

3 Questions to Quench Marital Bitterness

When Beethoven died, the cause of death was unknown. Reportedly plagued with a variety of unpleasant symptoms, he was chronically irritable, depressed and often suffered from abdominal pain. Some two hundred years later, chemical analysis of hair clipped from Beethoven's head the day after he died revealed the culprit—lead poisoning. The end did not come quickly. The lead killed him slowly and quietly—one little bit of poison at a time.

That's exactly how bitterness destroys a marriage—one little bit of poison at a time. It accumulates in the soul and slowly, but surely, poisons the one who carries it. In order to have sweetness in your marriage, you first have to quench bitterness. Here are three questions you need to ask.

What Causes Bitterness?

In every marriage, husbands and wives hurt each other. It's usually not intentional, but it is inevitable. Sometimes a spouse will continue to repeat a behavior that hurts the other, even after the behavior is confronted. Bitterness gets a foothold when you feed the hurt instead of granting forgiveness.

What's Wrong With Bitterness?

Being around a bitter person is equally unpleasant. A bitter person is easily identified by their sad or sorrowful countenance. They are typically sarcastic and critical. And bitterness has made them reluctant to trust others. There are three things that are ultimately wrong with bitterness.

1. It discourages forgiveness. You need to be able to let go of your list of offenses. You can't do that and be bitter at the same time. Forgiveness is **for** you to **give**. If you don't give it then nothing will change in your relationship or your life.

2. It keeps the offender from changing their ways. Bitterness starts off as small offense that the bitter person doesn't address with their spouse. Each new offense feeds the bitterness and takes up a lot of room in the person's mind and heart. Cultivating the bitterness keeps you from airing your grievance to your spouse. How can your spouse apologize for something they're not aware they are doing? How can they change something that they will not be forgiven for?

3. It spreads. Once bitterness has taken hold, it tends to contaminate, at least in the eyes of the offended person, everything the other person says or does, even if it's something good. Bitterness spreads like a crack in a window. It might look insignificant on the surface, but left alone it races forward, branching and splitting until the glass shatters into a million pieces.

How Can You Get Rid of Bitterness?

First, confess your bitterness to your spouse. One of the strongest holds of bitterness is the secrecy of it. Once you voice your concerns, they can be addressed. Find a time and a way that you can talk to your spouse about the hurt they caused without getting angry or attacking them.

Second, forgive your spouse and ask for forgiveness in return. Seek peace with your spouse and have the grace to forgive. You may not realize it, but you need to be forgiven as much as you need to forgive.

Third, identify all your hurts and address them with your spouse. Once you've finally decided to come clean about your bitterness, you want to get it all out. Now isn't the time to hold back, but be purposeful in seeking resolution, not just an opportunity to unleash. Before talking to your spouse, let them know that you plan to set aside some undistracted time for you to talk about some issues. As you talk, keep the discussion productive. Start with the confession, and then talk about your hurts. Above all, speak the truth with love and you will be able to put the conflict to R.E.S.T. (see below)

Fourth, remember that you can only change you. You cannot change your spouse.

Resolve to let bitterness go and embrace the sweetness that your marriage provides by meaningful, honest communication and love.

R – Review the Problem

Too often couples try to jump ahead to solving the problem even before they've clearly identified what the problem is. So, sit down with your spouse and try to pinpoint the exact issue.

E – Evaluate Options

Now that you've nailed down the issue, discuss the different options for solving it. Come up with solutions that can be measured. Make it a real brainstorming session where you just say whatever comes to mind.

S – Solving the Problem

This is where you select an option and put it into action. During the selection process, be open to compromise. Remember, if things don't work out you'll have an opportunity later to readdress the issue and options.

T – Track Your Progress

Don't skip this step unless you're making a decision on a one-time event or occurrence like where to go for vacation. In most cases, you'll want to set a specific time to sit down and talk about how your solution is working.