

DEADLY ROOTS

The subtle destructive power of bitterness

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INTRODUCTION

Bitterness is the internalization and personalization of a real or perceived injustice with a persistent and intense rumination about the injustice or the agent of the injustice, resulting in more damage caused by the bitterness than could ever be caused by the injustice.

You may have suffered some horrible abuse and feel your bitterness has merit. Physical, sexual, or emotional abuse is never justified. Civil society needs strong laws with harsh penalties for abusers. If you have suffered abuse, you do not have to live the rest of your life defined by the pain of the abuse. Abuse is a legless, hungry tiger growling on the other side of the room. Bitterness gives the tiger legs and claws, so now it can tear you to shreds. Do not allow your bitterness to provide a destructive power to abuse.

When I first began this journey to write about bitterness, I naively thought it would be a simple task. Bitter people are victims, victims of their own making, imprisoned by their own hands. Working as a family physician for four decades, I have seen lives destroyed by many agents. I have witnessed cancer taking the life of the young, heart disease kill people in their prime, and addiction rob the lives of many. Of all these agents of destruction, none compared to the devastating impact of bitterness. Bitterness will turn the wise into fools, the wealthy into beggars, and the delightful into the disgusting. Bitterness will steal your wealth, your health, and at times, your life. I thought it would be a simple matter of just stating the evils of bitterness, sound a loud warning, and I could then move on to another topic. My simplistic view may be of help to someone who is not bitter, but it has no value to those who are already bitter. Bitterness tosses away reason and makes the bitter person both blind and deaf. If it is possible to help someone caught in bitterness, we must look behind the scenes and address the causes of bitterness. This journey led me to explore the roots of bitterness, the actions, directions, thoughts, and beliefs of someone bitter. The bitter feel they need more to feel complete, and this led to an exploration of greed and self-centeredness. If greed and self-centeredness are behind bitterness, then what is the cause of greed and self-centeredness? This awareness led to a path

where only the brave dare venture, an exploration of spiritual emptiness. There is no adequate medical or psychological treatment for the misery produced by greed-fueled bitterness. Some therapies will lessen the pain of the misery, but they are not a cure. The only effective remedy is spiritual. If you are living in a pond of misery, you are also bitter. No life circumstance can cause you this degree of distress without you also being bitter. You will need to address the bitterness if you hope to escape the misery. So if you are not bitter, I hope the strong warning to avoid bitterness, like the poison it is, will be sufficient to keep you on the right path. If, on the other hand, you are bitter, and living in misery, then I pray you will have the courage to read on and allow God to guide you out of the hell of bitterness.

CHAPTER 1 – BITTERNESS

Bitterness is the internalization and personalization of a real or perceived injustice with a persistent and intense rumination about the injustice or the agent of the injustice, resulting in more damage caused by the bitterness than could ever be caused by the injustice.

Tannerite is a combination of two safe and stable compounds, an oxidizer, consisting of ammonium nitrate and ammonium perchlorate, and a catalyst comprised of aluminum powder. The oxidizer and the catalyst are very safe if kept separate, but when combined and subjected to the impact of a high-velocity impact, they explode. You get the same result if you mix an offense with bitterness. The offense is the oxidizer, and bitterness is the catalyst; the result is psychological Tannerite. Combine these two and subject the combination

to the high-velocity impact of stressful living and, kaboom; you have an explosion of misery.

Bitterness will steal your health, energy, and emotional stability. It will destroy your relationships, and rob your joy, peace, and contentment. It will kill your potential, purpose, plans, relationships, aspirations, and dreams. If this interaction between bitterness and injustice were a loaded gun, the injustice would be the gunpowder, and the bitterness would be the armor-piercing bullet. The gunpowder makes all the noise, demands all the attention, it fills the room with confusion, and smoke. Amid the noise, smoke, and fire, the projectile silently sails through the air and into your heart. Bitterness can and will kill you!

You have heard it said that bitterness is drinking poison, waiting for someone else to die. This statement is false. Bitterness is drinking poison and then giving a little to everyone you care about while you wait for someone to die.

If bitterness were an autoimmune disease, it would be the most lethal. It slowly chews away at your soul and leads you down a path of destruction. Not only is bitterness deadly, but it is also contagious as it generates bitterness in others as the toxic poison is shared. Bitterness leaves a wide wake of destruction. So, stop being bitter, but if you find it impossible, there is a better solution, a solution not harmful to anyone

else.

Caution: do NOT do this, it is only written for effect, to warn of the dangers of bitterness.

You would be much better off to wait for the next warm summer day and take a bucket to the closest dog park. Make it your goal to collect as many of the fresh brown dog deposits as possible. You will need about a quart. Now head home with your pale of treasure. To this bucket, add a rotten egg or two, and a quart of gasoline. You might as well go all out and use premium gasoline. Now blend this mixture until it is an elegant, thin, liquid that you will soon pour into a glass bottle. You will need to buy a case of insulin needles and syringes at your local pharmacy. Now every time you feel or express bitterness, don't speak it and hurt others, instead grab one of those syringes and inject 1cc of your blended mix into one of your hand veins. Yes, the injected substance will burn, and it will challenge your immune system, it will cause pain, and it will make you sick. Eventually, if injected frequently enough, it will kill you, but the toxic soup you are injecting into your veins will not poison others. This injection of a disgusting, poisonous mix is an ugly mental picture, but it is not as ugly or as destructive as bitterness. Bitterness must be recognized early. You must take personal responsibility for it, and you must run from it as fast as you can. Treat it as the

toxic poison it is, or it is likely to kill you.

Bitterness, to the degree, just described, is easy to identify. You know you are bitter, you are aware of the injustice, you are focused on the injustice, and it occupies every thought and often every conversation. To recognize this form of bitterness, just stand in front of a mirror and ask yourself, "Am I bitter?" Your answer will most likely be "yes, and because of what that so-and-so did, I deserve the right to be bitter." Remember, it does not matter how justified you feel about your bitterness, it will still kill you, and most likely have minimal impact on the object of your bitterness. You are not harming them; you are just hurting yourself! If questions remain after you look in the mirror, then just set the timer on your smartphone to ninety minutes; each time the alarm goes off, write down what you are thinking about at that time. It may take a few days, but you will quickly find out if you are ruminating about an injustice.

Do everything you can to recognize and avoid bitterness!

CHAPTER 2 – ROOTS OF BITTERNESS

If we would like to have any hope in stopping bitterness, we need to recognize it in its more subtle forms. By the time bitterness has fully developed, it has become a giant, well-established tree, impossible to bring down. At this point, you are no longer living your life with freedom and enthusiasm; you are living your life, negotiating your path, and conducting your relationships as a victim.

Now, there are benefits to being a victim. A victim receives attention from the stories of injustice and a sense of freedom from personal responsibility, but this benefit comes at a steep cost. The cost of being a victim is a deep sense of powerlessness and growing isolation. A victim lives in a cold, dark prison they have created with their own hands. As a victim, you have thrown away your opportunity to give your life direction and meaning, so now you can no longer live

deliberately, you are now a slave to your bitterness. We need to recognize the roots of bitterness and destroy them before they have a chance of developing into that well-rooted tree.

The following is a list of some of the more common roots of bitterness.

In the book of Hebrews in the New Testament, we are encouraged to: *“Watch out that no poisonous root of bitterness grows up to trouble you, corrupting many.”* Hebrews 12:15 (NLT) Be on your guard because these roots have corrupting power, and they present in a very subtle manner.

The following is a list of some of the early roots of bitterness, learn to recognize them early and get rid of them before they make you a bitter victim; you know what they look and feel like in their maturity!

When considering the roots of bitterness, for more precise understanding, I have divided the origins of bitterness into the three categories; Subtle Roots, Not-So-Subtle Roots, and Obvious Roots.

