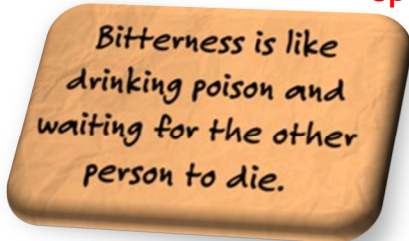




## Is Bitterness Ruining Your Life?

**Acts 8:22-23:** (NASB) <sup>22</sup>*Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you.* <sup>23</sup>*For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity.*

### Special Guest: Joy Thompson



We have all had experiences - real life experiences - that have triggered a bitter reaction in our hearts. This can actually be a very natural reaction. As we look at the harsh experiences of some, we often say things like "who can blame them" or "I'd feel the same way if that happened to me." The big question for today is simple: Once we go through the initial bitter reaction in any experience, where do we go from there? Does bitterness move in and take over or do we leave it behind? Stay with us as we look bitterness squarely in the eye and figure out what to do with it!

What is bitterness? *A lingering deep-seated resentment over something someone has done to you in your past - someone did something to you that hurt you deeply, messed up your life or made you mad and you can't get past it.*

### Bitterness can **come to us** as a result of a tragic loss:

**Jeremiah 31:15:** *Thus saith the LORD; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not.*

As we look into the mechanics of bitterness, we want to feature the story of a little known individual in the life of King David by the name of Ahithophel and see just how much bitterness would eventually cost him.

**1 Chronicles 27:32-34:** (NRSV) <sup>32</sup>*Jonathan, David's uncle, was a counselor, being a man of understanding and a scribe; Jehiel son of Hachmoni attended the king's sons.* <sup>33</sup>*Ahithophel was the king's counselor, and Hushai the Archite was the king's friend.* <sup>34</sup>*After Ahithophel came Jehoiada son of Benaiah, and Abiathar. Joab was commander of the king's army.*

Ahithophel was THE king's counselor and is named along with Hushai, the king's friend, which becomes significant later in the story.

### Just how good a counselor was Ahithophel?

**2 Samuel 16:23:**(NASB) *The advice of Ahithophel, which he gave in those days, was as if one inquired of the word of God; so was all the advice of Ahithophel regarded by...David...*

### Joy's story: Trusted Counselor

We have a family business here in Montana and we had an experience that really presented a huge opportunity to have bitterness. I relate to David and his relationship with Ahithophel. We had a relationship with an accountant. He was our accountant for twelve years or so and he was extremely capable. We really respected his advice. I developed a relationship with him. I would be able to ask questions and we talked about our kids and lots of business questions and complexities of business. He had a lot of ability and I had no reason to doubt his integrity. We have a large family business with 48 full-time employees including 4 family members.



Now at a pivotal point during the reign of King David, all would begin to change. David was losing his godly edge and had sent his men out to war without leading them himself.

**It was then that David's own base nature took hold of him:**

2 Samuel 11:3: (NRSV) *David sent someone to inquire about the woman. It was reported, This is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite.*

**What does this have to do with Ahithophel? Plenty!**

2 Samuel 23:34: (NRSV) *Eliphelet son of Ahasbai of Maacah; Eliam son of Ahithophel the Gilonite;*

So, Bathsheba is Ahithophel's granddaughter and Uriah was his grandson-in-law! Here we can see the events unfold that produce roots of bitterness...

**Once David has his sin revealed by the prophet Nathan, we can see a whole other set of events set to unfold that can certainly lead to bitterness on the part of David:**

2 Samuel 12:9-13: (NASB) <sup>9</sup>*Why have you despised the word of the LORD by doing evil in His sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the sons of Ammon.* <sup>10</sup>*Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.* <sup>11</sup>*Thus says the LORD, Behold, I will raise up evil against you from your own household; I will even take your wives before your eyes and give them to your companion, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight.* <sup>12</sup>*Indeed you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and under the sun.*

**Does David give in to bitterness and shame, now that his sin is before him?**

<sup>13</sup>*Then David said to Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said to David, The LORD also has taken away your sin; you shall not die.*



Ephesians 4:23-24: <sup>23</sup>*and be renewed in the spirit of your mind,* <sup>24</sup>*and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.*

One of the first steps is emptying our hearts of negative thoughts and the feelings those thoughts create. We don't keep them

in, but rather we pour them out, reminding us of: Psalms 62:8: *Trust in him at all times, O People, pour out your heart before Him. God is a refuge for us.*

We can't deny what we are feeling. We have to pour it out before God.

