

Yes, but How?

Practical, Biblical Ways to Deal with Life's Issues

The Ideal Reference Source for Bible Students, Bible Teachers, Christian Disciples and Those Who Mentor Them

by Harry C. Griffith



Bible Reading Fellowship

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Yes, but How?

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Foreword

Scripture has, among other things, the dual purpose of inspiring and challenging. In the process of serious Bible study, we should experience the transforming power of God. But the difficult part of that transforming work is living into the challenge to be the person God calls us to be. As has been well said, God loves us just as we are, but he doesn't want us to stay that way.

Therefore, it should be no surprise that the margins of our Bibles might well have "YBH?" at many places. We hear what God is saying to us through the verse or passage of Scripture, but how are we to do what he expects of us?

The purpose of this book is to answer those "Yes, but how?" questions. In it, we can look for the issues of life we are facing and find godly (because based on Scripture) suggestions for dealing with them. In a number of instances, we are given both practical and biblical approaches. The practical approaches are not necessarily tied directly to Scripture, but are consistent with it.

In using this resource, we are encouraged to keep in mind that this is not simply another "how to" book. As noted above, Scripture is to *transform*, not just *inform*. Yes, there is a lot of information in this book, but it is valueless independent of God's transforming work in our life. Being in a growing relationship with Jesus Christ is essential to understanding how God wants us to live.

By way of example, one of the greatest teaching books of the Bible is Paul's Letter to the Ephesians. In its six chapters he spends the first three talking about our relationship with God ("Spiritual Blessings in Christ," "Prayer and Thanksgiving," "Made Alive in Christ," etc.) before spending the last three telling us how to live. The second part is absolutely dependent on the first.

Put another way, think of the feeding of the 5,000 in John's Gospel (6:1-13). In a sense the miracle was dependent on a person: the young boy who was willing to offer some bread and fish. Like that boy, God calls us to use our potential to the maximum that we may be effective in doing his will in the world today. On the other hand, the miracle of feeding the vast crowd could not have occurred without the transforming power of God as Jesus took the meager offering, prayed over it, and supplied so much food there were twelve basketsful left over.

Henri Nouwen said this: "Reading often means gathering information, acquiring new insight and knowledge, and mastering a new field. It can lead us to degrees, diplomas, and certificates. Spiritual reading, however, is different. It means not simply reading about spiritual things but also reading about spiritual things in a spiritual way. That requires a willingness not just to read but to be read, not just to master but to be mastered by words. As long as we read the Bible or a spiritual book simply to acquire knowledge, our reading does not help us in our spiritual lives. We can become very knowledgeable about spiritual matters without becoming truly spiritual people. ...As long as we deal with the word of God as an item with which we can do many useful things, we don't really read the Bible

or let it read us. Only when we are willing to hear the written word as a word for us, can the Living Word disclose Himself and penetrate into the center of our heart.”

Thus, as this book seeks to help us answer the “yes, but how?” questions in our life, remember that they must all be approached prayerfully for the transforming power of God.

The potential uses of this book are virtually unlimited, but here are a few:

For all Christians: A place they can go for biblical and practical answers to life’s issues.

For adult Sunday school classes, Bible study groups, prayer and sharing groups, etc.: An ideal resource for study. In the Appendix is a simple example of how this can be done.

For counselors, mentors, disciplers, spiritual directors and soul friends: An extremely helpful source of information on issues they face.

For clergy: An abundance of sermon outlines and ideas.

For anyone doing Bible research or Bible study: a ready reference of highly informative and usable material.

May *Yes, but How?* be a blessing to you and you a blessing to others.

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Abuse

“The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you.”
James 5:4

Few subjects are discussed more in our day than the problem of abuse: child abuse, spouse abuse, sexual abuse, employee abuse, etc. We live in a society in which it is increasingly difficult to “keep secrets” of this kind. Although there is the danger that some will carry this subject to the extreme (i.e., claiming that appropriate punishment of a child is “abuse”), it is a healthy trend in society that abuse has been raised to our level of consciousness and that much is being done to prevent instances of it. But, how do we, as Christians, deal with it effectively?

It should not surprise us that instances of abuse also appear in Scripture. In 1 Samuel 1:1-20 we have the story of Hannah, the wife of Elkanah. Elkanah loved Hannah dearly, but she was barren. In those days, a childless woman was considered a failure. Children were vital in that society to help with the work and to support the parents in their old age. Hannah’s barrenness would have been a source of embarrassment to Elkanah. According to the custom of the time, she could have felt obligated to give one of her servant girls to her husband to bear children for her. Yet, Elkanah loved Hannah despite her shame.

Elkanah had another wife, Peninnah, who was prolific in producing children, and she continually provoked Hannah because of her inability to have a child. Despite the special attention Elkanah gave to Hannah, the abuse heaped on her by Peninnah made her life miserable. No amount of encouragement from Elkanah could offset the persecution she received from Peninnah.

The way in which Hannah dealt with her abuse was to pray desperately for the Lord to let her have a child. As a result, Samuel was born to her. She dedicated him to the service of the Lord and he became one of the great people of the Bible. Hannah’s prayer of thanksgiving (1 Samuel 2:1-10) is one of the finest hymns of praise in Scripture and modeled Mary’s song of praise (Luke 1:46-55) which we know as the *Magnificat*.

How to Deal with Abuse:

A. A Practical Approach

- (1) If you are being abused, get help to put a stop to it. You are not showing mercy to the person who is abusing you by simply accepting it; instead, you are enabling that person or system to feed an abusive addiction.
- (2) If you are suffering the effects of abuse, seek inner healing or, if the situation is serious enough, professional help. Inner healing involves getting a trusted and trained spiritual friend (such as your pastor) to pray with you for the spiritual “scar tissue” you have as a result of the way you have been treated.
- (3) If you are guilty of abuse, get professional help in order to overcome the problem. You should also seek forgiveness from those you have abused.

B. A Biblical Approach. In addition to the above, consider:

- (1) The relationship between people is meant to be one of mutual respect and accountability.
- (2) The Apostle Paul taught us “Children, obey your parents in the Lord” (Ephesians 6:1) and “Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (6:4).
- (3) The relationship between employers and employees is also to be one of serving one another in the Lord (Ephesians 6:5-9).
- (4) And, in the marriage relationship, we are to love one another as Christ loves his Church (Ephesians 5:25).
- (5) Furthermore, we are to defend the rights of the powerless.

Suggested Scriptural References/Abuse

Sarai, by Hagar (Genesis 16:1-4);

Sarai, of Hagar (Genesis 16:6);

Men of Sodom, of Lot and guests (Genesis 19:1-11);

Ishmael, of Isaac (Genesis 21:8-13);

Joseph, by his brothers (Genesis 37:18-36);

Potiphar’s wife, of Joseph (Genesis 39:1-20);

Pharaoh abused the Israelites by increasing the workload on them after Moses demanded that he let them go (Exodus 5:1-21);

Saul, of David (1 Samuel 18:1-13);

Shimei, of David (2 Samuel 16:5-14);

The abuse Israel felt as a nation, but confidence in the Lord even in the time of distress (Psalm 129:1-8);

The abuse shown to the prophet for speaking God’s word, Jeremiah’s Complaint (Jeremiah 20:7-18);

Jeremiah is imprisoned and thrown into a cistern (Jeremiah 37:21—38:13);

Paul and Barnabas are abused by the Jews in Antioch (Acts 13:50);

Warning to the rich oppressors (James 5:1-6).

Accountability

“So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.” Romans 14:12

Accountability is one of the most obviously missing elements between the way the Church functioned in its early days of existence and the way we function today. As is clear in passages from the Acts of the Apostles, Christians had high expectations of one another, and they held each other accountable for their actions. Today, we are mostly uncomfortable with confronting our fellow church members about their sins. Fortunately, there are movements afoot that are helping Christians become more accountable, such as encouraging people to be in small Bible study and sharing groups or to have a mentor or spiritual director. The popular Twelve Step groups also help fulfill this need. Christians know that they are accountable to God, but their responsibilities to God are much more likely to be taken seriously if there is also a human being or a group to which they are accountable.

In 1 Samuel 13:1-15 we have a classic example of doing the wrong thing for the right reason. Saul’s army was outnumbered by the Philistines and he panicked. He forgot that God was on his side and would allow him to prevail despite the odds. His troops began to scatter. So, he decided that he would undertake the priestly duties that were the responsibility of Samuel. Samuel had not arrived, so Saul rationalized himself into thinking that he could perform the priestly rites himself and justify it on the basis of Samuel’s tardiness.

In fact, what Saul did was directly contrary to God’s law (Deuteronomy 12:14) and against the specific instructions of Samuel (10:8). Saul thought he was doing a good thing (offering a sacrifice to God before a crucial battle) but he was taking God’s law into his own hands. When confronted by Samuel, he tried to justify his actions (can we see ourselves in this picture?). Samuel, however, was God’s representative in this situation, and he held Saul accountable for his actions. The result was that Saul would be replaced by a “man after God’s own heart” (David).

The lesson for us is clear. It is so easy to rationalize ourselves into untenable situations. When tempted to take matters in our own hands, we need to be patient and seek God’s guidance. Sometimes what seems to be the silence of God is a call to wait and obey.

Well, there are clearly some ideas in the above to help us be more accountable to God, but how else might we do that?

How to Be Accountable to God:

A. A Practical Approach:

- (1) Have someone other than your spouse to whom you are regularly accountable for your life as a Christian. This should be someone with whom you have a sufficiently open relationship that he or she would feel free to tell you when you are doing something you shouldn’t or are showing tendencies that could lead to trouble. But, this is also someone with whom you can discuss, in complete confidence, your troubles, doubts, needs, temptations, and especially obstacles

to your spiritual growth. This can be someone whom you believe to be further along the Christian journey than you are, and perhaps someone who has been trained to be a mentor or spiritual director.

- (2) Or, it can be simply a “spiritual friend” (someone at the same level of spiritual maturity as yourself) or prayer partner; in which case, the two of you would be mutually responsible to one another.
- (3) It is also possible to be in a small group of individuals who are mutually accountable.
- (4) Give serious consideration to these options and ask the Lord to guide you to the relationship that best suits your desire for an accountability partner or group.

B. A Biblical Approach. In addition to the above, you might want to consider:

- (1) If it is feasible, be in the sort of relationship with your pastor that he would feel free to confront you when you need to be confronted, just as Nathan was able to confront David about his adultery with Bathsheba.
- (2) Hold yourself accountable for your actions. God does.
- (3) When you know you have gone astray, confess your sin and seek God’s forgiveness. Being repentant is a key element of accountability.

Suggested Scriptural References/Accountability:

The classic confrontation in the Old Testament, wherein the prophet Nathan called David to account for his adultery with Bathsheba and his murderous conspiracy against her husband Uriah (2 Samuel 12:1-14);

Jesus’ Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids is a teaching on accountability (Matthew 25:1-13);

Jesus’ Parable of the Talents is also a teaching on accountability (Matthew 25:14-30);

Shows the closeness and interdependency of the early church (Acts 2:42-47);

This also shows how the early church functioned in interdependence of its members (Acts 4:32-37);

The Ananias and Sapphira episode, revealing the seriousness of the interdependence (Acts 5:1-11);

The church in Antioch discerns gifts among its leaders, and sends Paul and Barnabas as missionaries (Acts 13:1-3);

The Jerusalem Council questions Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles (Acts 15:1-35);

The disputation between Paul and Barnabas over the worthiness of John Mark to travel with them (Acts 15:36-41);

We are accountable to God, but Paul cautions not to do anything that would cause a fellow believer to fall (Romans 14:12-21);

Paul confronts Peter’s hypocrisy (Galatians 2:11-21)

James deals with our responsibility to each other in the Body of Christ (James 5:19-20).

Affirmation

“Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up.” 1 Thessalonians 5:11

The famed psychiatrist Viktor Frankl said, “True self-esteem and a true sense of identity can be found only in the reflected appraisal of those whom we have loved.” It is through the gift of affirmation we know we are loved; if we do not see ourselves as valued by others, we will have no sense of personal value. We gain self-confidence when someone believes in us. Likewise, one of the greatest gifts we can bestow upon others is the gift of affirmation, that they may know that they are loved and appreciated. But, how can we do that effectively?

The story of Ruth is such a wonderful illustration of affirmation that it is a common Scripture reading at weddings even though the situation only indirectly had to do with marriage. While living in Moab, Ruth’s mother-in-law Naomi had lost her husband and her two sons (one of whom was Ruth’s husband). Distraught, Naomi decided to return alone to her native Bethlehem, encouraging her daughters-in-law to remain among their own Moabite people. Ruth, however, refused to leave Naomi, pledging the familiar words (Ruth 1:16b): “Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.”

Naomi’s intentions were kindly ones. She didn’t want the women to feel bound to her but free to start their lives all over again in their homeland among their people. But Ruth’s intentions were even more kindly. She was willing to sacrifice the hope of remarriage in order to be a source of comfort and encouragement to her mother-in-law. Naomi was in a tough situation, and she was bitter about her condition (vv. 20,21). Ruth’s affirming nature changed everything for the better. God used her faithfulness to find her a wealthy husband (Boaz) in Bethlehem to her benefit and Naomi’s. Ruth became an ancestor of Jesus (Matthew 1:5b).

In the English language the familiar word *ruthless* (“without pity or compassion”) is simply the opposite of Ruth. Ruth can be an example for us all. She was one who did not let circumstances get her down. What others saw as problems, Ruth saw as opportunities and challenges. She lived a life of affirming others, and it was a joy-filled life.

How to Be Affirming:

A. A Practical Approach

- (1) *Encouragement.* A teacher once tried an experiment on her class. She congratulated them on the excellent work they were doing. “Of course,” she said, “I expected this of you because you are all exceptional students.” Actually, the only thing exceptional about them was that they were fortunate enough to be in her class. Nonetheless, they believed the teacher and began to perform as exceptional students. A little encouragement goes a long way.
- (2) *Acceptance.* John Powell, in his book *The Secret of Staying in Love*, said: “My greatest contribution to your life will be to help you love yourself, to think better and more gently of yourself, to accept your own limitations more

peacefully in the perspective of your whole person, which is uniquely valuable.”

- (3) *Genuine Love*. There are few things as personally uplifting as seeing the results of affirming another person. Mother Teresa of Calcutta was once asked by a woman in a group to which she had just spoken: “You have such a wonderful worldwide ministry, and I am just a housewife in Peoria, Illinois; how can I be an effective minister where I am?” Mother Teresa’s answer: “Just smile a lot.” It is amazing how much a genuine smile can affirm and uplift another person. If we just let God’s love flow through us to the benefit of others, great things can happen.
- (4) *Be a Blessing to Everyone*. In an age in which there is so much negativism and defeat, why not be an agent of affirmation and encouragement? It will make you feel better, and it will greatly benefit others.

B. A Biblical Approach. In addition to the above, consider:

- (1) The Bible clearly tells us to love one another. One of the most effective ways we can show love is by genuinely affirming others when the opportunities present themselves.
- (2) If we are sensitive to what is going on in the lives of others, we will increasingly be aware of the times that they need honest affirmation. Growing in that sensitivity and responding to it is one of the key signs of maturing in Christian discipleship.
- (3) We are called to let the light of Christ shine through us into the lives of others. How better to do that than by being an affirming person?

Suggested Scriptural References/Affirmation

Jonathan’s support of David (1 Samuel 18:1-4);

Jesus affirms Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10);

Barnabas comes to the aid of Saul (Paul) (Acts 9:26-28);

Barnabas comes to John Mark’s defense and takes him on a missionary journey. (Mark would later write a Gospel, and be a friend to both Peter and Paul) (Acts 15: 36-41);

Paul comments on building up our neighbor (Romans 15:2);

Paul urges being kind and compassionate to one another (Ephesians 4:32);

Encourage and build one another up (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

Anger

“He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty....” Proverbs 16:32 (KJV)

There are many examples of angry people in the Bible. The kings of Israel and Judah were often angry with the prophets for telling them God’s word rather than what they wanted to hear. The psalmists were often angry about their enemies and the injustices they believed had been done against them. Jewish leaders were angry with Jesus for being who he was and with the Apostles for preaching and demonstrating the Good News.

An early instance of intense anger occurs in the story of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1-16). The problem begins when Cain (a worker of the soil) brings some fruit as an offering to the Lord while Abel (who tended flocks) brings the fat portions of the firstborn as an offering. Abel’s offering pleases the Lord, but Cain’s does not. Cain becomes so angry that, despite God’s warning, he kills his brother.

