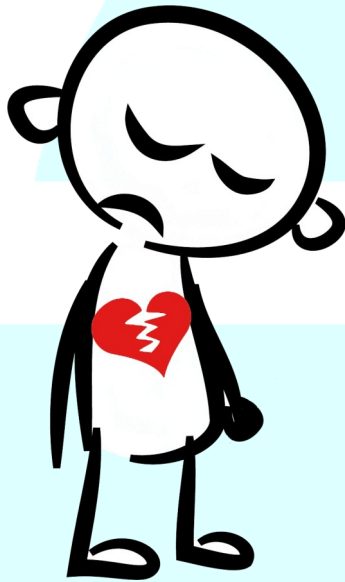


Is Bitterness Making You Sick?



■ by Debra Crockett, MSW, LSW

Have you experienced a wrong, an emotional injury that left you feeling hurt, angry, and wanting to strike back? We have all been around that bitter, resentful person who is angry at the hand they have been dealt in life. Perhaps that person is you. We want to explore how you can obtain release from prolonged feelings of bitterness or help others who may be ensnared by bitterness.

The Roots of Bitterness

Sometimes we do not realize that our feelings of bitterness are actually rooted in traumatic life events over which we had no control. It may be helpful to explore or reflect on what may have caused bitterness or resentment.

Traumatic events during childhood – physical/emotional abuse, neglect by a parent, sexual abuse or assault, divorce or separation of parents, parental alcoholism/substance abuse, or witnessing verbal/physical abuse - are painful experiences that can leave a lasting imprint and cause feelings of resentment because they occurred.

Painful events during adulthood – death, divorce, marital difficulties, personal illness or injury, job stress or termination, financial difficulties, among other challenges – are all experiences that can contribute to feelings of bitterness.

Effects of Bitterness

We may know the biblical command to “...Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.” (Eph. 4:31). However, we may be unaware of how bitterness is affecting us physically and emotionally. The cause of anxiety, depression and other illnesses may be unresolved bitterness.

Sadly, the person who is bitter and resentful is also repelling people at a time when they may need them most. Bitterness may cause isolation. Bitterness sucks energy and finds no peace. But there is an antidote to the feelings of bitterness. Obtaining release from bitterness is work, but the resulting emotional and physical wellbeing is worth it.

Antidote to Bitterness

Forgiveness provides the emotional, physical and spiritual healing we need and is the antidote to bitterness. Scripture reminds us to “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” (Eph. 4:32) Just as bitterness may result in physical and emotional illness, there are health benefits associated with forgiveness.

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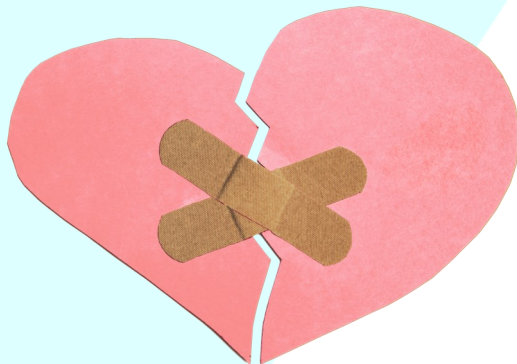
According to a November 4, 2017 Mayo clinic article titled "Forgiveness: Letting Go of Grudges and Bitterness," forgiveness can result in improved physical as well as emotional health including less anxiety, stress and hostility, lower blood pressure, a stronger immune system, improved heart health, fewer symptoms of depression and increased self-esteem, among other benefits.

Start Healing

How can we cope with the feelings of bitterness and simmering resentment against the parent who may have abused you, the spouse who abandoned you, the boss who fired you, illness or death?

Here are a few steps that will aid you in forgiveness and starting the healing process:

1. **Acknowledge that bitterness exists.** We need an honest self-assessment which is often done with the help of a trusted friend or counselor.
2. **Get in community which will help you cope.** God designed us for "one another" which includes "loving one another" and "bearing one another's burdens" includes emotional heartaches. Remember there is not a quick fix to lifelong hurts. Healing is a process and there are people who can help you along the journey.
3. **Give the hurt and bitterness to God.** Sometimes we are angry at God for allowing the hurt to occur. By acknowledging the hurt to God, you are submitting to His sovereignty. This is the most difficult step. By submitting to God's sovereignty, we are acknowledging that despite how deep and hurtful the past may have been or how we may have been wronged in the present; we have a loving God who will use even unjust, wrongful experiences ultimately for our good and His glory. "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to His purpose." (Romans 8:28).



I will never forget my own healing journey in forgiveness with a family member who wronged me. I harbored simmering resentment toward the person for years. One day during a woman's bible study class, the Holy Spirit revealed my sin of bitterness during prayer. I broke down in tears as I asked God's forgiveness. I then experienced His supernatural joy and peace.

Letting go of bitterness and beginning your journey toward healing through forgiveness will not be easy. It requires the power of the Holy Spirit, sometimes on a daily basis. I guarantee that the joy and peace that accompanies forgiveness is well worth it. ■



Debra Crockett is a Licensed Social Worker and sees clients in our South Holland, IL location.

References:
Mayo Clinic Newsletter, (2017, November 4). "Forgiveness: Letting Go of Grudges and Bitterness."
<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/forgiveness/art-20047692>

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