Empty out your heart first to make room for something different.





When bitterness festers over time, it only needs an excuse to blossom into its most ugly form!

Back to the story, Bathsheba was pregnant by David, lost the child and became Queen. Absalom was another son of David who was very rebellious. He conspired to take David's throne and Ahithophel is with him! Is he starting a treasonous relationship because he is still bitter that David took his granddaughter unlawfully?

2 Samuel 15:12: (NRSV) *While Absalom was offering the sacrifices, he sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counselor, from his city Giloh. The conspiracy grew in strength, and the people with Absalom kept increasing.*

 **Quote and chemicals, Bill Crawford, PhD**

- *It comes from a quote from that great philosopher, Anonymous, that says "Bitterness does more harm to the vessel in which it is stored than the vessel in which it is poured." I like that because I think it speaks to the experience of being bitter or holding onto bitterness. We are thinking about someone else, but that someone else is really not experiencing the harm. We are actually producing stress related chemicals - Adrenaline, Noradrenaline, Cortisol - that are throwing us into a fight or flight response. But since that person isn't here, then fighting or fleeing really isn't an option and therefore, we find ourselves just dumping more chemicals and that's not good.*

Bitterness can **develop** because we forsake God's ways: Bitterness knocks on everyone's door - we each decide whether or not to answer it!

Jeremiah 2:19: (NRSV) *Your wickedness will punish you, and your apostasies will convict you. Know and see that it is evil and bitter for you to forsake the LORD your God; the fear of me is not in you, says the Lord GOD of hosts.*

**David is now running for his life at the hands of Absalom's men:**

2 Samuel 15:30-31: (NRSV) <sup>30</sup>*But David went up the ascent of the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went, with his head covered and walking barefoot; and all the people who were with him covered their heads and went up, weeping as they went.* <sup>31</sup>*David was told that Ahithophel was among the conspirators with Absalom. And David said, O LORD, I pray you, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness.*

David was told that his chief counselor was with his enemy, his own son. Notice that David does not pray for the destruction of these enemies, rather just that the advice given will be foolishness.

**Joy's story: Found out from the FBI**

Well, I also had a realization come upon me. I was enjoying Christmas with my family there in Connecticut. I got a phone call from a secret service agent. He informed me that our accountant had fraudulently used somewhere around \$350,000 in one of our equipment accounts. I relate to David's experience because this was unexpected, it was sudden and I was completely startled because of my past experience with this accountant. It became an interesting thing to be on a first name basis with a secret service agent. It took quite a long time to figure everything out and put it all together.

It was shocking and it was just an intense experience, and it took a long time to grapple with it. We had lots of discussions and there were lots of prayers and again



pouring my heart out before God with my feelings of resentment, anger and confusion. There were lots of feelings involved in this whole issue.

**2 Samuel 15:32:** (NRSV) <sup>32</sup>When David came to the summit, where God was worshiped, Hushai the Archite came to meet him with his coat torn and earth on his head.

It might very well have been at this point when David wrote [Psalm 3](#). (See the [Bonus Material for more information](#).)

**Even in the midst of great sorrow, David is still able to focus on the duties of kingship:**

**2 Samuel 15:33-37:** (NRSV) <sup>33</sup>David said to him, If you go on with me, you will be a burden to me. <sup>34</sup>But if you return to the city and say to Absalom, I will be your servant, O king; as I have been your father's servant in time past, so now I will be your servant, then you will defeat for me the counsel of Ahithophel...<sup>37</sup>So Hushai, David's friend, came into the city, just as Absalom was entering Jerusalem.

David obviously fears the counsel of Ahithophel for its wisdom and perhaps for its bitter motivation!?

