

11 Challenges in Living a Bitter-Free Life

When I wrote the book *Bitter Free* in 2015, it was not from a place of theory or book knowledge. Little did I know in 2004 when I went all in for personal healing and transformation, that I would be challenged to the core relationally. When Jesus said in the last days hatred would increase, betrayal would abound and the love of many would grow cold, He was not kidding.

I took a step out to risk it all for helping people heal and walk with an overcomers heart and rise to walk in relationship transformation. Somewhat naive to the condition of people's hearts, I thought, "Who wouldn't want to experience greater freedom and healing and in their life?"

Boy, was I in for a rude awakening.

The realization of how much the enemy owned people's thought and choices was overwhelming. Not only was there so much destruction in people's lives, their ammunition would come firing at me. Whether it was direct fire or collateral damage, the explosions of bondage sought to defile me into a sea of bitterness.

I experienced more relational hurt than I ever did in the decades before I went "all in" for the overcoming life. I was challenged to the core. I felt the sting of betrayal from friends, neighbors and those that I was simply trying to help.

The abandonment came from those who said they would help, but would walk away so easily offended. If I had a nickel for the people who would pledge one day "I am all in," only to never be seen again ... So many would pledge support in words, only to disappear in action.

P.S. If you think I am talking about you, relax. I don't broadcast these issues or wear the pain on my Facebook page. Most people are not even aware of how their actions affected me and many others. Even when I tried to talk with them about it, the conversation would go sour. Too often people that hurt others are really just thinking of themselves. So many simply got knotted up in their own problems and personal brokenness, they had no time to see outside that.

God spoke to my heart in this season. I felt Him saying, "Are you willing to love people and equip them for healing, even if many reject you or hurt you back in response?" This was a tough question to answer, but one I was willing to face. I can't say I lived in it fully every day. I was still so shocked at how much believers were owned by the enemy.

I found myself receiving better responses from non-church people than those who called themselves followers of Christ. I would correspond with those who talked like they were comrades but would ignore my own season of hardship. I learned the hard way that most people get so lost in their problems that they become terrible friends. I would send emails for help and connection, only to get crickets. Something was really wrong!

It was in this time that living bitter free became formed in me through experiencing a lot of pain. I had a choice. Either the arrows that came at me would inject deep bitterness, or I would have to grow to a level I never walked in before.

The pages of that **book** became my own personal strategy to walk free in the midst of darkness. Besides what is in the book, here are some things I have had to learn to not let the enemy get the best of me in trying situations with people.

1. Many people simply won't run with you. You cannot take that personally. A lot of times it has nothing to do with you, but their own brokenness and focus on themselves.

2. Many do not want to deal with their issues. They would

rather remain in status quo of comfortability than face their pain and brokenness to go to the next level.

3. It's easier to blame than take responsibility. It is so much easier to blame my marriage struggles on my wife, ministry struggles on other people or limitations on what other people have or have not done. I ran into many who would rather blame their last pastor than deal with their own offended life. It is a lot harder to let God look at my heart and challenge me to go to the next level.

4. I can ignore the pain or face it and deal with it. I was one who shoved a lot of things down in the past. I would rather avoid the pain and move on than face what hurt and wounded me.

5. Healthy conflict resolution is really only for the overcomer. I believe one of the opposites of an overcomer is a coward. One of the signs of a coward is they run from any confrontation or hard relational issue.

I always wondered why in the book of Revelation, "cowards" were listed with the sexually immoral, murders and other sins. Yet I have learned that cowards create severe damage in organizations and families, because they never deal with issues in relationships. They can often be the most dangerous people in a group. They take the road of least resistance while the enemy devours their church, family and coworkers. They often allow more damage by their passivity than those who offensively destroy relationships.

6. What offends you and tempts you to be bitter reveals where you need to grow. We love to blame other people for our problems. I know pastors who would love to do ministry, just without any people. Sometimes I don't blame them. Yet we have to make the decision to grow in how we approach relationship and where we need love, grace and forgiveness to have a greater work in our lives.

7. The enemy is using more and more people to spread toxicity, so we must keep a spiritual lens on. We also cannot hide and isolate. Creating a log cabin in the woods away from humanity may sound nice, but it does nothing to lay an imprint of the kingdom in people's hearts. You cannot make a difference for God if you don't know how to do relationships. I don't care how spiritual you think you are.

8. Sometimes your anger is actually connected to something God is feeling over the land. I had a dear friend in ministry point this out to me as I grieved over what I saw in the church and in our generation. I was working hard to rid myself of this frustration, when this friend said to me, "I think you are feeling the ache of God over the land." When I noticed that, it caused me to immediately be more moved with compassion to make a difference, rather than sit in bitterness.

9. What I am able to handle now will determine my level of operation in the future. I have a choice. Do I want to remain stuck here, or do I want to grow? Will I wait for people to change or will I make the decision today to change and grow to the level of my walk? That choice is always mine.

10. I cannot carry the sin of others into my own being. Releasing and forgiving other people really helps me not to take their sin issues into my own life. Bitterness is the enemy's way of spreading the defilement of sin in the lives of everyone. It stops dead in its tracks when we forbid other people's negative choices to affect our being.

11. As I forgive others, I must also forgive and release myself. I have learned that being kind and gracious to myself is a gift to my health and wholeness. The junk of others can often cause me to be hard on myself. I would often think I was the problem or things were always my fault. This was a terrible trap, until I saw the enemy's plan in this area. Being kind to myself, staying out of guilt and not listening

to accusation, helped me to remain free of any shrapnel the enemy used through others to contaminate me.

Living bitter free is a choice. Who wants to join me as an overcomer to live in greater freedom? {eoa}

Mark DeJesus *has been equipping people in a full-time capacity since 1995, serving in various roles, including teaching people of all ages, communicating through music, authoring books, leading and mentoring. Mark is a teacher, author and mentor who uses many communication mediums, including the written word, a weekly radio podcast show and videos. Out of their own personal renewal, Mark and his wife, Melissa, founded Turning Hearts Ministries, a ministry dedicated to inside-out transformation. Mark also founded Transformed You, a communication platform for Mark's teachings, writing and broadcasts that are designed to encourage people in their journey of transformation.*

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