It is not clear in Scripture why God was displeased with Cain’s offering. It appears that he simply brought “some fruit” as an offering while Abel brought the best of the best for his offering. In any event, Cain becomes very angry. He is undoubtedly angry with God but also jealous of his brother.

Jesus’ teaching on anger in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:21-26) connects the Sixth Commandment (“You shall not murder” Exodus 20:13) with anger. Anger not only can lead to murder, as it did with Cain, but is evidence of a “murderous” intent in the heart. This kind of anger, sinful in itself, can lead to even more sinful actions if we seek to retaliate for the wrong we think we have suffered. Not only can our anger endanger others, it can impact our own physical, emotional and spiritual health. If anger is a continuing problem for us, it needs to be dealt with. Even if it only occasionally affects us, we need proper resolution. In any event, we need to know how to deal with anger.

Some Guidelines for Dealing with Anger:

A. A Practical Approach.

- (1) 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.
- (2) 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.
- (3) 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.

- (4) 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 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.
- (5) 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.
- (6) 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.
- (7) 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.

B. A Biblical Approach. In addition to the above, consider:

- (1) In giving the Colossians some rules for holy living, Paul made it clear that anger was one of the things of which they must rid themselves (Colossians 3:8).
- (2) Paul also gave us the oft-quoted thought that we should never let the sun go down on our anger (Ephesians 4:26). Scripture doesn't tell us that we shouldn't have feelings of anger, but that the crucial matter is how we handle our anger.
- (3) In his letter to Titus, Paul stresses that Christian leaders should not be quick to anger (Titus 1:7).
- (4) Christians are called to love one another, and certainly anger clouds our ability to show love instead.

- (5) Effectively dealing with anger toward another can open the door to reconciliation, a ministry that should be common to all Christians (see 2 Corinthians 5:19).

Suggested Scriptural References/Anger

Pharaoh's anger against Moses (Exodus 10:1-29);

Moses and the Golden Calf episode (Exodus 32:1-35);

Balaam's anger at his donkey (Numbers 22:21-41);

Saul and Jonathan exhibit anger toward one another because of David (1 Samuel 20:16-42);

Ahab's anger because Naboth would not sell him his vineyard (1 Kings 21:1-16);

Naaman's anger because Elijah told him to wash in the Jordan (2 Kings 5:1-14);

Haman's anger because Modecai would not honor him (Esther 3:1-11);

Nebuchadnezzar's anger at the unwillingness of Daniel's three friends to worship the golden image (Daniel 3:1-30);

Jonah's anger at the Lord's compassion toward Nineveh (Jonah 4:1-11);

Jesus' teaching on anger (Matthew 5:21-26);

In Jesus' parable, the laborers in the vineyard are angry because those who worked only a short time are paid as much as those who had worked all day (Matthew 20:1-16);

In the parable of the Prodigal Son, the elder brother is angry because of the love shown to the younger son (Luke 15:11-32);

Jesus' righteous anger at the moneychangers in the Temple (John 2:13-16);

Paul's teaching that we should not let the sun go down on our anger (Ephesians 4:26);

James' teaching on the subject (James 1:19-20).

Anxiety (Worry)

“An anxious heart weighs a man down.” Proverbs 12:25

A friend tells of the guy he knew in college who challenged others by saying, “Why pray when you can worry?” My friend says he has, over and over again, been convicted by that challenge. According to him, “I use the energy to worry rather than pray because I don’t want to face something or someone or some action I know God is calling on me to face. I’d rather embrace the insanity of wasting time, energy, health, etc. instead of allowing God to confront, challenge or convict me. The Serenity Prayer (God, give me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference) is a good antidote to this insane behavior. I must either change myself or let go of what’s worrying me and pray for discernment and wisdom.”

The fact that anxiety is a universal concern has resulted in its being depicted in innumerable clichés. “Worry is like a rocking chair; it gives you something to do, but doesn’t get you anywhere,” is a classic example. Basically, worry occurs when we assume responsibility for things we can do nothing about. George MacDonald pointed out that no one ever sinks from the burden of the day. “It is when tomorrow’s burden is added to the burden of today that the weight is more than a man can bear.” And Charles Swindoll said this concerning worry, “It won’t be long before you will look back on the up-tight, high-powered, super-charged issue with a whole new outlook. To be quite candid, you may laugh out loud in the future at something you’re eating your heart out over today.”

From a spiritual point of view, “Worry is like praying against yourself,” a friend once said. In a sense, that says it all. Matthew 6:25-34 is Jesus’ teaching on worry. He simply says not to do it; it’s a waste of time and accomplishes nothing. God provides. If our faith and confidence is in him, our needs will be met. Our primary concern is to be on the Kingdom of God, and then everything else will take care of itself. This means putting God first in our lives, filling our minds with his purposes and serving and obeying him.

The alternative is worry and its fellow travelers: injury to our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health; lessening of our effectiveness; inattention and/or inappropriate attitudes toward others; and distancing ourselves from God.

Jesus’ teaching on worry and all the cautions against it notwithstanding, the fact is that we all do face anxiety from time to time. What can we do about that?

How to Deal with Our Anxieties

A. The Practical Approach:

- (1) Think the thing through.
- (2) Ask yourself: What would the consequences be if what I am worrying about really happened?
- (3) What control do I have over this thing anyway?

- (4) Why is this worrying me? Is there some underlying issue I need to deal with?
- (5) Is there someone who could advise me or help me with this?
- (6) Sometimes it's a matter of just writing out the situation we are worrying about, and then seeing it in perspective.
- (7) Consider the various outcomes of the situation that is causing our anxiety. Sometimes this strips off the imagined threats, sets boundaries around the problem and reveals a way of dealing with it. An overactive imagination feeds worry like fuel on a fire!

B. A Biblical Approach: In addition to the above, here are a couple of things Jesus taught about handling worry:

- (1) The first is to concentrate primarily on the will of God rather than the immediate thing about which you might worry (Matthew 6:33). Jesus uses the terminology of seeking first the Kingdom of God; but, as William Barclay points out, the Kingdom of God and the will of God are the same thing (see Matthew 6:10). If we are doing our best to do what we believe God wants us to do, why worry?
- (2) Secondly, Jesus says that worry can be defeated if we have the ability to live one day at a time (Matthew 6:34). George MacDonald was saying the same thing in the above quote. We need to focus on today and let tomorrow take care of itself.

Suggested Scriptural References/Worry

Blessed is he who trusts in the Lord (Jeremiah 17:7-8);

Commit your way to the Lord; don't worry, trust him (Psalm 37:1-7);

Cast your cares upon the Lord (Psalm 55:22);

You know me, Lord (Psalm 139);

The anxious heart weighs us down (Proverbs 12:25);

The seed among the thorns (v.22) (Matthew 13:1-9, 16-23);

Jesus' parents were worried when, as a boy, he was in the Temple talking with the teachers of the law (Luke 2:41-52);

Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38-42);

Parable of the Great Banquet (Luke 14:15-24);

In times of testing, God will give us what to say (Luke 21:12-19);

Present your requests to God rather than worrying (Philippians 4:4-7);

Cast your anxiety upon the Lord (1 Peter 5:6-7).

Apathy

“So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.”
Revelation 3:16

There is a story about a teacher whose class was so unmotivated that he was on the verge of despair. One day, before saying anything to the class, he simply wrote in large letters on the board: APATHY. He sat back to let it sink in, continuing to say nothing, just looking at the students. Finally, one of the students turned to the class leader and said, “Don’t know that word, Joe; what does it mean?” To which Joe replied, “Who cares?”

That wasn’t exactly the situation in 1 Samuel 2, but there was certainly apathy. The sons of Eli the priest were guilty of the most heinous of crimes. Their responsibility was to be mediators between God and the people; in practice, they took every advantage of the situation to fulfill their own selfish desires. Eli, rather than taking effective action against them, allowed them to continue in their evil ways. His apathy cost the sons their lives and Eli the humiliation of ceasing to be the ancestor of the priests of God.

There was, in a sense, double guilt on Eli’s part. He had the responsibility as a father to discipline his sons. All parents have the duty to hold their children accountable for their actions. But, additionally, Eli was a priest of God overseeing his sons in their priestly duties. By not taking effective action against them, he was honoring his sons more than God.

We can be guilty as well if we are apathetic in our responsibilities, especially those related to our family and God. Do we honor God in our worship of him, in the time we spend with him, in obedience to what he teaches us in Scripture? If not, our apathy is sin.

Apathy is a serious failing of our age. The story of the teacher and his apathetic class is an all-too-typical picture of the time in which we live. There are probably many reasons. There is widespread disillusionment with government, society, and the systems and processes that seem to control our lives. Affluence, and the boredom that often results, is a factor. And, on the other hand, for those who are poor and disadvantaged, the unlikely escape from their condition leads to hopelessness.

Regardless of what might have caused it, all of us sometimes realize that we have fallen into an apathetic state about some important part of our lives, or about life in general. What can we do about that?

How to Deal with Apathy

A. The Practical Approach to Caring:

- (1) We need to care creatively if we are to build relationships. A busy executive missed his wife’s birthday, their anniversary and Mother’s Day all in one year.

He was so contrite that he told his secretary never to let that happen again. That was not creative caring! We need, instead, to make a deliberate choice to care for others, and to take the time and attention necessary to do so.

- (2) Relationships are like gardens; they need a lot of attention. But, just as gardens give back to us in beauty and productivity, so does the attention we give to others.
- (3) “The novelty wears off, and what was initially exciting and challenging has become dull and uninspiring.” “Familiarity breeds contempt.” Those are comments people commonly make to explain their apathy. Yet, those comments show that our focus is in the wrong direction. “Things of value get better with age.” “We live in a time of constant change; something familiar gives comfort.” Those are at least equally true comments. If we find that we are becoming bored with what we are doing, or other aspects of our life, maybe we need to look for the hidden treasure in what we already have and rejoice and be glad in it.

B. The Biblical Approach. In addition to the above, you might consider:

- (1) Having a mentor, spiritual director, soul friend, accountability group, or prayer partner with whom we can be honest about our disappointments in life, or feelings of failure and our lack of enthusiasm for work and/or spiritual disciplines can help us find our way out of our apathy.
- (2) And, if everything else fails, note what Dante said: “The hottest places in hell are reserved for those who remain neutral in a time of great moral crisis.”

Suggested Scriptural References/Apathy

Esau “despised” his birthright and gave it to Jacob for some stew (Genesis 25:19-35);

Moses cautions against, in the performance of priestly duties, on the occasion of the deaths of Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10:1-20);

The prophet’s warning about being complacent (Amos 6:1-7);

Paul’s warning against idleness (2 Thessalonians 3:6-15);

A warning against falling away from the faith (Hebrews 5:11—6:12);

The charge against the “lukewarm” church (Revelation 3:14-22).

Authority (Leadership)

“When Jesus called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority....” Luke 9:1

In the Old Testament, Moses, David and Nehemiah all exhibited excellent leadership qualities, and each one exercised considerable authority. For a study of leadership qualities as such, take a look at the book of Nehemiah. His life reflects such leadership qualities as sensitivity (1:1-4, 11b), godliness (1:4-11), ability to plan (2:9-16) and motivate (2:17—3:1), courage (4:1-15), preparedness (4:15-23), compassion (5:1-13), humility (6:1-15), devotion to God’s Word (7:73b—8:12), and perseverance (13:1-11, 30-31). However, for the purpose of our study, we will consider the authority of Jesus as a way of looking at Christian leadership.

The incident in Matthew 8:5-13, wherein Jesus was approached by a Roman centurion, is an interesting study in authority and leadership. The centurion was a man who, in Jesus’ day, had a great deal of authority. He would have had 100 soldiers under him, and the Romans ruled Israel, enforcing the law through such soldiers. Yet, he is a humble man. Rather than saying to Jesus, “I am a man in authority,” he said, “I myself am a man *under* authority” (v. 9). And he is one who has compassion on the illness of his servant.

The key point, however, is that he recognized the authority of Jesus. Although Jesus indicated a willingness to go to the servant to effect the healing (v. 7), the centurion believes Jesus can heal from a distance (which, of course, proves true). The centurion tells Jesus, “Just say the word and my servant will be healed.” One with authority recognized another with authority. A leader recognized a leader.

Jesus was a servant leader. His interest was not in his own power, but in the needs of others. He was compassionate but just. He was brave but discerning. He showed integrity and wisdom. When we are placed in positions of Christian leadership, how are we to exercise that kind of authority? We will combine the practical and biblical approaches in looking for an answer.

The Nehemiah Model:

- (1) Nehemiah took time to reconnoiter the situation; leaders don’t rush to uniformed decisions.
- (2) Nehemiah delegated; he did not try to do the job alone.
- (3) Nehemiah consulted with others; leaders seek the wisdom of others when and where appropriate.
- (4) Nehemiah got ownership of the project from the group before the work began. Vision sharing is important.

Characteristics of Christian Leadership:

- (1) Positions of Christian leadership are extensions of Christ’s ministry.
- (2) They are to be used to fulfill the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20).
- (3) They are made possible by gifts of the Spirit (Ephesians 4, Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12).
- (4) They are carried out for the growth and ministry of God’s people (Ephesians 4:12).

- (5) Christian ministry is servant ministry (2 Corinthians 4:5).
- (6) Christian leadership is not leadership by domination (Matthew 20:25-28).
- (7) Christian leaders should receive gratitude and support for their work.
- (8) The key to the propriety of Christian leadership, and the justification for the authority given Christian leaders, is whether they uphold the truth of the Gospel.
- (9) Nonetheless, Christian leaders are human beings who will make mistakes and otherwise disappoint us from time to time. We who are led need to be forgiving of those who lead us.

Suggested Scriptural References/Authority

Jesus taught with authority (Matthew 5:1—7:29);

Jesus had the authority to forgive sins (Matthew 9:1-8);

Jesus gave authority over evil spirits to the Twelve (Matthew 10:1-16);

Jesus' authority is challenged by the religious leaders (John 2:12-25, Matthew 21:23-27).

Bitterness

“Each heart knows its own bitterness...” Proverbs 14:10a

Bitterness is another theme that runs throughout the Bible. Job was certainly bitter about what had happened to him. The Israelites in captivity were bitter.

One of the deepest personal feelings of bitterness in Scripture is reflected in the situation Hannah faced (1 Samuel 1:1-11). Although the favored wife of Elkanah, Hannah was barren at a time when that was the greatest shame a wife could have. Furthermore, she was subjected to the ridicule of Elkanah’s other wife Peninnah who was very productive of children. Hannah was undoubtedly bitter not only about the situation in which she found herself but toward God who seemed to have allowed her to remain in that situation. Fortunately, Hannah’s bitterness ended when, as the result of prayer, she gave birth to Samuel, who became one of the great men of Scripture.

New Testament teachings, of course, caution against bitterness. Quoting from the Old Testament, Paul describes people, left to their own devices, as those whose “mouths are full of cursing and bitterness” (Romans. 3:14). In Ephesians 4:31, Paul, in discussing how to be children of light, says to “get rid of all bitterness.”

Bitter is a very descriptive word in considering what bitterness is all about. We all know how things taste if they are bitter. It’s a sour, acrid taste. And that’s how bitterness feels within us. It’s extremely unpleasant and it pains us. Bitterness is something we definitely want to get rid of. Yes, but how?

How to Deal with Bitterness:

In Hebrews 12, the writer says, “See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many” (v. 15). We don’t want the effects of bitterness and we do want the grace of God. We all know that a root can grow into a large tree. In the same way, bitterness can grow in our hearts and thwart God’s will for us.

A bitter root can get started with hurt feelings that grow into deep resentments or when we nurse grudges against those who have wronged us in the past. Bitterness leads to all sorts of bad feelings and bad actions. We can not only seek revenge—in actuality or in our hearts—against those who have offended us, but we can also spoil our most precious relationships because our general attitude becomes poisoned.

Thus, the first step in dealing with bitterness is to discover the basis of it. That should lead to the section of this book that deals specifically with the problem uncovered. Hannah’s bitterness, for instance, may have been because of both abuse and disappointment with God. Whether the cause of the bitterness is anger, disloyalty, jealousy, hatred, treachery or something else—or some combination of these—there is undoubtedly help for it in this book.