The Subtle Roots of Bitterness are very subtle, and they do not appear on the surface as roots of bitterness – they include the following.

Worry - a state of anxiety and uncertainty over actual or potential problems.

Impatience - intolerance of anything or anyone that causes a delay or hinders you from achieving a goal.

Envy - the desire to obtain a quality, possession, or other desirable attribute belonging to someone else.

Jealousy - close to envy but subtly different; it is acting fiercely protective or vigilant of one's rights or possessions. With envy, I want or think I deserve what you have, and with jealousy, I am afraid that you are going to take from me what I value.

Cynicism - an inclination to believe people are motivated purely by self-interest.

There are the Not-So-Subtle Roots of Bitterness, which are still subtle, like the following.

Disgust - a feeling of revulsion or strong disapproval aroused by something unpleasant or offensive.

Mocking - making fun of or mimicking someone with contempt, ridicule, or scorn.

Gossiping - idle talk or rumor, especially about the personal or private affairs of others.

Thirdly, there are the Obvious Roots of Bitterness, and these roots are not subtle in their presentation. When these roots show themselves, you know, you are bitter. They include some of the following.

Haughtiness - an act and attitude full of arrogance and pride. A haughty person is arrogant and acts superior and looks down on others.

Anger - an intense expression of emotion that involves a strong uncomfortable, and hostile response to a perceived provocation, hurt, or threat.

Hatred - feelings of animosity, anger, or resentment, directed against specific individuals, groups, entities, objects, behaviors, concepts, or ideas.

Deception - the act of causing someone to accept as accurate or valid what is false or invalid.

All of these roots share a common source. All origins of bitterness originate in greed.

Greed is an insatiable longing for gain, be it for food, money, status, or power. Greed is an inordinate desire to acquire or possess more than one needs.

Psychologist Erich Fromm described greed as “a bottomless pit which exhausts the person in an endless effort to satisfy

the need without ever reaching satisfaction.” Greed is ugly, and the roots of bitterness just a more palatable presentation of greed.

Greed is the ugly reality behind all roots of bitterness. Greed, the deep-seated need for more gets its power from spiritual emptiness. Greed and bitterness fueled by spiritual emptiness will destroy you. Be on guard. Stop these roots before they develop and devour you.

CHAPTER 3 – SUBTLE ROOTS OF BITTERNESS

The Subtle Roots of Bitterness are the most difficult to associate with bitterness. These roots are often not associated with a specific agent of offense or injustice, but they are still early roots of potential bitterness, so we need to be aware of them. One of the most subtle roots of bitterness is impatience. Impatience cries out, “this is my road; how dare you slow me down.” Impatience is self-centeredness regarding time and space.

Worry is another subtle root of bitterness. When the perceived injustice is a possible future threat of danger, loss, inadequacy, or harm to self or significant others, the result is likely to be, worry. The more chronic form of worry is anxiety. Most often worry does not lead to bitterness, it is usually a motivational anticipatory fear, leading to

precautions, avoidance of risky behaviors, leading to the development of a plan, and actions to accomplish a task or solve a future problem.

In its more troubling form, worry is continuous negative thoughts and emotions about future events. Worry can be repetitive and uncontrollable. It can be a consuming drive to resolve potential uncertainties in life, uncertainties for which there is no resolution. When this worry becomes continuous and chronic, it destroys the confidence necessary to solve problems as it magnifies the perception of the issues. This intense focus makes a small problem a massive problem. This magnification of a problem leads to a pessimistic view of the outcome and results in chronic anxiety. If you combine this kind of worry with blame or a victim mentality, it will quickly lead to bitterness.

Are you a chronic worrier? How do you view future problems and life changes? Do you see them as insurmountable obstacles or challenges that require your God-given, problem-solving abilities? There will be significant changes and challenges in your future; that is a fact. You need to give yourself the freedom to be uncomfortable as you apply your problem-solving skills before you find a solution. You should not fear failure; you should fear the lack of inertia. Constant worry is like standing at the starting line of a race, and when

the gun goes off to start the race, you just spin in circles. So, when facing some of life's more common fears, accept them as a challenge and not an over-consuming burden.

Don't worry about getting old; it is a fact of life and a privilege to be able to age; instead, concern yourself with how you are living today, and you will be a lot healthier and more active when you are 80 years old.

Don't worry yourself sick about your financial future; it will only drain your ability to live within your financial means today. Don't worry; plan wisely and ask for help.

Don't worry that your energy level is too low; this kind of worry only drains more energy and precious resilience. Instead, get physically active and follow a healthy diet. Do all those little things you know you should do every day to remain healthy and active, and be patient.

Don't worry about future job security; the most critical element affecting your work future is how well you work today. Focus on doing the best job you can today. Don't blame your boss or fellow employees; it will only lead to destructive bitterness.

Don't worry about what people think about you; it is their thoughts, and you cannot change them. Instead, pause and consider what is going on with others. The majority of people you pass by today will be going through trials and struggles

beyond what you could imagine. If you are kind and considerate, it will be a boost to your resilience and will lessen your anxiety.

Another subtle root is envy. When the perceived injustice is a sense of lack as compared to others, the result is likely to be envy. Envy is the intense longing for and an overestimation of the value of possessions, qualities, and social position possessed by others. Envy's energy comes from the hope that if any of these meaningless entities are acquired, they will meet and fill your inner awareness of emptiness and purposelessness. These possessions and qualities are meaningless and empty because they could not possibly achieve what you desire. You desire to be at peace and fill that sense of emptiness that lies deep within all human beings. The belief is you are at least as deserving, if not more deserving than your neighbor, who happens to have better possessions, relationships, and social status than you do, and that is not just. "I deserve better; I want his stuff. I deserve his stuff."

Envy comes from a deep sense of emptiness or incompleteness. It is a sense of generalized boredom, social alienation, and apathy. Envy is a spiritual matter too painful to face directly, so we convert it into a material matter. My sense of emptiness does not allow me to see the emptiness

in others. Now I look to my neighbor, whom I assume is living with a sense of contentment and completeness and make the false assumption that his satisfaction comes from his stuff, so if I had his stuff, I too would not feel empty. The inner awareness of emptiness can be so intense, and the emotional pain so high that it can lead to addictions, obsessions, violence, or frenzied action. If I only had my neighbor's parents, house, car, kids, spouse, job, friends, intelligence, education, or achievements, then I would not feel so empty and incomplete. Envy can also show itself on occasion as something called Schadenfreude, which is taking pleasure at the misfortune of others.

A small amount of envy may be a positive quality. Examining the merits of others and how they have become successful may encourage us to be more persistent and focused on what we are trying to accomplish. This form of envy may be productive, provided we do not see the qualities of others as a threat or see ourselves as a victim who is limited by injustice.

A positive result from envy is a rare thing as envy is usually nothing but destructive. A relentless passion attempting to fill an emptiness or give your life meaning and purpose by striving for what you see others have will lead to a sense of powerlessness, ungratefulness, and eventually bitterness. Envy is a misguided path to happiness and will only leave you

more empty, discouraged, and depressed.

You cannot destroy envy by just trying to be less envious. To destroy envy, you have to address and deal with emptiness.

Another subtle root similar to envy is jealousy. When the perceived injustice is fear or insecurity about the possible loss of possessions, status, or relationships to someone seen as having superior qualities, the result is likely to be jealousy. Jealousy most often includes envy. Envy over the attributes someone else has is perceived as a threat to what I, value, and desire to keep. Jealousy comes from a need for attachment, attention, and reassurance.

