

The Gospel According to Need

Reaching the World for Christ at Points of Need

The Amazing Grays

Introduction

The Amazing Grays consists of a group of Christian clergy and laypeople representing a wide range of denominations (including Roman Catholics and Baptists, for instance) who meet regularly for Bible study and reflections on their long years of walking with Christ. Facing the challenges of our day in the light of what Scripture tells us is our primary mission. Thus, the challenge we are calling “The Gospel According to Need.” Here is how it all came about.

A member of our group wrote a book on evangelism years ago. It was well received as a way to help people share their faith in Christ in a natural way. One criticism of it hit home, however. And that was that most people out there are hurting in one way or another—struggling with stress, worry and pain from emotional wounds—and what they really want to know is how to stop that hurting. Jesus Christ is the answer to those pains, but they need direct help with the pains in order to see that. We need to find ways in which we, as individual Christians and as the Church in general, can identify and minister to those pains.

We knew this criticism was right, and our role became how to get a handle on the problem. We realized that, in fact, people being brought into the church and into a relationship with Christ are more as a result of the meeting of individual needs than by what we normally think of as evangelism. Furthermore, we saw that it was the people whose particular needs were met by the Body of Christ who became truly disciples of the Lord and not merely church members.

As we discussed the matter, we recognized that the gospel does speak to individual needs if we have the wisdom to perceive the nature of the need and the answer which Christ, through his Church, can provide. Thus arose the concept of “the gospel according to need.” There is good news which will speak to each need that people face today.

This is what led to what follows in this document. We chose twenty-five feelings and emotions that are common to people in our day, mostly negative ones but some positive ones as well. Even as to positive emotions such as love and hope, there are people in pain because they lack these.

We decided to approach these issues from a standpoint of how we are personally affected by them and how we deal with them. From this, we sought how what we have learned about ourselves could help others at their points of need.

The procedure we followed in doing this was to take each issue and see, first of all, what the Bible says about it. Following that Scriptural guidance, we tested ourselves against it. Then we looked at how we and those we would serve as Christ’s disciples could most effectively deal with them.

The goal, again, was to learn how to help others in these situations—as well as helping ourselves, by effectively dealing with these issues in our own lives and thereby being better equipped to help others. The hoped-for end result would be the ability to reach people more effectively for Christ by showing how Christ can meet their point of need.

Please join us on this voyage of discovery that you, as a disciple of Christ, may be better prepared to lead others to Christ according to their need.

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Facing Distractions, Frustrations and Interruptions

As we begin to look at how Jesus wants us to live as his disciples as contrasted with what we actually face in our day-to-day lives, perhaps these issues are good ones with which to start. We want to discover God's truth for our lives with regard to these issues.

We can see Jesus' own frustrations in Mark 6:1-6 (unable to perform miracles in his own hometown); Matthew 8:23-27 (the unbelief of his disciples); and Matthew 17:14-29 (lamenting over Jerusalem). He also faced interruptions: Matthew 9:18-26 (the healing of Jairus' daughter and the woman with a blood problem) and Mark 10:13-16 (children being brought to him and, over the objection of his disciples, blessing them). In his Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), Jesus gives us an example of how not to act and then how to act properly when faced with a distraction. The Pharisee and the Levite in the story pass by the injured man, but the Samaritan comes to his aid.

To get more specifically to what the Bible teaches us about how to deal with these distractions, frustrations and interruptions, Paul, in Galatians 2:20, says that, as Christians, we are to die with Christ that we may live in him. In other words, if we live for Christ, God's will is our first priority in any situation we face. We are to put aside those things that interfere with our doing the will of God. In 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, Paul puts the same thing another way. We are not to run aimlessly in the race of life, but to win the crown of victory in Christ.

We get a model of what this is all about from the Old Testament in Joseph (Genesis 37-45). Here was a man who stayed focused on God's plan for him through continual problems of great magnitude. We will, in our lifetimes, likely avoid facing anywhere near the issues that Joseph faced, but he can be a good example for us.

In our day, we are constantly bombarded with communications coming at us from every angle! Our first step in seeking God's will in our life, while facing this barrage of information, is to ask ourselves (i.e., the Holy Spirit within us), "What is really important?" We bat away those gnats of distraction that don't really matter. We need to remind ourselves that our own understanding of the situation is not necessarily how God's understands it (Proverbs 3:5).

There are also those sports, entertainment, and opportunities to amuse ourselves that can be terribly distracting. Here we need to ask ourselves if our priorities are in order. There is nothing wrong with these in and of themselves; we human beings need wholesome sources of joy and involvement with others in our lives. But when how our baseball team is doing becomes more important to us than how we are doing as Christ's disciples, that's a problem.

Then there is the question of whether we are taking on too much, doing things someone else should be doing or could be doing better. There is the old saying that the good can be the enemy of the best, and God wants us doing his will...and that is always the best. A need is not necessarily a calling.

And, of course, people are constantly interrupting us when we need to be doing something else. Jesus' illustrations from the Bible passages above are examples on this matter.

Interruptions are opportunities to minister to others. If someone has come to you with a problem; by the grace of God, you may be able to help them. That is why Christ has us as his followers here to earth. Henri Nouwen gave a “real life” illustration of this when he wrote of a professor at Notre Dame who complained about students interrupting him when he was doing what he considered to be more important. Then he realized that there was nothing more important that he could do than minister to his students!

How did Jesus handle his frustrations? He was patient and prayed. He did not give up on his disciples despite how obtuse they seemed at times. We can be guided accordingly, seeking the Holy Spirit’s guidance in every situation we face. If it is especially difficult, get help from a respected advisor (i.e., give that person an opportunity to do God’s will for your benefit). When things are even more vexing, reflect on Paul teaching in Romans 5:3-5 that the stuff we work through in life helps us grow as Christians.

To summarize, God wants us available for the benefit of others, and to share with them what we have learned when we faced the same distractions, frustrations and interruptions they are facing.

Living in Hope

Having looked at situations that confront us every day, and how best to deal with them, we now consider a wonderful feeling we can have as Christians if Christ is the first priority in our lives.

In John 14:1-4, Jesus promises his followers that he is preparing a place for them in eternity; what better hope could we have than that?

Paul, in 1 Corinthians 15:54-58, speaks of Christ’s victory over death; and, in Colossians 2:15, of Christ’s victory over Satan (as can also be seen in Hebrews 2:14-15). In Romans 14:17-18, Paul says, “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.”

See also 1 Peter 1:3-4. Here Peter gives reassurance of what Christ has done for us and the many benefits to us as a result. Thus, he notes in 3:15 that we should be prepared to give an answer to anyone concerning the hope that is in us.

As devoted followers of Christ, we don’t have to fear the consequences of death but can look forward to a much better life forever with him.

We can, in the meantime, build hope in our lives by recounting and being grateful for all that God does for us.

The closer we walk with God in prayer, worship, Bible study, fellowship and service, the stronger our hope can be built within us.

With these things in mind, the question we have to ask ourselves is, “Do I have the countenance, the conversation, the outlook of a hopeful person?” Does hope shine forth from me for the benefit of others? Do we realize how important it is to let people know the hope that is in us because of Jesus Christ in our lives?

Phillips Brooks, who wrote *O Little Town of Bethlehem*, was once asked about the hope that was in him because of Christ, and he replied, “An aunt of mine who lives in New Hampshire.” Those who have shined the light of hope into our lives can have a major impact our lives of hope.

We are stewards of our lives, with the Holy Spirit within us to guide us each step of the way toward fulfilling all that God has for us in this life and the next. We are here for that truth to burst forth from us for the benefit of others that they may know this hope that is in us.

Dealing with Envy and Jealousy

Before beginning to look at the issues of envy and jealousy, some clarification may be needed. There is nothing wrong with wanting to do better and seeing the example of another as a challenge to doing so. In fact, that is a very positive feeling, one that motivates us to move forward. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 11:1, makes the point that he follows the example of Christ, as we all should. However, when our feelings become sinful—and, thus, pure envy or jealousy—is when they represent resentment or malice toward the person because they are getting things we don’t have or are being rewarded for efforts we believe we are deserving of. Here, we could look to Philippians 1:15-17, where Paul does a comparison between those who preach Christ out of envy and rivalry for selfish ambitions versus those who preach Christ out of love.

As we now think about the issue of envy and jealousy in our lives, we will see that there are a number of instances of this problem occurring in the Old Testament. It happens early in Scripture with Cain’s envy of his brother Abel to the point of murder. Then we have Joseph’s brothers being so jealous of him that they sell him into slavery. King Saul is jealous of David and unsuccessfully seeks his death. As we move into the New Testament, we have the example given by Jesus in his Parable of the Lost Son (Luke 15:11-32) of the older brother being jealous of his younger brother who has, after a rebellious life, been accepted in love by their father.

The Tenth Commandment not to covet is included in Jesus’ fulfillment of the law statement at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets; I have come to fulfill them.”

Envy and jealousy are condemned by Paul in Romans 13:12-14 (Put the darkness of jealousy behind you) and Peter in 1 Peter 2:1 (Rid yourselves of it).

Scripture makes it clear that envy, jealousy and covetousness are sin and to be avoided.

How can we deal with these feelings in our own day? If we have truly given our lives to Christ and are trying to do the things he wants us to do day by day, there is little room for such feelings. However, looking back on our lives we can see instances in which these feelings arose. There was the promotion we thought we were going to get that went to someone else; a friend was able to buy a car we wished we could have afforded; our neighbors went on a cruise that sounded wonderful but was above our budget—of course there were things like that at some time in the past. But, in retrospect, God seemed to have other plans for us and we are content with what we have and who we are.

Yet, there are those who do not know the life in Christ and who are less fortunate than perhaps we are. As we reflect on our own lives, we should understand how they feel. God will meet our needs (Philippians 4:19) and we want him to meet theirs as well. What are we to do about that?

The first step is to think about times when we have been envious or at least wished for something someone else had that we couldn't have. The best way to deal with our own feelings is to look at them honestly. As we reflect on envious feelings we have had in the past, what allowed us to put the desire aside? Maybe we prayed about it, and God showed us a better way or gave us a sense of contentment with what we had. It is only as we are willing to explore such feelings within ourselves—no matter how long ago they may have been—that we can begin to find ways to help others who are jealous or envious.

If our relationship with God in Christ is solid enough that we have put feelings of envy or jealousy behind us, we have good news for those who are dealing with these issues today. On one level, we can reason with them concerning their feelings. Are they truly justified when looked at “in the light of day”? Thinking about all of the good things they have going on in their lives, why want anything else? Besides, who knows all that is going on in the life of that other person our friend is jealous of. In this manner, there is the possibility of quelling feelings of envy or jealousy.

Much more importantly, however, is getting the issue focused on its proper base. If a person is truly jealous of another, it is a complaint against God. God has not granted our friend something that he has let someone else have. If we can get the person we are trying to help with his or her jealousy to admit that feeling, then we have a real base from which to provide permanent help.

It is the relationship with God that really counts. We Christians have an accessible God; we can go to him in prayer at any time. He can help us see through our unhelpful, sometimes sinful feelings by showing us a better way. As disciples of Christ, we can attest to why we no longer are envious or jealous of others. If we are doing what God wants us to do, other things just don't matter. If that is firmly the feeling we have within ourselves, it will ring true with the person we are trying to help and lead him toward the path of everlasting life. This is the gift we have...we are here to help others.