**David is under attack by his own son and betrayed by his own people, especially by his most trusted counselor:**

**2 Samuel 16:5-8:** (NASB) <sup>5</sup>When King David came to Bahurim, behold, there came out from there a man of the family of **the house of Saul** whose name was Shimei, the son of Gera; he came out cursing continually as he came. <sup>6</sup>He threw stones at David and at all the servants of King David; and all the people and all the mighty men were at his right hand and at his left. <sup>7</sup>Thus Shimei said when he cursed, Get out, get out, you man of bloodshed, and worthless fellow! <sup>8</sup>The LORD has returned upon you all the bloodshed of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned; and the LORD has given the kingdom into the hand of your son Absalom. And behold, you are taken in your own evil, for you are a man of bloodshed!

Shimei is another bitter man from the house of Saul, whom David replaced as king. Even though David never usurped Saul's throne, he was being blamed!

**Joy's story: The Impact of the Fraud**

The impact showed up over time. We were trying to get money from this equipment account for our loader. We had a piece of equipment that burned up over the earlier part of the winter and we had finally gotten some of the money, we thought. However, it ended up that this account was seized and there was no money available. The impact just kept getting more intense because this was at a time a couple of years ago when the economy had hit us pretty hard, and we were not in the best financial condition. It's like here's another thing for David to deal with...here's Shimei and he's cursing him. It seems like our experiences were similar. Things kept happening and the impact of not having this money available became more of an issue and created, again, more confusion, feelings of betrayal. As these things kept happening, it's like having to deal again and keep dealing with, I'm angry, I'm upset, and we need this money. Okay, Lord, help us know what to do. Help direct our thoughts and our feelings in this experience.

**How would we react? Would the pressure of the moment cause us to lash out?**

**2 Samuel 16:9-13:** (NASB) <sup>9</sup>Then Abishai the son of Zeruiah said to the king, Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over now and cut off his head. <sup>10</sup>But the king said, What have I to do with you, O sons of Zeruiah? If he curses, and if the LORD has told him, Curse David, then who shall say, Why have you done so?..<sup>12</sup>Perhaps the LORD will look on my affliction and return good to me instead of his cursing this day. <sup>13</sup>So David and his men went



on the way; and Shimei went along on the hillside parallel with him and as he went he cursed and cast stones and threw dust at him.

This is a powerful thought because when we take experiences and have the faith that it was through God's permission and His unfailing love for those experiences to even touch us, it can transform how we are looking at that experience.

We can have faith by understanding that God permitted this to happen.

**It is not enough to merely abstain from lying, we must be sure to proactively speak the truth as well:**

**Ephesians 4:25:** *Therefore, putting away lying, Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.*

To put away lying and speak the truth again, there's a replacement that has to take place. You have to replace negative thoughts with God's perspective and God's truth.

**2 Corinthians 10:5:** *Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ...*



**Psalms 119:29:** *Remove from me the way of lying: and grant me thy law graciously.*

**Proverbs 12:19:** *The lip of truth shall be established for ever: but a lying tongue is but for a moment.*

**2 Samuel 16:15-19:** (NRSV) <sup>15</sup>Now Absalom and all the Israelites came to Jerusalem; Ahithophel was with him. <sup>16</sup>When Hushai the Archite, David's friend, came to Absalom, Hushai said to Absalom, Long live the king! Long live the king! <sup>17</sup>Absalom said to Hushai, Is this your loyalty to your friend? Why did you not go with your friend? <sup>18</sup>Hushai said to Absalom, No; but the one whom the LORD and this people and all the Israelites have chosen, his I will be, and with him I will remain. <sup>19</sup>Moreover, whom should I serve? Should it not be his son? Just as I have served your father, so I will serve you.

By all appearances, Absalom cannot be stopped, for even David's friend Hushai is with him. The bitter mind of Ahithophel, in spite of its brilliance, could easily be so lost in the darkness of its own desire that all it wants now is to hurt and humiliate.