I could claim, for argument's sake, that a little jealousy may be a good thing. I would be wrong. If we pause to look at ourselves and the relationships and possessions we value, we may be motivated to better ourselves so as not to lose what we hold dear. If I live with the fear that what I value will be taken by someone with superior qualities, then I am living in a prison of constant external comparison. You are not going to win this battle. There will always be someone smarter, more productive, more beautiful, more durable, faster, and yes, younger. Welcome to a restless life of no contentment with no freedom to fully enjoy what you do have. If our precious relationships get caught in this jealous storm, you are increasing the likelihood of losing them. A

relationship with another human being is not a possession you own. If you treat it like a possession, you will smother it to death. It takes humility to strengthen a relationship. It is humility that builds the trust needed for a relationship to grow. The pressure to be who you are not, for the sake of hanging on to what you have, will destroy humility. Contentment and humility are much more attractive than a college degree or a new sports car. So be grateful for what you have, be humble about who you are, and be honest with yourself and others, and you will find your resilience will get more durable, and your relationships will improve.

Another subtle root of bitterness is cynicism. Cynicism is a general distrust of the motives of others. The cynic believes all human conduct is motivated primarily by self-interest and should not be trusted. The cynic believes there is a conflict between society's stated motives and goals and the actual motives and intentions. You know you are cynical when you experience frustration, disillusionment, and distrust towards organizations and others. To live in constant suspicion regarding other's motives is a drain on your resilience. The cynic must trust his ability to perceive and judge the motives of others accurately. It does not take long in life to realize two important truths, firstly, that everyone will prove themselves untrustworthy at some time. Secondly, your ability to judge the motives of others accurately is often faulty. It is hard

enough to figure out our motives, let alone the motives of someone else. So how does a defective human being live without becoming cynical? The world is full of imperfect, self-serving human beings. The cynic rejects others because of their self-centered actions or motives, and the cynic defines others by their actions. If you lie to me, you are a liar. If you steal from me, you are a thief. In the mind of the cynic, other people deserve rejection because they are self-centered and motivated by their self-serving desires. The cynic knows this as fact because they are just as self-centered as all those they judge as being unworthy, and this self-centeredness blinds the cynic. You cannot become a cynic without being just as self-centered as those you reject.

The cynic sees other's self-centeredness but not their struggle or pain. If we could see the internal conflicts and turmoil in others as quickly as we see their self-centered actions, we would not become so cynical. We do not have to accept the selfish acts of lying, cheating, stealing, etc.; boundaries need setting, but we should also not define the person by those actions or reject them because of their actions. To guard ourselves against cynicism, we need to "Hate the sin, but not the sinner." We need to be slow to judge, very slow to speak, and quick to forgive. The part in the Lord's prayer that states, "*Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors*" Matthew 6:12 (KJV) means we can expect forgiveness from God to the

degree that we forgive others. If you want or need a lot of forgiveness, then don't judge others too quickly.

Be on guard that these subtle roots of bitterness are not part of your life.

CHAPTER 4 – NOT-SO-SUBTLE ROOTS OF BITTERNESS

The Not-So-Subtle Roots of Bitterness are more evident than the subtle roots, but they are still subtle in their presentation. With this category of roots, you can start to taste the bitterness.

Two of the not-so-subtle roots of bitterness are disdain and disgust. With disdain, the self-centered, self-inflated, self-focus person looks at others as being unworthy. They only see themselves as being worthy. They treat others with contempt. The thoughts, feelings, words, and actions of others are not even worth acknowledging.

Disgust is a more potent form of disdain. With disgust, the self-centered person looks at others with extreme dislike or aversion to the point of being nauseated. The thoughts,

feelings, words, and actions of others are offensive. Ongoing disdain and disgust will eventually lead to a life of bitterness.

A more subtle, not-so-subtle, root of bitterness is mocking. Mocking is where the self-centered, self-inflated person attacks others through ridicule, contempt, scorn, or imitation. Mocking is disdain and disgust freely shared with others. Mockers attack through humor or shared secrets, leaving the hearer feeling privileged or entertained. If you listen to the mocker, the chances are good; you will become his next victim. Mockers are self-centered, and what they do is mock. Mocking stirs up all sorts of conflict, pain, and confusion. Stay away from mockers. Don't be a mocker. If you are a mocker or listen to mockers, you will eventually become bitter.

Even more subtle than mocking is the root of bitterness called gossiping. Mocking is evil, but gossiping is nothing more than "nice" mocking. Blackmail is gossip with a chance to stop it for a price, so in a way, blackmail is a more ethical form of gossiping. Gossiping is the idle talk or spreading of rumors about the personal or private affairs of others. The interpretation of the Hebrew word for gossip is an evil tongue, a form of corrupt communication that demeans the dignity of man. The gossiper shows they are superior by sharing things about others you do not know. As with mocking, if you listen

to gossip, you will become the next victim of the gossiper. The gossiper pulls you in with the bait of a shared secret to get you close enough to share your secrets. The gossiper then uses what they have learned from you to spread more gossip. Gossip is mocking with a new paint job. Our culture is obsessed with gossip. Gossip is used as a tool by one political candidate against another, and often the one with the best control of the gossip becomes the winner. Reality television shows are nothing more than glorified gossip. We enjoy taking a close look at the secrets of others, especially if they are rich or famous. Much cinematic drama is gossip about make-believe characters, and we sit there entertained hour after hour about the pretend lives of others. Gossip is consuming. Do not listen to gossip. Do not be a gossiper. Mocking and gossiping are nothing more than verbal, or in this age, electronic, communication violence against others. Just listening to mocking or gossip will drain your resilience. Be careful, or you will become bitter.

CHAPTER 5 – OBVIOUS ROOTS OF BITTERNESS

In this category of bitterness, there is no subtleness. These roots of bitterness are seen by all to be expressions of active bitterness.

One, somewhat subtle, obvious roots of bitterness is haughtiness. Haughtiness is where you place a very high value on how you do things. You believe your way of doing things is the only way. Haughtiness expresses itself as “my way, or the highway.” Haughtiness occurs when there is an imbalance in what you do and how you do it. If you are insecure in what you are doing or think what you have done will be viewed as insufficient by others, then you are likely to focus on how you do things, and this may result in haughtiness. Others perceive haughty people as being meddlers or micromanagers. Ongoing haughtiness will leave

you socially isolated and eventually bitter. Haughtiness appears to others as arrogance or snobbishness.

Another obvious root of bitterness is anger. Anger is an intense emotion. Anger is a strong, uncomfortable, and hostile response to a perceived threat or hurt. Anger occurs when a person experiences a violation of their boundaries.

Modern psychologists view anger as a primary, natural, and mature emotion experienced by virtually all humans at times, and as something having functional value for survival. Anger can be a protective mechanism to show a person something is wrong and requires changing. Anger can mobilize psychological resources for corrective action. Uncontrolled anger, however, can negatively affect personal or social well-being and negatively impact those around you.

There are three types or classifications of anger.

There is hasty and sudden anger, which is an impulse for self-preservation. This form of anger is episodic and usually resolves quickly.

There is deliberate anger, which is a reaction to perceived intentional harm or unfair treatment by others. This form of anger is also episodic.

Thirdly, there is dispositional anger, which is more of a

character trait and is not episodic. The individual with dispositional anger is angry all the time. Dispositional anger leads to or comes from bitterness.

Anger causes a reduction in cognitive ability and interferes with the accurate processing of external stimuli. In other words, when you are angry, you cannot think clearly or accurately evaluate your surroundings. Therefore, dangers seem smaller, actions seem less risky, ventures seem more likely to succeed, and unfortunate events seem less likely. Angry people are more likely to make risky decisions and make less realistic risk assessments. Being chronically angry drains your resilience, and can lead to bitterness.

Another obvious root of bitterness is hatred. Hatred is anger, disgust, animosity, or resentment directed against specific individuals, groups, objects, or ideas. Hatred is anger with a target. It will quickly drain your resilience and leave you bitter.