The second step, of course, is to deal with the issue that lies behind the bitterness. Bitterness, like anger, can be suppressed for a time. However, as long as it exists, it is gnawing at us physically, emotionally and spiritually. And, at any moment, it can flare into rage with devastating results.

Suggested Scriptural References/Bitterness

Job's complaint (Job 7:11-16);

Job's further complaint (Job 10:1-7);

The bitterness of Jerusalem's plight (Lamentations 1:1-4);

Ezekiel's call to comfort his countrymen in exile in their bitterness (Ezekiel 3:12-15);

Peter's confrontation with Simon the Sorcerer (Acts 8:20-23);

Paul's teaching that no one is righteous (Romans 3:9-18);

How to live as children of the light (Ephesians 4:17-31);

A call to holiness (Hebrews 12:14-15).

Blame

“They said, ‘Why did you [Moses] bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?’” Exodus 17:3b

It only takes the first three chapters of the Bible to get us into blame. People have been blaming someone else for their misfortunes from the very first of humanity. In our day, people are excused from personal responsibility for their sins because of their environment, the way they were raised, financial deprivation, or their sex, race, creed or color. We seem always to be looking for a scapegoat, someone on whom we can place the blame so that we do not have to deal with the consequences of our actions.

Adam, Eve and the snake in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:1-13) give us a clear picture of blame. Eve had eaten the forbidden fruit and passed the apple on to Adam, who was apparently standing beside her during the entire episode (v. 6b). When confronted by God with the gravity of what they had done, Adam blamed Eve and Eve blamed the snake.

What happened in the Garden of Eden happens in households all across our land day after day. Something has gone wrong. Immediately, each person in the household begins to build a defense based on the situation being someone else’s fault. We try to escape guilt by placing it at the feet of someone else. It is a senseless exercise in avoiding honesty. And, worse than that, we also fail to learn what God would teach us by the experience. How do we overcome the tendency to blame others?

Dealing with Blame

Almost all human beings will, at some time or another, want to blame someone else for what has happened to them. It’s a part of our sinful nature; and, of course, sometimes our plight *is* the result of what someone else did. Some wonderful advice on dealing with blame comes from Henry Brandt. He once said this to a friend, “You are the only problem that you will ever have. It’s not the others around you or your circumstances. Now, there’s great 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 the change in you.”

Suggested Scriptural References: Blame

Sarai blaming Abram for the way Hagar was treating her (Genesis 16:1-5);

Israelites blamed Moses for virtually everything that didn’t please them (see, for instance, Exodus 17:1-4);

Aaron, blaming it on the people when the Israelites worshiped the golden calf (Exodus 32:1-35);

The lame man by the pool of Bethesda, who blamed circumstances for his failure to be healed (John 5:1-15).

Blessings

“But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you....”

Matthew 5:44 (KJV)

It seems easy to bless those who are the natural objects of our affection—although perhaps we do not know how to do that as well as we should—but it is much more difficult to think in terms of blessing those who persecute us. We’ll look at both aspects of blessing.

“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.” This ancient blessing of God’s people in the Old Testament (Numbers 6:24-26) became very popular in Christian churches following the Reformation. Particularly significant is the reference to God’s “face.” The face of God is the source of light. While turning his face away from someone would be a sign of God’s displeasure, his turning his face (and his countenance, which means the same thing) toward someone is a sign of God’s pleasure in the company of the one on whom it shines. Likewise, the “peace” of God as used in this passage means the very best for that person in this life and the life to come.

The complete passage (Numbers 6:22-27) contains the instructions God gave Moses concerning how the sons of Aaron were to bless the people. Thereby, God’s *name* would be on the Israelites, and God would bless them. The blessing that the Lord commanded the priests to use on behalf of the people assured them of God’s favor and protection, mercy and compassion, approval and peace.

How can we carry this tradition into our lives for the benefit of those we love as well as toward those who oppose us?

How to Bless Others:

A. A Practical and Biblical Approach to Blessing Those We Love:

- (1) As Christians, it is our responsibility to encourage a deep love of God within our homes. It is especially important to be able to convey to our children that which is primary in our lives, namely our love of God. One of the simplest and most effective ways to help our children know and love God is to pray a blessing on them daily with the laying on of hands. This gives them a regular and concrete encounter with God’s power and protection.
- (2) If we have children in the home, each night before bedtime is an opportunity to lay hands on their heads and pray the blessing of Numbers 6:24-26, adding the child’s name and any special ways in which we want that child blessed at that time. If the child is having trouble sleeping, facing an exam at school, or whatever, seeking God’s blessing in that particular matter is an appropriate addition to the prayer.

- (3) Yet, even if our children are grown and far away from us, we can still pray a blessing on them and all of our loved ones each day.
- (4) And, for those of us who are married, we especially have the opportunity of praying a blessing on each other each day.
- (5) Of course, it is always appropriate to bless others by a simple but sincere statement such as “God bless you.” Many Christians end the message on their answering machines in that manner, and end telephone conversations in the same way.
- (6) We can also silently pray blessings on people we see at work, in the grocery store, or wherever we may be.
- (7) As one of our daughters has pointed out, one of the most effective ways of blessing others is to anticipate their needs and, when appropriate, meet them. “We have been most greatly blessed,” she says, “when, in the midst of some crisis in our lives, we have come home to find that a friend has prepared our meal for us or done other needful things that weren’t asked for nor expected.”

B. A Practical and Biblical Approach to Blessing Those Who Oppose Us

- (1) Abraham Lincoln is credited with this bit of wisdom. One of his aides complained that Lincoln was not retaliating strongly against his enemies. The President replied by pointing out that it seemed much more effective to him to try to make his enemies his friends.
- (2) Cursing those who curse us is not only not Christian, it accomplishes nothing other than giving us an outlet for our wrath. If we believe in the effectiveness of prayer, praying for them can.
- (3) By blessing our enemies or those who seem to wish us harm, we are better able to understand why they are the way they are, and why they feel the way they do toward us. It also may show that, because of something *we* may have said or done, they may be justified in opposing us.

Suggested Scriptural References/Blessing

Isaac blesses Jacob (Genesis 27:27-29);
 Jacob (Israel) blesses the sons of Joseph (Genesis 48:1-22);
 Jacob (Israel) blesses his sons (Genesis 49:1-28);
 God, through Balaam, blesses the Israelites (Numbers 22:1—24:25);
 Moses blesses the people as death approaches (Deuteronomy 33:1-29);
 The exchange of blessings between Boaz and his laborers in the field (Ruth 2:1-4);
 Eli to Hannah, that her prayer be answered (1 Samuel 1:1-20);
 Eli to Hannah and Elkanah, that they would have more children (1 Samuel 2:19-21);
 David to the men of Jabesh Gilead for burying Saul (2 Samuel 2:1-7);
 By God to the household of Obed-Edom, in keeping ark of covenant (2 Samuel 6:1-15);
 By Solomon to the people (1 Kings 8:54-61);
 By God to Job (Job 42:7-17);
 Jesus blesses the little children (Matthew 19:13-15);
 Elizabeth blesses Mary (Luke 1:39-45);
 The spiritual blessings of Christ (Ephesians 1:3-14).

Burdens

“For every man shall bear his own burden.” Galatians 6:5 (KJV)

Jesus did not promise us an easy life. As a matter of fact, he told us that following him would be burdensome; it would involve denying self and taking up a cross (Matthew 16:24). “Taking up the cross” includes the constancy of being a Christian to those around us in all the circumstances of the day. As we increasingly take our faith seriously, the more concerned we become for others. The good news, however, is that our burden is light (Matthew 11:29-30), because Jesus bears it with us; we are “yoked” to him, and he pulls the heavy part of the load.

A practical example of how to deal with burdens appears in Exodus 18:13-26. Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, had come for a visit. He saw Moses trying to serve as judge to all of the people (in addition to all of the other burdens of leadership!). He said, “What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out” (v.17,18). Jethro’s solution: Moses should delegate authority to those below him so that only especially difficult cases would be brought to him.

We all face burdens in life, and how we deal with them can be reflective of how seriously we take our faith in Jesus Christ. How can we deal with them most effectively?

How to Bear the Burdens of Life

A. The Practical Approach:

- (1) Set the parameters of what needs to be done, not taking on more than is your responsibility.
- (2) Be sensible about what can and cannot be done.
- (3) Realize that you cannot do it all by yourself.
- (4) Get the help you need, dividing the labor wisely.

B. A Biblical Approach. In addition to the above ideas, here are some things to consider. There are two aspects of bearing burdens. The first has to do with the “Jethro solution.” 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. These comments, however, have to do with being *over*burdened. 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:

- (1) It builds up our strength; the more we bear willingly, the more we are able to bear in the future, thereby developing leadership capabilities.
- (2) It gives us endurance; we won't be easily defeated.
- (3) We learn from the experience of it how to help and encourage others; it increases our sensitivity.
- (4) It teaches us that we can't do it on our own; we realize our dependence on God and on others.
- (5) It prepares us realistically for the future; we are less likely to be surprised by the events of life.
- (6) Those who can remain faithful to God in the face of the burdens of life can become increasingly useful to God in fulfilling his purposes in the world.

Suggested Scriptural References/Burdens

A re-statement of the action taken pursuant to Exodus 18:13-26; burdens carried by Moses were spread among many to ease the load (Deuteronomy 1:9-18);
Nehemiah takes action to uphold the Jewish Law against carrying burdens on the Sabbath (Nehemiah 13:19-22);
Penitence for the burden of guilt (Psalm 38);
Casting one's burdens on the Lord (Psalm 55);
Jesus teaches freedom from burdensome living (Matthew 11:25-30);
Jesus condemns religious leaders because of the burden of religious legalism they impose on the people (Matthew 23:1-39);
Resulting from the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-32), a letter is sent granting Gentile believers freedom from the burdens of Jewish Law (Acts 15:22-29).

Burn-out

“Then Moses cried out to the Lord, ‘What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me.’” Exodus 17:4

Burn-out is a condition of our age, even among Christians. The more we have become mechanized with labor savers, the more we have become burdened with “things to do.” Instead of having more leisure, we have become more occupied. Those who are not trying to live the Christian life are involved in a great variety of ways to amuse themselves. Those who take their Christian faith seriously are often expected by their church to perform an endless number of services to the congregation and the surrounding community. Although it has been noted above that burden bearing has many beneficial effects, there is a limit to what one person or one family can do. The result of over commitment is burn-out: physical, mental, emotional and spiritual exhaustion.

Exodus 17:1-4 demonstrates Moses facing burn-out. He had contended with Pharaoh (and the Israelites themselves) in order to free the people from the yoke of slavery, had led them successfully across the Red Sea, and had gotten them manna from God with which to feed themselves. Yet, as soon as a new problem arises, they are quick to blame Moses. No wonder Moses would cry out to God, “What am I to do with these people?”

Moses is exhausted by the constant complaints of the Israelites. How easy it is to complain when things aren't going our way, and to place the blame on others. Perhaps we have been guilty of complaining, or maybe we face burn-out because of the endless demands placed upon us by our family, our boss or our church. The answer here was prayer, and God responded. Prayer is always the first thing to do when we sense burn-out approaching. Not only does that give us some “space” from the situation and an opportunity to be objective about it, but God's guidance may be forthcoming to allow us to deal with the stress that is creating the situation. But, a way to help prevent burn-out in the first place is to build healthy boundaries.

How to Deal with Burn-out

A. The Practical Approach:

- (1) The solution to burn-out 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.
- (2) It is important to remember that “No” is a complete sentence.

B. The Biblical Approach: In addition to the above, have in mind that what we are doing may be good but not the main thing or things God wants us doing. God wants our best, not what is left over after we have run around in circles trying to meet every demand that is placed upon us. Jesus told us to love our neighbors as ourselves, but that includes loving ourselves. Unless we protect our own physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health, we are not going to be much good to others in the long run; we will burn out.

Suggested Scriptural References/Burn-out

Jethro advises Moses to divide his duties among the Israelite leaders to avoid burn-out (Exodus 18:13-26);

Elijah wearies of his ministry when threatened by Jezebel (1 Kings 19:1-9);

David prays for relief from despair (Psalm 13);

David cries out for deliverance (Psalm 22);

Jesus, in the Parable of the Sower, describes, in verse 22, the reason so many people burn out: the brambles representing the cares of the world (Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23);

Paul describes the frustration of trying to live a godly life in the face of his own sinful nature (Romans 7:14-25).

Busyness

“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow.... Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

Matthew 6:34

We live in a “stressed-out” time. More people are in need of psychological counseling than at any time in the history of the world. Over and over again, we hear of “successful” people having nervous breakdowns or escaping into alcohol or drugs. It is rare if we have no one in our family or among our friends who fall into that category.

Luke 10:38-42 tells the story of Jesus’ visit to the home of Martha and Mary, the sisters of Lazarus. Martha immediately got busy making all the arrangements while Mary sat at Jesus’ feet, listening to his teaching. When Martha complained that Mary should be helping her, Jesus pointed out that Mary was doing the better thing.

It is the old classic story: being so busy doing things *for* the Lord that we don’t have time to be *with* him. The busyness of our day is such that it is easy to rationalize our way out of our daily quiet time, the reading of Scripture, and our regular worship routines. Putting family first, as parents often believe the Lord is calling them to do, they have no time for him. Many people who call themselves Christians see Sunday as a day to sleep late and read the morning paper rather than worshiping the Lord in their community of faith. If asked about the situation they will say Sunday is to be a day of rest, and it’s the only opportunity they have to rest after such a busy and stressful week! The Martha/Mary story gives us Jesus’ solution: put time with him first and other things will fall into line. All well and good, we say, but how do we do that?

How to Deal with Busyness

A. A Practical Approach:

- (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.

B. A Biblical Approach: In addition to the above, you might want to consider this approach. 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 to 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.

Suggested Scriptural References/Busyness

After patiently following God's directions in relation to the Ark, once Noah was back on dry land he got busy planting a vineyard and getting drunk from the wine (Genesis 9:20-29);

Moses was being overworked in having to judge every situation that came before the Israelites, until his father-in-law Jethro showed him how to parcel out the responsibilities (Exodus 18:13-27);

Jesus cautions to build on rock (doing what he teaches) rather than on sand (ignoring Jesus) (Matthew 7:24-29);

In a parable about wheat and thistles, the workers want to go in and pull up the thistles prematurely (Matthew 13:24-30);

In this parable about the workers in the vineyard, those who have worked longer want to be sure they are paid more (Matthew 20:1-16);

In this parable about the son who had gone astray but returned, the other brother wants to be sure he gets preference because of his faithful work (Luke 15:11-32).

Callings

“As Jesus went out from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector’s booth. ‘Follow me,’ he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.” Matthew 9:9

When Christians think of people being “called” by God to ministry (as God called leaders like Moses, prophets like Elijah, and kings like David), the usual thought is that it is the ordained ministry that is being considered. The fact is that *all* Christians are called to ministry. The particular ministry or ministries to which God calls us might not be quite as dramatic as those set forth in the suggested readings below, but as long as the purpose of the call is God’s purpose, it should never be taken lightly. How we receive the call may vary greatly from how others receive their call, for Scripture gives us a variety of ways in which this can happen.

Very early in the Bible (Genesis 6:9-22) we experience the call of Noah. Can you imagine a man in a semi-arid land who had probably never seen a boat being told what God told Noah to do? The thought boggles the mind. But Noah was a righteous man at a time when the earth was corrupt and full of violence. God had had enough. The flood was to come, and Noah, his family, and the animals would be the only survivors. Although there are many instances of reluctance on the part of those called by God in the Bible, “Noah did everything just as God commanded him” (v.22).

It could be argued, of course, that in the case of Noah he would have been foolish to argue with God. His very survival depended on his obedience. However, as we look at the world around us today, corrupt and full of violence (v. 11), there is plenty of warning for everyone that we had better come into a relationship with God and accept any call he might have upon our lives. But, how many are responding?

Although we should be concerned about those who do not respond to God, and we have a responsibility to witness to them of God’s providence, our priority should be to know and follow God’s call upon our own lives. How do we do that?

How to Perceive a Call from God

Here we will look at a practical and biblical way of responding to what we perceive to be a major call upon our lives. For a vocational call (or any other particularly serious sense of being called into action by God), this is a formula that has worked. Spend the first day in prayer and fasting, listening to God. If you are married, it is ideal to do this with your spouse. Silence should be maintained to the maximum extent. The second day should be spent assessing what you heard the first day. That would involve discussing it with your spouse or a spiritual director or mentor. The third day should be spent in writing down your conclusions from the prior days. This latter step is more important than it might seem. If your conclusion from the guidance you have received is that you will, for instance, make the vocational change, what you have written down becomes the basis on which you will undertake that challenge. If you decide that God wants you to stay where you are rather than making the change, it will be helpful to have that decision sufficiently documented that, if you later begin to question whether you made the right decision, you will have a record of the reasoning behind it.