A former business executive put it this way. If you are doing your job well and succeeding, it may motivate others or they may become envious of you in an unhealthy way. I

learned early on the solution to this concerning those who worked under me. In everything we did, I made sure that they knew what we were doing, why we were doing it, and what outcome we sought. We were a team working together. As a result, rather than having to deal with people under me who wanted to jump over me in the ranks of management, they all pushed me up the ladder of success.

Living in Faith and Trust

Having looked at envy and jealousy, now we consider the difference that faith and trust mean in our lives.

In Matthew 17:10 Jesus teaches that, if his disciples have the faith of a mustard seed, they can move mountains. Although, in a sense an exaggeration, it is Jesus' way of getting the point across that faith in God can produce unbelievable results—"mountains" of doubt can be moved when we are doing things that God wants us doing.

Then, in Matthew 8:5-13, we have the story of the faith shown by the Roman officer who seeks Jesus' healing of his servant and shows humility in doing so despite his exalted status as a Roman officer. Instead of saying, "I am also one in authority" he says, "I am a man set under authority." For us, the story is at least of two-fold importance. First, there is much we can learn from the example of the centurion. Second, it calls us to take Jesus' healing ministry more seriously in our own day. Jesus said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith" (v.9). It has been said that there is more faith that God can heal in Twelve-Step Programs than in Christian churches today. Many of these people know God's power to heal; many in our churches do not.

Other examples of those showing faith in Jesus: woman with a bleeding problem (Matthew 9:18-26); blind man (Matthew 9:27-31); Canaanite woman whose daughter is demon possessed (Matthew 15:21-28); men who bring their paralyzed friend to be healed (Mark 2:1-12); and the one leper in the ten who were healed who came back to thank Jesus for the healing and thus showed his faith (Luke 17:11-19).

In Romans 4:1-25, Paul teaches about how Abraham was justified by faith. Abraham proved himself to be one who had great faith in God through many tests and trials, and Paul sees him as an example to us all. Galatians 3:1-25 is Paul's teaching on justification by faith. Then, in Galatians 3:26-4:7, he points out that, through faith in Christ, we become children of God, ones who have show that we are of the seed of Abraham by our faith. In Ephesians 2:8 is Paul's teaching that it is by grace we have been saved through faith.

Hebrews 11:1-12 tells about all of the heroes of the faith down through the centuries.

What, then, led us to faith in Christ? That question can be answered in many ways because Christ reaches people in so many different ways. For many it is simply the way they were brought up. They had parents who trusted in Jesus and shared that with them in a meaningful way. It is hard for them to point to a time and place when it happened. It has simply been a vital part of their lives all along. Others have a similar experience by having been brought

up in the Church, knowing the stories about Jesus from an early age and attending Sunday school classes and worshipping regularly. Some falling into these categories may have had “testing” as they went away to college or work environment and were under the influence of those who had not given their lives to Christ. If this caused them to stray from their Christian roots, perhaps they later had an experience such as those we will discuss below.

Those who grew up as doubters about Christ, or may have turned away from him at some point, perhaps had friends or loved ones who led them to Christ. Many have experiences of knowing someone or ones reflecting the love of God in a compelling way and needed to know what caused that. As disciples of Christ who are called to make disciples (Matthew 28:18-20), we are, of course, to be those kind of people. This is how we truly show our faith. We lead others to the point at which they place their trust in Jesus.

Of course, there are others who have something traumatic or miraculous happen in their lives that convinces them of their need for “something more.” Here, again, is the opportunity for us to introduce them to Jesus who can help them through their trauma or show them the glory of God that brought about the miracle. And there are those who, simply through the challenges of life, come to see the need for help and find God; but they also need someone to come along beside them and tell them about Christ.

As we think about how we came to give our lives to Christ, the next issue is how we have grown in our faith. What has God done in me, for me and through me day by day? We build our faith as we grow in trusting God by the experiences of life in him. Life in Christ is a sanctifying process; we don’t become more Christ-like overnight. As we study the Bible to learn how God wants us to live, as we become frequent and perhaps fervent in prayer and worship, and as we experience serving others in his name, faith grows. Even in the routine following of Christ’s pathway, we accumulate within ourselves—whether we realize it at the time or not—knowledge and trust that will reveal our faith in times of testing.

Someone whose faith “moved mountains” was Harriet Beecher Stowe. Her having the faith to write *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* did more to end slavery in this country than perhaps any other individual. That is the kind of faith God wants for each of us.

For our faith and trust to blossom in the way Christ intends it to, we will have opportunities to tell others why. In other words, pass it on, sharing our story of faith in Christ.

Dealing with Disappointment

Disappointment in some form is something most of us face every day. Jesus was certainly not able to avoid it. He was often disappointed with his disciples: Matthew 8:23-27 (disbelieving that Jesus could calm the storm); Matthew 14:23-31 (Peter sinks after trying to walk on water); Matthew 16:5-12 (the disciples not understanding the spiritual things Jesus was teaching them). But, in Luke 18:1-14, Jesus uses the Parable of the Persistent Widow to encourage them to pray and not give up.

In Romans 5:3-5, Paul tells us that such challenges build us up. He had faced his own discouragement when, in Acts 15:36-39, we learn of the dispute he had with Barnabas over young John Mark who had deserted them on a prior missionary journey.

How are we to deal with these feelings in our own day? We can easily be disappointed with things going on around us, from the behavior of our children to the cold, rainy day before us. Maybe it's what is going on in the world, the political situation or simply someone who has let us down. Often, it is disappointment with ourselves: we don't feel well, we haven't done some things we should have done, we've said the wrong thing or at the wrong time.

Philip Yancey tells this story on himself. "I remember a long night sitting in uncomfortable Naugahyde chairs in O'Hare Airport, waiting impatiently for a flight that was delayed for five hours. I happened to be next to a wise woman who was traveling to the same conference. The long delay and the late hour combined to create a melancholy mood, and in five hours we had time to share all the dysfunctions of childhood, our disappointments with the church, our questions of faith. I was writing the book *Disappointment with God* at the time, and I felt burdened by other people's pains and sorrows, doubts and unanswered prayers. "My companion listened to me in silence for a very long time, and then out of nowhere she asked a question that has always stayed with me. 'Philip, do you ever just let God love you?' she said. 'It's pretty important, I think.'"

If we're really honest about the matter, we *are* sometimes disappointed with God. When things don't work out the way we think they should, we wonder where God was in the situation.

Well, rather than dwelling on our multitude of disappointments, let's look at how to deal with them and how to help others deal with them.

A first step might be taking a look at the specific disappointments and what might be motivating them. Is it that our expectations are too high or unrealistic? Do we need to be more forgiving of those who are not measuring up to our expectations? Maybe we just need to slow down and take things one day at a time, perhaps even one moment at a time.

Especially we need to examine those things about which we are disappointed with ourselves. Why are we putting so much pressure on ourselves; do we think we are more intelligent, more capable, more needed than we really are? As Christians, we should certainly be willing to forgive others; why not forgive ourselves? And we should continually be examining our expectations to see if they are within the will of God.

Whether our disappointments are with ourselves or with others, and especially if they are with God, prayer is always an answer. As we begin to agonize about a situation, it may be time to just "shut up and listen"...that is, rather than running our mind, seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit within us. For the more oppressive disappointments or those that continue to occur, it is time for serious prayer time with the Lord. And remember, as Paul teaches, bearing with disappointments rather than letting them drag us down is one of the factors of life that builds us up into the kind of disciples Christ wants us to be.

Our giving thought to the issue of disappointment may well cause us to be concerned about ways in which we may disappoint others. That is a challenge to us as Christ's people in the world today and shouldn't be missed as we consider this subject. It should also motivate us to help others in dealing with their disappointments.

To help others, we have to be honest about our own disappointments and how we are dealing with them. And we have to listen. As television's "Mr. Rogers" told Congress one day based upon his work with children, feelings are both mentionable and manageable. We can assure another person that it is normal for them to be dealing with disappointment and then share with them how we deal with them. Here, again we have the opportunity to tell another that God has answers; and anytime we can help others see that God is there for them either gives them assurance—if they are already Christians—or shows them the better way if they are not.

Living in Kindness, Care and Tenderheartedness

We now look at how God can use us in reaching others at their point of need. Jesus showed kindness in sickness in Matthew 14:14 (healings in the crowd of 5,000), sorrow in Luke 7:13 (widow who had lost her son), hunger in Matthew 15:32 (feeding the crowd of 4,000), loneliness in Mark 4:41 (an outcast leper), bewilderment in Matthew 9:36 (those feeling lost like sheep without a shepherd) and to a host in an embarrassing situation in John 2:1-11 (turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana).

Jesus taught about kindness in Matthew 25:31-46, the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats. His story makes it clear who the people are whom God favors: ones who show kindness to those in need.

In Galatians 5:22, Paul names kindness as one of the fruit of the Spirit.

In Acts 11:27-30 we see the early church's concern for their brothers and sisters in the Jerusalem Church as they collect offerings to be sent back to the suffering church by Paul.

If we ask ourselves what opportunities we have to be kind to those around us, the answer could well be "unlimited." The one thing everyone has is some need. It may be physical (of the food, shelter and clothing kind), mental (calming someone down, answering their questions, guiding them in some way) or spiritual (helping them find Christ, even if what we have to share is only a first step for them).

To begin thinking about what God would have us do, a first step might be to reflect on what others have done to show kindness to us. It shouldn't be hard to think of things a loved one has done for us just within the last day. But, as we reflect back on our lives, perhaps we can see how significant kindnesses shown to us by others have shaped our lives. How willing are we to show our kindness to others?

Here, a couple of quotes might help us. John Wesley said: “Do all the good that you can, by all the means that you can, in all the ways that you can, in all the places that you can, at all the times that you can, for all the people that you can, for as long as ever you can.”

And here is what a missionary once said: “Kindness is demonstrated through words and deeds. When we talk to another, do the words we say uplift, encourage and bless them? Do we give them our attention when they are talking or do we project the appearance that we are not interested or don't have the time? Do we touch the hand or provide a hug for the elderly, the sick, the discouraged, the down-hearted? Do we listen to the stories of our elderly or our children although we have heard the same thing many times? Do we greet newcomers with a sincere welcome and show that we are interested in them and glad that they are there? Do we take the time to show someone the way who appears lost...physically or spiritually? Do we visit the shut-ins? Do we help the young mother struggling across the parking lot with toddlers, groceries, etc. or criticize her for yelling at the kids!”

Sometimes, being kind may be no more than a smiling “Good morning” greeting. But it is even better to be attentive to the persons we encounter. As the quote above indicates, we may notice a person in need of help in some physical way. Or we may see an opportunity to encourage someone, perhaps a friend who (from our last study) may be suffering a disappointment. Being attentive may be the key to being kind.

Needless to say, there are always charities to which we can contribute financial gifts, if not our direct time and effort. Financial help to those in need should always be a part of our Christian lives.

And, do we realize that kindness can travel through generations for the benefit of those to come? Anthony Bloom said this, ““It is an error to think that man’s connection with life on earth ends with his death. In the course of one’s life one sows seeds. The seeds develop in the souls of other men and affect their destiny, and the fruit that is born of these seeds truly belongs not only to those who bear it but also to those who sow.” Every day of our lives is a day of sowing some kind of seeds. We have the opportunity to sow the seeds of God’s love by showing kindness everywhere we go. Kindness is love in action.

Dealing with Anxiety/Worry

Before looking at the anxieties and worry we may face in life, and then the matter of fear that will follow this study, some definitions might be in order. **Concern** is a matter needing consideration. **Worry** is mental distress or agitation resulting from concern, usually for something impending or anticipated. **Fear** is a strong, unpleasant emotion caused by anticipation or awareness of danger.