**Joy's story: Further impact**

Appearances can be deceiving, even in this experience. David's friend Hushai appears to have gone over to Absalom's side. Anyway, we had an experience too in that the appearance of things wasn't really as it was. This whole situation and the fraud that





was committed were in the newspapers and in many papers in our areas. Some of the accounts were not entirely accurate. We got wind that some of our employees were very upset, some very angry with their own accusations and ideas of what had happened. They were blaming us and they didn't understand the situation. So, now we had to deal with suspicion from our employees and it's a very vulnerable feeling to have what has happened to you personally, even though it was our company, spread in the newspapers and everybody becomes aware. It's an invasive thing. I felt personally invaded. We had a special meeting with our employees, and we tried to straighten out the situation. This is nobody's business - how come it has to be in the papers? Well, that's how it is!

It's hard to have personal matters made public like this. It created more of a challenge. It created more feelings to deal with and more frustration and anger. It was a "wave" experience. It was not an easy street. It took a lot of going back to God over and over again.

**2 Samuel 16:20-23:** (NRSV) <sup>20</sup>Then Absalom said to Ahithophel, Give us your counsel; what shall we do? <sup>21</sup>Ahithophel said to Absalom, Go in to your father's concubines, the ones he has left to look after the house; and all Israel will hear that you have made yourself odious to your father, and the hands of all who are with you will be strengthened.

Ahithophel's counsel is for Absalom to basically go and commit similar sins to the ones that Ahithophel himself grew so bitter about! He recommended Absalom stand so firmly against his father that he could never be reconciled to him. Quite devious!

Bitterness blinds us. We end up doing the very thing to the person that hurt us so much!

<sup>22</sup>So they pitched a tent for Absalom upon the roof; and Absalom went in to his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel. <sup>23</sup>Now in those days the counsel that Ahithophel gave was as if one consulted the oracle of God; so all the counsel of Ahithophel was esteemed, both by David and by Absalom.

So Ahithophel advises what ends up being the fulfillment of Nathan's prophecy! Could it be that Ahithophel was there when Nathan prophesied and that he harbored this punishment in his mind just waiting for it to come to pass?

**2 Samuel 17:1-4:** (NASB) <sup>1</sup>Furthermore, Ahithophel said to Absalom, Please let me choose 12,000 men that I may arise and pursue David tonight. <sup>2</sup>I will come upon him while he is weary and exhausted and terrify him, so that all the people who are with him will flee. Then I will strike down the king alone, <sup>3</sup>and I will bring back all the people to you. The return of everyone depends on the man you seek; then all the people will be at peace. <sup>4</sup>So the plan pleased Absalom and all the elders of Israel.



So, bitterness leads to not only the breaking of loyalty but to the rash decision to take matters into one's own hands.

**Ephesians 4:26-27:** <sup>26</sup>Be angry, and do not sin do not let the sun go down on your wrath, <sup>27</sup>nor give place to the devil.

I need to say again that this was not an immediate fix. *Do not let the sun go down on your wrath.* I'm afraid that there were a number of days where I



still had unresolved feelings inside my heart. However, I continually poured things out before God. I remember this illustration someone told me: feelings are like the lights on a dashboard. They tell you what's going on. Instead of condemning my anger and being upset that I was still angry, what I attempted to do was just kept bringing it before God. The Psalms are full of David pouring his heart out with all kinds of feelings. It's a real example. I think this is part of being angry and not sinning. We have to be authentic; we have to be honest with where we are and realize God understands, but we don't want to get stuck there. I had to realize the need to not only grapple with the impact of the wrong that was done to me and what this other person did, but to deal with the impact of what my thoughts were creating in my own heart. That was just as big if not bigger an issue.

### **Rash plans call for all being in agreement:**

**2 Samuel 17:5-9:** (NASB) <sup>5</sup>*Then Absalom said, Now call Hushai the Archite also, and let us hear what he has to say. <sup>6</sup>When Hushai had come to Absalom, Absalom said to him, Ahithophel has spoken thus. Shall we carry out his plan? If not, you speak. <sup>7</sup>So Hushai said to Absalom, This time the advice that Ahithophel has given is not good. <sup>8</sup>Moreover, Hushai said, You know your father and his men, that they are mighty men and they are fierce, like a bear robbed of her cubs in the field. And your father is an expert in warfare, and will not spend the night with the people. <sup>9</sup>Behold, he has now hidden himself in one of the caves or in another place; and it will be when he falls on them at the first attack, that whoever hears it will say, There has been a slaughter among the people who follow Absalom.*