Suggested Scriptural References/Callings

The call of Abram (Abraham) (Genesis 12:1-9);
The call of Moses (Exodus 3:1-22);
The call of Joshua (Joshua 1:1-18);
The call of Gideon (Judges 6:1-40);
The call of Samuel (1 Samuel 3:1-21);
Elijah is called to confront Ahab (1 Kings 18:1-46);
Elisha is called by Elijah (in accordance with God's will) (1 Kings 19:19-21);
The call of Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1-8);
Jeremiah's call (Jeremiah 1:1-19);
Ezekiel's call and commission (Ezekiel 1:1—3:15);
The call of Jonah (Jonah 1:1-17);
Jesus calls Peter and Andrew, James and John (Matthew 4:18-22);
Jesus calls Matthew (Matthew 9:9-13);
Jesus calls the twelve (Matthew 10:1-16);
Jesus calls the first disciples (John 1:35-51);
The calling of Saul (Paul) (Acts 9:1-19);
Not based on human standards (1 Corinthians 1:18-31);
How to grow in our calling (2 Peter 1:3-11).

Captivity

“Free yourself from the chains of your neck, O captive Daughter of Zion.” Isaiah 52:2b

The illustrations of captivity in the Bible listed below are from the Old Testament. The Israelites experienced real captivity. It is interesting to note that, during the time of slavery in the United States, it was these Old Testament stories that inspired the slaves and led to the words in African American spirituals (“Let my people go”). In some parts of the world there are, of course, people who are in captivity in our day who also don’t deserve to be there. This would include Christians who are prisoners of conscience in countries where it is unacceptable to profess the Christian faith. But, we are probably all suffering from some form of “captivity.”

Exodus 1:1-14 finds the Israelites as slaves in Egypt. They had originally come into Egypt during the time of Joseph, who had become the second most important person in the land. But, in the intervening centuries, the Israelites had increased greatly in number and their influence had waned (v. 8). Becoming fearful of the Israelites, the Pharaoh put slave masters over them and oppressed them to kill their spirit and impede their growth. Later, he had all of the male children killed at birth (vv. 15-22). Only the miraculous events that led to the baby Moses being spared and raised by Pharaoh’s daughter (2:1-10) provided a means for the ultimate escape from captivity of the Israelites.

Despite the situation in which we find ourselves, God is always watching over us. It was as the Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out to God (2:23) that he heard their cry and called Moses to be the instrument of their delivery (3:1-21).

Today’s Captivity

There are at least two ways to look at captivity in our own day. The first is to be grateful that we live in a free country and that we neither have experienced nor have reason to fear the kind of captivity the Israelites encountered in the Old Testament. However, it is important to realize that we are all, in some sense, captives in our own day. Perfectionists, for instance, are captives of unrealistically high expectations of themselves. People pleasers are captives of the opinions and attentions of others. We are all captives of the enticements and distractions of the world around us, to varying degrees. Only as we realize the nature and extent of our captivity can we begin to deal with it and become free.

The other aspect of captivity we should consider has to do with what is going on in other parts of the world. More Christians have been martyred in the past century than in all previous centuries combined. Most western Christians do not realize this. It is our responsibility to overcome this ignorance and to become involved in praying for and otherwise standing up for our Christian brothers and sisters who are facing real captivity around the world.

Suggested Scriptural References/Captivity

Israel delivered from Egypt (Exodus 12:31-42);

Israel (Northern Kingdom) taken into captivity by the Assyrians (2 Kings 17:1-41);

Judah (Southern Kingdom) taken by Nebuchadnezzar, Jerusalem destroyed, and leading citizens taken into exile in Babylon (2 Kings 25:1-30);

Cyrus allows captives to return to Judah (Ezra 1:1—2:70);
Artaxerxes allows additional captives to return to Judah (Ezra 7:1—8:14);
Thankfulness for the return from captivity (Psalm 107);
Grief over the bitterness of exile (Psalm 137);
Comfort for God's people in captivity (Isaiah 40:1-31);
God's threat of captivity to Judah (Jeremiah 13:15-27);
Seventy years of captivity prophesied (Jeremiah 25:1-14).

Children

“Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.’” Matthew 19:14

Other than the opportunity of loving and serving God, there is probably no privilege as great in this life as having and raising children. Yet, we only need look at the newspaper or the television to know that family life is in grave jeopardy, and children are suffering as a result. Marriages—including Christian ones—are breaking down, and children are put in the untenable position of being torn between their parents. Loose sexual mores (i.e., “live-in” lovers) compound the problem. Value-shaping of children by television portends not only a continuation of present trends but a speeding up of them. Schools have become war zones and drug use by children is at staggering levels. The good news is that Christian children can learn guidelines for wholesome living even in the midst of the chaos they face, if their parents teach and live biblical principles. But, how?

Deuteronomy 6:1-9 contains the commandment to teach children the love of God. Verses 4-9 are known as the *Shema* (Hebrew for “Hear”), a confession of faith recited daily by pious Jews, and set the pattern for making the word of God an integral part of daily living. God is here emphasizing the importance of teaching Scripture to our children. The wording used (“upon your hearts,” “talk about them,” “tie them as symbols,” etc.) shows the nature of how his truth is to be conveyed: not just by the passing of information but by demonstration of life. The instruction of the children was to be life-oriented rather than information-oriented.

These words speak to us in our own day. Our children will learn much more by how we live than by what we say, but what we say is important as well (so long as it is consistent with what we do).

Biblical Principles Concerning Children:

- (1) Start early in telling your children about God. It is never too soon to do so; parents-to-be can even begin praying for the child in the womb that he or she will grow in the knowledge and love of God.
- (2) Let your children see you praying and studying Scripture.
- (3) Let your children see you repentant and vulnerable.
- (4) Be your children’s spiritual director or mentor.
- (5) Discipline your children but do not provoke them (Ephesians 6:1-4).

Suggested Scriptural References/Children

The birth of Moses (Exodus 2:1-10);

Again, the importance of teaching children about God (Deuteronomy 11:18-21);

Elijah raises a boy from the dead (1 Kings 17:17-24);

Elisha raises a boy from the dead (2 Kings 4:17-37);

A recounting of Israel’s history that children might know (Psalm 78:1-8);

Children are a gift from God (Psalm 127:3-5);

A father’s wise advice (Proverbs 4:1-22);

The birth of Jesus (Matthew 2:1-12);

Jesus feeds the 5,000 beginning with loaves and fishes provided by a boy (John 6:1-15);
Jesus raises Jairus' daughter from the dead (Mark 5:35-42);
Jesus raises a widow's only son from the dead (Luke 7:11-17);
Jesus heals a demon-possessed boy (Matthew 17:14-18);
Jesus uses a child as an example of the humility needed to enter the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 18:1-6);
Jesus blesses children (Matthew 19:13-15);
Paul's instructions to children and fathers (Ephesians 6:1-4);
Again, instructions to children and fathers (Colossians 3:20-21).

Choices

“[C]hoose for yourselves this day whom you will serve.... But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.” Joshua 24:15

Making choices is an integral part of life. People with leadership ability thrive on making choices. They realize that they will make a lot of mistakes, but they count on the fact that, most of the time, they will make the right choices. Decision making is simply something that goes with the job. People, on the other hand, who find choosing difficult face a dilemma because failing to choose is itself a choice that produces results. God would have us be willing “choosers” who make our choices in accordance with his will.

Luke 1:26-38 tells about what was probably the most important human choice ever made: Mary’s choice. She was just a young girl, maybe twelve or fourteen. The Son of God was to be born to her by an “overshadowing” of the Holy Spirit! Imagine if you can, in that era, being a young woman, unmarried and pregnant. The concept and the risk must have seemed overwhelming. But with courage and faith she decided: “I am the Lord’s servant,...may it be to me as you have said” (v.38).

What if she had said, “No”? Frederick Buechner put it this way: “She struck the angel Gabriel as hardly old enough to have a child at all, let alone this child, but he’d been entrusted with a message to give her and he gave it. He told her what the child was to be named, and who he was to be, and something about the mystery that was to come upon her. ‘You mustn’t be afraid, Mary,’ he said. As he said it, he only hoped she wouldn’t notice that beneath the great, golden wings he himself was trembling with fear to think that the whole future of creation hung now on the answer of a girl.”

We can be eternally grateful that Mary, faced with that enormous choice, made the right decision. The decisions we face seem very insignificant when viewed against Mary’s. Some choices truly *are* insignificant, such as what we will eat or wear. But other choices are important; much of what we do has significance for ourselves and others (sometimes many others). We want to make the right choices, but how?

How to Make Better Choices

A. The Practical Approach:

- (1) Make a list of the options we have.
- (2) Consider the pros and cons of each.
- (3) Weigh them, taking consequences into consideration.
- (4) Make your choice, writing down the reasons for it. That way, if you later decide you have made a mistake, you have a record of why you decided the way you did.

B. A Biblical Approach. In addition to the above, especially if our decision involves a moral choice, based on Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 9-10 (via the *Life Application Bible*), we could ask ourselves:

- (1) Does this choice help my witness for Christ (9:19-20)?
- (2) Is my motivation to help others know Christ (9:23, 10:33)?
- (3) Am I, in this decision, doing my best (9:24-25)?
- (4) Is it contrary to Scripture, or would it cause me to sin (10:12)?
- (5) Is it the best course of action (10:22, 33)?
- (6) Is my interest in the other person rather than myself (10:24)?
- (7) Am I acting lovingly rather than selfishly (10:28-31)?
- (8) Does it glorify God (10:31)?
- (9) Could it cause another to sin (10:32)?

Suggested Scriptural References/Making Choices

Adam and Eve in eating the forbidden fruit (Genesis 2:15-17; 3:17);
Cain and Abel in their offerings to God, and Cain in killing his brother (Genesis-4:1-8);
Abram, in following God's call to go to the Promised Land (Genesis 12:1-9);
Abram and Lot in separating and choosing different sections of land (Genesis 13:1-18);
Abraham in offering Isaac as a sacrifice (Genesis 22:1-19);
Esau in trading his birthright for food (Genesis 25:27-34);
The mother of Moses in hiding him in a basket and floating it in the Nile (Exodus 2:1-10);
The Israelites in accepting God's covenant (Exodus 24:1-7);
The renewing of the covenant under Joshua (Joshua 24:1-24);
Under Josiah's leadership, renewing the covenant again (2 Kings 23:1-3);
Joseph's choice to accept Mary's mysterious pregnancy (Matthew 1:18-25);
How Mary and Martha reacted during Jesus' visit (Luke 10:38-42);
Jesus' choice in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-46).

Church

“And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.” Acts 2:47 (KJV)

John Huess was, years ago, pastor of what was then one of the most influential churches in the United States: Trinity Parish, Wall Street. He wrote a booklet entitled “The True Function of a Christian Church.” Among other things, he said this, “It is a growing conviction of mine that no parish can fulfill its true function unless there is at the very center of its leadership a small community of quietly fanatic, changed and truly converted Christians. The trouble with most parishes is that nobody, including the pastor, is really greatly changed. But even where there is a devoted self-sacrificing minister at the heart of the fellowship, not much will happen until there is a community of changed men and women.”

Acts 11:1-18 tells of Peter informing the Christian leaders in Jerusalem of his expanded vision for the Church. He has realized (through his encounter with the Roman centurion Cornelius and his family, Acts 10) that the Church has a mission to the Gentiles. Christ’s Church was not meant to be exclusively for Jews or those who convert to Judaism but was to reach the world.

The early Christians were to be a band of radically changed and spiritually charged messengers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the far corners of the world as well as in their own neighborhoods. And so are we to be today. But, how do we do it?

How to Be a Church That Changes Lives and Communities

The “Yes, but How?” question is first answered by a radical conversion and commitment on the part of the leadership, as John Huess noted above. From that group comes equipping for the activities of prayer, fellowship, teaching, breaking bread, and serving and meeting needs. From that “apostolic mix” comes a church the Lord blesses.

Acts 2:22-47, in describing the newly-born Christian Church, provides a set of guidelines for what the local congregation should look like. It is a good measuring tool against which to compare our own worshiping community to see how we are doing and what we need to improve.

- (1) There was decisive preaching, always centered on the person of Jesus (vv. 22-36).
- (2) People were called to accept Christ as both Savior and Lord (v. 36).
- (3) They were likewise called to repentance from sin (v. 38).
- (4) They were promised empowering by the Holy Spirit (v. 38).
- (5) There was Scripture-based (apostolic) teaching (v. 42).
- (6) There was fellowship (v. 42).
- (7) It was a praying community (v. 42).
- (8) There was a sense of awe and expectancy (v. 43).
- (9) There was practical sharing among the members of the community (vv. 44-45).
- (10) Specifically, needs were met (v. 45).
- (11) There was regular, devoted worship (v. 46).

(12) The result was that the community was warmly attractive, gaining favor with all the people, and the Lord added to their number daily (v. 47).

Suggested Scriptural References/Church

The Christian church begins (Acts 1:1—2:47);

The church at prayer (Acts 4:23-37);

Scattered in persecution (Acts 8:1-8);

Encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grows (Acts 9:31);

The young church in action (Acts 11:19-31, 14:21-28);

In prayer for the imprisoned Peter (Acts 12:1-19);

Dealing with major issues (Acts 15:1-35);

Division existing within (1 Corinthians 1:10—6:20);

Dispute between Peter and Paul (Galatians 2:11-21);

How body of Christ is to function (Ephesians 4:1-16);

Instructions to the church (1 Timothy 2:1—4:16, 5:1—6:10);

Concerning leadership in the church (Titus 1:5-9);

Rebellion in the church (Titus 1:10-16);

Right living (Titus 2:1-15);

Letters to the churches (Revelation 2:1—3:22).

Communication

“Now the whole world had one language and a common speech.” Genesis 11:1

In the Tower of Babel story, we learn that the people wanted to build a ziggurat that would reach into the heavens to show their prowess. It was to be a monument to themselves rather than to honor God. So he frustrated their plans by scattering them over the earth and giving them diverse languages. Needless to say, communication has been a problem ever since.

In a sense, the whole Bible is about God communicating with people. One of the primary definitions of prayer in our day is that it is communicating with God. Nothing is more important than communicating with God, and teachings on prayer help us learn to do that better. But, people also need to learn how to communicate better with one another.

We focus on communicating with God in the section on prayer. Here our concern is how to communicate with one another. We are to love God with our whole being and our neighbors as ourselves. That involves communicating with God in prayer and worship, and communicating with our neighbor in any way that will reflect God’s love to him or her. Our most important “neighbors” are our spouse and children, but we also have an obligation to communicate as effectively as we can with everyone. Yes, but how?

Attitudes That Enhance Communications

- (1) People want to be communicated with in a warm and accepting way by people who seem to care about them.
- (2) They need someone who will listen and try to understand what they are feeling and what is happening in their life.
- (3) They want that person to be genuine and to take the time to truly understand the situation.
- (4) They want the other person to offer ideas, thoughts and suggestions as appropriate, but not to try to make their decisions for them.

Attitudes That Hamper Communication

- (1) It is difficult to communicate with someone who is inattentive, distracted, or only focused on their own concerns.
- (2) People also find it hard to communicate with others who want to probe them with questions or give them advice before their situation is fully understood.
- (3) They don’t need people to judge them, preach to them or condescend to them.
- (4) They also don’t want others to minimize the importance of what they are discussing by changing the subject or otherwise diverting their attention.

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Suggested Scriptural References/Communication

Abraham pleading for Sodom to be spared (Genesis 18:16-33);

Abigail and David (1 Samuel 25:14-35);

The prophets acted out parables as a means of communication (Jeremiah 13:1-11, for instance);

Jesus taught to simply let “Yes” be “Yes” and “No” be “No” (Matthew 5:37);
Jesus said many times, “He who has ears, let him hear” (Matthew 11:15, for instance);
Jesus taught in parables in order to communicate effectively with those who had “ears to hear”;
Paul, in reaching the Athenians (Acts 17:22-31);
Agabus’ acted out parable (Acts 21:1-16);
Paul’s introductions to his epistles (Romans 1:1-15, for instance);
Paul teaches avoidance of unhelpful talk but only what will benefit others (Ephesians 4:29).