Matthew 6:25-32 is Jesus’ teaching on worry; that we are not to do it. In his Parable of the Sower, Matthew 13:1-9, 16-23, Jesus says the worries of life can be like thorns that choke the message of the kingdom of God from the person who has otherwise received it.

In the story of Martha and Mary in Luke 10:38-42 we see Martha worrying about trivialities while Mary is content to listen to Jesus.

Paul, in Philippians 4:4-7, says, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, present your requests to God.” In 1 Peter 5:6-7, Peter says, “Cast all your anxiety on God because he cares for you.”

Proverbs, always a source of very specific words about our feelings, says, “An anxious heart weighs a man down, but a kind word cheers him up.”

As we then look at the problem of anxiety in our lives, perhaps it is helpful to begin by noting that concern, on the other hand, is a good thing. As Christ’s people in the world today, we do have responsibilities. At any time, there are a lot of things going on around us about which we should be concerned and ready to do our part to deal with them. And, we have our immediate responsibilities to our family and loved ones. It is when we carry these things too far and let them eat away at us that the trouble begins.

So, first we have to admit that we do let things worry us. When that happens, we need to think and pray. We deal with *why* this concern has driven us to worry. Is it really that important? Is this someone else’s responsibility and not ours; in other words, are we taking on too much? Is it that *we* want to be in control rather than letting God be in control? Those are the sort of issues we need to face when anxiety occurs.

Then, of course, we go to God in prayer about the matter, either for his clarification of it or his forgiveness.

Here’s a “real life” illustration. A guy knew his friend had a doctor’s appointment that could result in some really bad news. He was inclined to come along beside his friend to let the person know of his concern and his prayers, but he had other, important things that he felt needed to be done. As he thought about the matter later, he worried that he had made the wrong choice. When he found that his friend was now in a hospital emergency room, he was sure he had made the wrong choice. He went to the Lord in prayer not only for forgiveness but also with a plea for guidance in the future that would help him better set his priorities in order.

How, then, can we help others when they are faced with anxiety? By sharing with them how we deal with such matters. In some instances, we may even be able to be of direct help in relieving them of the problem that is creating their anxiety. In either case, it gives us an opportunity to be Christ’s disciple in that situation. The message to ourselves: replace your worry with healthy concern.

Dealing with Fear

Matthew 10:17-40 is Jesus’ discourse on what it means to follow him. His followers will face hardships just as he is facing because of people who reject the Good News that has come into the world through Christ. But, he encourages them to stand against the fear of the trials and

tribulations to come because he will be with them. In Luke 12:32-34 Jesus tells his followers not to be afraid because the Father is pleased to give them the kingdom. In Romans 8:15 Paul says that Christians did not receive the spirit of fear but of sons of God.

There are many instances of fear in the New Testament: Mark 4:35-41 (the fear of the disciples from a storm at sea); Mt. 14:28-33 (Peter's fear when he tries to walk on water); Mt. 26:36-46 (perhaps even Jesus' fear of the cross as he prays in the Garden of Gethsemane); Acts 16:25-28 (the jailer when a storm frees Paul and other prisoners).

As mentioned in the last study, although anxiety is sinful, concern is healthy. There are also instances in which fear is not a sin but advisable. We are not to expose ourselves to danger unnecessarily. There are precautions we need to take from time to time; that's just good sense. Fear may be the reason we do the right thing in order to avoid serious danger. If we don't, greater fear may well result.

However, unreasonable fear is what we are dealing with in this study, those instances in which we take upon ourselves some dread of the future that, on reflection, is not dangerous. So, the issue is: are there things that we truly fear?

If so, once again we are in a "think and pray" situation. Why am I fearful? Is this a one-time event, or a recurring one? What is the nature of it, and what makes it a danger to me? Am I not trusting God?

Once we are dealing internally with the heart of the matter, it is time to turn to God in prayer. We have an accessible God! Through the Holy Spirit within us, we can receive guidance in these situations. Sometimes the importance of them simply falls apart when presented to the Lord. At other times we get either a sense of peace about it or specific guidance about how to deal with it. If this doesn't work, it is time to go to a Christian counselor or friend for help.

For many people the great fear is death, and there are two aspects of that. The first is the physical and emotional trauma connected with it. It is something we will all face, some of us sooner than others. The closer we are to it, perhaps the greater our likelihood of fear. Death is simply something all of us must accept. Until it is an imminent danger, real fear is simply unreasonable; anyone in this condition needs spiritual and perhaps psychological help.

The more common fear of death concerns the consequences; what will happen with regard to afterlife. As Christians, that should never be a reason for fear. John 3:16 states clearly that everyone who gives his life to Christ shall not perish but have eternal life.

Where do we stand then in helping others deal with their fears? Generally, it would be to share with them how we deal with the matter in our own lives. In some instances, as noted above, they may need psychological help. As was the case in the study of anxiety, maybe there is something we can do to relieve their fear such as getting them protection from an impending danger.

One of the main messages to us as disciples of Christ in considering this issue is in dealing with those who fear they will not live in eternity with Christ. We should be sure that those closest to us don't have this fear. Even among professing Christians, the problem can be discovered in their remark, "I hope I'll be in heaven." Hope should not be an issue. See Romans 10:9. If the person is in doubt, we need to find out why. This is the opportunity to get them to see that their faith is too shallow if they do not accept God's word on the assurance of salvation or feel they have not committed their lives fully to Christ so that they can rely on that assurance. We need to help them take that step; and, if we are not the right person to do it, we should get them in touch with one who is.

Likewise, if the doubter about the afterlife is not a Christian, our ministry as Christ's person is to do all we can to open the door for their acceptance of Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Andrew Meekens was an elder in the International Evangelical Church of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. He was one of 163 passengers on a hijacked jet that ran out of fuel and crashed near the Comoros Islands in 1996. According to survivors of the crash, the pilot announced that he would have to attempt an emergency landing. Meekens got to his feet and spoke to the people on board, trying to calm their fears. Then he presented the Gospel of Jesus Christ and invited people to respond. A surviving flight attendant said that about 20 people did so including a flight attendant who did not survive the crash. Although Meekens was "reserved in manner," he did not hesitate to proclaim Jesus Christ when the crucial opportunity presented itself. A man "deeply committed in his faith," he was able to overcome his fear because of his trust in God. Andrew Meekens died in the crash but not before dealing with the fear of his fellow passengers and bringing the message of salvation to them.

Dealing with Anger

Matthew 5:21-26 is Jesus' teaching that the Old Testament said not to murder, and he says, basically, that anger against another is of the same nature.

In Matthew 20:1-16 we have the anger of the workers who believe they have been underpaid in the Parable of the Workers in the Field.

In Luke 15:11-32 we see the anger of the older brother against the Prodigal Son.

Jesus shows anger against the moneychangers in the temple in John 2:13-16.

Paul, in Ephesians 4:26-27, warns against letting the sun go down on your anger and giving the devil a foothold.

James 1:19-29 teaches us to be slow to anger.

So, how do we, as disciples of Christ in our day, handle anger? Are there some things about which we tend to explode in anger? Are there things about which, instead, we internalize them and seethe within?

Anger itself is not a sin if it is against injustice toward others. Even in some instances of injustice against ourselves, anger might bring peace to both parties. An example would be when an employee feels he is being mistreated and lets his boss know about it. Risky, but sometimes necessary. What we are looking at in this study, however, is anger in general, anger toward others whom we believe have hurt us, leading to unresolved suffering and pain.

It is good to question ourselves about how often we are angry, what things make us angry, how intense our anger is, etc. Then we need to examine how we deal with anger.

First, we recognize that anger itself is not sin; it is what motivates it and what we do with it that is proper or improper. Some of the greatest good for the benefit of mankind has occurred because Christian people became angry with injustices that were being imposed upon others.

On the other hand, people who have a tendency to explode with their anger can manifest it in shouting, cursing, throwing objects, physical abuse and even killing. Those who do so can experience exhilaration, a sense of power, and a deeply satisfying vindication. However, people and property are the victims of such outrages, and they need to be curbed if relationships are to exist for such a person.

Some people, on the other hand, experience just as much anger, but suppress it. That can be extremely damaging to our inner life. The anger just lies there, festering and causing all sorts of miserable side effects. Ultimately, it manifests itself in withdrawal, silence, avoidance, tears, and sickness. If this describes the way we process anger, it also needs to be dealt with if we are going to have healthy relationships with others and with God.

The first step in dealing with anger is to acknowledge it. Sometimes that is painful to do, but venting it or stuffing it within are not, as we have seen, helpful solutions. The next step is to reflect prayerfully on the meaning of the anger and decide what to do with it. We may, surprisingly, decide that the thing we were angry about was really no big deal and doesn't justify our spending our emotions on it; or, we may find that we were at fault in the situation that caused the anger. In any event, we need to think through how we can most constructively deal with the anger, and that process should include prayer for direction from the Lord.

Based upon the conclusions we reach, we then express our anger without venting it, sharing our feelings with another person who is willing to listen to us and reflect back to us what they hear us saying.

Another facet of dealing with anger involves how we help our loved ones and friends in handling their anger. That is a process of listening on our part. Just as we can be helped in sharing our feelings of anger with another, we should be willing to be a sounding board for the angry feelings of those who confide in us.

Whether the anger is ours or of someone who is sharing it with us, if it is evident that a pattern of anger exists, there is a need to get to the root of the problem. If there is a tendency for a person to lose his or her temper over trivial matters, there is probably something below the surface that is causing the recurring irritability. It may be unhappiness with one's job, or life in general. It could be burnout from overwork. It could even be a health problem. We need to take the time to seek out the reasons, to evaluate them and find the proper solution. Prayer, again, can be a big help in this process. And, if all else fails, professional help may need to be sought.

If we are able to find forgiveness toward the one who has caused us the anger, we should recognize that there still may be pain in our heart over the matter. Prayer, over time, can have a very healing effect.

Needless to say, prayer should undergird all of this, especially as a way to avoid making things worse. When we are about to give an angry response to someone, a quick prayer for guidance can often avoid an unnecessary and unpleasant encounter. And, as someone else has said, one way to avoid anger is to avoid the expectations that would lead to the anger. We are by nature prideful and controlling; that should give us caution concerning our tendency to be angry when others don't agree with us. Another caution is not to try to discipline our children or correct others when we are angry; we won't be effective and may cause more harm than good.

And, finally, we need to remember that remaining angry leaves us in pain and the victory is in the hands of the one who angered us.

Here is a story of how two conflicting angers got worked out to the glory of God. *Focus on the Family* told of Mitsuo Fuchida and Jacob DeShazer. Fuchida was a Japanese Commander who led a squadron of planes in attacking Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Sergeant DeShazer was an American who participated in Doolittle's daring raid on Tokyo April 18, 1942. DeShazer's B-24 bomber ran out of fuel before he could reach a safe area in China and he ended up in a Japanese prison camp for 40 months. DeShazer was bitter with anger until he was able to get his hands on a Bible in prison. God gave him the spiritual eyes to see His plan of forgiveness. This so changed the American that, following the war, he went back to Japan as a Christian missionary. Fuchida, in the meantime, had found it difficult to cope with the defeat of his nation and the forced return from a responsible military position to farming. A man in an anger crisis, he was given a leaflet by DeShazer. He became intrigued with DeShazer's story and wanted to hear more. This led to Fuchida getting a Bible and experiencing the same message of forgiveness that had turned the American's life around. Fuchida became an evangelist throughout Japan and Asia, and he and DeShazer became close friends. We have a God who works miracles in history and he can heal our anger.

