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## 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: 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

Our special guest, Joy Thompson, tells her story throughout this program about a personal experience that without intense and constant prayer and perspective, could have ended in tragic bitterness. Please subscribe to Christian Questions Rewind Full Edition (at no charge), which includes the transcript of her story.

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

**What does this have to do with Ahithophel?** Plenty! 2 Samuel 23:34: 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...

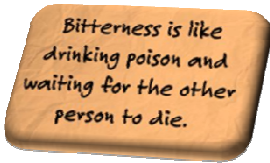
**Once David has his sin revealed by the prophet Nathan, we can see a whole other set of events set to unfold that can certainly lead to bitterness on the part of David:** 2 Samuel 12:9-13: Does David give in to bitterness and shame, now that his sin is before him?

**HOW TO COMBAT BITTERNESS:** **Be renewed in the spirit of your mind** Ephesians 4:23-24: 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: 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



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

**David is now running for his life at the hands of Absalom's men:** 2 Samuel 15:30-31: 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.

2 Samuel 15:32: It might very well have been at this point when David wrote Psalms 3.

**Even in the midst of great sorrow, David is still able to focus on the duties of kingship:** 2 Samuel 15:33-37: 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: 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! How would we react? Would the pressure of the moment cause us to lash out?

2 Samuel 16:9-13: We can have faith by understanding that God permitted this to happen.

**HOW TO COMBAT BITTERNESS: Dwell only in truth. It is not enough to merely abstain from lying, we must be sure to proactively speak the truth as well:** Ephesians 4:25: 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 Psalms 119:29 Proverbs 12:19

2 Samuel 16:15-19: 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.

2 Samuel 16:20-23: 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!

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

**HOW TO COMBAT BITTERNESS: Reign in anger and wrath** Ephesians 4:26-27

**Rash plans call for all being in agreement:** 2 Samuel 17:5-9: 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: 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

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

Ephesians 4:28: 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.



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:** 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.

**HOW TO COMBAT BITTERNESS: The test of our words, for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks!**

Ephesians 4:29: 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.

**So, David prepared for war against his own son: 2 Samuel 17:24**

**What part did bitterness play? 2 Samuel 18:5:** 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.

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:** 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...!***