Another obvious root of bitterness is vengefulness. Vengefulness is anger and hatred directed at a target with a plan to carry out an act to correct a perceived injustice with no regard for the law. The purpose of vengefulness is to punish a wrong by going outside the law. Vengefulness will not only drain your resilience tank and leave you angry and bitter, but it may also get you a free trip to jail.

Another more subtle yet obvious root of bitterness is deception. Deception is a way of attempting to gain power over someone else. It is a manipulation of the truth to create an impression of superiority. Deception comes from a deep feeling of insecurity, continually informing us if people knew us thoroughly, they would immediately reject us. If I can make you believe I am someone I am not, then my deception is successful. As you work to spread your deception, all you do is define yourself as a liar, and liars are not to be trusted.

Deception comes in many forms. It can appear as speech or silence, actions or inactions, a facial expression, an association, or a disassociation. Deception is a false image, and there are many degrees of deception. A lot of what we do is purposeful in creating an image of ourselves. Most often, this image is a fabrication or twisting of reality. From the way we comb our hair or don't comb our hair, to the car we drive, our actions and words have an image-purpose. We live in a world of pervasive deception, as we continue to deceive. Is there a sincere person anywhere? Where are the authentic people? Is all deception immoral? What forms of deception are harmful? What types of deception could be called a root of bitterness? Is there a moral manipulation of the truth for the greater good? Philosophers and theologians have pondered these questions for millennia.

The deception motivated by insecurity will lead to all sorts of actions and words to project an image acceptable to others. This type of deception or fraud is called pretense. Pretense is affirmation seeking deception. Pretense will more likely cause exhaustion and depression than lead to bitterness.

The deception motivated by greed is the type of deception, eventually leaving the actor bitter. This type of greedy deception is delusion through false hope. This type of deceiver is aware of human frailties and insecurities and uses them for their benefit. If I can promise you a small act on your part will provide a solution for fear or uncertainty, then you will be easily deceived. Destructive deception is a matter of motive, but we need to be very careful, or else we are likely to deceive ourselves, thinking our motives are pure when they are rooted in greed. Greed-seeking deception is destructive and will leave you empty because affirmation gained through deception never satisfies. After all, it is an affirmation for a fraudulently projected image. The image is not real, and therefore, the affirmation lacks substance. It may take a long time, but the truth will eventually surface. In the end, you will be exhausted and bitter. Do not be the deceiver. Live authentically.

CHAPTER 6 – GREED

The power behind all of the roots of bitterness is greed and emptiness. Greed is the passionate pursuit of more, just for the sake of having more. It is an insatiable longing that cannot be satisfied. It is a loud, demanding hunger. A hunger that does not go away. It is a desire for more food, money, affirmation, affection, power, knowledge, status, or comfort. It is an inability to experience contentment with what you currently have. Greed is an intense pang of hunger with unattainable peace. The Merriam-Webster dictionary definition of greed is “a selfish and excessive desire for more of something (such as money) than is needed, motivated by naked ambition.”

A form of greed is known as avarice, which is an excessive desire to gain and possess wealth. The root word for greed or avarice is also the ancient root word for grasping, craving,

long for, gluttony, voracious, hungry, covetous, or eager to obtain with an emphasis on hunger.

The destructive component in greed is not the hunger or the object of the craving. The lethal element is the lack of contentment in the passionate pursuit of attaining more when you already have enough.

Imagine a boatload of refugees afloat at sea in an attempt to escape execution. They hope to gain sanctuary in a country tolerant of their political and religious beliefs. Their expected journey should be four days, but the weather changes, and they have to endure a winter storm. They are now ten days into their ordeal and are tired, sore, and very hungry. A few of the refugees planned better than the others and brought extra supplies of food. One of the refugees brought enough food to last a month. While the group was sound asleep one night, the refugee who had a month's supply of food stole the food that the other passengers had brought with them. In this scenario, everyone is hungry, but only some have access to food. Greed is not hunger, nor is it the supply of food brought by one passenger. The picture of greed is the passenger with lots of food, stealing from the others. He craves more, more than he needs, but he remains unsatisfied. Greed is a thirst never quenched, a hunger never satisfied, or a longing never achieved. We all must wrestle with greed.

How does greed lead to bitterness? The intense desire and pursuit of more and the inability to experience contentment cause the greedy individual to view others as obstacles in their attainment of the more they desire. We perceive barriers as being unjust and offensive; therefore, we can justify being bitter. In my current line of work, if you get between an addict and their drug of choice, you will be seen as being offensive and a target of bitterness. Greed is the energy behind all the roots of bitterness.

The greedy individual focuses on their needs, and they soon become unaware of the needs of those around them. The greedy become blind and deaf to their world. This world view can be a disaster for relationships and guarantee the failure of a business. A business owner that loses sight of the needs of their customers will not be in business very long.

Jesus warned the people of His day to avoid greed as recorded in Luke 12:15 (TPT) *“Speaking to the people, Jesus continued, “Be alert and guard your heart from greed and always wishing for what you don’t have. For your life can never be measured by the amount of things you possess.”* Be on guard; greed is subtle but deadly and if we are honest, we are all greedy.

Greed will twist your thinking and fill your mind with all sorts of irrational thoughts and beliefs. Greed will convince you an

emotional need can be satisfied with a possession. The greedy believe you can eliminate misery with ownership. If I just possess more, life's misery will vanish. The greedy also assume that peace and contentment can be purchased. They may state they lack peace and contentment now because they do not have enough. Greed is self-centeredness on steroids.

Greed causes a restless intensity that will never be satisfied. With each unsuccessful attempt to attain more and an ongoing lack of contentment, the result is a growing dissatisfaction and despair. The greedy view other people as being obstacles to the achievement of more, so the greedy end up more isolated.

Proverbs 15:27 (MSG) describes the impact of greed on relationships. *“A greedy and grasping person destroys community; those who refuse to exploit live and let live.”*

The greedy live in constant conflict with others. Their needs are the only needs that are important, and they will do what they can to take from others. Proverbs 28:25 (NIV) *“The greedy stir up conflict, but those who trust in the LORD will prosper.”*

In the end, the greedy live out their lives in isolation and full of misery with no hope of a cure. If you are bitter, you are also

greedy. You do not want this to be a description of your life.

If you desire to be at peace and avoid greed, your goal should not be more; it should be contentment and gratitude for what we do have. 1 Timothy 6:6-10 (TPT) speaks to this issue. *“We have a “profit” that is greater than theirs—our holy awe of God! To have merely our necessities is to have enough. Isn’t it true that our hands were empty when we came into the world, and when we leave this world our hands will be empty again? Because of this, food and clothing is enough to make us content. But those who crave the wealth of this world slip into spiritual snares. They become trapped by the troubles that come through their foolish and harmful desires, driven by greed and drowning in their own sinful pleasures. And they take others down with them into their corruption and eventual destruction. Loving money is the first step toward all kinds of trouble. Some people run after it so much that they have given up their faith. Craving more money pushes them away from the faith into error, compounding misery in their lives!”*

Do not forget that greed is a part of every one of the roots of bitterness. Greed is ugly! If you are anxious, impatient, a gossip, a mocker, or any one of the previously listed roots of bitterness, then you are also greedy. We all need to admit and address the greed in our lives if we want to be free from destructive bitterness.

How do we get a handle on the evil of greed? Understanding where greed originates will help get it under control. Greed is a desperate attempt to fill a deep spiritual emptiness, a bottomless pit of human angst. Empty people are greedy; greedy people are bitter, and bitter people live in misery.

CHAPTER 7 – SPIRITUAL EMPTINESS

Are you living in misery? Are you exhausted and worn out? Has your life turned out differently than expected? Have you run out of answers? Do you feel isolated? Has life lost its meaning? Are you confused? If you think this way, you are spiritually empty. In the book of Psalms, chapter 6, verse 6, we read: *“I’m exhausted and worn out with my weeping. I endure weary, sleepless nights filled with moaning, soaking my pillow with my tears.”* (TPT)

The first step in learning how to deal with spiritual emptiness is to acknowledge its existence, and admit it is a problem. The root cause of your ongoing misery, greed, and bitterness is spiritual emptiness.