Discussion Questions:

1. What communication problems have you recently faced, and how were they dealt with?
2. What communication issues are you likely to be facing in the future for which you need prayer, support or advice?
3. When have you felt closest to Christ since we last met?
4. How will you seek to grow in your relationship with Christ until we meet again?

Companionship (Fellowship, Friendship)

“But I think it necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker....”
Philippians 2:25

Jesus chose twelve men into whom to pour his life. Although he spoke to large crowds, physically healed many others, and had some friends such as Mary, Martha and Lazarus, his real companionship was with the twelve. In our day, it is impossible to have a deep relationship with the perhaps hundreds or thousands of members of our community of faith. Real Christian companionship can only occur in small groups. That is why it is especially important to have small Bible study and prayer group opportunities in our churches and to have at least one “soul friend,” someone with whom we can share the most personal things in our lives.

As we learn from 1 Samuel 18:1-4, 19:1-7, and 20:1-42, the relationship between David and Jonathan appears to have been one of “soul friends.” It seems that they became good friends from the first. Their friendship was based on faith in God; it did not let anything interfere with it, even Jonathan’s father Saul’s jealousy and hatred of David; they became even closer when their friendship was tested; and they remained friends until the end. After Jonathan’s death, David fulfilled his promise to treat Jonathan’s children kindly (even though that was considered politically unwise in those days); David provided for Mephibosheth, Jonathan’s son (2 Samuel 9).

Loyalty and trust were major elements in the relationship between David and Jonathan. Those are valued characteristics today. We need friends we can rely on in “fair weather and foul.” We cannot have such friendships without earning them through our own trust and loyalty. How would God have us do that?

How to Build Friendships

A. A Practical Approach. George H. Gallup is someone who has a caring heart and, through his vocation as a nationally-known pollster, understands a lot about human nature. Here are his four key elements of Christian friendship:

- (1) Listening. Friends listen not simply with our ears, but with our whole being. What is this person seeking to share, to say at a deeper level? Where is this person’s heart?
- (2) Validation. We need to acknowledge that God loves all his children. Each person is unique, a beautiful creature waiting for us to have the ears to hear and eyes to see that beauty. A real friend helps the other person to identify their strengths, talents and gifts bestowed on them by God. A key factor in validation is realizing that the person who stands before us is the product of many years of struggle and painful experiences that have shaped their character and personality. Validation involves sharing our life with the other and walking along side them in times of need.
- (3) Empowerment. This involves helping our friend identify and put into practice the strengths, talents and gifts God has given them. We

encourage them to soar in using these to serve the Lord. But being a Christian friend also means speaking the truth in love to the other person. Although it risks hurting their feelings, it is done for their greater good. True friendship is caring enough about the other to speak the painful truth.

- (4) Thanksgiving. As a Christian friend, we need continually to thank God for how he is working in the life of our friend. This means having the kind of relationship that allows us to know what is going on in the life of the other and to hold that person before God. That is evidence of our thankfulness that this person is our friend and that we want God's best for him or her.

B. A Biblical Approach. In addition to the above, you might want to consider:

- (1) Find a close Christian friend. A good friend will help you through times of trouble and temptation (Galatians 6:2).
- (2) Avoid relationships that will tempt you to sin. Friendships with people who flaunt the word of God can lead you into trouble, sometimes before you realize it (2 Corinthians 6:14).
- (3) Be sure your relationships honor God. Deep and abiding relationships should be with those who believe what you believe about Christ (1 John 1:7).
- (4) Encourage and affirm one another to build the relationship (1 Thessalonians 5:11).
- (5) Pray for one another. Nothing leads to better understanding between you (Colossians 1:9).
- (6) Be honest with one another (Proverbs 28:23).

Suggested Scriptural References/Companionship

Within the infant Church (Acts 4:32-37);

Leaders of the Jerusalem church (Acts 21:17-19);

Paul's personal greetings (Romans 16:1-27);

Paul's companionship with Philemon and Onesimus (Philemon 8-22).

Complaining

“These men are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires....” Jude 16

We of the western world live in a time of unprecedented prosperity. The affluence the average person in the United States enjoys would have been beyond the belief of prior generations. Yet, we are a people besieged with psychological problems and general unhappiness. Passive-aggressive people are ones who will not make a decision or take a stand until someone else does it for them, and then they complain about the decision. Have we become a nation of passive-aggressive citizens? People complain about the government but don't vote. They complain about their bad health but won't do the things necessary to improve it. They complain about the way their church is being run but refuse to help or volunteer or to serve on committees. There's nothing new in all of this: God had a special relationship with the Israelites, and yet, they too, constantly complained.

In Exodus 15:22-27 the Israelites blame Moses because the water is unfit to drink. By the miraculous hand of God, Moses has just delivered them from slavery and from a vengeful Pharaoh, and they immediately complain. This is just the first in a series of complaints the Israelites launch against Moses.

In verse 26, God promised good health to the Israelites if they would just do what he said. God's laws are for our benefit. By following them, we avoid many of the troubles that plague others. If we can come to see God's laws as objects of rejoicing (see Psalm 119), we can live much healthier and happier lives than if we are railing against God and complaining. Yes, but how?

Remedy for Complaining

The most effective way of overcoming a complaining attitude is to adopt, instead, an attitude of gratitude. Until we can see and appreciate all God does for us, we stumble in the darkness of disappointment and defeat. A particularly helpful thing to do when we are going through a negative stage is to stop and, prayerfully, make a list of all the things we have to be thankful for.

Be Contented Instead (from Donald M. Hulstrand, in reflecting on Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Living*):

- 1) If something displeasing happens to us, we can ask God to turn it into an advantage. The world is full of stories of people who actually found a blessing in the midst of difficulty. They can even say afterwards that they thank God that they had to go through it.
- 2) Never wish to be someone else. The lives of others may seem more charmed than ours but if we walked in their shoes we would find that there are hidden things in their lives that we would never want to bear.
- 3) Even if an unwelcome cloud seems to hang over us for what seems to be a long while, take the Christian attitude that God is still shining beyond and through that cloud. This is the meaning of hope.

- 4) Jeremy Taylor teaches us to enjoy the present. Yesterday is gone and there is nothing we can do to change it. Tomorrow is an unknown. Jesus tells us not to borrow trouble from the future but to live in the ongoing now.
- 5) Don't be surprised or overwhelmed when our situation changes. It *will* change. However, God never changes and our spirits go ahead unchanged as we are linked to him.
- 6) A contented person does not desire what he does not need. Too often we begin to construct a list of things or conditions that seem to us absolutely necessary. Are they, or are they invitations for disappointment?
- 7) A contented person does not allow other people to judge what should make us content. Their discontent must not be allowed to make us discontented.
- 8) A contented person knows God as a friend. This is not taking God too lightly; it is taking him seriously.
- 9) To be content, simplify. A complicated life is not a happy one. A contented life finds the beauty of focused simplicity.
- 10) A contented person is one who understands that time will heal all.

Suggested Scriptural References/Complaining

The Israelites complain upon entering the Desert of Sin (Exodus 16:1-5);

The Israelites complain again when camped at Rephidim for lack of water (Exodus 17:1-7);

The Israelites complain about the hardships of the desert and the lack of meat to eat (Numbers 11:1-35);

When faced with the fear of entering the promised land, the Israelites complain against the leadership of Moses (Numbers 14:1-45);

The Israelites complain again about Moses' leadership (Numbers 20:1-13);

The Israelites become impatient and complain against God and Moses (Numbers 21:4-9);

The elders of Israel, unhappy with circumstances, demand a king (1 Samuel 8:1-22).

Compromise

“When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere...he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd.” Matthew 27:24

The fact is that there are two kinds of compromise: the healthy and the unhealthy.

In an age when people do not have deep convictions, the unhealthy kind of compromise becomes too easy. If we allow ourselves to be seduced by the ways of the world, or just really don't care, why not give in? The people of the Old Testament often did. The example of building the altar of the golden calf while Moses was on the mountain receiving the Ten Commandments is a classic example. Aaron was trying to serve as leader of the people in Moses' absence and gave in to the crowd (Exodus 32:1-10). In the New Testament, Pontius Pilate did likewise concerning the fate of Jesus (Luke 23:13-25).

On the other hand, Paul exercised compromise in a healthy way concerning the circumcision of Timothy (Acts 16:2,3). Timothy had a Jewish mother and a Greek father. Paul knew that Timothy would be more effective among Jewish Christians if he were circumcised, and therefore it was done. The decision of the Jerusalem Council (Act 15) that Gentiles did not have to be circumcised to be legitimate Christians was another healthy compromise.

When we must compromise, it is good to search our inner motives that we may make our decisions in accordance with God's will for us. How can we do that?

When and How to Compromise

- (1) Compromise is defined as the settlement of differences reached by mutual concessions. It can be a healthy process if those trying to reach compromise have strong convictions but want, most of all, to be in the Lord's will.
- (2) Compromise should never be the result of cowardice or the sacrificing of allegiance to God or the truth of Scripture. As John MacNaughton has said, “The world is filled with compromise in things big and small. In matters of business negotiations and politics (often called the art of the possible), thoughtful compromise has a real place. In matters of faith and morals, compromise is the enemy.”
- (3) Healthy compromise is necessary in business, politics and marriage. In the day-to-day issues on which people must compromise, a good starting point is to talk about feelings rather than rights.
- (4) It is especially helpful to discuss the feelings that underlie why we have difficulty giving in on a particular point.
- (5) A next step is to look at the various options open to us that could break the impasse.
- (6) The final step is to look for common ground rather than the things that will accentuate our differences.

Suggested Scriptural References/Compromise

Israel followed ungodly alliances (Numbers 25:1-18);

Saul's compromise in failing to follow God's instructions in destroying the Amalekites (1 Samuel 15:7-26);

Solomon exercises wisdom in the compromise involving two women who each claimed to be the baby's mother (1 Kings 3:16-28);

Solomon's wives turn his heart from God, and he follows other gods (1 Kings 11:1-13);

Enemies of the Israelites offer compromise in order to intimidate and discourage the people (Ezra 4:1-5);

The Israelites marry heathen spouses, thus compromising God's purpose for them (Ezra 9:1-15);

Pilate compromises, and turns Jesus over to be crucified (Luke 23:13-25);

Paul's teaching that Christians avoid relationships that compromise their faith (2 Corinthians 6:14-18);

The Church in Ephesus is commended for not tolerating evil in the church, then warned because of falling away from Christian truth (Revelation 2:1-7).

Courage (and Cowardice)

“Joshua said to them, ‘Don not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Be strong and courageous.’”
Joshua 10:25

Life tests courage in a variety of ways. A brief period of reflection is all most people need in order to recall the key times in their lives when their courage has been tested and stood or failed. A godly couple, friends of ours, set out to build a retreat center years ago. They had a beautiful piece of land in a rural setting, easily reached from the Interstate, and they firmly believed God wanted them to use it to his glory. The problem was lack of money and building experience. Emboldened by 1 Chronicles 28:20, which they believed the Lord had given them for the project, they began the effort without the funds to cover it, or, as they said, to cover their mistakes. That took courage! It required believing God was directing them to fulfill his purpose. They were fearful all along the way; but, once they started, they believed there was no turning back. The Lord did provide, and a wonderful Christian retreat center is the result.

From the moment we give our lives to Christ, the issue of courage changes significantly. Once our primary allegiance is to Christ, it becomes much easier to stand against many of the things that have challenged our courage in the past. We are now operating under a different set of rules with entirely new values. But, suddenly, we are faced with a new set of threats to our courage. Will we stand up for our faith against those who ridicule it? Will we have the courage to share our faith with others? Will we have the courage of our convictions when temptations come our way? There are many illustrations of both courage and cowardice in the Bible to guide us in how we should go.

In Numbers 13:1-33 courage is shown by Caleb in the face of the cowardice of ten others who had gone with him to explore the land God had promised to the Israelites. Twelve had been sent to spy out the land so that Moses could develop a strategy for conquering it. Instead the men come back with stories of giants in the land; “we felt like grasshoppers next to them” (v.33 NLT). Only Caleb (and apparently Joshua, though he is not mentioned here) showed courage. The others stirred up the people and they rebelled against going into the land. The result was 40 years of wandering in the desert.

It takes courage to speak out when everyone else sees the issue in an entirely different light from the way we do, particularly when we are badly outnumbered. At times like these, it is important to know that we are on the Lord’s side on the issue. When we are on the Lord’s side, numbers don’t matter. But, how should we deal with our courage being tested?

How to Show Courage in Times of Trial

- (1) The times when our courage is tested can strengthen our faith. Our character is developed and our faith purified (1 Peter 1:3-7).
- (2) Testing helps us help others. As God comforts us we will be led to comfort others (2 Corinthians 1:3-7).

- (3) Pain and suffering can be kept in perspective. Though surrounded by testing on every side, our troubles are small compared to the glory that the Lord has for us (2 Corinthians 4:7-18).
- (4) The situations we face in life test our foundation. When we are grounded in Christ, we can weather any storm (Luke 6:47-49).
- (5) Our courageous acts can engender courage in others. As we stand up to the tests that face us, others will be encouraged to follow (1 Samuel 17:48-52).
- (6) Jesus has gone before us; he is the way. We can have peace of mind in the middle of our most severe testing because we belong to Jesus and will live with him eternally (John 14:1-7).

Suggested Scriptural References/Courage

Cowardice shown by the Israelites when faced with entering promised land (Numbers 14:1-45);
 Joshua is encouraged by God to be courageous in taking the promised land (Joshua 1:1-18);
 The prostitute Rahab showed courage in hiding the spies sent into the land by Joshua (Joshua 2:1-24);
 Caleb is rewarded for the courage he had shown (Numbers 13:1-33 above) (Joshua 14:6-15);
 Jotham, Gideon's youngest son, shows courage in prophesying what will happen if the people make Abimelech king (Judges 9:1-57);
 When it was time for Saul to be called forth as king of Israel, he hid among the baggage (1 Samuel 10:1-27);
 Saul, after being reluctant to accept kingship of Israel, boldly leads the Israelites to victory over the Ammonites and becomes king (1 Samuel 11:1-15);
 Jonathan is courageous in taking the Philistine outpost (1 Samuel 14:1-14);
 David is courageous in killing Goliath (1 Samuel 17:1-58);
 Saul shows cowardice in committing suicide (1 Samuel 31:1-13);
 Hezekiah shows courage in putting trust in the Lord in the face of Sennacherib's might (2 Kings 18:1—19:37);
 Esther is courageous in going before the king in violation of his law (Esther 4:15—5:8);
 Courage comes from trust in the Lord (Psalm 34);
 Jeremiah is courageous in speaking God's word facing the threat of death (Jeremiah 26:1-24);
 Daniel shows courage in standing up for his beliefs (Daniel 1:1-21, 3:1-30, 6:1-28);
 Courage that turns to fear—Peter walking on water (Matthew 14:22-33);
 Peter shows cowardice in betraying Jesus (Matthew 26:69-72);
 Peter and John before the Sanhedrin are courageous (Acts 4:1-22);
 The Apostles show courage after being put in jail (Acts 5:17-42);
 Stephen is courageous while on trial (Acts 6:8—7:60);
 Ananias shows courage in praying for Saul (Paul) (Acts 9:1-19);
 Barnabas displays courage in taking a chance on Saul (Paul) (Acts 9:26-31);
 Paul must constantly show courage from his conversion until his death (Acts, Epistles).

Crises

“The disciples went and woke him, saying, ‘Lord, save us! We’re going to drown!’” Matthew 8:25

“Constant change is here to stay” is an apt expression in our day. The more rapidly things change, the more crises we face. But, as is true of all traumatic situations in life, crises are opportunities for growth. How we approach and deal with crises can tell us a lot about ourselves.

Exodus 14:5-31 tells the story of the Israelites’ flight from Egypt, pursued by Pharaoh. It was certainly a crisis situation! Six hundred Egyptian chariots were bearing down on the defenseless Israelites who were caught between the mountains and the sea. It was a situation in which only God could provide deliverance. He did, by allowing the Israelites to pass through the sea, but not the chariots. The incident was so miraculous that the memory of it was recited again and again throughout the history of the Jewish people.

