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Doctor's Journal

General Recovery - Releasing Bitterness

Have you repeatedly tried to forgive someone that has wounded you, only to struggle with bitterness toward her/him again? One of the main reasons it is so hard to forgive those who have wounded us is because of a feeling that we will lose something if we do. Bitterness, while self-destructive, gives us some feeling of control- it is at least something we can do to defend ourselves in the face of wrongs. If we let go of the bitter roots, we may feel like we're admitting that the wounds were alright- we fear we will never be heard or validated. This is why it is so important to recount your list of hurts to someone you trust. When we allow a trusted peer to hear our list of hurts, the peer is able to validate our reality- that the hurtful events and their related wounds are real. This is often life-changing, as many of our hurts have been denied by the perpetrators. We have been told "it wasn't that bad," that we are "ungrateful," or even that we are "crazy." So, we bury and hold on to our rage, hoping that in time the wrong will be avenged. We may even unconsciously believe that if folks who have wounded us see our self-destructive behaviors, they will finally begin to understand or even take responsibility for how they have hurt us (the "they" I am referring to may even be someone who is dead, or may have generalized to the painful world as a whole). I wish I had seen this approach work. It doesn't. Instead, we slowly reap our own mental/emotional and even physical ruin by continuing in our negative behavior patterns. After all, bitterness can be more comfortable than changing whatever we'd have to change if we did not have an excuse to continue in our unforgiveness. May you step out in faith and begin your forgiveness process, being ready to experience its immense freedom over time.