

Avoiding the Deadly Sins of Marriage

Why Does It Hurt So Bad?

How to Avoid Bitterness

Grace Fellowship Church / Pastor Brad Bigney / Sept. 28, 2003

Heb. 12:14-15 "Pursue peace with all men, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking diligently lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled."

Col. 3:19 specifically talks to husbands when it says "Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them."

I. How Would You Know If You're Bitter?

A. Do You Talk Bad About Your Spouse to Others?

Honestly, do you have either nothing or very little that is good to say about your husband or wife? Whenever you open your mouth to mention your spouse is it usually to run them down and to complain about the last thing they did that you don't like?

In his excellent book, *The Complete Husband*, Lou Priolo uses a quote from the old Puritan Richard Baxter as a reminder that when you said, "I do" to your spouse in marriage, you did so knowing that he or she was a sinner and so you're gonna need constant forgiveness. **Baxter says**, "Remember still that you are both diseased persons, full of infirmities; and therefore expect the fruit of those infirmities in each other; and make not a strange matter of it, as if you had never known of it before. If you had married one that is lame, would you be angry at her for limping? Or if you had married one that had a putrid ulcer, would you fall out with her because it stinketh? Did you not know beforehand, that you married a person of such weakness, as would yield you some manner of daily trial and offense? If you could not bear this, you should not have married her; if you resolved that you could bear it then, you are obliged to bear it now. Resolve therefore to bear with one another; as remembering that you took one another as sinful, frail, imperfect persons, not as angels..." *The Complete Husband*, Lou Priolo, p.117

Philippians 2:14 "Do all things without grumbling or disputing..." And that includes your marriage.

Ephesians 4:1 "...with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, **bearing with** one another in love"

B. Do You Judge Their Motives?

Whatever they do... is it suspect in your eyes? Even if he does something nice, do you assume the worst and think his motive must be off. "Oh, he only did that to look good to his parents." Or "I know it seemed like a nice gesture, but he didn't really mean it."

I Cor. 4:5 "Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God."

C. Are You Self-Centered? Self-Absorbed?

If you spend a lot of time thinking about yourself and how life and your marriage has not gone the way you thought it should... watch out. You're preparing the soil of your heart for bitterness. If your focus is primarily on the hurts done to you by your spouse or others... chances are you're growing bitter.

Philippians 2:4 "... do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but look to the interest of others. "

D. Have You Lost Most of Your Joy and at Times Do You Even Despair?

Bitterness produces a 'wounded' spirit that's like an open wound... so tender... so sensitive... and ready to react with anger or with tears at the slightest provocation.

Missionary, Skip Gray, "Bitterness is the poison we swallow, while hoping the other person dies."

Psa. 38:3-8 "There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your anger, nor is there any health in my bones because of my sin. For my iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds are foul and festering because of my foolishness. I am troubled, I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the daylong... I am feeble and severely broken; I groan because of the turmoil of my heart."

Jeremiah 3:17-18 "And my soul has been rejected from peace; I have forgotten happiness. So I say, 'My strength has perished, and so has my hope from the Lord.'"

E. You Look for Revenge?

When you're bitter you start to hate the person and look for ways to avoid them altogether. Maybe you leave whenever your spouse is home... or you get up and go into another room... or you pout... or you give them the cold shoulder. In your mind you're paying them back for what they've done to you.

Romans 12:17, 19 "Never pay back evil for evil to anyone... Never take your own personal revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God..."

F. Do You Dwell On and Continually Rehearse the Ways They've Hurt You in the Past?

Some of you here today are living with a spouse who's made a major mistake... maybe they sinned against you greatly. Maybe it was a financial mistake... maybe it was a moral failure... maybe it was a poor decision... but you just won't let it die. You want leave it alone. Maybe it was months ago... or maybe it was years ago. But you will not let them forget about it... and you've never let them off the hook.

Paul Tripp writes, "The bitter person broods about what their spouse has done. They think about it often and play it over and over in their mind. Like a cassette tape that can be popped in and started on cue. You keep it on the very forefront of your mind, already cued up and ready to go. At the slightest notice you just hit "Play" and it starts all over again. Have you ever noticed that the way we sin against people... has a pseudo-confessional quality to it? Harboring bitterness against people is actually confessing their sin to myself, over and over again. Anger is akin to confessing their sin to God, dissatisfied that He hasn't done something and placing myself in His position as judge. Gossip is confessing their sin to someone else. Each of these can exist in a subtle form in our hearts..." ***Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands***, Paul David Tripp, p. 229

I Corinthians 13:5 "Love does not take into account a wrong suffered."

Gary Thomas in his book ***Sacred Marriage*** tells about a time that he spoke at a staff retreat for a church that was using a Catholic retreat center. He says, "The chapel was very small but very distinguished, and I poked around a little shortly after I arrived. I saw a confessional booth in the back so I opened the door and was startled to find, of all things, a file cabinet." He goes on to say, "Sometimes that's what marriage is like; our spouse has confessed sins and weaknesses to us, and we've kept every confession in a mental file cabinet, ready to be taken out and used in our defense or in an attack. But true forgiveness is a process, not an event. It is rarely the case that we are able to forgive "one time" and the matter is settled. Far more often, we must relinquish our bitterness a dozen times or more, continually choosing to release the offender from our judgment." ***Sacred Marriage***, Gary Thomas, p. 169 & 170

G. Do You Have a Critical, Judgmental Attitude Towards Your Spouse?

Very often a bitter person is critical and full of faultfinding. It's so easy to see the faults of others... especially your spouse because you live so close to them.

