

Is There Bitterness in Your House?

I was once scheduled to speak at an annual women's conference at the Potter's House in Dallas. Before I arrived, I prepared the teaching I planned to give, "Is There a Lady in the House?" in which I describe two kinds of women: the industrious one lauded in Proverbs 31 and the "keeper at home" Paul writes about in Titus 2. But just as I was getting up to preach, the Lord told me, "You can't preach that message tonight."

At first I tried to convince Him to change His mind. But He reminded me that I was on assignment. I knew I had to say whatever He instructed, empowered and encouraged me to say—regardless of the risk or cost. And He wanted me to ask not "Is there a lady in the house?" but "Is there bitterness in the house?"

A Root of Bitterness

Why bitterness? Because we cannot be the women God desires us to be when there is a root of bitterness in our souls.

You know what bitterness in the natural is. Something that leaves an acrid, lingering taste in your mouth. Something that is unpleasant, distasteful, galling and unpalatable.

Bitterness of soul is also unpleasant. It develops as a result of facing something that is grievous, difficult to accept or extremely painful. It is marked by harshness, resentment and deep animosity. And it sounds something like this:

"I'm married, but my husband would rather be with someone else."

"I've been faithful to God, but He hasn't fulfilled my desire to marry yet, and I'm almost 40 years old."

"I give my tithes and offerings every week, and still I drive a raggedy car, have no husband and live in a one-bedroom apartment with my three fatherless children."

"I can preach and teach, and I'm anointed, but no one calls me to speak at conferences or meetings."

"I was a virgin when I got married in the church. Thirty days after my wedding, I found myself infected with a sexually transmitted disease I caught from my husband."

"I joined a church that I desperately want to be an active part of, but the pastor's wife resists me, the women ignore me, the men despise me and the pastor overlooks me."

"I raised my children to know and love God. I sacrificed time and money to educate them at a private Christian school. One year after graduation, my son dropped out of college and stopped attending church. He also started smoking dope and got his girlfriend pregnant. What did I do to deserve this?"

Bitterness manifests itself in various ways, but the overall effect is to keep us from living the kind of life God intends. It cripples us and prevents us from becoming the great, gracious, exciting women of God we are meant to be.

Instead of being loving and forgiving, we're angry and uptight. Instead of walking by faith, we're full of fear, worry and doubt. Instead of teaching other women to love, train and discipline their children, we're abusing our own. Instead of developing proper relationships with our husbands, we're building walls to protect ourselves from all men.

Can we win over bitterness? Unequivocally, yes! God never asks us to do anything He has not equipped us beforehand to do.

In Ephesians 4:31-32 He commands: "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted,

forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you" (NKJV).

He also warns: "Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled" (Heb. 12:14-15).

Both these texts suggest that one of the most effective weapons Satan uses against Christians is bitterness. Bitterness will kill your spirit. It will wipe the smile off your heart and drain the river of blessings from your soul. Bitterness will paralyze your effectiveness for God.

But there is an answer.

Overcoming Bitterness

The first step on the road to overcoming bitterness is to decide that regardless of what happens to you, you will overcome it. Put on the mind of Christ, as Paul encourages us to do—"Let this mind [attitude and purpose] be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5)—and expect victory. Then do the following:

1. Admit that you have bitterness in your heart. Treat it like any other sin, confessing it to the Lord and receiving His forgiveness. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).
2. Recognize that bitterness is wrong and damaging to you.
3. Take responsibility for your own mistakes rather than trying to blame others. "First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye" (Matt. 7:5).
4. Look for the lessons the Holy Spirit wants to teach you in

your circumstances.

5. Do not talk about your bitterness, or the experiences that caused it to develop, to others.

6. Stay in harmony with godly friends and associates.

7. Meditate on the Scriptures, especially the psalms, many of which record David's crying out to the Lord in painful circumstances.

8. Plan new experiences in your future.

9. Look ahead and not backwards, as Paul learned to do: "Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13-14).

10. Be filled with the Spirit, for then bitterness will be literally "choked out" and displaced.

11. Study the lives of winners—winners over bitterness—in the Bible. Joseph, who had to forgive his brothers for selling him as a slave, is a good example. You must never allow the root of bitterness to rob you of the success and joy you can experience as a winner.

12. Remind yourself that winning over bitterness (when you make up your mind to surrender to God) is just a matter of time.

Personal Victory

I had an opportunity when my first husband passed away to allow bitterness to take hold in my heart. We had been pastoring a church together, and I knew I would miss his godly leadership. But God didn't allow me to dwell on the negative aspects of his absence.

About 20 days after he died, I was sitting on the platform as the new interim pastor. Draped in black from my head to my toes, I looked like a professional mourner. I had already purchased several outfits in navy blue or black for the season of grieving ahead.

The time came for me to rise and walk to the podium to do the “senior pastor” thing. Suddenly, the Lord arrested me and commanded me to stop the praise singers from singing so pitifully. He told me to signal all the musicians in the band to be silent and to say to the church exactly what He ordered.

By faith, I stepped forward, not knowing what God was going to ask me to do. In that moment, the Lord reminded me that “His house is to be a house of praise and worship.” Although our senior pastor had died, He, the Lord, was still alive and worthy to be praised!

He told me, “Bend down, and when you lift your head, lift the veil off your face, take the hat off your head, and begin to praise Me.” He was literally pushing me to lead our church from mourning into worshiping.

After the service, I went home and removed all the newly purchased black and blue outfits. I put the veiled hats away. On that day, our church became a house of praise again!

Don’t let the circumstances in your life prevent you from praising and worshiping God. Don’t let any crisis keep you from loving Him. And don’t allow pain to remain locked up inside your soul so long that it turns to bitterness. You will have victory over it if you surrender to Him.

Read a companion devotional.

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