**Loyalty to God's anointed speaks out against bitterness toward God's anointed.**

### **Hushai continues by painting an irresistible picture of glory in battle:**

**2 Samuel 17:11-14:** (NASB) <sup>11</sup>*But I counsel that all Israel be surely gathered to you, from Dan even to Beersheba, as the sand that is by the sea in abundance, and that you personally go into battle. <sup>12</sup>So we shall come to him in one of the places where he can be found, and we will fall on him as the dew falls on the ground; and of him and of all the men who are with him, not even one will be left. <sup>13</sup>If he withdraws into a city, then all Israel shall bring ropes to that city, and we will drag it into the valley until not even a small stone is found there. <sup>14</sup>Then Absalom and all the men of Israel said, The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel. For the LORD had ordained to thwart the good counsel of Ahithophel, so that the LORD might bring calamity on Absalom.*

**Ahithophel's counsel seemingly had never been wrong before. It was actually a good strategy to end David's life, but we see that God still did stand with David. Why? In spite of all his sins, David always truly sought the will of God and repented mightily and publicly for those sins.**

### **Joy's story: The sentencing**

I had the option of going to the sentencing. It just impresses me how the Lord ordained to thwart the good counsel of Ahithophel. The Lord intervened in our experience also for good. In thinking of attending the sentencing, I didn't have to go. But I kept thinking about it and I kept feeling compelled that I needed to go to this for some reason. I already had sent a victim impact statement that I wrote. I just kept feeling compelled that there was a reason I needed to go. I didn't want to go, but I went anyway. It had been a year and a half to two years since he embezzled money. It was a long period of time.



## When did a godly perspective start winning out?

It was an up and down process. I would have times when I felt, okay, I got it now, God's in control and there's a reason for this and then impact would happen and I would feel again an overwhelming wave of discontent and anger, resentment, whatever. It was just not a simple journey. It had its ups and downs all along the way.

It was very emotional for me. I related the kind of business that we have, the fact that we have made mistakes in our lives and any time that we have, we do the best we can to make amends and to live in integrity and make things right. I talked about the small beginnings of our family business, where we got to the shock of this whole thing happening, and then the impact between just grappling with someone that we trusted and the betrayal. I talked about the employees, the newspaper article - what I've laid out in this story. I talked about the financial difficulty because it was the time the economy was having an impact on our company. I talked about what we wanted from our accountant. He was there in the audience and his wife was there.

I explained that we wanted to make sure that he never ever did anything like this again, that we wanted to him to pay us back, we wanted him to make amends, and that we wanted him to be the person of integrity that he really, I believe, was and is in his heart. I heard about something in his past in this hearing. He got lost in his life. I told him, "I want you to be able to stand before your Creator. I want you to be able to live your life in an honorable way and a way of integrity." That was our greatest desire, actually.

He had huge consequences...the pain he caused his family and wife. He spoke about that at this hearing. I trusted God to overrule whatever other consequences were necessary. I didn't feel like I needed to be the one to orchestrate them.

The judge stated, "I am deeply and profoundly moved by what Mrs. Thompson has said."

That shocked me that he said that. At first I thought he was trying to make me feel better, but both lawyers told me that in all of the years he has sat in this court, he has never heard the judge say anything like that.

### Hushai warns David:

**2 Samuel 17:15-16:** (NASB) <sup>15</sup>Then Hushai said to Zadok and to Abiathar the priests, This is what Ahithophel counseled Absalom and the elders of Israel, and this is what I have counseled. <sup>16</sup>Now therefore, send quickly and tell David, saying, Do not spend the night at the fords of the wilderness, but by all means cross over, or else the king and all the people who are with him will be destroyed.

## HOW TO COMBAT BITTERNESS:

**Don't do damage;  
rather contribute**

**Do not continue in habits of life that damage; rather replace them with activities of life that contribute:**

**Ephesians 4:28:** Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.

Ultimately we should want the best end result possible for everyone involved. Bitterness cares about *feeling* better and is selfish. We want to be full of integrity and godliness.