What is spirituality? What is spiritual emptiness? Why is spirituality important?

Spirituality is restoration. It is the restoration of body, soul, and spirit. It is the path and process of reclaiming our relationship with God, learning to walk with Him, and not in opposition to Him. It is the recovery of the image of God in man. It is the rebirth of our spirit with subsequent transformation in our soul and body.

Spiritual emptiness is the pursuit of comfort and a sense of completeness apart from a relationship to God. Man attempts to live life without depending on God, and the result is emptiness and misery.

We live in an age with a lot of possible solutions to our problems, not requiring reliance on God, so why do spiritual things matter? We know about proper diet and exercise. We have beneficial models of psychology and philosophy. We have affluence and distractions keeping us busy. We have never known so much about diet and exercise, yet we are more obese than ever. We have never had so much information on our psychology and emotions, yet the suicide and addiction rates are skyrocketing. We are rich in resources, yet poor in spirit. Something vital is still missing. We are all aware, deep inside us, there is someone, a master designer, who is much bigger than ourselves, and we were made to serve that someone and not to spend our life in endless self-service and misery.

We are rarely aware of our spiritual emptiness. It becomes apparent when we are up against something much bigger than ourselves, like the threat of a significant loss or a struggle with addiction. We are also aware of it during times of prosperity when, even if we have acquired everything we could want, we are still aware something vital is missing. This awareness is often written off as a bout of fatigue or emotional exhaustion when we are trying to fill our spirit with a substitute that could never satisfy.

If you are a pastor, counselor, social worker, psychologist, psychiatrist, or medical professional, be very cautious. If you make it your mission and responsibility to find a cure for this misery, you will burn out. There is no effective psychotherapy or medication for this type of misery. You may be able to provide some brief consolation with your medications and talk therapy, but the cure is dealing with spiritual emptiness.

How do you know you are spiritually empty? What are the signs and symptoms of spiritual emptiness? A spiritually empty life is a life of self-centeredness and self-promotion. All that matters are my experience, my life, my comfort, and my image. I may be aware of others, but not aware of their pain or their struggle. The life mission of the spiritually empty is to avoid discomfort and pursue comfort, no matter what the cost.

If you are spiritually empty, you are proud; you think your way

is the only way. You may be sweet and kind about it, but you are still arrogant.

If you are spiritually empty, you are also deceptive. You deceive others, and you deceive yourself. You work hard to hide your faults and point out the flaws in others; in an ever so lovely way.

If you are spiritually empty, you are not thankful or grateful. You live your life with constant discontent. You are never satisfied.

These are several pieces of evidence of living a spiritually empty life, but the most significant proof is that you are living a life of constant comparison. You will find hallow contentment or increased discontentment in comparison with peers or comparison with your former youthful self. We continuously use comparison as a tool to determine our value. From the time we are first born, the comparisons begin. We are weighed and measured and labeled based on our size. As life goes on, the comparison continues.

Just pause for a moment to consider the many tools of comparison you experience on an average day. You have scales to weigh you, measuring tapes that size you, clothing sizes, IQ tests, school grades, credit scores, and of course, the big one, a mirror. We compare ourselves to others and

our former selves, and in the end, we are not satisfied. If you score high on the comparison scale today, the result is pressure to maintain your position or arrogance because of your success. If you rate low on the comparison scale, the result is discontentment. As you age, the person you see in the mirror every day becomes a fading vision of your once fit and fashionable self. Spiritual emptiness, the life of constant comparison, results in a life of quiet desperation, full of disappointment, and discouragement.

We end up wasting a lot of our life trying to fight or change what we cannot change. It is time to accept, as people, we are all very self-centered. We grumble and complain because no one understands us. We believe no one can experience our physical or emotional pain the way we can, so we end up on a life-long personal mission to achieve comfort. When we accomplish some degree of comfort, we become proud; when we fail, we become depressed and even more self-centered. To get what we feel we need, we become deceptive and, in the process, lose our authenticity. We are no longer thankful or grateful; we live discontented and dissatisfied in a sea of constant comparison. This experience is the living hell of spiritual emptiness, a life of quiet desperation where at best, we experience momentary comfort amid meaningless, endless distractions. It is a life of continuous self-service and fading compassion. All we care about is our comfort. We are

willing to bend the rules because we see our circumstances as being unique, so society's rules don't need to apply to me. We live as bitter, lonely victims with no sense of meaning or purpose. Our thoughts and motives are awash with denial and irresponsibility. We are dependent on our environment to come through for us and lessen our discomfort. When our discomfort increases, we become more self-focused and more aware of our pitiful human predicament. We spend our life wallowing in discontent. Living this way is the definition of spiritual emptiness. We are all born with our backs turned to God, determined to go our own way, and in the process of seeking comfort, manage to create even more discomfort and pain.

How do we deal with this weight of spiritual emptiness? If we recognized what the problem is and acknowledge it is an issue for all humans, we can stop comparing ourselves to one another and get on with addressing the real problem, our spiritual emptiness. If we are aware that where we turn to address and fill our void will not work, then maybe we will have a chance to change directions. We do not have to remain spiritually empty. The problem, however, is it takes humility, honesty, courage, and gratitude to turn our lives around and seek God, and of course, this requires a leap of faith. It takes faith to believe there is a loving creator who has provided a way back to Him through the sacrifice of His Son. A sacrifice

that meant He experienced all the physical pain, social isolation, misery, and psychological anguish that all humans have ever experienced. There is someone who knows what we are experiencing. He suffered it on the cross. He bore the weight of it for you. He has provided the path back to God. God has provided this gift, a gift we only need to accept.

So, what does spirituality mean? How do we become more spiritual? The answer is simple. In the book of Jeremiah, chapter 29 and verse 13 (MSG), *“When you come looking for me, you’ll find me. Yes, when you get serious about finding me and want it more than anything else, I’ll make sure you won’t be disappointed.”* The path to spirituality is the humble, courageous path of seeking God with your whole heart. As we take these steps, it is essential not to be confused by what spirituality is not. People and society promote many practices and beliefs as being spiritual or as a means of gaining a relationship with God. Most of these means are nothing more than counterfeit spirituality.

Spirituality does not involve comparing yourself to anyone else. Spirituality is comparing yourself to what God has in store for you and living by His Word. Much of what we have equated with spirituality is nothing more than man’s program to feel good about himself. I have worked with a lot of criminal patients over the years; as a group, most of them attend

church regularly. They attend church, not for spiritual growth, but as a way of convincing themselves, they are good people, and how they conduct their life is not so bad. If you pause and look, you will find self-deceivers in every church. Are you one of those self-deceivers?

Spirituality is not the maintaining of a list of laws and rules. Laws, regulations, and boundaries are helpful to avoid negative consequences, but the keeping of commandments does not get you closer to God. A life focused on law-keeping will result in a lack of compassion and joy. Rule-keeping and law-focus is another mode of comparison used to determine our value. If I keep more laws than you, then I am more spiritual than you – this is not spirituality; it is a force driving people away from God and away from each other.

Spirituality is not a specific group of practices like meditation, prayer, or worship. Prayer, meditation, and worship are valuable elements of a relationship with God but are only weak psychological boosters outside of a relationship with God. Do not use these practices as a measure of your spirituality. Just because you pray longer than your spouse does not necessarily make you a more spiritual person than your spouse. Are you praying, meditating, and worshipping because of your relationship with God, or are you praying, meditating, and worshipping trying to gain favor with God?

