

## ROOT OF BITTERNESS

This worksheet is designed to aid you in working toward a victory over the root problem of bitterness – a growth experience in your Christian life which will help you more fully realize what Jesus meant when He said, “I come that they may have and enjoy life, and have it in abundance – to the full, till it overflows”. (John 10:10, Amplified)

Since the symptoms of bitterness are many and varied, it will be exceptionally easy to be mystified into believing and adamantly defending your belief that bitterness is not a problem to you, e.g., “If I could get rid of my headaches, everything would be fine.” I love my children. I just can’t find the right way to discipline them.” “As soon as my husband gets saved, I’ll be happy.”

Also, since bitterness often exists at a deep (subconscious) level, it is able to have a subtle yet devastating impact on your Christian experience; in particular your family life. “Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled.” (Hebrews 12:15, KJV)

Thus, if, at the outset, you can believe that God wants you set free worse than you want free; purposing to remove a root of bitterness can become a very exciting adventure.

Through it, you have an opportunity to prove God and to see, firsthand, whether or not the promises in the Bible are a reality for you. Also, it will be possible, to understand why prayers aimed at victory over isolated symptoms or fruits of root problems seem never to be answered. (Oh, Lord, please take away my bad temper!)

It has been very encouraging to see the results when people seek the Lord for wisdom and understanding concerning a specific problem. Such an attitude in prayer has a two-fold blessing. First, you will see that God’s promise (“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him.” James 1:5) is true for you! Second, you will gain insight into the underneath source of the problem for which you have been seeking a solution.

Root problems affect, limit, determine, and in many cases eliminate a person’s relationship with God. Since we were made to have fellowship with Him, it is easy to understand why God would, in great abundance, give us insight as we move to remove anything that reduces our capacity to fellowship with Him. (“Just as a father has compassion on those who fear Him.” Psalm 103:13)

The most misleading and harmful, yet very popular teaching about anger, resentment, and bitterness is in the following statements: “Don’t hold it in. Let it out!” “Stand up for your rights!” “Say what you feel!” “If the other guy gets his feelings hurt, that’s his problem (weakness).”

This existential philosophy assumes that once you let it out, it will stay out. I have spent hours upon hours in encounter and sensitivity groups and therapy sessions doing nothing but letting it out and saying what I felt. Be assured that once you begin to let it out, you will quickly find a seeming bottomless pit or inexhaustible reservoir of anger, critical comments, and gossip that will increasingly and incessantly demand an avenue

of expression. In time, you will find yourself getting better and better at being worse and worse with no end in sight.

An equally misleading and confusing approach to bitterness is a type of crucifixion technique; a procedure whereby a person will attempt to attack the problem by eliminating isolated surface symptoms. This is a variation of holding it in.

In the case of a person with a root of bitterness, he may gain a conviction that his critical nature is wrong and will study and meditate on James 3. Through this, the person will gain a sense of victory over his tongue only to become aware of a subtle depression, withdrawal feelings, and increase in the frequency of headaches, etc.

While the person gained a victory over one fruit of bitterness, he did not eliminate the source of this bitter poison. The energy usually channeled through the tongue simple sought expression through other available avenues.

Paradoxically, the person will feel defeated in the face of obvious victory. There exists a great potential for being discouraged in trying to attack a root problem by attempting to eliminate a surface symptom. The probability is seemingly much higher when a person totally relies upon any philosophy. Satan is willing to give you a temporary victory in order to “addict” you to some way of life. The purpose is to defeat you later on with your own theory.

Finally, it is possible to define a problem as a (subconscious) process whereby you are agreeing with Satan over one of his lies about the character of God (John 8:44,45). Consider, for example, that Satan’s initial method of operation is to get you to believe that God has cheated you or will cheat you out of that which you should rightfully have. Once you have begun to live as though this lie were true, you will feel compelled to bitterly work to stand up for your rights. Part of the lie is that the process of keeping your rights intact is a foundation of happiness, i.e., once you let someone destroy your rights, they have taken away your chances for happiness.

## **SYMPTOMS OF BITTERNESS**

- Depression** – Low self-acceptance; loss of interest; sleeplessness; feeling cut off from God; loss of appetite; self pity; boredom; desire for significant change in life style; general malaise.
- Mistrust & Suspicion** – Need or desire to check on intimate aspects of the lives of others; marital conflict; fear that others will hurt you or be unfair to you; concern over what others are saying about you; cautiousness in relationships; avoidance of others; defensive thoughts and actions; withdrawal.
- Unbelief in God** – “Oh, I wish I had the faith you have.” “Oh, I believe in God, but not like the fundamentalists do; He’s just the power in the universe.”

**Criticism** – Conflicts and rejection of authority; job failures, hyper-critical over little details; seeing only faults in others; giving, listening to, and inviting a bad report about family members; disloyalty.

**Insensitivity** – “How do you act when you are hurt?” Self-centered; fear of not getting all you deserve; envy; discomfort in company of others; intolerant of others; seeing problems in others as a sign of weakness; inconsistent discipline of children; seeking accomplishment through children’s success; fiscal irresponsibility.

**Tension** – “Stiff neck”, muscle tension symptoms, headaches, back pain; physical problems for which there is no disease or apparent organic cause; (If there is any doubt, consult a physician.) physical difficulties that have their origin in misplaced bitterness.

- See S.I. McMillen, M.D., None of These Diseases for further insights.