Dealing with Hatred

Proverbs 10:12 tells us, "Hate stirs up dissension, but love covers all wrongs." Psalm 139:17-24 is David's self-examination concerning hateful wrongs he believes have been committed against God, seeking God's guidance that he not sin; vengeance is up to God (Deuteronomy 32:35).

For the Christian, hatred is the equivalent of murder in our heart (Matthew 5:21-22; 1 John 3:15). In Luke 6:22-31, Jesus tells his followers that others will hate them because of him but concludes by saying that we should love our enemies. I John 2:7-11 and 4:7-21 spell this out in more detail; we are to love rather than hate.

Unfortunately, the next step from anger is often hatred. It is, of course, proper to hate sin, but the problem comes in how not to hate the sinner.

How do we deal with matters that might lead to hate? The beginning step is to look at the heart of the matter in a prayerful way. We try to resolve the "cause and effect" nature of it, seeking some solution. The steps we looked at in the study of Anger might be helpful to us and in helping others. We may, like David, end up turning it over to the Lord.

If nothing else works, we need to accept the fact that holding onto the hate only hurts us and can lead to serious emotional, spiritual and physical illness. As long as we allow hatred to be a part of our lives, we are giving someone else other than Christ control over us. If our immediate response to someone who hates us or does a hateful thing to us is to hate them back, they are controlling our life. If we spend our time trying to get back at someone who has injured us, or thinking of all the clever things we wish we had said in rebuttal to someone who insulted us, we are letting others control our life. The Christian is to be controlled by Christ alone. We cannot do this by ourselves. But, if we are willing to yield ourselves to the Holy Spirit within us, and be guided by the values that Jesus has taught us, we can learn to respond properly rather than reacting in hate. Paul said, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13).

We shouldn't leave this study without specifically asking ourselves, "How do we turn hateful feelings toward others into Jesus' way of dealing with the issue?" Christ asks us to *love* these people. Again, this takes supernatural (Holy Spirit) power. We simply can't do it ourselves. As much time as it takes to go to the Lord in prayer about the person or persons, we must do it.

An additional note. There are a lot of day-to-day things we say we hate: "I hate getting up in the mornings;" "I hate this constant pain in my back;" "I hate mosquitoes." It's not sin to have these feelings unless they show resentment against God. It's just the way things are, and we might as well accept them! We live in a fallen world.

And here is a powerful story how hate can be relieved in a person's life even after years of pain and suffering because of it. A priest counseled a friend to say to God, "I hate you." When the man's parents had been killed, someone had told him that God needed his parents more in heaven. As a result, resentment toward God had smoldered for 18 years and misshaped the man's life. He needed to let God know exactly how he felt, but he was afraid to. The priest told the man that we can't hide our feelings from God, nor "protect" him from our emotions. God knows what we need before we ask him, and is much more ready to give than we are to pray. God longs for us to talk to him about what is on our mind so that he can lead us to the intersection of our needs and his blessings. When the man finally told God he hated him, he wept bitterly, draining out the years of resentment, and went on to love God deeply.

Dealing with Busyness and Burnout

Matthew 11:25-30 is Jesus' teaching that, "for those who are weary and burdened" he promises that "my yoke is easy and my burden is light" because he is carrying the bulk of the load if it is yielded to him. In his Parable of the Sower, Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23, Jesus points out that the brambles of life can choke out the message of the kingdom of God.

From the Old Testament, Isaiah 40:27-31 calls us to "walk and not grow faint."

Paul, in Romans 7:14-25, deals with the inner conflict within himself that battles against doing the things he should be doing.

Hebrews 12:1-2 challenges us to run with perseverance the race that the Lord has set for us.

How, then, do we deal with the busyness of life and the burnout it might cause? The solution to burnout is having healthy boundaries. There is a saying that good is the enemy of the best. There is only so much that we can do. When we are being asked to do too much, it is important to remember that "No" is a complete sentence. Remember, a need is not a calling.

The question is how we get ourselves into these situations. Jesus promised that, as long as we were doing what he would have us do, our "yokes" would not be too burdensome. The problem is that we make our own yokes. Remember that a need is not always a calling. We should ask ourselves, "Is this the main thing God wants me to do?"

If busyness is overburdening us or others we may be trying to help, here are some steps to follow:

- (1) Make a list of how much time you spend each day (or week or month, if you prefer) doing various things.
- (2) See if there are things you could quit doing or do in less time (if, for instance, you were better organized).
- (3) Prioritize your time.
- (4) Re-allot your time based on what you have found out about yourself.
- (5) Begin to function on the new, wiser schedule.

As with other things we have discussed in this series, prayer should be at the center of our considerations. Author and pastor Charles L. Allen begins his book *God's Psychiatry* by "prescribing" the Twenty-third Psalm as the cure for busyness. He told his patient, a stressed-out business executive, to read it five times a day for seven days. He was to read it first thing upon awakening in the morning. He was to read it carefully, meditatively, and prayerfully. Just after breakfast, he was to do the same thing. This was to be repeated just after lunch and dinner, and then the last thing before he went to bed. The "patient" was told not be hurried in reading, but to think about each phrase, giving his mind time to absorb as much of the meaning as possible. At

the end of one week, Allen promised, things would be different for the overly busy man. The results were so helpful to the man that Allen continued to prescribe the same remedy for many people he counseled in subsequent years.

There is also the matter of sharing burdens. In Exodus 18:13-26 we have what has been called “The Jethro Solution.” Moses was overburdened with responsibilities, and his father-in-law Jethro suggests a method by which he can engage others in helping him and thus relieve his burden. Many of us, even in doing Christian work, carry greater burdens than God intends for us. He wants us to be conscious of our own need for physical, emotional and spiritual health. We can be of little good to Him or others if we are over-burdened. Furthermore, if others are to grow in their relationship with God, they need to be given responsibility and authority rather than our holding onto everything ourselves. In family situations, there are opportunities for us to share responsibilities with our spouse and sometimes our children.

These comments, however, have to do with being *overburdened*. There are emotional and spiritual burdens we bear on behalf of others whom God places on our heart or that occur in the natural consequence of living. Kept within reasonable bounds, these burdens are healthy and helpful to our future growth. The person who exercises regularly knows that bearing burdens with a positive attitude has many beneficial effects. As a guy who runs marathons noted, “You need to keep pace, stay surrounded by a supportive group as you run, and be sure to provide yourself with enough nourishment—for the Christian, spiritual nourishment—to finish the race.”

Experiencing Joy

Jesus reflected joy in his telling of the Parable of the Lost Sheep (Matthew 18:10-14). He also illustrated it in his Parable of the Lost Coin (Luke 15:8-10)

Paul, in Romans 5:1-21, teaches about joy, specifically the joy of eternal life that we have through faith in Jesus Christ. He also includes joy as one of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22, 23.

James, in his Letter (1:2), tells us, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds,” because the testing of our faith builds perseverance.

John mentions joy in 1 John 1:1-4 (he writes the letter “to make our joy complete”), in 2 John 4 (the joy he finds in “children walking in the truth”) and 3 John 2:3 (the joy he felt from hearing of the faithfulness of others).

In thinking about the issue of joy, a first step, perhaps, is distinguishing it from happiness. Happiness is in the nature of an outward demonstration of good feelings resulting from something that has happened in your life. Joy is much more deeply rooted. It springs from a solid sense of well-being. For the Christian, that well-being is grounded in our faith in Christ. Put another way, happiness has to do with current circumstances; joy is the result of the blessings of life in Christ.

Christians should be people who reflect joy. The closer our relationship with the Lord, the more we feel our lives are on the right track. The better we feel about ourselves and what we are doing. That joy is built as we share it with others. If we encounter people who lack joy, it is our opportunity to let them know the joy that is within us and why it is there.

Here are some ways to build joy into our lives and encourage others to be more joyful:

- (1) Serve others. Few things give as much joy as unselfish acts for the benefit of others (Acts 20:24).
- (2) Worship God. True worship is one of life's most exhilarating experiences (Psalms 30:5, 89:15).
- (3) Read and study Scripture. The Bible both enlightens and inspires when read devotionally (1 Thessalonians 1:4-6).
- (4) Be in fellowship with God. It changes your whole perspective concerning the things that happen in your daily life. Knowing and trusting God is the source of great joy (1 Peter 1:8).
- (5) Share your faith. Leading people into a relationship with Jesus is not easy, but the end result is cause for joyous celebration (John 4:36).
- (6) Remember you are a child of God and will spend eternity with him (Romans 15:13).

On that final point, a friend shared this. He was with his brother when the brother died. He had prayed with him for his eternal rest with God. As the brother then died, he said, "My guardian angel is leading me out of darkness." That is a demonstration of eternal joy!

Dealing with Loneliness

Jesus faced his life's trials alone. Matthew 4:1-11 tells of his temptation in the wilderness at the beginning of his ministry. Matthew 26:36-41 is his testing in the Garden of Gethsemane. Mark 15:25-37 recounts Jesus' crucifixion.

John the Baptist had a lonely life. Mark 1:4-8.

Paul's loneliness is expressed in 2 Timothy 4:9-12, 16-17,

From the Old Testament, a significant Bible passage on loneliness is 1 Kings 19:1-9, telling of the desperation of Elijah in fleeing from Jezebel. Genesis 2:18 is where God says, "It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

So, how have we experienced and dealt with loneliness in our own lives? Perhaps we tend to think of loneliness as something mainly affecting older people, especially those who have lost their spouse and other loved ones, but loneliness can occur to all at all ages. As people of all ages—but especially young people—become increasingly addicted to their digital devices they lose physical contact with other people. Other young people starting out in a new school or a new job

can face loneliness. Middle-aged people facing the children leaving home, divorce or job loss deal with the same thing.

As Christians, a first remedy for loneliness is always prayer. We know that Christ, through the Holy Spirit, is always with us. But we also need physical contact. God made us to be people in community. If others are not reaching out to us in our loneliness, we need to force ourselves to reach out and get involved. That is the reason that life care facilities taking care of older people have many activities, games, outings, etc. for their people. Loneliness can lead to depression and depression can lead to death—spiritually, emotionally and physically.

How, then, do we reach others who are lonely? There is the story of the woman who came to her pastor asking him to pray for a lonely neighbor about whom she was concerned. He had to bite his tongue and politely point out to her that he would be glad to pray, but the obvious solution was for the woman to befriend the lonely person. We are God's person in any situation, and reaching out to the lonely is an obvious one!

Here are some guidelines on loneliness that might be helpful both to us when we are lonely and when we have the opportunity to reach others who are:

- (1) Have faith in Jesus Christ. We are never completely alone as long as we are one with him.
- (2) Rely on the Body of Christ, the Church. If we are part of a worshiping fellowship, we have many others with whom we have something in common, and that "something" is the most important thing in life: we are brothers and sisters in Christ.
- (3) Reach out to others. Think of other people who are lonely, grieving, ill or in some other form of distress. Let them know you care about them and are thinking of them. If you can't do it physically, write a letter or make a phone call.
- (4) Undertake some inter-generational activity, especially if that means you can be working with children or older people. That can bring refreshment to your life, and stretch you at the same time.
- (5) Serve others. Few things bring as much joy as unselfish acts on behalf of others, and it can build lasting friendships.
- (6) But, one word of caution. Don't overdo, talk too much (listening is twice as important as talking) or try too hard. You want to make friends, not drive people away. Be patient with yourself and let God's love flow through you to others. God will help in the development of new relationships.