Spirituality is not “sacrifice.” A relationship with God should free us to be generous in our giving, but how much you give does not determine your level of spirituality. You should be free to give because of what God has given to you, giving out of gratitude and thanksgiving and not as a means of buying special favors from God.

Spirituality is not a specific diet or dietary code. You are responsible for what you put into your body. A specific diet will not get you closer to God. On the other hand, gluttony, alcohol abuse, and drug abuse are evidence you are spiritually empty. You are responsible for everything you eat, drink, inhale, or inject. Choosing to put anything into your body to alter your mood is evidence of spiritual emptiness.

Spirituality is not a belief. As it states in the Bible – “even the devil believes.” It is more a matter of faith and seeking God than knowledge. It is not just the belief; it is what you do with the knowledge. How have your beliefs changed your life?

Spirituality is not belonging to a specific group or club. Membership or attendance at a church or religious group does not make you spiritual. Encouraging one another of similar faith can be very uplifting and healing. It can promote a relationship with God, but it is not a relationship with God or a measure of your relationship with God.

Spirituality is not knowledge, wisdom, or reason. Spirituality is trusting God and not trusting your ability to reason. It is often more difficult for those seen to possess knowledge, wisdom, or ability to rely on their strengths and not to trust God. Gaining knowledge and acquiring wisdom can help determine a path in life, a track with more positive results than negative consequences. But exceptional mental skills do not equate with spirituality. Knowledge can help you see the wonder of God's creation. Reason can help you evaluate your life, and if mixed with honesty, it can help you realize your knowledge and wisdom is not enough to build a relationship with God. A high intelligence quotient does not equal a high spiritual quotient, which is only a product of humble faith.

Spirituality is not doing something to gain God's approval; it is accepting what He has so graciously offered. Spirituality is not living with pressure to perform but living with thanksgiving for what He has provided. Try as hard as you like; it will not improve your walk with God. The effort and activities you use to gain spirituality may act as diversions, or a means to avoid painful areas in your life, but it will not bring you closer to God.

Spirituality is not just crying out to God for deliverance or personal comfort. Most people live their lives with no desire to relate to God. They carry on from day to day until some big disaster; then, they cry out to God to come through for them.

God is gracious and, at times, will come through. Still, it is much better to develop this relationship before the going gets tough, at a time when the relationship may guide you in a direction that could avoid some of those big disasters.

Spirituality is not a partial surrender or calling out to God to rescue in times of trouble. Spirituality is not surrendering in part or your life with the hope of seeing improvement, it is a surrender of all areas of your life. In my work in addiction medicine, I meet a lot of people who use surrender as a means of trying to build a stronger inner resolve to fight a craving. This type of surrender is more of a psychological trick to fight off an urge. Often the addiction wins this fight. Surrender and submission are all or none, and it is terrifying.

Are you miserable? What are you doing about your spiritual emptiness? Is spirituality important to you? Are you discontented? Are you spiritually empty? Are you working hard to achieve what God has given as a gift? Are you honest about your life? Are you humble? Are you grateful? Are you content? Where do you turn for answers to life's difficult questions? Do not forget the promise that if you seek Him, you will find Him - seek with your whole heart - God will not disappoint.

CHAPTER 8 - LIVING IN A BITTER WORLD

We live in a world awash with bitterness and misery. How do we survive? How do we keep it together? How do we protect ourselves against bitterness?

God created man to experience fulfillment in quality relationship with God, aware of his value and purpose, active and creative, with power, and a vibrant eternal spirit. Humanity is to be both physically alive and spiritually alive. God created humanity with all that was needed to be completely content. With disobedience came a fracture in our God-image. Now there is a problem. We still have God's image, but its expression and experience have become severely distorted.

God is patient, God is kind, and God has provided, through His Son, a path of restoration. God loves you and is wanting

to relate to a humble, honest, and thankful humanity. Psalm 139: 5-6 (TPT) is an expression of this kind of love. *“You’ve gone into my future to prepare the way, and in kindness, you follow behind me to spare me from the harm of my past. With your hand of love upon my life, you impart a blessing to me. This is just too wonderful, deep, and incomprehensible! Your understanding of me brings me wonder and strength.”*

We do not need to fear the future; God has gone into our future to prepare our way. Even when things seem dark and uncertain, God has prepared our future. You do not need to be anxious about tomorrow or paralyzed because of your past. We do not have to be controlled by guilt, shame, offenses, past abuse, or injustices. We do not have to live a life of misery and bitterness. There is hope. Because of a loving God, we can be free from anxiety about the future and harm from the past and live with thanksgiving today. Relationship with God is the only effective treatment for the misery of bitterness.

“Then God said, “Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground.” Genesis 1:26 (NLT) God imprinted humanity with His image. This image of God is the essence of who we are as humans. If we live

consistent with the image, we are content, but if we live contrary to the image, the consequences are emptiness, greed, bitterness, discontent, pain, and turmoil. This fractured-image is why we struggle with the burdens common to all humanity. We all, to some degree, struggle with the same things. Life is hard. On the surface, it may seem some struggle more than others, but we are all tempted to turn our backs on God to the same degree. Our emptiness drives our greed and gives birth to self-destructive bitterness and misery.

In God's grand creation, humans are unique. We are all image-bearers. We are not the same as other mammals. We have the image of God and an eternal spirit.

As an image-bearer, no matter how hard we try to deny God, we know there is a God, a benevolent, intelligent creator and we are not that creator. *"For ever since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power, and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through His workmanship [all His creation, the wonderful things that He has made], so that they [who fail to believe and trust in Him] are without excuse and without defense."* Romans 1:20 (AMP) We do not have to feel pressured to convince people there is a God. The knowledge of God is already in them and is evident everywhere you look in God's creation. There is an intelligent creator, a loving, intelligent creator.

Unfortunately, the knowledge that there is a God does not mean we will seek Him. On the contrary, we all try to hide from God. We have our ways to protect ourselves from God. We hide from God through open rebellion, denial, drugs, or alcohol. We can also hide in innocent appearing ways like computer games, work, service, and on and on. We are skilled at running and hiding. We justify the hiding by focusing on the injustices we have had to endure. We feel we deserve to be bitter. Bitter towards our fellow man and resentful towards God.

We are all greedy and self-serving. Our only experience of this world is through our own eyes, and we become blind to the life and struggles of others. We are here for ourselves. Apart from a relationship with God, we all, whether sweet or nasty, follow a self-serving life path. If we are not God-serving, we are self-serving. What has been self-serving soon becomes self-consuming! All the selfish acts we have performed and all the self-serving stuff we have gathered will eventually burn.

Discontentment is a part of every human's life experience. The result of being a fractured bitter image-bearer is discontent. This discontentment is often deep and painful. The pain of this discontent causes us to be self-focused and self-protective. If you drop a concrete block on your foot, you

are not likely, at that moment, to be thinking about your neighbor's struggle with life. We become fixated on our pain and how we have been offended. When you focus on pain, it only makes the pain more intense.

As fractured image-bearers, we are all equally tempted to turn from God and seek our way. We try to make our life work and lessen the pain of discontent. The light from God's presence reveals our deception and self-centeredness, and this exposure is painful, so we run and hide.

The pain of life's struggles compels us to look for solutions that are within our power and control. We do everything in our ability to remain independent of God and, in the process, become dependent on our irrational beliefs and schemes.

We know there is more because God has planted eternity in our hearts. This life on earth cannot be all there is. We do all we can to quiet this unsettling feeling. We use distraction, denial, activities, and possessions to gain some sense of superficial peace. None of our ingenious schemes work, so we end up living in quiet discontent or open misery.

Discontent becomes discomfort, which then drives our actions and motives to seek comfort. Comfort at any cost becomes life's main priority. Compulsive comfort-seeking quickly turns into an addiction.

Bitter people like to stick together, and they do not wish to be around contented people. Misery truly loves company. We do not want our secret comfort plan exposed, so we avoid those who have a restored God-image and huddle together with other bitter people.

