

## **Breaking the Chains – Bitterness and Resentment**

No one gets through life without being hurt by another person. We all have experienced the pain of a thoughtless remark, gossip, or lie. If you have experienced an unhappy marriage, the devastation of infidelity, or suffered physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, you know what it feels like to be hurt. When you are offended or disappointed by others and allow the hurt to germinate in your heart, bitterness and resentment will take root.

Characterized by an unforgiving spirit and negative, critical attitudes, bitterness and resentment are sinful and self-defeating. They will color both your conscious and unconscious thoughts and actions. It is sometimes tempting to hold on to these feelings and build a wall of safety around yourself. After all, in the world's opinion, you are probably justified to have these feelings. But allowed to fester, they will destroy and kill (Galatians 5:19-21).

### ***What Causes Bitterness and Resentments?***

Resentment results from burying our hurts. If resentments are then suppressed, left to decay, they cause bitterness, anger, frustration, and depression. Some of us actually become addicted to our resentments. Even after we accept the Lord as our Savior and try to follow His will for us in other areas of our life, we can wrongly choose to run on the energy we derive from continually stirring the coals of resentment – keeping past hurts and hatred alive long after the events that caused them. But experience tells us that what we don't talk out creatively, we act out destructively.

Bitterness is a spiritual malignancy that makes a person extremely vulnerable to unwise decisions and destructive thought patterns that infiltrate and affect our bodies as well as our souls. It may aggravate or even cause physical problems. You can be affected mentally, spiritually and otherwise. Your relationships will always suffer.

God can free you from this sin. It is an oppressive and destructive emotion having its root in hate, which is likened to murder. You must repent. No one can have peace and happiness with such emotions tearing at him.

### ***Forgiveness – God's Prescription for Healing***

God forgives and forgets sin. However, you may have made your best effort to forgive and forget and find that you cannot. God can help you to cleanse your memory. Instead of remembering with malice and hurt, remember with forgiveness. Then go one step further and ask God to forgive your offender. By forgiving and then asking God to forgive your offender, you release God to bless you and the other person.

When you forgive another person, you no longer allow their behavior to cause you anger, pain, bitterness, or resentment. Forgiveness breaks the cycle! It doesn't settle all the questions of blame, justice, or fairness, but it does allow relationships to heal and possibly start over. When you choose not to forgive, you make the choice to hold on to your feelings of resentment, anger, and pain.

## ***Why Should I Forgive?***

Think of forgiveness as a gift that you give to yourself. It is not something you do for the person who hurt you. It is a gift to yourself because it enables you to stop feeling painful feelings and pushing others away. Forgiveness frees you from anger and allows you to restore your ability to have close and satisfying relationships with others.

Anger is a poisonous emotion that comes from being hurt. When you are consumed with anger and bitterness, it hurts you at least as much as it hurts the person who has harmed you. It is as if you are filled with poison. If these feelings are not resolved, they can begin to eat you up inside.

You have two choices: to stay connected to the person who hurt you by keeping these poisonous feelings alive, or to let the feelings go and forgive the person who harmed you. When you withhold forgiveness, think about who is actually being hurt. It is more than likely that the person who is filled with anger and anxiety is you, not the other person.

## ***What Forgiveness is Not:***

- Forgiving another does not mean you will never again feel the pain or remember the thing that hurt you. The hurtful experience will be in your memory forever. By forgiving, you are not pretending the hurtful behavior never happened. It did happen. The important thing is to learn from it while letting go of the painful feelings.
- Forgiveness is not about right or wrong. It doesn't mean that the person's behavior was okay. You are not excusing their behavior or giving permission for the behavior to be repeated or continued.
- When you forgive another, it does not mean you wish to continue your relationship with them. This is a separate decision. You can forgive a person and live your life apart from them.

Forgiveness can only take place because the Lord has given us the ability to make choices. This ability is a gift that we can use it whenever we wish. We have the choice to forgive or not to forgive. No other person can force us to do either.

## ***How to Find Freedom:***

1. Identify areas of bitterness and resentment in your life. Confess these negative feelings as sin and ask for God's forgiveness. God says in Jeremiah 6:14, "You can't heal a wound by saying it's not there!"
2. Admit or "own" the problems. We have to admit that we have been defeated by an internal force that has brought nothing but pain and degradation to our lives; then, we have to admit we need help in dealing with that force.

3. Ask for and accept the Lord's help in dealing with our feelings. We must completely accept the fact that we cannot remove our own shortcomings, and we must become willing for God to remove them for us.
  - The Lord will not deal with our sin unless we repent of it and give Him permission to do so. Our hearts must be surrendered to the will of God.
  - We must forgive others and we must take control of our thought life. Our greatest spiritual battles are fought in our minds, Second Corinthians 10:5 says, "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ".
  - C. S. Lewis put it this way: "We find that the work of forgiveness has to be done over and over again. We, forgive, we mortify our resentment; a week later some chain of thought carries us back to the original offence and we discover the old resentment blazing away as if nothing had been done about it at all.
  - We need to trust in the goodness of God.
  - We need to trust in the justice of God.
4. Join with others for support and accountability. Join a small group for support and form an accountability relationship with someone of the same gender.

***Prayer for Deliverance:***

Dear Lord, I acknowledge that I have been holding on to resentments and bitterness against others. I confess this as sin and ask you to forgive me. I repent of those feelings now and give them over to you. I choose to forgive those who have hurt me in the past. Today, I lay down my bitterness and resentments at the foot of the cross. Please take them from me and help me to rely on You for the strength, comfort, peace, and assurance I need each moment of every day. Help me to walk according to the Word of God by the power of the Holy Spirit that I may be victorious in every way. In the precious Name of Jesus, AMEN

***Scriptures for Overcoming Bitterness and Resentment:***

Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many *Hebrews 12:14,15*

Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you *Ephesians 4:31,32*

When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly *1 Peter 2:23*

Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing..."

*Luke 23:34*

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. *Romans 12:14-21*

For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. *Matthew 6:14,15*

I myself no longer live, but Christ lives in me. So I live my life in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. *Galatians 2:20*

When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, your lives will produce these evil results: sexual immorality, impure thoughts, eagerness for lustful pleasure, idolatry, participation in demonic activities, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, divisions, the feeling that everyone is wrong except those in your own little group, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other kinds of sin. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives, he will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Here there is no conflict with the law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. If we are living now by the Holy Spirit, let us follow the Holy Spirit's leading in every part of our lives. Let us not become conceited, or irritate one another, or be jealous of one another. *Galatians 5:19-26*

***Declaration of Freedom:***

I, \_\_\_\_\_, declare by faith that by the power of the Blood of Jesus Christ, The Word of God, and His Holy Spirit, I have been forgiven and strengthened and can now walk in freedom. I will not let resentments and bitterness destroy what the Lord wants to do in my life. I choose to forgive those who have hurt me that I may also walk in forgiveness.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

I will be accountable to \_\_\_\_\_ in this area.

*(Note: An accountability partner MUST be of the same gender.)*