gracious. (I'm not suggesting that you let yourself be run over.) When you are unkind, you have become like the person who made you feel bitter. You'll be amazed how much better you will feel when you keep on being kind.

## **IX. Expect Disappointments And Set Backs.**

That's just part of life. It comes with the territory. Tough times will come, difficulties will arise, people will let you down and hurt you (certainly not always intentionally). You will get offended.

### **Luke 17:1 NASV**

*And He said to His disciples, "It is inevitable that stumbling blocks should come, but woe to him through whom they come!"*

The issue is one of "when," not "if." Also, the issue is not that it will happen, the issue is how you will handle it when it does happen.

### **Luke 17:3 NASV**

*"Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him."*

There are two obligations Jesus set forth when a person has been offended: (1) Rebuke. It's not biting someone's head off, but letting him know that what he did bothered you or hurt you. It's "speaking the truth in love." (2) Forgive. Let it go. Send the offense away. Choose to release it.

Jesus says, "Be on guard." "Take heed." **Luke 17:3** Expect it. Be ready for it. Know how you will respond.

## **X. Satan Must Be Resisted.**

Your bitterness is a welcome mat, it is a formal invitation for the devil to work in your life. James says to resist him and he will run.

### **James 4:7 NASV**

*Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.*

It begins by obeying God. Do what God says (submit). **Resist** means to stand against. You take your stand against Satan by obeying God's word, being right with God, standing on God's word, standing for the things of God. He will flee – be put on the run. **Flee** means to run away. By choosing to forgive, you put the devil to doing a sprint.

## **XI. Sin Must Be Confessed.**

Bitterness must never be tolerated in the life of a Christian.

### **Ephesians 4:31 NASV**

*Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.*

Notice the bitterness is expressed most often through the tongue (what you say). Repentance can break the power of bitterness. There has to be a brokenness before you can break the bondage of bitterness.

### **CONCLUSION:**

You've carried that bitterness around too long. Do it now. Let it go. You don't have time for bitterness. You now have the key to unlock the chains of bitterness.

## **XII. Endnotes**

1 **Illustration:** “Church Humor Digest” – Graham

2 **Illustration:** “Be a People Person” – Maxwell

3 **Illustration:** “1001 Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking” – Hodgins