The nature of this situation required total dependence on God. Too often, when we face crises in life, turning to God is the last thing we do rather than the first. Although we can’t expect God to “part the sea” for us every time we face a crisis, we do need to give him the opportunity to guide us in the way he would have us go. He can calm us down, help us to see the situation in perspective and give us ideas on how to cope with it. How?

How to Handle Crises

A. The Practical Approach: Here are four steps to consider:

- (1) Fight panic. It can rob you of reason and that’s what you need most in a time of crisis.
- (2) Rely on any training, experience or other background you may have that is related to the crisis you face.
- (3) Rely also on your intuition or “gut feeling” concerning the matter.
- (4) Advice from a more knowledgeable person can also be a tremendous help, but often such advice is not readily available in times of crisis.

B. The Biblical Approach. In addition to the above, consider these steps:

- (1) Prayer. Paul says to be constant in prayer; and, as we face each crisis, it is through prayer that God can give us the insights and inspirations, the ultimate solutions, and the calmness to reach them.
- (2) Patience. In Romans 12:12, Paul also says to be patient in tribulation. If the crisis we are facing is not one that demands immediate action, looking for the easiest way of getting through a crisis is not always the best. Otherwise it may soon crop up again and be an even bigger problem. Each crisis is deserving of the right solution, and that can be found only if we are patient with ourselves and everyone else involved in it. Sometimes God will show us that the best

thing for us to do is nothing at all, but simply have faith that God will provide the solution in some way that we cannot foresee.

- (3) Preparation. Although most crises do not require the immediate decisions we may initially think they need, some do need to be addressed quickly. Therefore, we want to be ready when these kinds of crises occur. We can only be ready if our priorities are straight, and our priorities can only be straight if we are earnestly trying to live in the will of God.

Suggested Scriptural References/Crises

Pharaoh's refusal to free the Israelites, and the ensuing plagues (Exodus 5:1—11:10);

The Israelites form a golden calf and worship it (Exodus 32:1-35);

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace (Daniel 3:1-30);

Daniel in the lion's den (Daniel 6:1-28);

Jonah, disobeying God, causes the ship he is in to face disaster, as a result of which he is thrown into the sea and swallowed by a fish (Jonah 1:1-17);

Joseph, warned in a dream, takes Mary and the babe to Egypt to escape King Herod (Matthew 2:13-15);

Jesus faces temptation in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11);

Jesus calms the storm (Matthew 8:23-27);

Lazarus dies and is raised from the dead by Jesus (John 11:1-44);

Jesus at Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-43);

The disagreement between Paul and Barnabas over John Mark (Acts 15:36-41).

Death

“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes in him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.” John 5:24

The *Disciple’s Study Bible* says this: “From the beginning, death has been understood as the consequence of human rebellion (Genesis 2:17). This includes both physical as well as spiritual death. The Bible contains a growing revelation that death is not the ultimate end of life, for through Jesus Christ we have hope of a final victory over both spiritual death through redemption and physical death through resurrection.” In our day, the secular world avoids the idea of death at all costs. Many Christians also refuse to plan for their own death until it is obvious to everyone that they have only a short time to live.

Sarah’s death and burial are covered in Genesis 23:1-20. Death and burial were steeped in tradition and ritual in Abraham’s day. The important thing was to show proper respect for the person who had died. Mourning was essential, and friends and relatives let out loud cries of grief so as to be heard by others in the neighborhood. An appropriate burial site was part of the tradition, thus necessitating the formal exchange between Abraham and Ephron the Hittite.

Because of Christ, Christians view death and burial quite differently. Some churches give their members the opportunity to plan their own funeral, called a resurrection liturgy. Hymns of joy are to be sung, and scriptural readings will emphasize triumph over death. Often today the body is cremated and the ashes placed in a courtyard at the church rather than taken to a cemetery. Even among the most devout Christians, however, death is always taken seriously; and, when the death is of a tragic nature (a child accidentally killed, a young mother dying of cancer), the similarity between a Christian funeral and the one given Sarah is more evident.

How to deal with the death of loved ones might be helped by reading the section on Grief (Grieving), but we Christians will all experience physical death. How can we best face it?

How to Prepare for Death

There is no doubt that death holds some fear for virtually everyone, and for many reasons: we know little about the afterlife even from the Bible so there is fear of the unknown aspects of it; physical pain and suffering are most often associated with death; and, there is concern about those we will leave behind.

As Christians, however, we have very positive things to look forward to in spending eternity with the Lord, and there are some very positive ways we can prepare for that time. As a matter of fact, these are things we should be doing all of our lives, whether death is near or not. Examples would be:

- (1) growing in our understanding of and ability to praise and worship,
- (2) growing in our knowledge of the Lord (Scripture) and our relationship with him (prayer),
- (3) practicing the presence of God,

- (4) developing a more godly disposition through bearing the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22, 23), and
- (5) using our spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12 and Ephesians 4) and laying up for ourselves treasures in heaven (sacrificial acts on behalf of others).

In his bestselling book *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff*, Richard Carlson suggested imagining ourselves at our own funeral. He said, "Almost universally, when people look back on their lives while on their deathbed, they wish that their priorities had been quite different. With few exceptions, people wish they hadn't "sweated the small stuff" so much. Instead, they wish they had spent more time with people and activities that they truly loved and less time worrying about aspects of life that, upon deeper examination, really don't matter all that much. Imagining yourself at your own funeral allows you to look back at your life while you still have the chance to make some important changes. While it can be a little scary or painful, it's a good idea to consider your own death and, in the process, your life. Doing so will remind you of the kind of person you want to be and the priorities that are most important to you. If you're at all like me, you'll probably get a wake-up call that can be an excellent source of change."

Suggested Scriptural References/Death

Cain kills Abel (Genesis 4:1-12);

Abraham's death (Genesis 25:7-11);

Jacob/Israel dies in Egypt (Genesis 49:29-33);

Joseph dies in Egypt (Genesis 50:22-26);

Elijah is taken to be with God (2 Kings 2:1-18);

Job raises the question of whether there is life after death [answered in John 11:25] (Job 14:1-14);

John the Baptist is beheaded (Matthew 14:6-12);

Lazarus dies and is raised from the dead by Jesus (John 11:1-44);

Judas hangs himself (Matthew 27:1-10);

Jesus dies on the cross (Matthew 27:45-54).

Deception (Lies, Seduction, Trickery)

“[Herod] sent them to Bethlehem and said, ‘Go and make a careful search for the child...so that I too may go and worship him.’” Matthew 2:8

Deception, lies, trickery, seduction and related activities seem to be illustrated in Scripture more than any other general category of sin. Deception begins with the serpent, and runs throughout the Old Testament, and there are a couple of illustrations in the New. One cannot help but conclude from this evidence, if it had not become obvious in other ways, that deception is Satan’s primary method of operation.

Genesis 27:1-40 contains the story of how Jacob gained his father’s blessing (intended for Esau) by collusion with his mother Rebekah. Esau and Jacob were twins, but Esau was the firstborn. Isaac favored Esau and Rebekah favored Jacob. Favoritism is never healthy in a family, but it was particularly troublesome in this situation. Isaac, the son of Abraham, was to be the father of a great nation (Israel) through his sons. Because of the deception practiced in this passage of Scripture, Jacob went on to become the ancestor of the Israelites while Esau became the ancestor of the Edomites who later became enemies of the Israelites.

God had already told Rebekah that Jacob would be the successor of Isaac (Genesis 25:23), but, when Rebekah found that Isaac was going to bless Esau, she took matters into her own hands. She undoubtedly rationalized that the end justified the means; but, in fact, she simply did not trust God to fulfill his promise. Too often, we make the same mistake. We know what seems to us to be the right solution, but we resort to ungodly means of achieving it. That is never God’s will and can lead to disastrous results. How are we to deal with the problem of deception?

How to Cope with Deception

The general rule about being deceived by a particular person is this. It can happen to anyone the first time, but when it happens the second time, it’s your own fault. Scripture teaches us that we are to be forgiving, as our Heavenly Father is forgiving. However, when God forgives, he completely forgets. We are required to forgive and we are to “forget” in the sense that we don’t carry a grudge (the old, “I’m forgiving but I’m certainly not forgetting” attitude). But, we are not required to forget in the sense that we pretend the thing never happened and then let it happen all over again. If a person has deceived us (or lied to us, seduced us, or tricked us) in the past, we should not let it happen again. The “seventy times seven” guideline is not meant to turn us into victims of someone who means us harm.

On the other hand, what about the ways in which we deceive ourselves (as illustrated in the Rebekah/Jacob story)? As a friend recently commented, “Deception from others is easier to deal with than deception from within. The problem with addictions begins with deception, thinking ‘things will be better this time,’ ‘I need this to survive,’ ‘I deserve this,’ ‘God understands that I’m special or different,’ or ‘this isn’t hurting anyone.’ AA calls this ‘stinking thinking,’ and offers a rigorous method of self-examination. The mind has been the spiritual battleground from the beginning—‘Did God say...?’” Unless we can be brutally honest with ourselves or have some

other means of holding ourselves accountable (see the section on Accountability), we can too easily fall into self-deception.

Suggested Scriptural References/Deception

The serpent in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:1-7);

Abram, entering Egypt, has his wife Sarai pose as his sister (Genesis 12:10-20);

Sarah denies that she laughed upon hearing that she would bear a child in her old age (Genesis 18:1-15);

How Lot's daughters got pregnant by him (Genesis 19:30-38);

Abraham, in Gerar, has Sarah pose as his sister again, this time to fool Abimelech (Genesis 20:1-18);

Jacob got Esau to give him his birthright by catching him at a vulnerable point [hunger] (Genesis 25:19-35);

Isaac, like his father before him, told the people of Gerar (Abimelech was still king) that his wife (Rebekah) was his sister (Genesis 26:6-11);

Laban sends his daughter Leah into Jacob's wedding bed instead of Rachel for whose hand in marriage Jacob had labored seven years (Genesis 29:15-30);

It is difficult to tell, in this story, who is outdoing whom in trickery, but Laban seems almost as competent at deceptions as his son-in-law Jacob (Genesis 30:25-33);

Jacob flees from Laban without telling him he is leaving (Genesis 31:1-21);

Tamar poses as a prostitute to have sexual intercourse with her father-in-law Judah. (Genesis 38:11-30);

Joseph, in concealing his identity from his brothers (Genesis 42:1—45:28);

The midwives tell Pharaoh that Israelite women had their children before they could get to them to kill them before they were born. A case of justified deception? (Exodus 1:15-21);

Aaron, in explaining to Moses how the golden calf was formed (Exodus 32:1-35);

The Moabites, in getting certain Israelites to have sexual relations with them and to worship Baal (Numbers 25:1-18);

The prostitute Rahab, in hiding spies sent by Joshua and sending their pursuers in a wrong direction. Another case of justified deception? (Joshua 2:1-24);

How the Gibeonites got Joshua to make a peace treaty with them (Joshua 9:1-27);

Ehud the judge told Eglon the king of Moab that he was bringing him a message from the Lord, but, instead, pulled out a sword and stabbed the king (Judges 3:12-30);

Jael, pretending to protect Sisera, puts him to death (Judges 4:1-24);

How Gideon defeated the Midianites. Clearly a justified deception (Judges 7:1-25);

By Samson's Philistine wife, to gain the answer to his riddle (Judges 14:1-20);

How Delilah found the source of Samson's strength (Judges 16:1-22);

The men of Jabesh Gilead told the Ammonites that they would surrender the next day, knowing that Saul was coming to rescue them (1 Samuel 11:1-11);

Here it is the Lord who institutes the deception, telling Samuel how to hide his real purpose in going to anoint a successor to Saul (1 Samuel 16:1-5);

Saul, in plotting against David (1 Samuel 18:1-30);

Michal, in saving David's life (1 Samuel 19:1-17);

David, in telling Abimelech that he was in Nob on the king's business (1 Samuel 21:1-9);

David, in pretending to be insane (1 Samuel 21:10-15);

David, in telling Achish that he was attacking towns other than the ones he was attacking (1 Samuel 27:1-12);
David's treatment of Uriah (2 Samuel 11:1-27);
Amnon, in gaining access to Tamar so he could have sexual relations with her, and then Absalom, in getting revenge on Amnon for having done so (2 Samuel 13:1-39);
Absalom's conspiracy against David (2 Samuel 15:1-12);
David sends Hushai to Absalom to be a spy for David (2 Samuel 15:31-37);
The old prophet, in getting the man of God from Judah to come home with him (1 Kings 13:1-34);
Jeroboam, in sending his wife to gain a word from the Lord from Ahijah the priest (1 Kings 14:1-20);
Used by those who opposed the rebuilding of the temple by offering to help (Ezra 4:1-5);
Schemes by those who opposed Nehemiah to kill him or get him to compromise himself (Nehemiah 6:1-14);
King Herod, in trying to locate the Messiah so he could kill him (Matthew 2:1-12);
Ananias and Sapphira, in making it look like they were being more generous than they were (Acts 5:1-11);
Paul warns against false prophets (2 Corinthians 11:1-5);
Paul warns against false teachers (1 Timothy 1:3-11);
John warns against false teachers (2 John 7-11).

Depression

“My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me, ‘Where is your God?’”

Psalm 42:3

Richard Kirby, in “Depression: Agent of Hope,” begins with these words: “Mental depression, at first sight, is a gloomy subject. It sounds and feels like bad news; it seems to be the antithesis of the Christian message, and the kind of thing which is wholly diabolical in its origin. It is frightening, or at least sad, to experience; we long for it to go away. Good moods are, we readily believe, the wine of life; depressed moods are the dregs. People who have experiences of severe depression seem to be terrified of a recurrence; they will go a long way to avoid a depressed mood, and, if they find themselves in one, will move heaven and earth to get out of it.” God can use depression as an agent to help us grow in our relationship with him, but it is not something anyone looks forward to.

Saul, the first king of Israel, seems to have been depressed a great deal of the time. See, for instance, 1 Samuel 18:6—19:24, 28:1-25 and 31:1-6, for some illustrations of the fits of depression Saul had. At first, it was jealousy because of David’s popularity with the people. This, in turn, led to fear of David, and an increasing desire that David be killed. A tormented spirit came upon Saul from time to time. Ultimately, he consulted a medium even though he had earlier sought to have them banished from the land. In the end he committed suicide.

Saul’s life was a contrast between pride (1 Samuel 14:24) and a poor self-image (1 Samuel 10:17-22). In that sense it could be said that he had a built-in susceptibility to depression. But, there are a great many things that can lead to depression, some spiritual, some emotional and some physical. Moods of depression can come on us suddenly and unexpectedly. They are not signs of weakness or instability. Some of the greatest people in the world, including spiritual leaders such as Martin Luther, have suffered from depression. How do we deal with this? The first step is to admit it when we are depressed and begin trying to do something about it.

How to Cope with Depression

A. The Practical Approach:

- (1) When you are depressed, let others know how you are feeling; don’t hold it in.
- (2) By talking your problem over with a wise friend—especially one who has fought depression—you may be able to get to the bottom of the problem and find a solution.
- (3) Is your suffering a result of natural consequences over which you have no control? If so, recognize that we live in a world in which good and evil exist side by side. Try not to weigh yourself down with something that is not your fault and is outside of your control.
- (4) Perhaps there is a physical or mental health problem involved. Many people get depressed because something wrong is going on within their bodies that can be corrected by medication. Get professional help.

B. The Biblical Approach. In addition to the above, consider:

- (1) Is God punishing you for sin? If so, confess it.
- (2) Is this an attack of Satan? If so, resist the devil and call on God for help.
- (3) Is God preparing you for special service, that you might be more compassionate toward those who suffer? If so, resist self-pity. Ask God to lead you to others who are suffering as you are.
- (4) Are you being tested, as Job was? If so, pray for endurance, and trust God to work his purpose through you.
- (5) Is your suffering for some unknown reason? If so, don't let that quandary defeat you. Keep seeking God's word on the matter and wait patiently in the knowledge of God's love.
- (5) Remember that nothing can separate us from the love of God, and, in the end, God will wipe away all the tears from our eyes.

C. Helping Someone Who Is Depressed

A friend tells this story. A man fell into a hole and couldn't get out. A doctor came by and tossed a prescription into the hole, but that didn't help. A clergyperson came by and tossed a prayer into the hole, but that didn't help either. Then a man came by who climbed down into the hole with him and said, "I've been in this hole before and know how to get out." When a friend or loved one is in deep depression, sometimes the only thing we can do is to give them the gift of our presence. Even if we've never been in that particular hole ourselves and therefore don't know how to get out, just being there for the other person can be a huge help to one who is depressed.