At least in this experience, one of the activities of life that really did make a difference was giving the impact statement and being present at this hearing at the sentencing. The impact statement including the honest truth about the difficulty that we went through as a result of what this accountant did. It included the attitude and desire for God's highest good and healing to happen for this accountant and his family in God's time and way. The combination was being authentic and honest. I was not denying what was happening and glossing over it. At the same time, these people and their lives and what was in their hearts was a very important issue also, and to have that combination was a very powerful activity. It is not an easy place to get to. It took a lot of time and up and down experiences.

Let us remember that Ahithophel would have seen the sins of David, seen the revealing of those sins and seen the pure and deep humility of David's repentance for those sins, and yet he chose NOT to trust in any of that. Rather, Ahithophel harbored and fed his bitterness until it entirely consumed him.

**Now his counsel is not heeded and he knows all will be lost - so, what does he do?**

2 Samuel 17:23: (NASB) *Now when Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his donkey and arose and went to his home, to his city, and set his house in order, and strangled himself; thus he died and was buried in the grave of his father.*

This was a tragic loss of who was once a wise and mighty counselor to the throne of Israel. That is the result of bitterness.

I could have been strangled by this and other experiences I have had in life. Bitterness really sucks the life out of you and makes it so that you can't breathe the life-giving lessons that God has for you. It completely sabotages spiritual growth and spiritual life. It is so powerful that we can be strangled.

**The test of our words, for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks!**

Ephesians 4:29: *Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.*

Make sure what you speak has the intention to build up. Bitterness has no intention to edify. Its only intention is to dismantle and destroy.



Our words are an index of what is in our hearts. Our words will tell us we have not overcome bitterness, so they are also a good barometer. Listen to ourselves and we will hear it! It's also that little voice inside our heads. That little voice is the root of bitterness. Then it becomes like in Hebrews 12 where the root of bitterness defiles and eventually becomes blatantly obvious.



A caller suggests: Proverbs 26:27: *He who digs the pit falls into it and a stone comes back upon him who rolls it.* In contrast: Matthew 5:7: (Aramaic) *Blessed are they from whom their inner wounds birth mercy. They shall feel its warm arms embrace them.* What we hold inside we produce. But if we find the smallest spark of mercy inside of us and nurture it, it will grow.



### So, David prepared for war against his own son:

2 Samuel 17:24: (NASB) *Then David came to Mahanaim. And Absalom crossed the Jordan, he and all the men of Israel with him.*

### What part did bitterness play?

2 Samuel 18:5: (NASB) *The king charged Joab and Abishai and Ittai, saying, Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom. And all the people heard when the king charged all the commanders concerning Absalom.*

David's response to his son lining up against battle against him is to "deal gently with him." Here we again see the lack of bitterness on the part of David even though he still prepared for war. The battle ensues, David and his men are victorious and Absalom is slain.

### Joy's story: Conclusion

I could have strangled myself with bitterness, but the Lord gave me a final crowning experience after the sentencing. In the sentencing, there was five years of supervisory probation. And I was totally fine with that because we worked together in partnership, the Lord and I, in all of this.

The thing that really impressed me was that after all of this was over, I went up to the accountant's wife and she looked at me and said, "I am so sorry that you have gone through all this." And there were tears in both of our eyes, and I told her, "I appreciate that. We don't want your husband to do this ever again," I restated our position, "and I am praying for the highest good and healing for you and your husband and your family in God's time and way." We struck up a conversation and we embraced. I got her address and we have written to each other a couple of times. I am totally grateful - I would have cheated myself of the great joy of building a bridge between her and I, communicating and having the privilege of encouraging her. That would have totally not even been possible if this whole process hadn't happened of dealing through bitterness...I could have sabotaged the blessings that God had in store.

Bitterness that is long lasting can only be that way if we choose to give it the space in our hearts to settle, feed it by repeating the hurt we experienced in the past, over and over again in the present and cherish it by placing our future in its hands.

