

The Power of Love over Bitterness

Ros: That person just shouted at me again! What they said makes me feel so small. My heart's pounding, my mouth is dry. I want to say something back that will make them feel hurt too.

I'm tired of feeling hurt every time they speak to me like this...

Carol: Hello... welcome to Women of Hope, I'm Carol. ...Are you there, Tammy?

Tammy: Yes, I'm here – I was just thinking about what Ros said. I know *just* how she feels. Do you?

Ros: Hello... I'm Ros, and I'm sure you know how it feels to be upset – so upset that your heart beats fast and you start to feel that you can't breathe properly. And you certainly can't think clearly. The hurt you feel takes over your whole mind...and your body.

It's not a nice feeling is it? And when you try to get on with other things in your life, the words keep coming back. And even worse – as soon as you put your head on your pillow at night, those words come back...again! Maybe *your* words come back into your mind too – and you can hear the whole horrible conversation. You try to think about what you *could* have said – or what you *might* say next time it happens.

Carol: That's so true isn't it! When someone has upset you, it's very hard to stop thinking about it. It can begin to affect your whole life. And before you know it your heart feels hard and bitter towards that person.

Ros: Today we'd like to spend some time thinking about these feelings we call 'bitterness' and how *bitterness* can affect our whole lives.

First, let's think about that word *bitter*. The first thing that comes to my mind when I think of bitter – is the taste of a lemon! A lemon looks fresh and juicy, but if you bite into a whole piece – ooh, it makes you screw up your face – the taste on your tongue is so bitter.

Tammy: I love lemon-flavoured things – but they usually have some sugar in as well to make them taste good.

Ros: That's so right Tammy. Imagine if we had to eat sour and bitter things all the time... Soon we wouldn't enjoy our food much at all.

And I guess that's how it is with the things in our lives that are sour and bitter...things that someone says or does that hurt us. Soon our lives begin to feel sour...and *bitterness* starts to affect everything we do.

Carol: I think we all know how it is to feel bitter...but how can we tell if it's really affecting our lives? Maybe we've become so used to feeling bitter that we don't realise how much it affects us – and our family too.

Ros: What really is *bitterness*? ...it could be feeling angry...hurt...resentful. ...When you think: "It's not my fault. I'm the victim. I can't believe he or she said those hurtful things to me."

The bitter feeling often starts out small...but as we choose to hang onto those words, we let the feelings inside grow, and we feel the hurt and pain more as time goes by.

Has someone deliberately hurt you...or let you down? Maybe your husband got angry and shouted at you in front of the children? He promised he would *not* do it again...but he did – more than once. And before long you feel resentful and hostile towards him.

Tammy: It's easy to feel that you have the *right* to feel bitter. Someone has done, or said something mean or hurtful and you can't put those bitter thoughts away.

Ros: I know that feeling. Do you?

Bitterness is like a tree root...something that's under the ground and out of sight. There's a big tree in my front garden that looks lovely...but when you look closely you can see the roots pushing up above the ground. They're so strong they can even break cement paths or push through rocks.

Just like tree roots, we can feel bitter and resentful under the surface but eventually it will come up and cause trouble and hurt.

Carol: Bitterness can also spread through a group of people like wildfire. How? Because someone decides to tell someone else about another person – something they did not need to tell them. In other words, *gossip* - passing on your bitter feelings about someone -can make *them* feel bitter too. It's so easy to do.

Tammy: Today on Women of Hope we're talking about how easy it is to feel bitter towards someone for something they've done or said. And how easy it is to pass on those bitter feelings to others when you gossip about the other person.

Carol: And I've been thinking about how feeling bitter can affect your *health*. Do you think you can get physically sick from bitterness? What happens if you keep those bitter feelings inside for many years?

Ros: The medical experts say that feeling bitter over a long period of time can definitely affect your body and have negative effects on your physical health. It can affect the way you digest your food. You may develop headaches. It can even affect your immune system – your ability to fight infection and disease.

Tammy: Sometimes a feeling of resentment goes on so long that we can't even remember what started it...but we hold onto those negative feelings. Bitter feelings get worse the longer we hold on to them. A person does not usually become *less* bitter as they get older. They become *more* bitter...it does not just fade away. So what can we do about bitterness?