Living the life that God intended – the life of a restored image-bearer brings contentment. Thankfully, God has a plan for restoration – a way for us to regain the restored God-image. *“Even though you were once distant from him, living in the shadows of your evil thoughts and actions, he reconnected you back to himself. He released his supernatural peace to you through the sacrifice of his own body as the sin-payment on your behalf so that you would dwell in his presence. And now there is nothing between you and Father God, for he sees you as holy, flawless, and restored,”* Colossians 1:21-22 (TPT) We do not have to remain in a life of misery.

With the renewing of our spirit, we can live as God intended, but we still have an unrestored mind, habits, emotions, and desires. We need to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, and our minds need ongoing renewal. Romans 12:1-2 (AMP) *“Therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies [dedicating all of yourselves, set apart] as a living sacrifice, holy and well-pleasing to God, which is your rational (logical, intelligent) act of*

worship. And do not be conformed to this world [any longer with its superficial values and customs], but be transformed and progressively changed [as you mature spiritually] by the renewing of your mind [focusing on godly values and ethical attitudes], so that you may prove [for yourselves] what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect [in His plan and purpose for you].” Our minds are renewed or washed by God’s word. Ephesians 5:26 (TPT) “to make us holy and pure, cleansing us through the showering of the pure water of the Word of God.” We are now on the path from misery to peace. The process is one of humbly coming before the Lord, asking Him to search our hearts and identify and root out the irrational thoughts, the untamed emotions, the damaging habits, and the ungodly desires. We can rest confident in Philippians 1:6 (AMP) “I am convinced and confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will [continue to] perfect and complete it until the day of Christ Jesus [the time of His return].” If you are drowning in bitterness or wallowing in misery, take time daily to ask God to search your heart and then have the courage and faith to change what He reveals to you. At the end of your day, as you prepare for bed, pray Psalms 139:23-24 (TPT), “God, I invite your searching gaze into my heart. Examine me through and through; find out everything that may be hidden within me. Put me to the test

and sift through all my anxious cares. See if there is any path of pain I'm walking on, and lead me back to your glorious, everlasting ways - the path that brings me back to you." If you abandon this daily growth process, it will not take long, and greed, misery, and bitterness will slowly creep back into your life.

If you follow this path, do not expect appreciation from your previous group of family and friends. If you have been part of a group that shares their bitterness and you move in a godly path, you will face rejection from your former bitter friends. Your contentment is a threat to their beliefs, irrational thinking, and their way of life. You bring with you God's light, and this is a threat to those hiding in the darkness. They hide knowing they are not living as one should; they know their deeds are self-centered and evil. They don't want your light around. If you become offended because your previous social group rejects you, you may resort to your previously destructive irrational thoughts as a way of escape. Bitterness can be tempting. Stand firm, God is faithful, even when your family and friends are not.

How do we live contented and at peace in a world of bitterness? How do we thrive and grow in godliness in a crooked and perverse world? How do we survive with a bitter spouse or close friend? What does Philippians 2:12 (AMP)

mean when it states, “*continue to work out your salvation [that is, cultivate it, bring it to full effect, actively pursue spiritual maturity] with awe-inspired fear and trembling [using serious caution and critical self-evaluation to avoid anything that might offend God or discredit the name of Christ]?*” This renewed God-image life is only possible if we follow Paul’s advice in Philippians 2:5-9 (AMP). “*Have this same attitude in yourselves which was in Christ Jesus [look to Him as your example in selfless humility], who, although He existed in the form and unchanging essence of God [as One with Him, possessing the fullness of all the divine attributes—the entire nature of deity], did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped or asserted [as if He did not already possess it, or was afraid of losing it]; but emptied Himself [without renouncing or diminishing His deity, but only temporarily giving up the outward expression of divine equality and His rightful dignity] by assuming the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men [He became completely human but was without sin, being fully God and fully man]. After He was found in [terms of His] outward appearance as a man [for a divinely-appointed time], He humbled Himself [still further] by becoming obedient [to the Father] to the point of death, even death on a cross.*” If we expect to thrive and grow and break free from bitterness, we must humble ourselves as Christ humbled Himself. We need, with the help and comfort

of the Holy Spirit, to live without regard to our reputation. We must lay aside our self-centeredness and pride and seek Him.

The individual with the restored God-image will pursue the most important relationships in their lives. The most important relationship is the relationship with God. Take time to talk to God, ask Him questions, look for answers to your questions in His word.

Secondly, value your relationships with other people. Follow the instructions given in Philippians 2:4 (KJV) and *“Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.”* Do not just rapidly pray for others; take time to consider their “personal interests.” Ask yourself, what is it like to be _____? (fill in the name of the individuals you will meet today). If you find your love for others has grown cold, you will find it starts to warm again if you take the time to consider their “personal interests.” To help with this a little more, I would like to introduce a concept called “burden filtering.” Your love grows cold because you have become preoccupied with the miseries of your life.

This painful misery results in self-focus, and this causes our love for others to grow cold rapidly. Following the advice in Philippians 2:4 will begin to warm your compassion. Take five minutes daily for the next seven days and consider someone else. Now “burden filtering” is not just thinking about them; it

is prayerfully thinking about them in the light of their possible present struggles. Make a list of the people you are going to consider. The list should include a parent, your spouse, or a close friend, someone much younger than you like your child or grandchild, a person of prominence you admire, a homeless person standing on the street corner with their cardboard sign, and a friend. You should include someone you dislike, like someone who has mocked you or caused an offense. Now take five minutes to consider the person in the light of their life misery and struggle. Do they struggle with a sense of isolation and meaninglessness? Are they struggling with their decisions and purpose? Are they struggling with their mortality, and are they spiritually whole? Are they struggling with issues of trust? Are they aware that God loves them? Do not use this time to compare their struggles to yours. Assume that their battles are currently more intense and painful than yours. Remember, we are to consider others above ourselves and not less than ourselves. Once you have completed this time of “burden filtering,” it is time to pray.

Start by thanking the Lord for them, thanking Him that He loves them more than you ever could, thank Him that John 3:16 applies to them as much as it does to you. Ask that the word of God’s love come to them, and offer yourself as a means to deliver the message of hope. Ask the Lord to prepare your words and provide the opportunity. Ask the Lord

to send other believers across their path, someone who they will listen to that can guide them to Him. Ask that the scales of doubt, denial, self-centeredness, and spiritual blindness fall from their spiritual eyes. Ask the Lord to protect them so they may feel the consequences of their life direction but not suffer harm in pursuing that direction. If this “burden filtering,” followed by prayer, becomes a regular part of your life, you will find you start to see others as God sees them, and your compassion will warm. Boundaries will still be necessary, but at least you will be able to set them with kindness.

By seeking God to address your emptiness and setting aside greed and bitterness, you are now free to live your life as originally intended. What you depend on for your sense of value owns you. God Himself owns you now; He paid the price for your freedom. You are now free from the exhausting efforts you used to spend to gain a sense of value apart from God. You can now live with realistic expectations and priorities that will bring contentment and fulfillment. This freedom will unleash your creative power and bring life and substance to your dreams and imaginations, so you can find and fulfill your role in making the world and God’s kingdom a better place.

With a restored God-image, you no longer must live being controlled by fear. We can live with the promise in Romans

8:31(AMP) *“What then shall we say to all these things? If God is for us, who can be [successful] against us?”* We no longer feel the need to waste our life hiding, guarding secrets, or living in denial. God is big enough to handle any reality. We are free to be humble and honest.

A restored God-image means we are more spiritually intact and aware. We understand the meaning of Ephesians 6:12 (AMP) *“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood [contending only with physical opponents], but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this [present] darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly (supernatural) places.”* We are aware that there is a lot more going on than we see on the surface.