**Compulsion** – Sense of being in bondage to a habit which no amount of effort can break; willful continuance of a habit which you know to be harmful to your body such as tranquilizers, drug abuse, gluttony, reckless driving, temper outbursts, alcohol addiction, smoking, homosexuality, etc.

Revenge- pounding thoughts of revenge; pressing urge to hurt or kill someone; stealing; gossip and slander; compulsion to witness and bring people to Christ; mental arguments with others in your head; seeking forgiveness from person, yet having the subconscious motive- “See how much I’ve changed because of what you did to me!”

**Rejection of Authority** – Juvenile delinquency; adultery; cheating in school; job failures; occult involvement; temper outbursts; ungratefulness; disloyalty; fornication; profanity; contemptuous; imprisonment; financial irresponsibility.

This one particular aspect of bitterness is the feature that probably causes the most difficulty and the one that has very far reaching consequences. The barometer of the effects of this particular cluster of symptoms can be found in the relationship a person has and has had with his parents. The problems, which developed within a person’s family, if they are not solved, will simply follow the person into the “world” and all but determine the extent of his success or failure in any endeavor he would attempt.

This makes having a right relationship with authority a critical foundation for success. It may be that the most efficient way to gain this vital starting point is through relationships with one’s parents. (See Encouragement)

## DECEPTIONS ABOUT BITTERNESS

### **Believing a lie (falsehood) and thinking and acting as though it is the truth.**

1. **“I’ll forgive, yet I’ll never forget!”** This is an attitude of suspiciousness or caution toward the person who has hurt (sinned against) you. It communicates that you expect the person to do it again and that you must keep an eye on him just in case. Such an attitude also makes it clear that if (when) he does hurt you again, you will have the right to personally seek revenge.

2. **“Well, there may be the evidence of bitterness, but I don’t think it’s a problem. See, I love my mother (wife, children, etc.).”**

The closeness and intensity of relationships are such that it is possible to love a person and be resentful at the same time. Each loving relationship has the possibility for hurts, which, if they are not forgiven, are stored in the memory (subconscious) as bitterness or resentment.

a. **“I’m not bitter towards my husband; I just don’t have any feelings.”**

It is possible to consistently keep angry feelings pushed out of awareness such that a person will become numb towards a person. This is the process whereby a person will begin to believe that he has fallen out of love with his spouse. The deception is that that apparent absence of feelings is the same as indifference or neutrality, i.e., “I’m not bitter.” “I’m not in love with her anymore.”

3. **“I can’t forgive because I just don’t feel like it.”**

The deception is believing that forgiveness is a feeling rather than an act of the will. However, we by-pass the feelings by obeying what God has taught us to do through an act of our will. The emotional sense of forgiveness will follow our willful step of action. (See “How to Love By Faith”)

4. **“As Christians, we are taught to hate evil. I am not bitter, I’m just reacting to the evil around us.”**

It is possible to find considerable scripture and psychological writings, which seemingly justify this particular approach to avoiding the fact that your actions are motivated by bitterness. Here are some examples of this basic attitude: “My spiritual gift is prophecy so I’m just naturally sensitive to evil.” “That’s just the way I am because of my temperament type.”

This type of self-deception is the result of the person establishing himself as his primary authority with considerable encouragement from his feelings of resentment. This foundation of self is then “established” with selective interpretations of various passages of scripture. The confusion and determination of this type of deception results from the fact that justification for the bitterness (the conclusion) was arrived at prior to seeking scriptural reinforcement.

**“Just look at what Jesus did to the money changers in the temple.”** This story is frequently used to argue that when the chips were down, Jesus really did not turn the other cheek. Rather, He used the occasion to stand up for His rights!

## **STEPS IN REMOVING BITTERNESS**

1. **Be sure you are a Christian.** The assurance of this as a foundation will save many futile hours of effort in trying to remove bitterness in the energy of the flesh. If you have any doubt, “How to Be Sure You’re a Christian”, is a very helpful study guide.
  - a. Tell God that your purpose to remove the barriers which bitterness, hatred and resentment have placed between you and Him, e.g., you could read Psalm 51 to Him as a way of starting.
  - b. Be willing to see the problem (symptom) which bitterness has generated as sin. Confess it to God as sin and claim His forgiveness. (I John 1:9) Very frequently, the pain and discomfort of the problem can confuse your awareness of this aspect, especially if bitterness is the root of a painful physical symptom.
2. **Make a list of all your symptoms of bitterness.** (Keep a notebook.) Ask God in prayer (James 1:5-8) to show you the source of this bitterness.
  - a. A very helpful approach is to list all the attributes in others, which anger you, the fastest, e.g., characteristics in spouse or mother which you intensely dislike. Then, according to Romans 2:1, ask God to show you how you have the same root attitude and related behaviors.
  - b. Ask God to show you how these attitudes have defiled your relationship with Him. See also if this does not make you more understanding of the other person’s offenses against you; as a sign that they too have suffered hurts at the hands of others.
3. **Seek the forgiveness of the person or persons at whom you have been bitter.**
  - a. If you have been shown a problem of self-acceptance, Chapter 11 in How to Win Over Depression is a very useful guide to gain self-acceptance. Self-acceptance is often a powerful barrier between a person and God. Also, it is a very important platform for seeking forgiveness.
  - b. If you have been shown a problem with past persons who have been in authority in your life, seek to clear your conscience with them.
4. **Stand fast.** Since bitterness has such a defiling impact on the hateful person and on those around him, especially his family, Satan has much invested in maintaining this root problem. Through it, he can destroy families for generations to come.