To get rid of bitterness in my life, I have to recognize that it's *my problem*. Yes the other person has hurt me, and maybe *they* had a big problem then, but it's my choice to hold onto that hurt and become bitter.

Ros: How can you tell when someone is bitter? You can hear it in the tone of their voice and you can hear it when they assure you that they're not bitter! Sometimes you can even see it in their eyes and in the lines on their face. Or you might see it in the way they hold their mouth.

Carol: What about ourselves? It isn't always easy to recognise our own bitterness. Most of the thousands of conversations we've had in our lifetime, we've forgotten. But there may be one that upset you a long time ago, and you still remember every detail, every angry word.

If we feel like this, it's a sure sign that we still feel bitter about that conversation! We think about it when we try to sleep at night, and we get upset and maybe angry each time we remember it. If I'm holding onto bitterness, it's *my problem only*, no matter what anyone said or did to me.

Ros: My friend, if you're holding onto resentment or bitterness *only you* can do something about it. Keeping on feeling bitter can only hurt you...and your friends and family.

You need to talk about your feelings with a friend you trust, or a family member, a pastor from your church, or a professional counsellor who knows how to help you to forgive the other person. It might take time and it won't be easy, but it's the only way you will find peace.

If something happened that hurt your relationship with a friend, maybe you could try to remember the good times. This is like adding the sugar to the lemon!

Perhaps the person didn't mean to hurt you and you could think about what they might have been feeling too.

Instead of letting those negative thoughts take over, you could think about the things that you're grateful for.

But bitterness is also a spiritual problem, and we need to look at that too.

After this song, our friend Marli is going to tell us a story about *her* friend who found a way to get rid of the anger and hurt in her life. Stay with us...

Tammy: Marli, the founder of Women of Hope, is here again to tell us the story of her friend. Welcome Marli.

Marli: Thank you. I love to be here with you. Let me tell you about the day my friend, Sue, called me on the phone. I knew something was wrong. Her husband, Joe, had lost his job at a company where he'd worked for more than twenty years. He was totally devastated and became deeply depressed. For three years all he did each day was lie on the couch, doing nothing. Sue told me that she was very upset and could not understand how her husband could just give up on life. She was hurting badly and was very angry. She found a job working from home for a printing company to support their family.

She felt more and more bitter towards her husband...until now she felt she just could not put up with him any longer. They had been sleeping in different rooms for a long time. She said, "The Bible says that a person who does not work is not supposed to eat! So I won't give him food anymore. Maybe he'll wake up and do something! Tell me what to do."

What could I possibly say? I prayed in my heart that God would give me a wise answer. How could I encourage her? I said, "Sue, how I wish I could do something to change your whole life right now, but I can't.

I knew that Sue was a believer in Jesus so I reminded her of some words from the Bible... David, who wrote many of the Psalms, was going through a very bad time in his life. He said, 'Take me to the rock that is higher than I'. (Psalm 61:2) David was looking for a place where he could find protection and peace by trusting in God, his rock.

Then I said to Sue, "You know very well that Jesus Christ, the Son of God is this Rock. The Bible says that he is the Rock of our Salvation. He is our Redeemer. He is the only one who can make us strong enough to live above our pain and hurts.

So here's what I want you to do...climb onto this Rock and from there, see the problem with God's eyes. You see, God's love is unconditional...he loves those who are un-lovable...he loves your husband. I cannot guarantee that your circumstances will change, but Jesus, the Rock, can change your heart.

Jesus can change you if you only give him your bitter feelings, your anger and your resentment. Would you do this? I will pray for you."

There was silence...and then she said, "I'll think about it." I did not hear from her for months after that phone call.

Have you ever been in Sue's situation? Are you holding anger, pain and resentment in your heart? Have people disappointed you? ...maybe your husband...your children...your mother-in-law...or your friend?

You see, Sue was blinded by bitterness. She couldn't see anything but her own pain. Sue called me months later and told me how she dealt with her anger and pain. I will tell you the rest of her story after this music...

