

9 PROMISES

FOR EVERYONE READY TO DIE (*TO SELF*)

Crushing bitterness to find your life for the sake of Christ

BY BRIAN BARCELONA

Every teaching that Jesus gave pointed His disciples to lay their lives down.

When we think about the gospel being preached today, we sometimes picture a man on a stage giving a powerful altar call with a band. The message we would call the gospel is that Christ came, Christ died and Christ rose again. I wouldn't disagree with that message. But do you ever wonder what Jesus preached when He preached the gospel before He had died?

I've heard people say that Jesus went to the cross so we wouldn't have to, but as someone once said, He went to the cross to show you how to. I think the gospel that Jesus was preaching before He died was simply a forerunner message to His death. He was teaching people how to lay their lives down, only to then demonstrate it on the cross.

You see, Jesus came with a message that was quite different from the Old Testament. It wasn't different because it was the opposite.

It was different because He was in the process of fulfilling it.

Jesus was taking the Old Testament to an entirely new level. Where the Old Testament would say, "An eye for an eye," or, "A tooth for a tooth," Jesus would say, "Turn the other cheek," (Lev. 24:19–20; Matt. 5:38–39). Where it would say, "Thou shalt not murder," Jesus would say, "To hate your brother is to already have murdered him," (Matt. 5:21–22). There was a

greater laying down of His life that Jesus demonstrated in the New Testament, which He lived as well as taught. Whether it was His miracles, His teachings or His parables, Jesus was constantly pointing us to lay our lives down and die to ourselves.

Jesus must have understood the fulfillment of laying down your life and how when you do that, then and only then will you find your life. It almost seemed as if Jesus made it difficult to follow Him. If we remember the story of the rich young ruler, Jesus said he must go sell everything (Matt. 19:16–22). He knew that tricking people into following Him wouldn't make disciples—it would make disasters.

We can see through His parables that Jesus was leading us to lay our lives down and teaching us how to die to ourselves. He did this by bringing culturally relevant stories that the Jews would have understood but also that we can relate to more than 2,000 years later.

Overcome Bitterness: Cling to God's Promises

It's time to serve bitterness an eviction notice.

Bitterness cannot simply be prayed away; it often accompanies self-righteousness. When I say that only the revelation of the cross can help you nail it to the cross, I mean you need to recall the price that was paid for you and allow your heart to

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release the pain of your past. We must understand the fruits of bitterness, how dangerous its root is, how to identify it and why we absolutely don’t want it. Bitterness must be expelled from our temple.

Though it may seem that bitterness, often feeling justified, is the hardest thing to die to, the way out is through the cross. It’s easy to believe that Jesus can set a drug addict free, but somehow it’s harder to believe He can free you from bitterness. We might find it easier to have faith that He can save a prostitute, but we struggle to believe He can uproot the effects of bitterness. We would even say we have faith that God could save a prodigal, but when it comes to our bitterness, His arm is too short to reach us.

But the good news is that the Word of God tells a different story. The Bible is filled with promises to believers that go far beyond material gains such as new cars, debt relief, random checks in the mail and a fancy jet. I’m talking about promises that are eternal. Did you know the Bible contains 7,487 promises from God to man, 991 from one man to another, two from God the Father to His Son and 290 from man to God—over 8,000 in total? We obviously can’t explore each one here, but as 2 Corinthians 1:20 assures us, all God’s promises are yes and amen.

Here are nine of God’s promises for you to reflect on:

His promise of not leaving us: God will never leave or forsake us (Heb. 13:5), providing constant support during times of bitterness.

His promise of peace: He gives peace that surpasses all understanding (Phil. 4:7), and it is greater than the lies of bitterness.

His promise of support in struggles: His instruction to cast our cares upon

Him reveals that He wants to sustain us through both our moments of success and our mess (1 Pet. 5:7).

His promise of forgiveness: Confessing our sins leads to immediate forgiveness (1 John 1:9), offering a path out of bitterness.

His promise of escape from temptation: God promises a way out of every temptation (1 Cor. 10:13), affirming that bitterness does not define us.

His promise of answering: God demonstrates that He cares about our needs by assuring us that He will meet our asking, seeking, and knocking (Matt. 7:7).

His promise of wisdom: God assures us that wisdom will be given when we ask for it (James 1:5).

His promise of renewed strength: The promise of renewed strength if we persist in faith enables us to endure without exhaustion (Isa. 40:31).

His promise of keeping His word: God’s steadfastness assures us that even when we fail, His promises remain secure (Num. 23:19).

We can’t merely be believers who uphold His laws. We must also cherish His promises. These promises empower us to live lives of freedom and to conquer bitterness.

Bitterness Affects Our Lives and Our Faith

So often, bitterness profoundly impacts our lives and relationships, sometimes leading us to part ways with others. It’s likely you’ve encountered a pastor or leader—and if not yet, you probably will—who has fallen prey to the effects of bitterness. This is often evident in their sermons, which may reveal underlying insecurities. Although names are not mentioned, the slight slander

makes it clear whom they are referencing. You might have also met other believers striving to build something for God, yet bitterness underpins their foundation. No matter how much they try, nothing they build can be pure until the bitterness is eradicated.