An ultimate act of aiding one who was alone at death is told in this story. The nurse took the tired, anxious Marine to the bedside of the elderly man. "Your son is here," she said to the man three times before he opened his eyes and noticed the young man next to his bed. Heavily sedated because of a heart attack, he reached out his hand. The Marine wrapped his toughened fingers around the old man's limp ones, squeezing a message of love and encouragement.

The nurse brought a chair and the Marine sat holding the man's hand and offering him words of love and strength. This went on through the night. Occasionally the nurse would suggest that the Marine move away and rest for a while, but he refused. The dying man said nothing, just holding the Marine's hand. Along toward dawn the old man died. The Marine released the hand and went to tell the nurse what had happened. When he did, he asked the nurse who the man was. She was startled. "I thought he was your father," she answered. "No, I never saw him before," said the Marine. "Then, why didn't you say something?" the nurse asked. "I knew right away that there had been a mistake, but I also saw that there was a man who needed his son, and his son just wasn't there. When I saw that he was too sick to know the difference, he needed me to stay." The next time someone needs us, let's be there for them.

A final note. Laypeople sometimes fail to realize that their pastor or priest may be lonely. They tend to put clergy on a higher level than themselves, seeing them as advisors and guides rather than as friends. But they also need friends, and their own laypeople are the best prospects for friendship.

Experiencing Love

In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul says it all! In a sense, the entire Bible is about love, selfless (*agape*) love.

In Matthew 5:43-48, Jesus teaches that we are to love our enemies. In Luke 15:1-32, we have three parables that are centered on love. In John 15:1-17, Jesus tells his followers to love one another. John's other teachings on love are in 1 John 2:7-17, 3:11-24 and 4:7-21; 2 John 4-6; and 3 John 5-8.

On a cold and rainy day, following the worship service at his church, an older man walking to the parking lot fell flat on his face, splitting his lip and driving gravel into his cheek. Immediately a young woman was at his side, lifting him to his feet. "You need help," she said. "Let me take you to your car and drive you home. My husband will follow me in our car." She did this, got him to his apartment, cleaned his wound, made sure he needed no more immediate help, and left her telephone number in case he later needed her." That is love in action. That is Christ's love flowing from the woman to the situation before her.

Too often, what people think of as love is merely paying back others for things they have done for us, or doing things out of duty or responsibility, or maybe because it is expected of us as a spouse or parent. Selfless love is when God's love within us spontaneously reaches out to the occasion. Doing things for the sheer love of God is heartwarming and joyful within us when it happens. And that can occur at any time and in any place.

The crunch comes in the matter of loving our enemies. That's what Christ calls us to do (Matthew 5:43-48). It is only the supernatural power that is in us through the Holy Spirit that can cause us to love our enemies, but, as disciples of Christ, we are commanded to yield to that power. Of course, we love those who love us and are willing to lend to those whom we know can repay; anyone will do that. No, more is expected of the followers of Christ: unlimited love. Jesus

wants us to be able to look at things from God's point of view. We aren't here on earth to get our rights, but to serve. When someone wrongs us, God doesn't get angry with that person; He grieves because that person is out of step with him. He also understands what is going on within that person that caused him to act that way. When we begin to care about others in that way, and to be so guided by the Holy Spirit in our response to them, we understand what loving our enemies is all about.

There are so many other things we can take into consideration in connection with showing selfless love to others that they could fill a book. Here is a brief listing of some possibilities:

- (1) Affirmation. One of the greatest gifts we can give in this life is affirming others by caring enough to love them. God doesn't care what other people think of us but He cares very much about what we think of other people. Remembering people's names is a good starting point for most of us.
- (2) Sensitivity. Part of our growth as Christians is our growing love and concern for others. Our sensitivity to the needs of those around us should become more finely tuned. If we don't have an intercessory prayer list....
- (3) Action. It has been said that the Christian faith "talks easy but walks hard." If we know all of the right things to say, but don't put our love for others into action, our talk is like "a noisy gong or clanging cymbal" (1 Corinthians 13:1).
- (4) Spouse. In thinking about Jesus' commandment that we love our neighbors as ourselves, we need to remember that our spouse is our closest neighbor. So often, simply showing love can heal those marital spats that inevitably happen from time to time.
- (5) Test. If we want to test ourselves to see how we are doing in showing selfless love, we can write down the elements of love in 1 Corinthians 13 and check ourselves against each.
- (6) Thanksgiving. One way to grow in selfless love is to become more conscious of such love being shown to us. Find a container in which you can put a coin representing each special kindness shown to you by another (those for which nothing in return has been expected). When the container fills up, give the money to a worthy cause.
- (7) Unlovable. It is especially important to show love to the one who is acting or feeling unloved. When the other person rejects us or blames us for what is going on, it is often because he or she is feeling rejected or blameworthy. Instead of retaliating, we need to follow Christ's example and show acceptance, understanding, and love.
- (8) Spontaneity. It is sometimes difficult to separate selfless love from manipulation. That is, we too often do things because we want something in return. We may even do things out of feelings of guilt so that we can have acceptance from the one we have offended. Spontaneous love paints a much more beautiful picture than those things we intentionally do in order to effect some result of our own choosing.

Few stories express the beauty of love as well as this one. Dr. Richard Selzer tells it in his book *Mortal Lessons*. The doctor, in having to remove a tumor from a young woman's cheek, could not avoid severing a tiny nerve. Unfortunately, it was the nerve that controlled the muscles of her mouth. The result was that her mouth would always have a twisted, clownish appearance. "Will my mouth always be like this?" the woman asked while her young husband gazed at her lovingly, standing beside her bed. The doctor tells her it will. She nods in silent acceptance of the fact, but the young man smiles. "I like it," he says. "It's kind of cute." The doctor is deeply touched; in awe, he realizes that he is in the presence of godly people. He is encountering God through the loving actions of these young people toward one another in a moment of crisis. Unmindful of this, the young husband bends down to kiss the crooked mouth. The doctor is standing so close that he can see that the man has twisted his own lips to accommodate hers, to show her that their kiss still works.

Dealing with Pain and Suffering

Jesus often faced people who were in pain and suffering: the widow who had lost her only son (Luke 7:11-15) and Jairus, whose daughter had died (Matthew 9:18-19) are examples. And, of course, he had these experiences himself in the death of his friend Lazarus (John 11:1-44) and his agony in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:31-46).

Likewise, Paul had the pain of rejection on many occasions and was stoned and left, believed to be dead, in Acts 14:19-20. In 2 Corinthians 12:2-10 Paul talks of the "thorn in the flesh" from which he suffered. In 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, he praises God for His compassion and comfort.

Hebrews 2:10 speaks of God making Christ perfect through suffering; and 5:8 acknowledges that Christ learned obedience through suffering.

James 1:3-4 reminds us that perseverance in faith leads to maturity.

Pain is something we are all familiar with although it comes in many ways. We suffer physical pain from illnesses and injuries. We experience emotional pain in the loss of loved ones and in personal failures. Spiritual pain comes from realizing we have failed our Lord in various ways. Some pains are merely passing in nature and our suffering from them soon fades. Others are continuing or at least endure for an uncomfortable length of time.

How do we deal with them? Prayer, of course, is always the first step...in regard to pain and suffering, sometimes it is persevering prayer. It has been said that advice we listen to, pain we obey. We shouldn't get rid of the pain until we know the root of it. What is the underlying cause, and what can be done about that? We need to look for the challenge in the midst of the pain.

In this inner exploration process, it is time to listen to what God is showing us through our prayers and our internal enquiry, and to share our feelings with others. That can include asking others to pray for us. God does heal through the prayers of others, and we should not be

reluctant to ask a Christian friend to lay hands on us for healing prayer; miracles do happen and God is glorified when they do.

If immediate relief is not to happen, we shouldn't despair. As our Bible passages reveal, suffering can be a time of spiritual growth. We can wrap within our prayers a sharing of the pain of Christ who suffered the ultimate for our salvation. We shouldn't waste our pain; there may be much we can learn about ourselves, our relationship with God and His purposes for our life. God always gives us strength equivalent to the burden of pain He allows us to carry. We need to lay ourselves on the altar of God (Romans 12:1) to do with as He wills.

So, what does this say to us about the pain and suffering of others? It doesn't take any of us very long to be able to picture similar instances of pain in the lives of our friends and loved ones as well as others we are in contact with through our daily lives. Pain is as unavoidable in life as is death itself. As Christians, our spiritual growth normally causes us to be more sensitive to the needs of others, and therefore more conscious of the pain around us. Unfortunately, we cannot always bring relief to the pain in the manner that Jesus did in the above Bible passages. But, we can bring everything we have, starting with but not limited to our prayers, that God will help us help others in their pain. That can involve sharing with them what we have learned about dealing with our own pain and suffering, but giving physical, emotional and spiritual support to them as they work through theirs. And, again, that can include not only praying for them generally, but laying hands on them with specific healing prayers when acceptable to them.

Mental and emotional pain can sometimes be as great as physical pain. There is the story of a very successful lawyer who ended up in prison for fraud. Forced to give up his nice home and luxuries, his wife and daughter abandoned him. He came to prison with faith only in himself; but, after six months of dealing with his pain, he accepted Christ. His pain began to ease and he became a teacher, lawyer and father to the 50 young men in his cell block. As he began to grow in faith, he learned of God's righteousness and forgiveness and began to write to everyone he had hurt, especially his family. He begged for forgiveness, and his wife and daughter accepted him as a new man. When the time came, the warden said he was one of the very few men he was sorry to see leave prison. Now, that's the story of someone who learned from his pain!

Showing Mercy and Compassion

In Matthew 5:7 Jesus blesses the merciful as one of the Beatitudes. In Matthew 18:21-22 Jesus teaches mercy in telling Peter to forgive in an unlimited manner; and, in Matthew 18:23-45, he spells this out in the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant. In John 8:1-11 Jesus forgives the woman caught in adultery. Of course, the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) is a classic example of the showing of mercy and compassion.

In 1 Timothy 1:13-15, Paul expresses his appreciation to Christ for showing mercy to him despite the manner in which he had first rejected God's message in Christ. James, in James 1:12-13, teaches that "judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment."

Each of us needs mercy from God and from others daily. We say something we shouldn't have said or do something we shouldn't have done. Perhaps more often, we fail to say something we should have said or failed to do something we should have done! But there are also times when we are in pain or sorrow and need the comfort and compassion of others. Perhaps it is the simple matter of needing someone to help us do something or to do it for us.

As we reflect on times when we have been in great need of mercy and compassion from others—loss of a loved one, a disaster that has happened to us or our children, loss of our job or some other financial disaster, a serious illness, or whatever—we can rejoice that there were those who came to our side and showed us their love and concern. We can be grateful, too, of those times when God has shown His mercy to us in times of need.

Life is tough. There are a lot of people around us who may be working through hard times of one kind or another. How conscious are we of other people's pain? How willing are we to help them? How can we best show mercy and compassion to others? Being attentive to the needs of others is a first step. Listening. Simple kindnesses. Putting ourselves in the other person's situation so as to be conscious of exactly what their needs may be. Overlooking slights toward us by others. Forgiving debts of one kind or another. These are the simple, everyday things we can do to show Christ's love, his mercy and compassion.