As a final thought, we want to remember the grandfather of Bathsheba, Ahithophel. Had he not given in to the base bitterness in his own heart, he may have lived to see his great grandson Solomon rise to the throne in Israel and be hailed as the wisest man in all the earth! That's what he lost. Bitterness vs. blessings! The price of bitterness is too expensive.

### Bitterness lessons:

Hebrews 12:15: (NASB) *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;*



Bitterness takes no courage, it just takes reaction. It takes courage to look bitterness in the eye and say you will not rule my life because there is something higher, stronger and healthier I can chose above and beyond bitterness. The Scriptures give us plenty of stories and examples to follow so that we can live a life where bitterness is a distant memory to learn and grow from.

*So, is bitterness ruining your life...?  
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...  
Think about it...!*



**What is bitterness?** *A lingering deep seated resentment over something someone has done to you in your past - someone did something to you that hurt you deeply, messed up your life or made you mad and you can't get past it*

**The 3<sup>rd</sup> Psalm** - most likely written by David while on the run from Absalom up on the Mount of Olives - knowing the context helps to find the meaning!

**Psalms 3:1-8:** (NASB) <sup>1</sup>O Lord, how my adversaries have increased! Many are rising up against me. <sup>2</sup>Many are saying of my soul, "There is no deliverance for him in God." Selah <sup>3</sup>But You, O LORD, are a shield about me, my glory, and the One who lifts my head. <sup>4</sup>I was crying to the LORD with my voice, and He answered me from His holy mountain. Selah. <sup>5</sup>I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the LORD sustains me. <sup>6</sup>I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people who have set themselves against me round about. <sup>7</sup>Arise, O LORD; save me, O my God! For You have smitten all my enemies on the cheek; You have shattered the teeth of the wicked. <sup>8</sup>Salvation belongs to the LORD; Your blessing be upon Your people! Selah.

**Seek to replace the bitterness with the peace of God and rest in God:**

**Hebrews 4:11-16:** (NKJV) <sup>11</sup>Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience. <sup>12</sup>For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. <sup>13</sup>And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account. <sup>14</sup>Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. <sup>15</sup>For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. <sup>16</sup>Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

**Philippians 4:7-8:** (NKJV) <sup>7</sup>and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup>Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.

**What is bitterness?**

- It is a waste of perfectly good emotional energy.
- It is a poor excuse for not taking positive action.
- It is our personal expression of laziness regarding our own destiny.



- It is a symptom of an ego gone bad.
- It is a complete waste of time!

There is a solemn responsibility to being members of one another, a responsibility that really has no room for any root of bitterness to form.

**1 Corinthians 12:12-18:** (NKJV) <sup>12</sup>For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. <sup>13</sup>For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. <sup>14</sup>For in fact the body is not one member but many. <sup>15</sup>If the foot should say, Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? <sup>16</sup>And if the ear should say, Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body, is it therefore not of the body? <sup>17</sup>If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? <sup>18</sup>But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.

### **Bitterness creates in us fountains of pride:**

**James 3:7-18:** (NRSV) <sup>7</sup>For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, <sup>8</sup>but no one can tame the tongue—a restless evil, full of deadly poison. <sup>9</sup>With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. <sup>10</sup>From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so. <sup>11</sup>Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and brackish water? <sup>12</sup>Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, yield olives, or a grapevine figs? No more can salt water yield fresh. <sup>13</sup>Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. <sup>14</sup>But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. <sup>15</sup>Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. <sup>16</sup>For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. <sup>17</sup>But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. <sup>18</sup>And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.

- Once bitterness has taken root, it poisons our words.
- We become a walking contradiction, speaking both blessing and cursing.
- We now pollute our spiritual environment with unspiritual and devilish attitudes.
- Now, rather than witnessing to the Gospel, our lives witness against it!
- If we contaminate our spiritual environment, surely we also contaminate our physical environment.

**Bitterness imprisons life; love releases it. - Harry Emerson Fosdick**



(Source: theatlantic.com article, The Psychology of Bitterness: 10 Essential Lessons, Hans Villarica August 31 2011)

## 10 things you should know about bitterness

### Lesson #1

*Bitterness follows unwanted experiences—failures, disappointment, setbacks—that are perceived to be beyond one's control.*

Wrosch says: "The quality of the negative emotions we feel when things don't work out may depend on how we appraise the reasons for failure. If we think that we are responsible ourselves, we may experience regret and sadness. However, if we feel that it was not our fault, but other people were responsible for the problem, then we may be rather angry or bitter."