Unlike a motivational speaker whose goal is to build you up for a better life, the enemy uses bitterness in our lives to destroy us and, more significantly, to shipwreck your faith. Bitterness often leads to sin, and as the Bible teaches, “The wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). That means that if you work for sin, your paycheck is death. Many Christians who fall into sin have bitterness lurking nearby. As bitterness isolates them—keeping them from the Word of God through pride or shame—it convinces them that they are justified, elevating their source of truth above the Word of God. It’s reminiscent of old cartoons where a villain lays a breadcrumb trail to trap someone; as the victim follows, eating one breadcrumb after another, they head toward destruction. So too does bitterness lead to ruin.

Bitterness infiltrates even the lives of good and godly men in the Bible, as no one is immune to its effects. Consider Job, a man of character and wealth. Job’s story is one of the most beautiful illustrations of a man who, although he was blessed, lost everything, battled poor advice, endured physical trials and tribulations, lost loved ones, questioned God, and even cursed the day he was born. It seems everything was setting him up to remain bitter forever, yet at the mention of repentance God blesses Job with twice as much as before. The lesson here is profound: Even if you have been bitter, there are steps to walk out of bitterness, with repentance as the foremost step.

In Job’s life we see that nothing excuses bitterness to dwell within a believer—not the loss of a job or a marriage, not the passing of a loved one, or a fallout with a ministry. While it’s true that experiencing these hardships is painful, we are not accountable for what happens to us. But we are responsible for how we respond.

A Disclaimer for the Struggling

Do not be discouraged if you are struggling to overcome in any of areas of your life. Rather, rejoice that the Holy

Spirit is illuminating them to you and that you are working to overcome. I have come to find that struggling with your sin often is one of the greatest indications that you are a true believer and that the Holy Spirit dwells in you. If the Holy Spirit did not dwell in you and there was no struggle, you would just willfully give in to that sin.

The Holy Spirit is what enables you to put up a fight with your flesh, ultimately crucifying it to the cross. Struggling with sin as a believer is far different from giving in to it and willfully accepting it as your lifestyle.

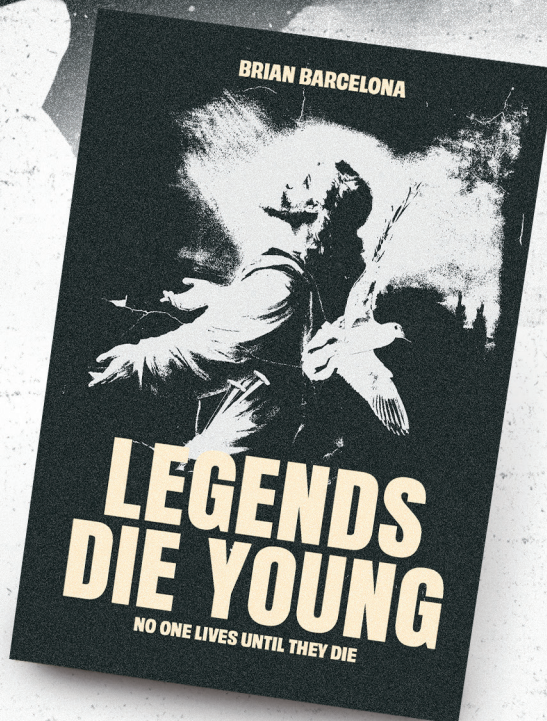
I once heard an analogy: If you were to crucify yourself daily, you would know that a cross requires three nails. I'm speaking metaphorically, although the cross was literal. If you were able to hammer the nail in your feet and then one in your left hand, you would still have your right hand open, which means you would require someone else to help crucify you. Sometimes the things you are going through require a friend to come and help nail your works of the flesh to the cross. That might look like them praying with you, fasting with you, reading the Word with you and helping you see the truth when you can't see it for yourself. Godly friends and family are often placed by God in our lives to help make sure that the old versions of us stay dead and are never resurrected.

As Christians it is our honor to follow in the footsteps of the greatest legend: Jesus Christ. He was a legend who died young, at the age of 33, but He also died young much earlier in His life. His greatest desire was to bring His Father joy.

May our lives mirror His, bringing joy to the Father. May He find faith when He comes to the earth, and may the Lamb receive the reward of His suffering. ◀

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Every martyr had surrendered long before their ultimate sacrifice, death.



Are you really ready to lay your lives down for God?

Brian Barcelona's *Legends Die Young* relays practical wisdom and contemporary tales of believers who selflessly sacrificed themselves to ensure the longevity of their faith. They didn't live just to die; They lived to serve, to surrender, and to sacrifice for the Kingdom. Learning about the legends of the Christian faith, you will not only nurture your heart's core but also foster an unwavering connection with God.

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