Suggested Scriptural References/Depression

The Israelites were depressed because of their labor and bondage being made more cruel by Pharaoh (Exodus 5:1—6:9);

Moses in desperation over the attitude of the Israelites (Exodus 17:1-4);

Hannah's depression over being childless (1 Samuel 1:1-8);

Elijah's depression resulting from fatigue and discouragement (1 Kings 19:1-9);

The Israelites became depressed about the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem because of threats and taunting by their enemies, but this is overcome under Nehemiah's leadership and assurance that the Lord would give them the needed strength to persevere (Nehemiah 4:1-18);

Job is depressed during much of the book; these are exemplary chapters (Job 3, 6, 7);

The psalmist is discouraged, apparently because of being in exile (Psalm 42);

Jonah, in the belly of the great fish (Jonah 2:2-10).

Disappointment and Discouragement

“[T]here was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me.”

2 Corinthians 12:7

Sometimes it's just when things seem to be going well that something comes along to disappoint or discourage us. Our mood becomes cloudy and we feel sorry for ourselves. In such instances, we may be disappointed in ourselves because our problem is the result of something we are guilty of doing or not doing. At other times we may blame someone else for the unhappiness we are experiencing. If we are honest with ourselves, often our disappointment is with God for allowing something to happen that we can't blame on ourselves or someone else. There is a separate section in this book on "Disappointment with God" that may supplement our need for help in dealing with disappointment and the discouragement that often results from it.

Disappointment and discouragement were certainly experienced by people in the Bible. Jesus was often disappointed with his disciples who seemed to have little faith (Matthew 8:26) and less understanding (Matthew 16:8, 9a). Paul was so disappointed in John Mark that it led to Barnabas no longer being his partner in mission (Acts 15:36-39).

There is no way to avoid disappointment; unexpected, unpleasant things are simply a part of life. And, often these will lead to discouragement. The key is how we, as Christians, deal with these situations and circumstances.

Some Encouraging Words

Don't be discouraged when someone rejects you because of your faith. In doing God's will, you are always doing the best thing. Exodus 5:1-3

Moses faced one conflict after another, from Pharaoh and from his own people, but he continued to have faith in God. Hold onto your faith in times of disappointment. Exodus 12:31-32)

Pray when you are disappointed or feel discouraged. Remember what prayer did for Hannah. 1 Samuel 1:10-20

Don't let others discourage you. Tell God how you feel and remember how he has encouraged you and strengthened you in the past. Nehemiah 4:1-5

Despite being under arrest and in chains, Paul was able to give encouragement and courage to others. Philippians 1:12-14

It is disheartening not to be listened to when you are trying to do what you believe God has called you to do, but God values what you are doing and that is what is important. Ezekiel 20:48-49

When we face daunting tasks and our resources are few, God through his Holy Spirit will sustain us and we can do things we could never do in our own strength. Zechariah 4:6

If you are serving the Lord, nothing you do is ever wasted. 1 Corinthians 15:58

“What are we to do when our disappointments turn to discouragement and our discouragement turns to despair? The *world* encourages us to ‘keep a stiff upper lip,’ to fight harder, to utilize our inner strength. The *Word* reminds us of our need to rely on God alone. He is the ultimate source of wisdom, strength, and deliverance. Until we quit trusting in ourselves and lean on God, we will never know how dependable and infinite his resources are. Think of a problem that is nagging your family. What human solutions have failed to fix it? Ask God for the wisdom to see the situation from his perspective and for the courage to depend on him.” (*Parents Resource Bible*) 2 Corinthians 1:8-10

“Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.” Luke 18:1ff

“[B]ut we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.” Romans 5:3-5

And remember one piece of practical advice: share your disappointment with a loved one who has faced similar disappointments. The old saying is that a problem shared is a problem halved; but sometimes it is a problem solved.

Suggested Scriptural References: Disappointment and Discouragement

The Israelites became discouraged as they traveled in the wilderness (Numbers 21:4-5).

Moses told the Israelites not to be discouraged or afraid to take the land God had given them (Deuteronomy 1:21, 29).

God will not be discouraged until he has established justice on the earth (Isaiah 42:4).

Jesus was disappointed in the lack of faith on the part of his followers (Matthew 6:30; 14:31).

Jesus grieves over Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37).

Fathers are not to embitter their children or they will become discouraged (Colossians 3:21).

James encourages the persecuted, promising God’s mercy and compassion (James 5:11).

Disappointment with God

“Why, O Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?” Psalm 10:1

Many of us, if we are honest with ourselves, have to admit that, from time to time, we become disappointed with God.

Perhaps we are experiencing this at the present time. We have prayed about our concerns and nothing seems to have happened. We worship God in church regularly, read our Bible, try to live by Christian principles, but we’ve lost our job or our spouse, contracted a dreaded disease or otherwise seen our world fall apart around us. We’ve decided, at least to some extent, that God is not to be trusted, much less obeyed and followed in every aspect of our lives.

As Christians, we know that we are to love God with all our heart, mind and soul, but how do we do that when we are disappointed with God?

In the Bible, there were believers who were clearly disappointed with God, though they did not ultimately give up on him. Abram (later called Abraham) was disappointed with God when Sarai (Sarah) did not become pregnant although God had promised them a son (Genesis 16:1-3). Moses seems to have been disappointed with God more than once, but certainly when, after doing what God told him to do to force Pharaoh to free the Israelites, things got worse instead of better (Exodus 5:22-23). Interestingly, there are other outstanding examples in the Bible of people who might have been disappointed with God, but didn’t seem to be: such as Joseph of the Old Testament who suffered several misfortunes even when he was obeying God; and David, whose son by Bathsheba was born dead despite his prayers and fasting.

How to Deal with Disappointment with God

A. The Practical Approach:

- (1) Get to the heart of the issue. What, specifically, was I expecting to happen that didn’t? What is going on in my world that leads me to believe that God doesn’t care? What pain am I suffering that God hasn’t healed? Whatever it is that has caused us to be disappointed with God, we shouldn’t let it float around as a vague notion. What is it that really disappoints us with God right now?
- (2) Approach the solution to our problem the way Jesus would have done. Jesus, above all else, wanted to be in God’s will. So, we need to check our expectations and examine our motives. In other words, we need to be sure that we are not really disappointed with ourselves or someone other than God. We shouldn’t blame God for our own mistakes or those of others.
- (3) Be honest with God in prayer and see what happens.

B. A Biblical Approach: In addition to the above, here are a few things to consider:

- (1) The book of Job is considered to be the Bible’s most poignant look at suffering, and few would have been surprised if Job had given up on God after all of the

disasters he faced. However, he did not. He was tested, and he found that he could not fathom God's ways. Yet, in the end, he reaffirmed his faith in God, and God blessed him. When we believe we are suffering even a portion of what Job suffered, he can be an inspiration to us.

- (2) We yearn to sense God's presence and to believe that he answers our prayers. Remember, however, that it was during the time when God was "closest" to the people of Israel (in the wilderness when there as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, etc.) that they continually fell away from him. And, as soon as Jesus faced crucifixion and death, his followers ran and hid. God wants us, instead, to show our faith in times of uncertainty, testing and doubt. He wants us to be in his will and to pray in the name of Jesus.
- (3) In his book *Disappointment with God*, Philip Yancey tells the story of Douglas who had experienced a series of Job-like disasters. Yancey wondered how Douglas was able to remain faithful in such circumstances. Douglas replied, "I have learned to see beyond the physical reality in this world to the spiritual reality. We tend to think, 'Life should be fair because God is fair.' But God is not life. And if I confuse God with the physical reality of life—by expecting constant good health, for example—then I set myself up for a crashing disappointment." There is wisdom in this teaching, but one could question Douglas' assumption that God is fair. The laborers in the vineyard (in Jesus' parable, Matthew 20:1-16) certainly wouldn't have thought so. In fact, God does what he wants to do to accomplish his greater purposes. That is something else we should keep in mind when we are questioning his treatment of us.
- (4) In response to the question, "Where is God when it hurts?" Dr. Paul Brand (the man who made great medical breakthroughs in treating and healing leprosy), replied, "He is in *you*, the one hurting, not in *it*, the thing that hurts [you]."
- (5) Romans 8:28 represents truth even if what is happening to us at a particular time doesn't seem like it.

Suggested Scriptural References/Disappointment with God

The book of Job;

Elijah, following the miraculous demonstration of God's power to Ahab (1 Kings 19:1-10);

David, in his song of lament (Psalm 22);

Jeremiah, in wondering why the wicked prosper (Jeremiah 12:1-4);

Jesus, on the cross, quoting Psalm 22 (Matthew 27:46).

Discernment (Contrasted with Judgmentalism)

“When Jesus saw Nathaniel approaching him, he said of him, ‘Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false.’” John 1:47

As Christians, we are not to judge others (Matthew 7:1-2). But, as Mark Pearson points out in “May Christians Judge?” there are times when we simply have to do that. “We certainly wouldn’t leave our children with just any babysitter. We would find out whether he or she were competent, reliable and mature. We wouldn’t blindly accept any teaching that comes along but would test it to see if it is from God (1 John 4:1).” Pearson’s point is that we have to use discernment in making intelligent and proper choices in life. And discernment is a process that involves using our judgment.

In 1 Kings 3:16-28, Solomon discerns who is the real mother of a child claimed by two women. He does so by suggesting that the child be cut in half, with each mother getting half of the child. The woman who reacts in horror to this possibility Solomon immediately judges to be the real mother. This story is told as an illustration of the wisdom God had given Solomon in response to his prayer for wisdom (3:1-15).

Wisdom leads to discernment whereas prejudice leads to the kind of judgment of which Jesus disapproved. Prejudice is rooted in sin; wisdom comes from God. But, how do we know the difference?

Discerning Versus Judging

Using Mark Pearson’s guidelines, here are some ways of distinguishing between discernment and the sort of judging Jesus condemned:

- (1) Discernment withholds forming an opinion until it checks things for accuracy, and does it first-hand with the person involved. Judgment forms opinions on first impressions, hearsay or secondary evidence.
- (2) Discernment examines self first before presuming to go to others. Judgment condemns others without getting oneself in order.
- (3) Discernment has as its purpose the restoration, improvement or well-being of others. Judgment has as its own purpose the putting down, discouraging or embarrassing of others.
- (4) Discernment condemns the action but truly loves the person. Judgment condemns the person involved.
- (5) Discernment deals with the matter privately; it goes to the person directly and involves no one else. Judgment deals with matters publicly; it gossips and seeks to make others judge the person as well.
- (6) Discernment is needful; it is involved only when it has the right to be and when the Lord directs it. Judgment is nosy; it butts in where it has no business being, and speaks when the Lord hasn’t told it to.

Note: See also the section on Judgmental, Being.

Suggested Scriptural References/Discernment

Elisha discerns dishonesty on the part of his servant Gehazi, who sought and accepted a gift from the healed Naaman after Elisha had refused a gift (2 Kings 5:16-27);
Jesus discerned in Nathanael an Israelite in whom there was no guile (John 1:43-51);
Jesus discerned that Peter was speaking by the Holy Spirit in recognizing him as Messiah, but by the wrong spirit in denying Jesus' predictions about his death (Matthew 16:13-23);
Jesus discerns in Zacchaeus one ready to turn his life around (Luke 19:1-10);
Peter discerns Ananias and Sapphira's deceit (Acts 5:1-11);
Paul discerns that Elymas, the sorcerer, is full of all kinds of deceit and trickery (Acts 13:4-12);
The slave girl, who had an evil spirit of divination, discerned the Holy Spirit in Paul and his associates (Acts 16:16-18);
Paul's teaching that, without God's Spirit, we cannot discern the things of God (1 Corinthians 2:6-16).

Discipleship

“To the Jews who had believed in him, Jesus said, ‘If you truly hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.’” John 8:31

According to the *New Believer’s Bible*, “Many people do not realize that Jesus has disciples in this day and age. While every disciple is a believer, not every believer is a disciple. A disciple is someone who has made a wholehearted commitment to follow Jesus as Savior and Lord. In one sense, you might call discipleship ‘radical Christian living.’ When you truly make a commitment to be Christ’s disciple, you will be living the Christian life as it was meant to be lived. Anything short of discipleship is settling for less than God desires.”

In Luke 14:25-35 Jesus teaches about discipleship. There are several aspects of it that he makes very plain. The first is that Jesus is to have priority (over family, for instance) in our lives. The second is that we are to bear whatever burdens of discipleship might be required of us (cross) in following Jesus. The third is that we are to count the cost of following him before we begin the journey so we won’t be easily discouraged and turn back to our old way of life. The fourth is that we are to be salt to the world, flavoring others with God’s love rather than being blended into the mix of worldliness about us. Yes, but how do we do that?

Understanding the Nature of Discipleship

In *The Workbook on Abiding in Christ*, Maxie Dunnam says this: “We talk and act as though ‘discipleship’ is a special vocation to which some Christians are called, while the masses may live as Christians without this ‘deeper level’ of commitment and devotion.” He goes on to say, “The problem comes when we act as though there is a difference between being a Christian and being a disciple. That suggests that you can be a Christian without having any intention of following Christ as a disciple. This notion has too often pervaded our understanding of church membership; thus churches are filled with ‘undisciplined disciples.’ I believe with Dallas Willard...that most problems in contemporary churches can be explained by the fact that members have not yet decided to follow Christ. The call of Christ is to follow. Following him is not optional for Christians.”

How to Be a Disciple

Here are some other examples of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ:

- (1) We set aside worldly ambitions in favor of what God wants us to do (Luke 9:23-25),
- (2) We proclaim boldly the Good News (Luke 9:26),
- (3) We remain in a close relationship with Christ. He is the source of our strength (John 15:1-17). We do this through regular worship of God within our community of faith, Bible study, prayer, fellowship with other Christians, and service in Jesus’ name.
- (4) We pattern our lives after Jesus; he is the ultimate example of how to live (1 John 2:3-6).

Suggested Scriptural References/Discipleship

The cost of following Jesus (Matthew 8:18-22, 24:1-25; Luke 9:51-62);
Many disciples desert Jesus (John 6:41-71);
Jesus warns of the world's hatred (John 15:18—16:4);
Peter and John before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:1-22);
Stephen is martyred (Acts 6:8—7:60);
Saul (Paul) finds that the Jews are conspiring to kill him (Acts 9:19b-25);
James is killed and Peter is imprisoned by Herod (Acts 12:1-5);
Jews oppose Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:44—14:7, 19-20);
Many hardships for the kingdom of God (Acts 14:21-25);
Paul and Silas are imprisoned (Acts 16:16-40);
Paul's arrest and trials (Acts 21:20—28:31);
Teaching on submission to authorities (Romans 13:1-7);
The God of all comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3-11);
Paul's hardships (2 Corinthians 6:3-13, 11:16—12:10);
Put aside desire for wealth (1 Timothy 6:3-10, 17-19);
Calls for perseverance (Hebrews 10:19-39);
God disciplines his children (Hebrews 12:1-13);
Trials and tribulations will come our way (James 1:2-18);
Patience in suffering (James 5:7-12);
Strangers in the world (1 Peter 2:11-25);
There will be suffering (1 Peter 4:12—5:11);
Call to persevere (Jude 17-23);
The rewards of discipleship (Revelation 21:3,4).

Disloyalty

“And so the conspiracy [against his father David] gained strength, and Absalom’s following kept on increasing.” 2 Samuel 15:12b

Disloyalty is the ultimate insult. When the people we most count on to support us turn their backs on us, it is one of the most devastating experiences we can have in life, and is one perhaps common to us all. In an age in which the watchword is “relativism,” and in which there are few standards or deep convictions, disloyalty can become epidemic. If there is little to stand for, it is easy to walk away from those who do have standards and convictions and leave them standing alone. Yet, as Christians, disloyalty is not a luxury we can afford.

Rebekah was certainly disloyal to her husband Isaac in getting Jacob blessed instead of Esau (Genesis 27:6-17). God had already told Rebekah that her second son (Jacob) would be the family leader (25:23), but she wanted be sure that he received Isaac’s blessing even though it was Esau (as firstborn) who was entitled to it. Aiding Jacob in robbing Esau of the blessing dishonored her husband and was an act of extreme disloyalty to him.