Marli: Sue gave me permission to share her story with you. When her husband lost his job, after working for a company for more than 20 years, he changed from being a hard-working man, a good husband and father. He became very depressed. He did not do anything but lie on the couch. He didn't even take care of himself...or keep himself clean.

How did Sue cope with this situation? Let me read part of a letter that she sent me...

'God has delivered me from the agony of bitterness. He has lifted me up and given me faith to live above my circumstances. I want you to share this with your ladies wherever you go. After I talked to you I prayed that God would help me to love my husband with God's love. I told God that I had no love to give to my husband. There were too many hurts and disappointments.

Then I asked God to pour his love into my heart. I promised God that I would meet my husband's needs as a wife should do. As I went to bed that night I saw him lying on the couch as usual. I gave him a goodnight kiss. As you know we haven't been sleeping together for more than three years. I just can't. As I kissed him I said to God, "Please help me to love him the way you love him." My heart was as cold as a stone...no feelings at all, but when I left the room I knew I had done the right thing.

My husband has not changed yet and neither have my circumstances. Joe continues lying on the couch not relating to the family. I've spent a lot of money on doctors trying to find a way to help him. I take care of all the bills and all the decisions. I take care of everything.

Sometimes I start to feel bitter and resentful, but straight away I remember, and I turn to Jesus, the Rock of my Salvation, and he saves me from it all. Every time I ask for his help I receive it. The promises of God give me strength. I know God will never leave me or reject me. Somehow he has allowed me to walk in this dark valley. But he knows all about it and I trust him. Maybe I'll *never* see a change in Joe, but I know one thing: *My heart has changed* and God has given me joy for this journey. God's word says: 'I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.' (Philippians 4:13) I say the same. I am so thankful. I'm sure that God will never fail me, he will see me through!

Carol: Thank you Marli... As I think about Sue and her situation, I think about many women who face similar situations. There are things we all need to learn in order to live *above* our circumstances. Firstly, she *knew and trusted God*.

Marli: She did. One of my favorite parts of the Bible is Jeremiah Chapter 31 verse 3, "I have loved you with an everlasting love, therefore I have drawn you to myself with loving kindness." God's love paid the ultimate sacrifice for us. He gave his only Son to die for us at the cross of Calvary. Oh friend, accept his love! Trust in him as your personal Savior. He'll give you power to live a victorious life.

Carol: Secondly, Sue had experienced the grace of God in her own life when she asked Jesus, God's Son, to forgive her for her sins. God helped her to show grace to her husband, even though he didn't seem to deserve it. She chose to love him when she didn't really think she could. God's word says, 'Look after each other so that none of you fails to receive the grace of God. Watch out that no poisonous root of bitterness grows up to trouble you...' (Hebrews 12:15 NLT)

Marli: Sue knew that even when she felt discouraged, she could trust God's love and grace for any difficult time. And so can you, my friend. Whatever your hurt, or your past, God's grace is enough for you today. Accept his love.

Carol: Thirdly, Sue accepted God's *love and authority*. You see, Sue had already done everything in her power to solve the problem. She took Joe to the doctor, she tried to find a job for him, and she supported her family. She did everything...but she forgot to watch her heart. She started looking at all the negative things. Sue stopped loving Joe. She forgot that all of us need God's grace. We all, in one way or another, need to be forgiven and to be loved, as her husband did.

Marli: Sue forgot to lift up her heart in faith to God and receive his grace and his strength in her life. However, as she gave her bitterness to God, he took over and brought healing to her soul. Love is a powerful thing. Love heals.

My very dear friend, my prayer for you is that you would give God all your bitterness and pain and that you would stand on the Rock, Jesus Christ, and his unfailing love for you. Let me pray with you now.

Dear Father God, I bring to you my dear friend today. You see how much she is bleeding inside. She has felt bitter, resentful and angry for so long, Lord. I ask you to free her. To take away all these ugly feelings and to pour your love into her heart right now, so she can forgive those who have done wrong to her. Help her now to trust you so she can live above her circumstances. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Tammy: It's that time again – for us to go. We always love to hear from you. Maybe you would like to share *your* story with us, and we can pray for you.

Goodbye now.

Marli: Goodbye and God bless you as you learn to trust him.