

Bitterness Part 2

By Wendy Wood



In the last blog, bitterness was defined and its roots and growth were discussed. You can read that article [here](#). In this second part, I want to lay out how to help someone repent of bitterness and display the fruit of a deep, abiding faith in the Lord.

First, your counselee needs to see their bitterness as sin. As the last article stated, anger, discontentment, and complaining are results of bitterness. As the mind dwells on the trials and difficulties of life, rather than on God, bitterness grows and grows into rebellion. Numbers 11 is one of my go-to scriptures to show the sinfulness of bitterness in one's heart. Moses and the Israelites are wandering in the desert. God has continually promised good to the Israelites (Numbers 10:29) and he continually showed His presence in the cloud and pillar (Numbers 10:24). And yet, the

Israelites were bitter. They focused on the hardships of life rather than God's presence and goodness. They were focused on what they thought they deserved, which was life on their own terms. Bitterness so turned their heart to negative thinking that their view of the past was skewed. The Israelites now claim that life in Egypt was good and they wished they were back living as slaves because that was better than what God was providing for them (Numbers 11:5). The Israelites were rejecting and rebelling against God's provision and protection over them. Numbers 11 shows how evil God sees the sin of bitterness. "And the people complained in the hearing of the Lord about their misfortunes, and when the Lord heard it, his anger was kindled, and the fire of the Lord burned among them and consumed some of the outlying parts of the camps" (vs 1). As the people continue to complain, God's judgment on their heart attitude is displayed in the form of a plague. God takes seriously the sin of bitterness. Remember, bitterness is our judgment of God's goodness and providence in our lives. When we complain and grumble, we are essentially telling God He has not been good to us. That is the root of bitterness that must be uprooted.

Ruth 1 is another passage to use to help your counselee see the destructive force of bitterness. Naomi and her husband left Israel for the land of Moab. We don't know the exact motive for leaving but they chose to leave the promised land for a pagan nation. There had been a famine in Israel (Ruth 1:1) so Elimelech took his wife and two sons to Moab. The sons married Moabite women (Ruth 1:4). After a period of time, Elimelech and both sons died. Naomi's response is "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 on me? (Ruth 1:20-21)". Naomi judges God's providence in her life. She charges God with wrongdoing for the death of her husband and sons. Naomi's view of the past is again faulty. "I went away full" is not entirely true if they fled Israel during a famine. Naomi's bitterness has grown to the point of complaining and stubbornly choosing to see only what she lacks from her perspective. She has a loving daughter-in-law by her side and God is

about to place them in a loving, prosperous situation with Boaz. Bitterness is short-sighted and in rebellion to God's sovereign plan.

So first, help your counselee see their bitterness for the sin that it is. Help them see that bitterness is judgment of God's goodness, wisdom, and love. Lead them to repent not just of the complaining, anger, and rebellious actions that have resulted from bitterness, but to repent of the false and evil lies they have believed about God. Help them to put into words the unbelief they are expressing toward God and to ask God for forgiveness for those beliefs and thoughts.

The next step is helping your counselee renew their minds in the truths of God and His character. Your counselee needs to meditate on scripture that tells of God's goodness, grace, mercy, sovereignty, wisdom and love. Your counselee needs to meditate on God's promises for His children in the midst of suffering. Your counselee needs to understand and embrace God's purpose in suffering and pray to grow in being able to rejoice in suffering because we share in Christ's suffering. Your counselee could study and meditate on 1 Peter 1:3-11, Romans 5:1-5 or James 1:2-4 to learn about God's purpose in suffering. They could study Ephesians 1, Romans 8, Job 38, 39, Isaiah 40 and other passages that speak of God's goodness, wisdom, sovereignty, and love to help them trust God with hard circumstances or people. I also use specific verses that counselees can memorize quickly. Some of my favorite passages about God's sovereignty and that He is working His perfect plan for my life are Job 42:2, Ephesians 1:11, and Psalm 139:16. Romans 11:33-36 is a wonderful passage on God's wisdom and that we as finite humans cannot fathom all that God understands as He governs this world. Romans 8:31-39 points us to God's love and that there is no circumstance that can separate us from God's love. Even more, those difficult trials serve God's purpose in our lives to shape us more and more into the image of Christ.

Your counselee needs to transform their mind to the truth of God's word. Help them create a list of scriptures that combat the lies about God and unbelief in their heart. The list may be different from counselee to

counselee depending on how they have sinfully interpreted their situation. But it is through scripture that the Holy Spirit will transform and renew their mind.

Third, your counselee needs to put on Chrislikeness. Where bitterness has led to complaining, anger, and rebellious actions, the new creation in Christ must put on thankfulness, contentment, love and good deeds. As your counselee is renewing their mind in Truth, have them write out a “Thankful List” every single day. As they embrace God’s purpose in suffering, they can give thanks in all circumstances because God is always at work to fulfill His redemptive plan. Psalms commands us to “enter his gates with thanksgiving in our hearts”. Thankfulness is the gateway to God’s presence. It grows our dependence and humility before Him. Thankfulness is key in the life of every believer.

Your counselee will need to put on humble responses to trials. Rather than anger when a difficulty comes, your counselee must demonstrate trust in God by responding with prayer and contentment. Belief in who God is and that He will do what He has promised is demonstrated in our response to the moment to moment situations of daily life. A heart that is settled on God’s goodness, sovereignty, wisdom, and love at all times is able to respond with gentleness and peace in the face of trouble. Help your counselee to plan out and be resolved to trust the truth about God in their specific circumstances. For example, if your counselee has been bitter about a situation at work, plan for the next time their boss makes a decision that negatively impacts your counselee. Be very specific. “When my boss does _____, I will _____”. The list should include prayer, scripture recitation and prayer that the counselee would trust God’s plan and purpose in the situation. The list should include specific ways the counselee will respond with words and actions that honor and glorify God.

As your counselee continues to pray and study God’s word, actively repenting of bitterness, searching for ways that they are not trusting in God’s attributes, and actively putting on attitudes, words, and actions that

honor God, they are transformed from bitterness to contentment and thankfulness.