And here are some biblical guidelines for ourselves and for the benefit of others:

- (1) True forgiveness is always an act of mercy (Matthew 18:21, 22).
- (2) Alleviating suffering is a showing of mercy (Exodus 2:25).
- (3) Providing help when needed is merciful (Exodus 22:27).
- (4) Mercy is manifested in doing the loving thing unselfconsciously (Matthew 25:31-40).
- (5) Saving another from physical, spiritual or emotional harm is merciful (Genesis 19:16).
- (6) Giving to one who is undeserving is merciful (Romans 5:8).
- (7) Patience demonstrates mercy (Deuteronomy 30:1-6).
- (8) Standing against injustice is merciful (1 Samuel 9:16).
- (9) Showing understanding of one's situation is showing mercy (Psalm 26:11).
- (10) Releasing others from their impossible indebtedness to us is an act of mercy (Matthew 18:23-35).

Here is a story that can teach us some things about mercy and compassion. A storeowner was tacking a sign above his door that read "Puppies for Sale." Such signs have a way of attracting children, and soon a small boy appeared asking, "How much are you gonna sell your puppies for?" The owner replied, "Anywhere from \$30 to \$50." The little boy reached in his pocket and pulled out some change. "I have \$2.37. Can I look at them?"

The storeowner smiled and whistled. Out of the kennel came his dog named Lady, running down the aisle of the store followed by five little puppies. One puppy was lagging considerably behind. Immediately the little boy singled out the lagging, limping puppy. He asked, "What's wrong with the little dog?" The man explained that when the puppy was born

the veterinarian said this puppy has a bad hip socket and would limp for the rest of his life. The little boy got excited and said, "That's the one I want to buy." "No, you don't want to buy this puppy," the man said. "He'll never be able to run, jump and play like other dogs. If you really want him, I'll give him to you." "He's worth every bit as much as the other dogs and I'll pay full price," the boy responded. "In fact, I'll give you \$2.37 now and 50 cents every month until he's paid for."

The boy then reached down and rolled up his pant leg revealing a badly twisted left leg supported by a metal brace. He looked up at the man and said, "I don't run so well myself, and the puppy will need someone who understands." Tears welled up in the man's eyes and he said, "Son, I hope and pray that each and every one of these puppies will have an owner such as you."

Dealing with Grief

In Matthew 23:37-39 Jesus grieves over Jerusalem because so many have refused to receive his message. In John 11:1-41 Jesus grieves over Lazarus. From Isaiah 53:3 it was foretold that Jesus would be "a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering." In Luke 7:13 he comforts the widow who has lost her son.

Thus, as we look at the issue of grief, we will be considering deep grief and not just concern about something we shouldn't have said or done. This is the grief we have from the loss of a loved one, from children who have gone astray, from a life-threatening illness that plagues us, from financial disaster and such things. Our own sin can lead to this kind of grief.

How do we deal with this level of grief? Prayer, of course, is a first step. No matter how bad things are, God is still in control. The Psalms can be a comfort at times of grief. In the John passage above, Jesus wept, and we need to release our pain in that way as well. These are some guidelines:

- (1) Don't hold it in. Admit the pain of your loss.
- (2) Find someone with whom you can talk who will understand your grief.
- (3) If the grief persists, it may be helpful to get professional assistance. There are bereavement groups in which people share their grief and support one another. Incidentally, people who have been in grief therapy following the loss of a loved one say they are encouraged not to focus too much on either the bad times or the good times they and their loved one had shared together. It is difficult enough to cope with the grief that accompanies the loss without compounding it with negative thoughts ("If only I had done this, or not done that"). On the other hand, giving attention only to the good times causes a person to idealize the relationship and never be able to overcome the grief. In grief, as in all things in life, there must be balance.

Many churches have helped their people deal with grief by setting up grief recovery

groups such as mentioned above. Open communication with others who have recently suffered the same loss within the same general time frame is said to be especially helpful. Some churches even have pamphlets designed specifically to help people deal with their grief.

Additionally, what can we do to help others in grief? It has been said: “We know we are loved when our pain is shared by another at a deep, personal level. Tears of shared grief water the roots of love.” In genuine sharing of the grief of others there may be the opportunity to bring Christ into the picture. The good news we have in Jesus Christ does not always eliminate pain. As a matter of fact, as we grow in our faith, we tend to become more sensitive to the pain and suffering of others, opening us up to more instances of genuine grief. We, like the psalmists, cry out to God for solace, understanding and faith. The surrounding darkness sometimes seems impenetrable. Significantly, however, the psalms of lament always end with an affirmation of God’s deliverance from the situation. We want to stay as close to God as we can in our pain. As Psalm 30 tells us, for instance, “weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning” (v. 5). This is the truth we can share with others who grieve.

When it comes to dealing with grief, here is a young man who could teach us all a lesson. The four-year-old’s next-door neighbor was an elderly man who had just lost his wife. Upon seeing the old man cry, the boy went into the man’s backyard, climbed into his lap, and just sat there. When his mother asked the boy what he had said to the neighbor, he replied, “Nothing. I just helped him cry.”

A final note. Grief is often associated with funeral or memorial services. If the service is a Christian one, there is time for rejoicing in the fact that a loved one has moved into a greater place, although our hearts are deeply saddened by the loss. The greatest grief we can have, however, is in the loss of a loved one who has not accepted Christ as their Lord and Savior. That thought should help us to do a better job of being Christ to the people around us so that they don’t ultimately fall into that state of permanent loss.

Experiencing Peace

In Luke 1:79 Zechariah’s prophecy about the baby Jesus sees him as one “to guide our feet into the path of peace,” and in 2:29-32 we have Simeon’s saying that God has released him in peace because he has been privileged to see the day of salvation prepared for all by Jesus’ birth. In John 14:25-27 Jesus, in telling his disciples of the coming of the Holy Spirit, says, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.” And, in John 20:21, Jesus, in appearing to his disciples after his resurrection, greets them in peace.

Romans 5:1-11 is Paul’s teaching on peace and joy. In Galatians 5:22 he mentions it as a fruit of the Spirit. Philippians 4:7 tells us that the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard our hearts and minds in Jesus Christ. Verses 8 and 9 then call us to put into practice what Paul has said so that God’s peace may remain with us.

From the Old Testament we have Proverbs 14:30, “A heart at peace gives life to the body.”

Here, of course, we are dealing with inner peace. As Christians, we should basically be people at peace within ourselves. In truth, that is not always the case. Things disturb us, making us restless and ill at ease. The ideal is for us to be concerned about the present and future without the terror of either. But, how do we accomplish that?

- (1) First, we must relinquish control of our lives to God. The Lord can run our lives much better than we can on our own (Matthew 11:28-30).
- (2) Second, peace grows as we grow in our relationship with God. We come to see that, regardless of the problems that confront us in life, the Lord is with us (John 16:31-33).
- (3) Third, peace increases as we allow the Holy Spirit to guide us. When we quit allowing our old, sinful nature to control us, we can experience genuine peace (Romans 8:5-8).
- (4) Fourth, God's peace rules in our hearts. As long as God is our first priority, the situations we face in life can always be kept in perspective (Colossians 3:15).

A related issue for some is the matter of perfectionism. The perfectionist typically deals with inner peace to a greater extent than the rest of us. Perfectionism can keep our heart from being at peace. Peace of mind and heart are in conflict with perfectionism. When we are under a compulsion to always have things a certain way—better than they already are—we are engaged, almost by definition, in a losing battle. Rather than being grateful for what we have, we are focused on what's wrong and why we need to fix it. We are in a constant state of dissatisfaction, discontent. Whether our discontent is related to what we are dealing with in our own lives or the "imperfections" in the lives of others, the very act of focusing on the imperfection severely hinders peace of mind and heart. God's wisdom is to do our very best but not to be concentrating on what's wrong with us and everything and everybody around us. When we quit stressing on imperfections, we will be more open to God's perfect will, and that leads to a heart at peace. Only the peace that Jesus gives brings real peace.

Elizabeth Sherrill has this to teach us about having peace in our lives. It is the lesson of the benches. She had a good remedy for those of us who cannot find peace because of rushing through life without observing all that God has given us and all that He has for us to see. She said, "I've tried to learn a lesson from benches. At first I thought it was simply that I was to slow down. We're such hurriers, we Americans. Benches remind us that we don't need to rush through the days. But they do more. They tell us something about the purpose of journeying. Why, I started asking, is there a bench in this particular location? There was always an answer. A gap between the mountains allowing a glimpse of higher mountains beyond. Something I could have missed if the bench placer had not helped me see it. That's the true message of the bench." God wants us to find our peace in Him and in the things He has created in this world to let us relax in Him.

Dealing with Shame/Guilt/Repentance/Atonement

Perhaps the most poignant passage on shame is Matthew 26:69-75 (Peter's denial of Christ and his resulting shame). Similar to that is Matthew 27:1-5 when Judas, in shame for betraying Jesus, hangs himself. Paul accuses Peter of shameful behavior in sitting with the Judaizers and separating himself from Gentiles in Galatians 2:11-14.

John the Baptist began his ministry by calling for repentance (Matthew 3:1-12). So did Jesus (Matthew 4:12-17), as did Peter also (Acts 2:38-39).

On the issue of atonement, in Matthew 18:10-14 (the Parable of the Lost Sheep) we have the message of joy in retrieving the one who has strayed. James 5:19-20 also remarks that the one who turns a sinner from error saves him from death to life. From the Old Testament, Psalm 51 is David's lament over his transgressions. And, of course, Acts 9 tells of Paul's miraculous conversion from being an enemy of Christ to his obedient servant.

There are two kinds of shame. One comes from a feeling of inferiority generally or in a specific incident. The other is from personal failure, particularly for the Christian the committing of a sin. With regard to the first, we need to be reminded that we are not inferior; God just gifts us in different ways. It is the second category we are looking at in this study.

When we, as Christians, are in shame for a failure, action on our part is a first step. If our shame is as a result of our having done or said something inappropriate to the situation or failing to do something on behalf of another that we should have done, the answer may be an apology and an asking of forgiveness. If our shame is for a sin we have committed, our apology is to God and asking for forgiveness from him. Dealing with our shame for sin should, at its best, include several steps; but, first, let us look at some other aspects of the issue.

What about carrying the burden of our shame, our feelings of remorse? Although the actions mentioned above should bring relief, we sometimes have a tendency to feel an ongoing responsibility that can weigh us down. One solution many have found helpful is to take all of those feelings and write them down; then, turn them over to the Lord in a prayerful way and burn them. Another that is particularly helpful concerning things we wish we had said or done on behalf of a loved one now departed is to write them a letter of regret, apology, and love. Confession before a priest or spiritual director is helpful for many.

Some people experience corporate shame for what has happened in their church, the nation as a whole, or some other group of which they are closely connected. Prayer, especially corporate prayer with those having the same feelings, can be helpful.

Here are the comprehensive steps to repentance and confession:

- (1) *Sensitivity*. Living a life in consciousness of our relationships with God and others.
- (2) *Self-examination*. Discovering our sins, wherein we have failed in our relationships. This should lead to contrition—being sincerely concerned about our actions. This is absolutely necessary and often missing in the progression toward wholeness.

- (3) *Repentance*. Being truly repentant, which is essential before we can expect our confession to be meaningful and our absolution complete. This is more than just “feeling sorry” for what we did; it means a turning away from the action and a firm intention not to repeat it (see 2 Corinthians 7:10).
- (4) *Confession*. Admitting those sins we have discovered and our responsibility for them.
- (5) *Seeking forgiveness*. Asking God to forgive our sins.
- (6) *Making restitution*. Sometimes God will require some act from us to show the sincerity of our confession or to bring a needed reconciliation. This could involve, for instance, apologizing to the person we have offended if doing so would not just make matters worse.
- (7) *Restoration*. Restoring that which we have damaged, whether relationships, material goods or community.
- (8) *Accepting God's forgiveness*. Forgiveness also includes the experience of being restored to wholeness/health with God and our neighbor. True repentance and confession will not have occurred until we have acknowledged within ourselves God's release of us from our sin.

