

# *It Is Written*

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## **The Silent Killer**

By Mike Johnson

High blood pressure is sometimes referred to by doctors as “the silent killer.” It is referred to in this way because people often do not even know they have high blood pressure until it has already done its damage. This is not an article about high blood though, but instead, about another silent killer condemned in the Scriptures — “bitterness.” Bitterness might be called the real silent killer. Like high blood pressure, bitterness may go unnoticed by others, and sometimes the person who has bitterness may not fully realize it. Thus, it is important for us to “put on the cuff” from time to time and check our “bitterness level.”

We speak of something being literally bitter when it has a sharp or unpleasant taste. Mentally, however, bitterness is an ongoing pain, hurt, and mental anguish which is felt by people due to past events or circumstances. Bitterness has been called “resentment which has been held on to.” It is resentment which has become rancid and rotten. It has also been said that “bitterness is loss frozen in resentment.” Bitterness grows out of our refusal to let go when someone or something is taken from us. People get hurt because of difficult circumstances, events, or other people; they hold on to that hurt, and it turns into bitterness.

Naomi, from the Old Testament, serves as an example of a person who became bitter due to various setbacks in life. In the book of Ruth, we learn that Naomi, along with her husband and two sons, went to Moab to live because of a famine in Judah. Her sons married two women — Orpah and Ruth. In the course of time, her husband died, and then her two sons died. Naomi’s losses made her bitter. She said, “. . . Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me” (1:13. 20-21). The name Naomi signifies “pleasant” or “amiable”; the name Mara, which she wanted to be called, signifies “bitter.” Note above the number of times that she blamed God for her misfortunes. Naomi allowed her losses to cause her to become bitter. Often, people allow difficult circumstances to cause them to become bitter today against others and, sometimes, even against God.

Hannah is another Old Testament example of bitterness. She was married to Elkanah who had another wife besides her. Hannah was unable to bear a child and was very sad as a result. Also, Elkanah’s other wife was able to bear children, which seemed to cause resentment between the two women. Although Elkanah treated Hannah very well and loved her dearly, she was deeply grieved. Her husband could not console her. According to I Samuel 1:10, she was in “bitterness of soul.” This is another example of the circumstances of life causing bitterness. To Hannah’s credit, however, she turned to the Lord during this very difficult time. She asked God for a child, which she would give to the Lord, and God granted her request.

Hebrews 12:15 is one of several New Testament passages which warns against bitterness. It says, “Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled.” A “root of bitterness,” like the root of a tree, can be below the surface and not detectable by others. Eventually, it will show itself, producing the fruits of bitterness such as evil speaking, anger, and hatred. Bitterness, as the text says, can defile others, as well. It can hurt relationships and can even cause disunity within a congregation.

Colossians 3:19 speaks of the danger of bitterness within a marriage as it says, "Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them." Instead of having bitterness toward his wife, the husband is told to love her. When bitterness exists, proper love is lacking. Problems often occur between a husband and a wife and when problems are not settled, ill-feelings can fester into resentment and bitterness. Some disagreements need to be discussed and resolved. Trivial disagreements should simply be forgotten. Many couples need to learn how to "forget about it" or to "get over it." If not, bitterness can develop which can destroy any relationship, especially a marriage.

Bitterness is a sin, and it must be put away. Ephesians 4:31 says, "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice." Sometimes a person will say, "With what has happened to me, I have a right to be bitter." The Biblical answer is, "No you don't." Some people, for example, say that they can't stop gambling, committing fornication, or drinking. It may be difficult, but people can stop these sins. In the same way, although it might not be easy, people can get rid of bitterness. God does not require the impossible.

How do we put away bitterness? Ephesians 4:32 makes it clear that bitterness is to be replaced with kindness and compassion. We need to have enough kindness and compassion in our hearts so that there is no room for bitterness. Verse 32 also points out that we are to forgive one another "even as God for Christ's sake" has forgiven us. Sometimes it is very difficult to forgive, but we must. Even if a person will not repent, the Bible teaches that we are to love our enemies (Mt. 5:43-44), and that we are to overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:17-21). Finally, we must repent and pray (Acts 8:22) in order to be forgiven.

Many of life's dealings can cause bitterness: the deaths of loved ones, sickness, difficult circumstances, people hurting or mistreating us in some way. We must realize that life is full of hurts; it always will be. We must never allow ourselves to be the "victims" of other people's offenses. Bitterness has been called "the nest that the devil digs into our soul." It must, for our own good and for the good of others, be put away.

## *Patience*

By Mike Johnson

The term "patience" occurs frequently in the Bible. Patience is a difficult lesson to learn in the age that we live in, yet, it is a trait that Christians must have. The church at Ephesus, for example, was commended for their patience (Rev. 2:2-3). Hebrews 12:1 says that Christians are to "run with patience" the race that is set before them; II Peter 1:6 says that patience must be added to the Christian's faith.

What is patience? Patience might simply be called "enduring under trials or tribulations." Thayer, in his Greek Lexicon (p. 644), says that in the New Testament it is, "...the characteristic of a man who is unswerved from his deliberate purpose and his loyalty to faith and piety by even the greatest trials and sufferings."

Patience is very similar to "longsuffering," but a distinction between the two words can be made. Patience generally refers to an enduring with respect to situations or circumstances. Longsuffering, on the other hand, is more of an endurance, or the quality of self-restraint, with respect to people. Patience involves difficult circumstances; longsuffering involves difficult people. If a person is longsuffering, for example, towards another, he will not retaliate when provoked. Also, a person facing trials and tribulations will patiently continue to serve God.

Patience comes by the trying of our faith (Jas. 1:3) and by tribulation (Rom. 5:3-5).