Galatians 5:14-15 "For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!"

II. O.K... So Maybe I'm Bitter! How Do I Get Free From This?

A. Start by Seeing Your Own Sin First!

Matthew 7:2-5 "And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck out of your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck out of your brother's eye."

Paul Tripp writes, "God's grace is most powerful and effective at the moment of my greatest weakness. How practical and life changing is this? One of the most significant problems in our marriage relationships is that there is no economy of grace. With all our obvious difficulties, what is most shocking is the profound gracelessness of our marriages. There is no willingness to look within and confess deep-seated sins, so we never find sweet forgiveness. There is no vertical hope to carry us in dark and discouraging times. There is no rest that comes from entrusting each other to the God of grace. There is no faith that God will give us all we need to respond to each other in godly ways. As a result, the relationship is reduced to human demands, human performance, human failure, human judgment, and human punishment. There is no hope or power for change. And because we're are not daily soaking in the fountain of God's grace, we do not extend it to one another." ***Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands***, Paul David Tripp, p. 32 & 33

B. Clear Your Conscience by Asking for Forgiveness

Ask God to forgive you for your bitterness...

I John 1:9 "If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Ask Your spouse to forgive you for your bitterness...

James 5:16 "Confess your sins to one another... that you may be healed."

Then Forgive Your spouse

Ephesians 4:31-32 "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you (NIV Get rid of all bitterness), with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you."

Gary Thomas says, "I have a theory: Behind virtually every case of marital dissatisfaction lies unrepented sin. Couples don't fall out of love so much as they fall out of repentance. Sin, wrong attitudes, and personal failures that are not dealt with slowly erode the relationship, assaulting and eventually erasing the once lofty promises made in the throes of an earlier (and less polluted) passion. All of us enter marriage with sinful attitudes. When these attitudes surface the temptation will be to hide them or even run to another relationship where the attitudes won't be so well known. But Christian marriage presumes a certain degree of self-disclosure. When I gave my hand in marriage, I committed to allow myself to be known by Lisa. -and that means she'll see me as I am-with my faults, my prejudices, my fears, and my weaknesses. The reality can be terrifying to contemplate. Dating is largely a dance in which you always try to put the best face forward-hardly a good preparation for the inevitable self-disclosure implied in marriage. In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if many marriages end in divorce largely because one or both partners are running from their own revealed weaknesses as much as they are running from something they can't tolerate in their spouse." **Sacred Marriage**, Gary Thomas, p. 96 & 97

Avoiding the Deadly Sins of Marriage

Why Does It Hurt So Bad?

Getting Free from Bitterness through Forgiveness

Common Signs of Bitterness

Ask yourself if you are manifesting any of these signs

Rate yourself on a scale of 1-5 (one being the lowest score and 5 being the best) Make note of the ones you scored the lowest on and write down specific ways you can improve in that area. Then come together with your spouse and ask them to rate you in each area. (The scores may not be the same!) Make changing a matter of specific prayer and ask your spouse to hold you accountable.

1. Gossip and Slander

In the process of complaining, you gossip about your spouse and slander them, thereby defiling others. You have either nothing or very little that is good to say about them.

"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..." Hebrews 12:15-17

|-----|
1 2 3 4 5

2. Ungrateful and Complaining

You aren't grateful for your spouse. You murmur to yourself and complain to others about them.

"Do all things without grumbling or disputing..." Philippians 2:14

|-----|
1 2 3 4 5

3. Judges Motives

Whatever they do is suspect in your eyes. Even if they do something nice, you think their motive must be off. For example, "They only did that to look good to their parents." "I know it seemed like a nice gesture, but they didn't really mean it."

"Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to them from God." I Cor. 4:5

|-----|
1 2 3 4 5

4. Self-Centered

You spend a lot of time thinking about yourself. You are very self-absorbed. Your focus is fixed on yourself and the hurts done against you.

"... do not merely look out for your own personal interests..." Philippians 2:4

|-----|
1 2 3 4 5

5. Excessive Sorrow and Loss of Joy

Grief and hurt have crowded out any joy, peace, or love that you used to have. It has, in fact, filled up your heart. It may, at times, overwhelm you. Lately, you have little or no delight in your relationship with the Lord. Because of your sin, instead of God's peace and joy, you're experiencing intense emotional pain and misery.

"... sorrow has filled your heart." John 16:6

"I shall delight in Thy commandments which I love." Psalm 119:47

|-----|
1 2 3 4 5

6. Vengeful

You look for ways to avoid your spouse. Perhaps you leave when they are home, pout, or give them the cold shoulder. You're paying them back for what they've done to you.

"Never pay back evil for evil to anyone... Never take your own personal revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God..." Romans 12:17, 19

|-----|
1 2 3 4 5

7. Brooding

You brood about what your spouse has done. You think about it often and play it over and over in your mind.

"Love does not take into account a wrong suffered." I Corinthians 13:5

|-----|
1 2 3 4 5

8. A Critical, Judgmental Attitude

It is difficult for you to take your focus off what your spouse has done wrong and focus instead on what you are doing wrong.

"Before you can see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye, first take the beam out of your own eye." Matthew 7:1-5

|-----|

1 2 3 4 5