Charles V. Naugle uses this illustration to point out how God can help us through the shame and guilt in our lives. A parishioner of his had a very twisted piece of driftwood on his mantel. Naugle asked the significance of it and the man said, "Like that piece of driftwood, my life was quite gnarled and storm-tossed. But Jesus my pilot rescued me." Then he went on to say, "And I want to polish it and make it more beautiful by my life in Christ." Jesus Christ died on the cross to reconcile us to God, forgiving our sins and reshaping our lives into his image.

Dealing with Pride

There are several glaring instances of pride in the Bible. Examples are: Matthew 14:1-12 (Herod is forced to keep his oath, resulting in the death of John the Baptist), Matthew 18:1-6 (an argument among the disciples about who is the greatest), and Matthew 20:20-28 (James and John want a special place next to Christ in heaven). Acts 12:19b-23 tells what happened to Herod because of his pride.

Luke 14:7-11 is Jesus' teaching on the issue. James, in his letter (4:13-17) deals with the problem of boasting. From the Old Testament we have Proverbs 26:12, “Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.”

C. S. Lewis said, “According to Christian teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil, is pride. Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere fleabites in comparison. It was through pride that the devil became the devil. Pride leads to every other vice; it is the complete anti-God state of mind.”

2 Kings 5:1-27 tells of Naaman's pride in expecting special attention from Elisha when he went to see the man of God to be healed of leprosy. Naaman was a great man by worldly standards, the commander of the army of the king of Aram, yet he had a skin disease. In seeking healing from Elisha he at least expected Elisha to see him, but the man of God simply sent the

message to Naaman that he was to wash seven times in the Jordan River. That was so humiliating to Naaman that he almost refused to do it.

The sinfulness of pride is centered in our thinking so much of ourselves that we are not willing to be humbled before God or others. This is a common experience of many of us because we are taught to be independent and live in a culture that teaches us to be people of importance. This not only separates us from God but also can lead to inappropriate and ungodly action on our part as it almost did with Naaman. How do we deal with pride?

Here we are dealing with personal pride, not just good feelings about something we have accomplished, or that our children have (for instance), unless we are really congratulating ourselves on how good, or smart, or successful, etc. that *we are*. When we pat ourselves on the back, we have reached the level of pride.

The best thing is to catch pride at the moment it happens, and turn to God in repentance for the thought. It is realizing that the evil one has put the ungodly thought in our head and rejecting it immediately. If not, it can lead to damaging results. It is easy enough for us to recall people we know of (even including some clergy) who have believed the adoration laid upon them by others and the resulting destruction of their lives, to know to avoid pride at all costs.

One helpful weapon against pride is to begin each day by committing ourselves into God's hands: body, mind and spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:23). And, of course, at the end of each day, thanking God for His protection.

Whereas pride often comes from the admiration of others for something we have said or done, the opposite can also be true. It can be when someone criticizes us or otherwise finds fault in us that we feel ourselves reacting in a prideful manner; "Wait a minute!" we say to ourselves; "I'm not that way; I'm far better." Self-confidence can lead to arrogance, and pride is the next step.

Pride can keep us from asking God for what we need. Because of the way we were brought up, pride may have a stronghold in our lives. That could either be because we were always told how we were better than everyone else; or, maybe the opposite was true, and we had to become self-reliant because we were otherwise ignored or left disappointed. The only solution is giving up our prideful self-sufficiency.

We are not better than everyone else; as a matter of fact, we are not better than *anyone* else. Yet, on the other hand, we are a person made in the image of God and whom God loves very much, and that makes us as good as anyone else. Our dependence is on God. What we are and have are gifts from his gracious goodness. As long as we can believe that, and remember it in our day-to-day lives, we can squelch pride and please God.

We are unlikely to realize that we may be coming across as a prideful person. Dr. Henry Brandt taught a lesson on this subject. He said to a friend, "You are the only problem you will ever have. It's not others around you or your circumstances. Now, there's hope in that truth because you can take yourself to God and be changed. You can't take anyone else to God. But

they can benefit from your change.” What an important message to us all concerning how we appear to others. If we’re thinking too much of ourselves, it’s time to go to God and be changed. That is the way we can be most helpful to others in dealing with the issue of pride: showing to them the life of a truly humble person because of our reliance on God.

One final reminder in looking at Shame and Pride in relation to one another; we are as good as anyone else but we are not better than anyone else.

Dealing with Prejudice/Judging Others

Matthew 7:1-5 is Jesus’ teaching not to judge, or you will be judged. In John 1:43-46, we have the instance of Nathanael’s prejudice about not anything good coming out of Nazareth.

Illustrations of prejudice are seen in Luke 7:36-50 (Simon the Pharisee’s prejudice against the woman washing Jesus’ feet) and in the discussion Jesus has with the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4:7-26. Also, in the Old Testament, Esther 3:1-6 is about prejudice against the Jews, and, from 1 Samuel 16:7, we have “Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

Paul, in Romans 12:9-16, expresses the right way in which we should regard others; and, in 14:1-23, he tells us how to help others rather than judging them. James 2:1-7 contains his teaching on being impartial in our relationships with others.

Here we are considering prejudice and unkind judgment against others. Discernment is another matter. Discernment is coming to understand the reality of a situation. We are not to be oblivious to what is going on around us that is due to what other people say and do. We will all be judged (by God). See Matthew 25:31-46, for instance. And, by the grace of the Holy Spirit within us, Christians are to use their own good judgment in dealing with the issues of life, including what other people are saying and doing.

It is when we look down on other people solely because of the ways in which they differ from us that prejudice comes into the picture. And, if we are honest, we have a tendency to do this from time to time. It may be a built-in prejudice from our parents...derogatory things we were told about people of other nationalities or races. It may be the way we were brought up “to be better than other people.” It may be from our own experiences of life such as disappointment with politicians or mistreatment by others. It may simply have become accustomed to ethnic jokes. Whatever the root of our prejudice we need to deal with it.

Prejudice falls into two categories: open prejudice and latent prejudice. Latent prejudice occurs when we believe we have put a deep-seated false impression of others aside only to see it surface unexpectedly in a racial or ethnic joke we tell or in some other spontaneous response we make. The best way to deal with latent prejudice is to admit that it exists and to pray that others will bring it to our attention if we don’t realize it on our own. When that happens, we need to ask forgiveness of anyone we have offended and to make a conscious effort to recognize the fact that the prejudice is still lurking there and needs to be dealt with.

Open prejudice, of course, must also be dealt with. It is inconsistent with faith in Christ. Thus, again, the first step is recognizing any prejudices we have and then getting to the root of why we have them. Once we identify specific prejudices and their cause, we can ask a trusted friend to help us deal with them. Prejudice is like hatred; and, as is discussed in our study of Hatred, continuing with it is letting someone (or some group) other than Jesus control our lives. If we cannot overcome our prejudices after considering these suggestions, professional help may be needed.

Only in Christ can we truly deal with the prejudice within ourselves. Read Paul's brief letter to Philemon. It shows how to see as a brother someone who was once a slave.

Here are a couple of examples of the pain of prejudice and how it can be overcome. The first is about a pastor who noticed a small girl standing outside his small church crying her heart out. She explained that she had been turned away from Sunday school because the church was too crowded. Seeing her shabby dress, the pastor realized that she had probably been rejected because of her appearance more than lack of space, so he took her inside and found a place for her. When, two years later, she died, the pastor was asked to handle the final arrangements. In the process he discovered a small, crumpled purse with 57 cents in it. With the money was a note in the child's handwriting that said, "This is to help build the church bigger so more children can go to Sunday school." The pastor used this story of unselfish love to inspire his congregation to build a bigger church. A newspaper picked up the story and published it. Soon, gifts were coming from everywhere. One thing led to another with the result that Temple Baptist Church in Philadelphia could seat thousands of people and Temple University provides much more than a "Sunday School" education. The pastor used the illustration of prejudice against a poor child to awaken his congregation to the glory of God.

The other story involves a man who was the child of an unwed mother and was, therefore, known in the community—to put it politely—to be "illegitimate." He said that, for years, he faced the disgrace of being asked, "Who's your father?" One day a new pastor arrived at his church, and when he met the boy he asked unknowingly, "Who's your father?" Immediately noticing the boy's reaction, he followed with, "Wait a minute! I know who you are. I can see the family resemblance now. You're a child of God." Patting the boy on the shoulder, he said, "You've got a great inheritance. Go and claim it." The boy did, and went on to be the Governor of Tennessee, Ben Hooper.

Learning Patience

In Luke 13:6-9, Jesus uses the Parable of the Fig Tree to teach patience. He makes, basically, the same point in his Parable of the Weeds (Matthew 13:24-30).

Paul teaches the value of suffering in patience in Romans 5:3-5. In 2 Timothy 3:10-15, Paul uses himself as an example of patience in affliction.

James 5:7-11 contains his teaching on patience, with examples of the prophets and Job who have demonstrated patience in the midst of suffering.

Proverbs 19:11 says, “A man’s wisdom gives him patience.”

Patience implies waiting and enduring. Contrasted with the slogan, “Just do it,” its motto is “Take your time.” It is in patience that we recognize God as the Lord of time who does not run behind schedule.

Genesis 29:15-28 tells the story of Jacob, who had to work 14 years to earn the right to marry Rachel. Laban, the father of Rachel and Leah, tricked Jacob because Jacob did not know the custom of the land that the older daughter must be married first. So, after working seven years for Laban, Jacob was given Leah as a wife and then had to promise to work seven more years in order to marry Rachel, the one he truly loved.

In our day of “instant everything,” our first reaction is that Jacob’s plight seems harsh in the extreme. Yet, in real life, our patience is constantly tested. It can be as small a thing as being trapped in a traffic jam when we are late for work or for an appointment. It can be as great as a crippling injury or illness that seems to put our entire life on hold. We can either accept patience as a friend who is telling us to slow down, or we can rail against it as an enemy and suffer the consequences of ill temper and ill health. Thus, we need to consider the matter of being impatient with ourselves as well as being upset by what other people do or don’t do. Many of us are undoubtedly frustrated by our own inadequacies or impairments. Yes, but how can we practice patience and deal with our impatience?

The two primary qualities needed in order to be patient are inner peace and living one day at a time. Inner peace comes from a stable relationship with God through prayer, Bible reading and worship. It helps us keep things in perspective, and focuses our attention on others and their needs rather than our selfish desires. Living one day at a time allows us to experience life at its fullest rather than fretting over things of the past or future.

Here are some specific steps we can take and recommend to others:

- (1) First, we need to *name* our own impatience.
- (2) Then, after identifying it, we need to ask ourselves some questions: (a) why am I being impatient, (b) do I trust God in this circumstance, (c) is there a good reason God is asking me to wait, and (d) am I just being selfish?
- (3) Ask God, through His Holy Spirit, to reveal what is behind our impatience.
- (4) Finally, confess it. Impatience, like every other sin, requires both the Lord’s forgiveness and the inward work of the Holy Spirit to overcome it. We need to make this a matter of prayer, and then experience the transformation that only God can work in us. “Pray, hope and don’t worry.”

We shouldn’t overlook the issue of how we react to others when we are impatient because of their incompetence or inaction. We are Christ’s person in that situation. Take a prayerful breath and give them a break. A genuine smile...and not a sarcastic one...might be in order. We should never avoid the opportunity to show God’s love, even in troubling situations.