### Lesson #2

*Bitterness occurs when one believes, rightly or wrongly, that other people could have prevented the undesired outcome. Regret involves blaming oneself.*

Wrosch says: "Psychologists have shown that certain phenomena, such as regret, are not purely emotional. They involve the construction of specific thoughts that are associated with an alternate reality. Some may think, 'If I had studied more in school, I would have a better job.' The same may be true for bitterness, except that the scenarios involve other people: 'If my colleague hadn't interfered with my work, I would have finished the project on time.'"

### Lesson #3

*Bitterness, much like other negative emotions, could forecast physical disease.*

Wrosch says: "Health psychology has shown that negative emotions can influence stress responses and release the hormone cortisol. Chronically high levels of this hormone in turn can disrupt other bodily systems, including the immune system. If this happens, it can increase vulnerability of a person to developing a number of diseases."

### Lesson #4

*To regulate bitterness, individuals who failed should assess the likelihood of achieving the goal if they decide to try again.*

Wrosch says: "Outcome expectations are supposed to trigger either continued effort if optimistic or disengagement if pessimistic. If it's possible to overcome the problem that brought about bitterness, like when a person doesn't get promoted but can still reapply, persistence may pay off. Sometimes, it may not, as when a marriage is broken."

### Lesson #5

*If success is unlikely, individuals should move on to other pursuits.*

Wrosch says: "Goal disengagement can prevent repeated failure and associated negative emotions, and has been associated with lower cortisol levels, less systemic inflammation, and fewer reports of health problems. However, people



also need to find new purposeful activities. They have to reengage—find a different job or look for a different partner. Reengagement in turn has been shown to predict higher levels of positive emotions and purpose in life."

#### Lesson #6

*The embittered should try to reconcile, take some responsibility, and get over the blame game.*

Wrosch says: "Bitterness is often experienced in the context of other people who are being blamed for the problem. In some instances, these people may have to be part of the solution, like when a spouse needs to help fix a troubled marriage. In such special case scenarios, people who are bitter may have to change their attributions of blame because otherwise they may run into new problems with the other person."

#### Lesson #7

*Older adults generally experience more disappointments that could lead to bitterness.*

Wrosch says: "Opportunities for realizing a variety of goals are age-graded in our society. It's difficult, for example, to become a doctor or play in the NFL at age 50. Self-regulation capacities become particularly important to deal with an increasing number of losses and protect emotional well-being. Those who blame others for not reaching their potential may have problems overcoming a bitterness experience. They have to adjust their aspirations and goals."

#### Lesson #8

*Most older adults can easily disengage from impractical goals and commit to other meaningful pursuits.*

Wrosch says: "The capacity to adjust goals to constraints improves as people get older. It's probably based on life experience. Over time, individuals who experience that they could adjust and nonetheless live happy lives, like a person who wanted to be a doctor but became a nurse instead, may get better with managing such situations. This capacity is particularly useful for maintaining happiness in old age, when many experience health-related declines that can constrain a number of goals."

#### Lesson #9

*Older adults who can't curb their bitterness may be compromising their health and happiness.*

Wrosch says: "Unfortunately, not every individual's goal adjustment capacities increase with age. Individuals with difficulties in goal adjustment may become very vulnerable to major psychological problems. In our recently accepted work in *Health Psychology*, we show that older adults who cannot disengage from unattainable goals, but experience the onset of functional disability, show a steep increase in depressive symptoms over time."



Lesson #10

*If bitterness persists, consult a mental health practitioner.*

Wrosch says: "Bitterness can be triggered by events that are associated with feelings of unfairness. If you are unable to deal with these feelings yourself, consider asking for professional help. Some clinicians have reported that bitterness can result from Post-Traumatic Embitterment Disorder (PTED), which may develop after severe negative life events and requires appropriate treatment."