In the ideal situation, in a world of non-bitter, contented people, relationships would be straight forward; people would love one another; they would be trustworthy and authentic. We will have to wait for that world. So, how do we maintain a life free from bitterness in a world of bitterness?

We should have the attitude of Philippians 2:5 (AMP) as a guide to relationships this side of heaven, *“Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit [through factional motives, or strife], but with [an attitude of] humility [being neither arrogant nor self-righteous], regard others as more important than yourselves.”* This attitude will impact the quality of our

relationships, give love a definition, help with proper placement of trust, and encourage authenticity. The Bible tells us that they will know we are Christians by our love and that we are to love others as we would love ourselves. Love, compassionate consideration of others must be balanced this side of heaven with boundaries. My work with people suffering from addiction is an excellent example of the importance of this principle. If I provide compassionate care without limitations, it will be interpreted as a license to continue a self-destructive lifestyle. These boundaries can and do save lives. Take time to think of appropriate boundaries. Boundaries are necessary for all our human relationships. At times these boundaries must be written and signed, especially if you are in the awkward position of raising a rebellious teen. Be courageous enough to state the boundaries. Give thoughtful consideration about what should be appropriate boundaries.

Our relationships should be compassionate and loving, but problems arise when we talk about trust. It is relatively easy to love, it is challenging to trust, yet it is the level of trust that more clearly defines the quality of a relationship. Trust should be based on someone's actions and not just their words. Some of the hardest criminals will speak some of the sweetest, kindest words. Trust is essential, but it must be with caution. Be patient in your judgment. The Bible tells us it is

by their fruit we will know someone. Develop your skills as a fruit inspector. You need to maintain clear boundaries while you wait to see the fruit of their life. Be honest and trustworthy, but be wise when it comes to trusting others. You do not want to permit ongoing injustice and offense.

Strive to be authentic. Be honest and humble. Cherish your solitude time with God, ask Him daily to search your heart then be willing to change what needs to be changed. The more authentic you are, the more clearly you will recognize authenticity or the lack of authenticity in others.

In an ideal world, we would all work together, and our meaning and value would be secure in who we are in a relationship with God. We would all cooperate and work to elevate one another. There would be no competition or striving for meaning, value, or purpose; we would have a clear understanding of our God-provided value.

We should live aware that our value comes from God. This awareness should produce an attitude of thanksgiving. Whether you succeed or fail in a task, your inherent value is secure as a child of God. Your life should reflect the words of the psalmist in Psalm 107:1 (AMP) *“O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; for His compassion and lovingkindness endure forever!”* Are you this thankful? Are you full of gratitude for all God has done for you? If thanksgiving is waning, it may be

time to ask why. It may be time for a humble and honest evaluation of where you draw your sense of meaning and worth. Pause, look at all you have or all you desire, and give it all back to God and let Him energize you.

2 Chronicles 7:14 (ASV) *“if my people, who are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.”* Humble yourself and pray, God will lift you, and He will restore your thanksgiving as you find your value in Him.

As you set aside greed and bitterness, you are now free to serve others. 1 Peter 4:10 (AMP) *“Just as each one of you has received a special gift [a spiritual talent, an ability graciously given by God], employ it in serving one another as [is appropriate for] good stewards of God’s multi-faceted grace [faithfully using the diverse, varied gifts and abilities granted to Christians by God’s unmerited favor].”* Your value does not come from your gifts or talents; they were given to you by God; you do not own them; you are a steward. Use what He has given you, whether it is much or little to serve others.

We are to be co-creators with God. With bitterness set aside, we have the freedom to approach a task as God intended. We can rely on our God-given creativity and curiosity to

pursue our dreams with passion and commitment.

We are free to use our God-given talents and abilities to dream and imagine solutions, businesses, inventions, and so on to serve God and others. Acts 2:17 (AMP) *“And it shall be in the last days,’ says God, ‘That I will pour out My Spirit upon all mankind; And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, And your young men shall see [divinely prompted] visions, And your old men shall dream [divinely prompted] dreams;”* It is time for God’s people to wake up and dream! You are free to use your energy to focus on the task and not be distracted, trying to gain a sense of meaning or attempting to avoid the consequences of destructive decisions. You can push ahead with diligence. Colossians 3:23-24 (AMP) *“Whatever you do [whatever your task may be], work from the soul [that is, put in your very best effort], as [something done] for the Lord and not for men, knowing [with all certainty] that it is from the Lord [not from men] that you will receive the inheritance which is your [greatest] reward. It is the Lord Christ whom you [actually] serve.”* If you are serving yourself, your diligence will dissolve, and you will become bitter. Do all you do as if you are serving the Lord.

You can now live your birthed dream with passion and commitment with the energy to see the vision come to reality.

When you live free of bitterness and misery, you no longer live

controlled by fear. You are secure in your relationship to God and no longer need to be controlled by fear of failure or the reliance on an excellent result to be confident in yourself. Isaiah 41:10 (AMP) *“Do not fear [anything], for I am with you; Do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, be assured I will help you; I will certainly take hold of you with My righteous right hand [a hand of justice, of power, of victory, of salvation].”*

With a restored spirit, we can now live with the right priorities. We no longer need to live in denial or be controlled by fear. We can begin to see and prioritize as God sees and prioritizes. We can understand what will last and what will burn. We are not held hostage by our sense of mortality.

When you are living in misery, you are focused on the injustices and offenses that have come your way. This type of life focus will destroy you. We should be living with eternity in mind - living to build and support God's kingdom, not striving to create our own little empire. Is eternity in your mind?

We should value what has eternal value. Pause to consider what will last and what will not last. Where is your focus? What do you value? What do you treasure? Luke 12:34 (AMP) *“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”* If your heart is troubled, it is because you have

rotten treasure. Live today with eternal priorities and values.

You are unique. God loves you. You can have a meaningful relationship with God. As His child, you have substantial value. You have God-given creative power. God gave you an eternal spirit. So, live your life as God intended, free from emptiness, misery, greed, and bitterness.

EPILOGUE

I have witnessed many lives destroyed by bitterness, but I have also experienced it in my own life. Several years ago, I was the recipient of what I felt was a massive injustice. Overnight, the world as I knew it changed dramatically. I was confused, anxious, restless, and gradually became bitter. I jumped on the indignation train to self-destruction. I cried out to God, I read the Bible, I prayed for a solution, but I remained bitter and self-centered. Thankfully, God is loving, gracious, and kind. The scales of self-centeredness gradually became apparent. I am thankful for those who prayed for me at that time. I am grateful for those who dared to speak. As the scales began to fall away, I found that I was ruminating about an offense, energized by arrogance, motivated by self-protection and rushing headlong into a bottomless pit of stupid. God is faithful, and if you humble yourself and pray,

He will provide a path for restoration.

I now pray every night as I go to bed Psalms 139: 23-24 (TPT)
“God, I invite your searching gaze into my heart. Examine me through and through; find out everything that may be hidden within me. Put me to the test and sift through all my anxious cares. See if there is any path of pain I’m walking on, and lead me back to your glorious, everlasting ways—the path that brings me back to you.”

If I had remained bitter, my life would have been a disaster. I want to live well, and I want to end well. I want to live in a way that brings glory to God and builds His kingdom. Wouldn’t we all want to be one of those people written about by the psalmist in Psalms 92:14-15 (TPT) *“For in your presence they will still overflow and be anointed. Even in their old age they will stay fresh, bearing luscious fruit and abiding faithfully. Listen to them! With pleasure they still proclaim: “You’re so good! You’re my beautiful strength! You’ve never made a mistake with me.”* There is no room for bitterness when you are in the position to proclaim with passion and conviction that *“You’ve never made a mistake with me.”* God did not give me the offense, but He was able to use it to show His love, compassion, and grace. Oh, what an incredible savior!

Books by this Author

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