The inner joy of learning patience can come in some interesting ways. Jim Spencer tells this story on himself. He was not getting the answers to prayers that he wanted, or when he wanted them. Finally, one day he cried out in impatient desperation, letting God know, in no uncertain terms, that he was angry, that he believed God was letting him down. He wanted God to know exactly how he felt. As this happened, God responded by way of an inner voice in Jim's heart, "I'm not Santa Claus, you know!" Jim says he was brought to the realization that it is the relationship with God that counts, not the answers we want when we want them. We certainly have no reason to be impatient with God. He knows best when things should be done. His answers to prayers are always on time, even when it doesn't seem so to us. Jim rejoiced that God had spoken to his heart, even though it was not the message he wanted to hear.

Dealing with Temptation

As we tackle the last area of feelings and emotions in this series, it seems appropriate for it to be temptation. It was, after all, the temptation of Eve by Satan in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3) that started the problem of sin we humans have been dealing with ever since. And the Old Testament gives us another classic instance of temptation (2 Samuel 11) in the story of David and Bathsheba.

Jesus charges us not to be led into temptation in the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:13). Jesus was himself tempted by Satan in Matthew 4:1-11. In very descriptive terms, Jesus tells what might tempt us to sin and the consequences if we succumb to the temptations in Matthew 18:7-9.

In Hebrews 4:14-16, we are reminded that Jesus can identify with us because he was faced with temptations in every way, yet was without sin. We will look at some other passages later as they illustrate what we are learning about temptation.

First of all, we should note—as we did in our study of envy—that there can be a good side of what we sometimes think of as temptation...that is, when we are sometimes inclined (we tend to say “tempted”) against all odds to stand up against evil or simply something that we inherently believe is wrong and needs to be dealt with. In this series we are dealing with real temptation, being tempted to do the wrong thing.

If we are honest, we have to deal with some aspects of temptation on a regular basis. This could be something as simple as being tempted to eat or drink too much, or the temptation to do what I want to do rather than what I think God would have me doing at any given time.

But there are, or course, what seem to be the more serious temptations...those that would lead us to commit acts contrary to the Ten Commandments, for instance. How do we deal with them?

Avoiding allowing ourselves to be in a place or situation that we know will be tempting to us is great wisdom, of course. A little foresight can be helpful. But, at the root of the matter is protecting our thought life in the first place. That is, growing in the knowledge and love of God and thinking about how we can serve others and please God rather what we selfishly want to do.

Paul puts it this way in Romans 6:13-14, “Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.” And, in 1 Corinthians 10:13, Paul says, “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.”

But there are several other matters to consider. If we are having recurring temptations, we need to examine our thought life. This involves taking it to the Lord in prayer, of course, but perhaps also discussing it with a Christian friend or counselor. Another issue is the tendency that some of us have to rationalize; rather than seeing that we are being tempted and resisting it, we start weighing the pros and cons of what action we should take. Unfortunately, we might sometimes talk ourselves into the selfish action that yields to temptation. There is also the matter of temptations that can lead to addictions. Young people today are tempted to see what it feels like to take an illegal drug that can be a first tragic step toward addiction. The temptation to drink too much alcohol can have the same disastrous effect.

One thing that bothers some Christians is that, in the Lord’s Prayer, “lead us not into temptation” raises the question of whether it is otherwise God who does lead us into temptation. James 1:13-14 hits this squarely: “When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desires, he is dragged away and enticed.”

Of course, it is Satan who leads us into temptation. He will do anything to take us away from God. James 4:7 says, “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” As mentioned earlier in this series, the ideal way to resist Satan’s wiles is to begin each day by committing yourself into the Lord’s hands...body, mind and spirit...and putting on the Whole Armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-18).

It is in understanding our own temptations and how we deal with them that we can best reach other people for Christ who are dealing with the problem of temptation. As in the other issues we have dealt with in this series, we recognize that we live in a world of pain and suffering and that, as God’s people, we are here to help.

One other point. There are those among us who have not had the problem of temptation in their lives to the extent that others of us have. It’s because their parents were such an example of the godly life that they chose to follow their parents’ example rather than the wily ways of the world. This is a message for those of us with young children who need our good example.

In summary, we all face the possibilities of temptation all day long every day. However, few of us face what happened to Dan and Diane Shereda, according to an article in the *Chicago Tribune*. They had bought a piano from an estate for \$700. When a piano technician they had hired began to pull bundles of money out of the piano, they were overwhelmed. Bills of differing denominations were in the bundles, some dating back to the 1930s. The bonanza totaled \$140,000! Apparently the owner had stashed money in the piano, and the Sheredas were faced

with the temptation of keeping the fortune or handing it over to the attorney for the deceased. They chose the latter on the truth that everything belongs to God and the Lord wanted them to do what they thought was the right thing.

One More Thing

Our desire is to help Christians truly be Christ's disciples in the world today as we are called to be. We have looked at the feelings and emotions we experience in our lives to help us cope with them and thereby help others. In doing this we have made no attempt to tackle issues beyond our capabilities.

When we talk of the pain that exists among people in the world today, we recognize that there are physical, mental, emotional and spiritual problems of a greater depth than the issues we have covered. On the one hand, there are people who are deeply depressed over feeling inferior to others, unloved, or totally failures in their lives. Then there are those with debilitating illnesses, aging issues and mental problems. Some have serious marital problems, or are homosexual or gender-confused, perhaps have suffered sexual abuse. Still others are addicted to drugs, are alcoholic, and perhaps even suicidal. Jesus even encountered people who were demon-possessed and we can't overlook that this condition also exists in our age. What is our responsibility in these situations?

The one thing we can do is love them, show concern for them, and care for them to the extent of our limitations. It is equally important for us to realize what our limitations may be in each of the situations we might face. Counseling and other professional help would be needed in most of these instances. We are not to take on more than we are qualified to handle.

Afterword

Having looked at these areas of need, how do we deal to them? As indicated in the Introduction to this document, Christ's message of salvation may not be good news to the person who is hurting too badly to hear it. We have now considered many areas of need that people have and we want to be able to share the story of God's love to them through their particular area of need. To reach that point we need to hear and understand the other's person story. We need to learn to listen.

St. Paul makes it clear that the greatest gift of all is love (1 Corinthians 13). Maybe we can conclude that the reason he never mentioned listening is because love and listening so obviously go hand in hand. Effective communications is a difficult art, but we can learn to do it if we care enough to love and to listen.

Jesus, of course, is our example of how to love by listening; and how, as a result, to meet human need. Our Lord was a master diagnostician. He loved and he listened; he had the wisdom to perceive the need underlying the words. It was only after he had made his diagnosis that he prescribed the remedy. Let's look at some examples in Scripture.

The woman at the well (John 4:4-30, 39-42). Here was a woman who had been married five times and was now living with a man who was not her husband. She had had many lovers, but no love. Jesus loved her enough to give her living water.

Zaccheus (Luke 19:1-10). This was a man who had money and all it could buy, but no friends. In fact, what he had most of all were enemies. Jesus gave him the one thing he needed: acceptance.

Martha (Luke 10:38-42). Martha had control of every situation and plenty of things to be done. She needed release from her controlling spirit and the gift of peace.

The list could go on and on. Peter, the impetuous one, was always ready to do something, even if it was wrong; and, often it was wrong. Peter needed forgiveness, which Jesus provided in that unforgettable encounter in John 21:15-19. And many people were healed by Jesus of physical, emotional and spiritual illnesses. There is never an indication that Jesus made a wrong diagnosis; he listened before he acted.

In a world filled with distractions and busyness on the one hand and great loneliness on the other, there is no gift that we can give as Christians more needed than the gift of listening. Sometimes we do not have the ready answer for a person's particular need. Sometimes the answer is simply loving them enough to be with them in the time of trial or crisis. The gift of listening can be the gift of presence to many in need. Now, by what we have learned in this series, we will be much better equipped to respond

effectively to what we hear from the other person concerning their area of need...and to help them in Jesus' name.

Only Jesus truly satisfies the deepest needs of mankind. It is not necessary to shout that from the house tops to people who are not ready to hear it, but we do need to have confidence in its truth for the time when the other person's problems surface in our presence. We need the courage to offer what we believe the Holy Spirit is showing us. He want us to share in a gentle and loving way.

Jesus also offers us forgiveness. On the surface, people out in the world do not know that they need to be forgiven by God. Deep down within, however, they are dealing with a multitude of spiritual, physical and emotional ailments brought about by their separation from God and their need to be reconciled to him. To tell people they need to be forgiven is to send them running in the opposite direction. But, again, if we are willing patiently to listen, the time will come when they seek God's forgiveness which is only available through Jesus, mediated through us as his ambassadors here on earth. We can initiate the idea of forgiveness by sharing how we realized we needed it.

And only Jesus offers ultimate healing. Medicine can bring healing to many physical ills. Psychiatry can help with emotional ailments. Only Jesus can deal with the root causes of spiritual, mental, emotional and physical sickness. People out in the world do not know that. If we are willing friends and listeners, however, the time will come when we have an opportunity to offer Jesus' healing love.

John Claypool uses Bernard of Clairvaux's four stages of spiritual growth to demonstrate an important point in this "gospel according to need."

The first stage of life involves love of self for self's sake. We are born with an innate desire to get what we want. Our "prayer" is simply a cry for help: food, a change of diapers, whatever. We are, of course, to grow out of that stage of life; although, unfortunately, some people never do.

The second stage is love of God for self's sake. Here, we have come to a realization that there is a force out there greater than ourselves, so we try to use God. Our prayer is for what we want. Our own ego is still the motivation for our actions. We do come to some understanding of God; and, as a result, we may move on to a higher stage of spiritual growth. Unfortunately, concludes Claypool, most people never get beyond this stage.

The third stage is love of God for God's sake. Here we have come to a real understanding of who God is and we worship him because of who he is. We learn about praise and adoration. We come to our prayer time without a personal agenda. We are transfixed by the mystery and majesty of God, lost in wonder, love and praise. Prayer is finding out what God wants for me and for others. This is not the final stage of spiritual growth, however.

The fourth stage is love of self for God's sake. The hardest person to love, in the end, is ourselves. Here we are dealing with the incredible all rightness of who we are. We are grateful for this windfall we call life; we acknowledge that God loves us as we are; and we can even rejoice in our limitations and imperfections. In this fourth stage, our prayer is to ask God how to make this gift of who we are available to someone else. Here, we have the gift of presence; we come to the other with no pat answers, just our time, our undivided attention, our listening and our love—the greatest gift of ourselves that we can give. We give all that we have, knowing that we cannot out-give God.

John Claypool gives this illustration. A woman came to his office, wanting to know more about this God of Jesus Christ. She was a long distance telephone operator who worked the late night shift. One night she had misdialled a number, awakening the wrong person at 2:30 a.m. Rather than cursing her for her stupidity (as others often did), the man who answered the phone simply accepted her apology and said something like, "It's perfectly all right. Good night, and God bless you." Sometime later, the operator made the incredible error of ringing the same man by mistake, again in the middle of the night, with the same result. Stunned by his gracious response she immediately rang him back. "It is most inconsiderate of me, and definitely against company policy, for me to call you like this," she explained, "but I must talk to you again. I am the telephone operator who has awakened you twice in the middle of the night. Both times, rather than complaining about my mistake, you have been entirely forgiving. I want to know why."

"Well," the man replied, "you see, I have made a lot of mistakes in my life and God has always forgiven me. It is easy for me to forgive others. God bless you."

In Jesus Christ we know a God who wants to forgive and heal a world in great need. We have a gospel that can meet that need if we are willing to love and to listen.