People are seldom disloyal without a reason. Sometimes the reason is pure selfishness, such as wanting to get our own way, as was the case with Rebekah. Sometimes we are disloyal because of jealousy; we think we can do a better job than the person over us at work, so we sabotage that person’s efforts. Disloyalty can result from fear as well; we abandon our friend who has taken an unpopular stand because we find it uncomfortable to be identified with him or her. Regardless of why we are disloyal, it is almost always wrong; and, no matter how our friend may rationalize disloyalty to us, it is still very painful. How can we cope with disloyalty?

Dealing with Disloyalty

Three steps in dealing with the problem of disloyalty are:

- (1) Earn loyalty. Trust is built up over a period of time, a time during which we prove we are trustworthy. The same is true of loyalty. We gain loyalty by showing that we are loyal both to those over us and those around us.
- (2) Forgive disloyalty. When it happens we Christians have no choice but forgiveness, because that is commanded by the Lord. If we refuse to forgive, the problem will fester and destroy our effectiveness.
- (3) Be forewarned. As is discussed under the section on Deception, although we forgive the person or persons disloyal to us, we trust that person or persons later at our own risk.

Suggested Scriptural References/Disloyalty

Abram’s disloyalty to his wife Sarai when, in Egypt, he passed her off for his sister (Genesis 12:10-20);

The disloyalty of the brothers of Joseph toward him and his father Jacob by selling him as a slave (Genesis 37:12-36);

Potiphar’s wife’s disloyalty to him by trying to seduce Joseph (Genesis 39:1-20);

The disloyalty of David and Bathsheba toward Uriah (2 Samuel 11:1-27);

Amnon’s disloyalty to his half-sister Tamar by raping her (2 Samuel 13:1-22);

Absalom's disloyalty to his father David by conspiring against him (2 Samuel 15:1-12);
In Jesus' parable, the disloyalty of the man who received one talent and buried it instead of investing it on behalf of his master (Matthew 25:14-30);
The betrayal of Jesus by Judas and the desertion of the other disciples (Matthew 26:47-56);
Peter's denial of Jesus. (Matthew 26:69-75).

Disrespect for God

“Eli’s sons were wicked men; they had no regard for the Lord.” 1 Samuel 2:12

There are, perhaps, two major problems involving disrespect for God in our day: Christians who are too casual in their relationship with God; and others who either ignore God or call upon him only in desperation or cursing. Because we cannot see God, we Christians can become rather careless in the way we honor him and hold him in awe. That was certainly part of the reason for the disrespect the Israelites showed in many of the passages below. They had a better excuse than we do because we live on the other side of the Incarnation and we have the Holy Spirit living within us. Perhaps it is because of our failure to honor God properly that others disrespect him.

Even for those of us who call ourselves Christians, we disrespect God by taking things into our own hands. Genesis 16:1-3 tells about Abram and Sarai deciding to fulfill God’s promise of offspring by arranging for Abram to have sexual relations with Hagar. God had promised a son to Abram and Sarai in their old age; but, when time passed and it had not happened, Sarai worked out a solution that was not uncommon in her day. Yet, it was clearly contrary to God’s will and showed lack of trust in, and therefore disrespect for, God.

We seldom get messages from God as clearly as the one Abram and Sarai had received, but we have Scripture to guide us in making decisions. Yet, we too sometimes take actions that are clearly contrary to Scripture and, therefore, contrary to the will of God. When we do, we are just as guilty of disrespect for God as Abram and Sarai were. Yes, but how do we combat lack of respect for God?

Dealing with Disrespect for God.

In the case of our own tendencies to disrespect God, see the sections on Obedience and God’s Will for guidance.

As to those showing disrespect for God with whom we come into contact, we should pray that the Lord will guide us in what to do and say. The possibilities are too numerous to try to provide guidelines. But, the following example should be helpful. A friend once faced a situation we all face from time to time: being in the presence of a person who takes the Lord’s name in vain. He took as much of it as he could stand and then began to pray to the Holy Spirit for guidance about what to do. As a result, he was inspired to say to the man, “You certainly have a God-consciousness in your life.” Immediately the man was convicted of his sin. He admitted that he was a churchgoer and yet he had fallen into the habit of saying “goddamn” from time to time. When no one corrected him, he began to do it so much that it became a part of his regular vocabulary. He thanked our friend for pointing the matter out to him, and promised to quit.

Suggested Scriptural References/Disrespect for God

Cain’s failure to bring first fruits of the soil, and the killing of his brother Abel (Genesis 4:1-15);
The Israelites, in making and worshiping the golden calf (Exodus 32:1-35);
A man who blasphemed God is stoned (Leviticus 24:10-16, 23);
Micah and his mother, in making an idol, and Micah in “hiring” himself a priest (Judges 17:1-13);

The Danites, in using Micah's priest and household gods to overtake the land of Laish (Judges 18:1-31);

Eli's sons, who were priests, used their position for evil purposes (1 Samuel 2:12-17, 22-25);

Uzzah, in touching the ark of the covenant (2 Samuel 6:1-11);

Adonijah, in putting himself forth as king rather than waiting for God's choice (1 Kings 1:1-27);

God warns Solomon what will happen if he and his sons turn away from the commandments (1 Kings 9:6-9);

The people, by taking care of themselves rather than rebuilding the temple (Haggai 1:1-10);

Herod, in allowing himself to be thought of as a god (Acts 12:19b-24);

Jews who invoked Jesus' name in driving out evil spirits (Acts 19:13-20).

Dreams and Visions

“In the last days, God says, ‘I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.’” Acts 2:17

According to *The New Bible Dictionary*, “Dreams recorded in Scripture are of two kinds. Firstly, there are those consisting of the ordinary dream phenomena in which the sleeper ‘sees’ a connected series of images which correspond to events in everyday life (Genesis 40:9-17, 41:1-7). Secondly, there are dreams which communicate to the sleeper a message from God (Genesis 20:3-7; 1 Kings 3:5-15; Matthew 1:20-24; Acts 18:9f).” And, in Scripture, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between dreams and visions.

In Genesis 28:10-22, Jacob, escaping Esau, has a dream in which he sees a ladder on which angels are ascending and descending. God spoke to Jacob through the dream, offering to Jacob the same covenant he had established with Abraham and Isaac. Jacob, in gratitude to God, established a memorial and made a pledge to God.

This is one of many dreams and visionary experiences in Scripture. It is not unreasonable to assume that each of the people whose dreams are told about in the Bible had a multitude of other dreams that are not recorded. Each person reading this book has probably had many dreams but perhaps only one or two that had “life changing” qualities. Those are the dreams and visions that confirm God’s presence in our lives, warn us of bad habits we may be forming, or show us a particular direction he would like for us to go. Those dreams are not so different from the ones in Scripture. However, our other, more ordinary, dreams can also be a way in which God is speaking to us. But, how do we know?

How to Reflect on Our Dreams

Christians in our day undoubtedly have dreams in which God speaks directly to them and tells them what to do. More often, however, God speaks to us through our subconscious in our dreams. There have been a number of books by Christians on how to interpret dreams, writers such as Herman Riffel, John A. Sanford and Morton Kelsey. Riffel lists these as a summary of how to proceed in interpreting your dreams:

- (1) Make the basic decision that you want and need God’s help and direction in your life.
- (2) Keep a notepad beside your bed and write down what you can remember of your dream as soon as you awake.
- (3) Dreams speak to us symbolically, and you need to find associations for each symbol in your dream.
- (4) Look at the setting of the dream, including what you were involved in and thinking about when you had the dream.
- (5) Most dreams are subjective; the experts say that 95 percent of all dreams speak to the dreamers about themselves, even though the dream may be about someone else.
- (6) Don’t strain to get the message of your dream.

- (7) Test your interpretation in the following ways: (a) go directly to God in prayer for confirmation, (b) check it against Scripture, (c) seek confirmation from trusted friends, and (d) heed the feeling you have in your own spirit about the interpretation.
- (8) Take the action called for in the dream.

Suggested Scriptural References/Dreams

Jacob recounts the dream in which God told him to return to his homeland (Genesis 31:10-13);

Jacob wrestles with God (Genesis 32:22-32);

The first of Joseph's dreams, in which his brothers bow down to him (Genesis 37:1-11);

Joseph correctly interprets the dreams of two of Pharaoh's officials (Genesis 40:1-23);

Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dream (Genesis 41:1-40);

A Midianite has a dream that leads him to believe that Gideon would defeat them (Judges 7:1-25);

The Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream (1 Kings 3:5-15);

Nebuchadnezzar's dreams (Daniel 2:1-49; 4:1—5:31);

Daniel's dreams and visions (Daniel 7:1-28; 8:1-27; 9:20-27; 10:1—12:13);

Amos' visions (Amos 7:1—8:14);

Zechariah's visions (Zechariah 1:7—6:8);

Angel appears to Joseph in a dream (Matthew 1:18-25);

Magi are warned in a dream (Matthew 2:1-12);

Joseph warned to flee to Egypt (Matthew 2:13-23);

Peter on the rooftop (Acts 10:9-23);

Paul's vision of the "Man of Macedonia" (Acts 16:6-10);

The Lord speaks to Paul in a vision (Acts 18:9-10);

The major portion of the book of Revelation is the result of visions received by the writer.

Drunkenness

“Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness.”

Romans 13:13

Few problems have gained as much attention in recent years as alcoholism. As alcoholism has become an increasing tragedy in the lives of people, there has been an increase in counseling, recovery centers, AA meetings, and knowledge of the disease.

In the not-too-distant past, motion pictures and other forms of entertainment made a joke of alcoholism, and families of alcoholics did everything in their power to ignore or disguise the problem. We can despair that so many people continue to become victims of the disease, yet we can also rejoice that it is no longer taken lightly and that there are means of healing.

An early example of drunkenness in the Bible appears at Genesis 9:20-29. Noah, after the Great Flood, became a farmer, grew grapes, made wine and got drunk. (One of the wonderful things about the Bible is that it does not hide the sinfulness of some of its most outstanding characters). Noah had been the only righteous man living before the flood, and here he proves himself susceptible to the same temptations that face all of us.

This story is helpful because it shows that, spiritually speaking, no matter how high we climb, it is still easy to fall. Some of the most shocking plunges into sin have occurred to people who were so highly respected as Christian leaders that they began to “believe their own press” and let pride lead them into iniquity. We must always be on guard. The good news is that, if we are repentant, God will forgive us and we can make a fresh start. Yes, but what can we do to deal with alcoholism in our time?

How to Deal with Alcoholism

The most successful remedy for alcoholism has proved to be living the “12 Steps” of Alcoholics Anonymous, which are clearly based on Christian principles:

- (1) We admitted that we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
- (2) Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
- (3) Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
- (4) Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
- (5) Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
- (6) Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
- (7) Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
- (8) Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
- (9) Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

- (10) Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
- (11) Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
- (12) Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Suggested Scriptural References/Drunkenness

How Lot's daughters became pregnant by him (Genesis 19:30-38);

Eli thought Hannah to be drunk because of her weeping and prayer (1 Samuel 1:1-20);

The drunkenness of Nabal (1 Samuel 25:36-38);

Jesus accused of (Matthew 11:16-19);

Pentecost looked like to outsiders (Acts 2:1-13).

Environment

“God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.” Genesis 1:31

Recycling, air and water pollution, disposing of chemical and nuclear waste and many related subjects are very much on the minds of people today. As we human beings have begun to wonder if we are an “endangered species,” many have gotten serious about our need to protect the environment. When God created us, he gave us dominion over the world, with the attendant responsibilities. We became stewards of the earth and all that inhabits it. Christians, as God’s people in the world today, therefore have a special responsibility to protect and preserve the environment.

Genesis 1:26-31 is the place in the Bible where mankind is created and given dominion over the earth. The *New Living Translation* says that people were to “be masters over all life” (v.26). Even though God remains the ultimate authority, our responsibility as human beings, functioning under the authority he has delegated to us, is rather awesome when fully comprehended. If we remain insensitive to our environmental duties, we are failing to serve God in the manner he has a right to expect of us. How can we become more sensitive to and involved in saving our environment?

Solutions to Pollutions

Here is a checklist for your possible involvement in six kinds of “pollution” Christians may be concerned with at the (a) national, (b) state, (c) local and (d) personal levels. Find your place in these areas of concern and get involved.

- (1) Air pollution: (a) acid rain, danger to the ozone and “the greenhouse effect,” (b) industrial smog, (c) automobile emission smog, and (d) cigarette smoking in the home and workplace.
- (2) Water pollution: (a) pollution of our beaches, (b) pollution of our rivers and streams, (c) the quality of our drinking water, and (d) water conservation in the home and workplace.
- (3) Visual pollution: (a) strip mining and landfills without properly reclaiming the land, (b) pornography, (c) trash and graffiti in public places, and (d) maintaining home and property in a visually attractive way.
- (4) Noise pollution: (a) unsolicited commercial and fund-raising phone calls, (b) cursing and other filthy talk on television and in public places, (c) blaring radios and recording devices in public places, and (d) your own television, radio and dog.
- (5) Mind pollution: (a) mindless television, (b) materialistic value system, (c) degeneration of school systems, and (d) the need for Bible study.
- (6) Spirit pollution: (a) moral decay, (b) heresy, secularism, occult influences, and satanic cults, (c) drugs, and (d) need for regular prayer and worship.

Suggested Scriptural References/Pollution

God creates the heaven and the earth, and they are good (Genesis 1:1-25);

Because of disobedience, mankind will, through painful toil, eat from the land, which will also produce thorns and thistles (Genesis 3:1-24);
God gives instructions concerning the care of the land and those who work it (Exodus 23:10-12);
God speaks to Job of creation (Job 38:1-41);
God, the mighty Creator, speaks of his greatest creation: mankind, and the authority humans have over creation (Psalm 8);
The heavens declare God's glory and the skies proclaim his work (Psalm 19:1-6);
A hymn of praise for God's creation (Psalm 104);
All creation praises and worships the Lord (Psalm 148);
What God did, through Jesus, because of his love for his creation (John 3:16-21);
Paul's teaching that God's truth is revealed in the created order, and the consequences of ignoring that truth (Romans 1:18-32);
Creation eagerly awaits liberation from the bondage to decay (Romans 8:18-25).

Evangelism

“[You] will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth.” Acts 1:8b

The final words of the Gospel according to Matthew represent the “marching orders” for all Christians, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20). This is our call to evangelism, and it is a call to all Christians. God will use us in a great variety of ways to do his work of evangelism, but it is a ministry in which we all have our part.

Psalms 67:2 says, “May your name be known throughout the earth, your saving power among people everywhere” (NLT). That can only happen if you and I make it known. But how do we do it?

A clergy friend says this: “The turning of a human heart and mind toward God is the work of the Holy Spirit. The confession of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord only comes by the Spirit planting that truth in our hearts by faith. It is a gift. We certainly have a responsibility to bear witness to the Truth in word and deed but, ultimately, it’s up to God to change someone’s heart. In a ‘results’ and ‘performance’ oriented culture, we can’t remind people of that reality too many times.

“The Holy Spirit is also the one who empowers and equips us to walk worthily of the calling to which we have been called...conforming us in thought, word and deed into ‘little Christs’ (Christians). It is the attraction of Christ that draws people, not we ourselves. ‘Let your light so shine before others that they will see your good works and glorify God who is in heaven’ (Matthew 5:16). We’re not trying to get the attention of our neighbors for our sake, but for the sake of Christ.”

With that in mind, let’s look at:

A Way to Evangelize Your Neighborhood

In the spirit of James 5:13-20, the steps are as follows:

- (1) Bless those who live in your neighborhood. Pray for them, especially praying for those who are not active Christians. Pray God’s blessing on them regularly.
- (2) Establish a relationship with your neighbors so that, when they need you, they will call upon you for help and prayer.
- (3) Be the instrument through whom God works a miracle in the life of your neighborhood. As your neighbors come to understand what Jesus means in your life, and know that you will pray for them and that they can come to you with their needs and problems, they will see God work through you in their lives. When the miracle happens, they will know that it was because of your prayers.

- (4) Tell them about Jesus. As my friend quoted above notes, this is “where the rubber meets the road,” and where many people fail. You should pray before meeting with your neighbor that God, having gone before you to prepare the way, will fill your heart with his love for your neighbor’s redemption, your mind with the very thoughts of Christ, and your mouth with words that will be effective.

See also **Good News**

Suggested Scriptural References/Evangelism

Moses told his father-in-law Jethro all that God had done for the Israelites in freeing them from Pharaoh and caring for them in the desert, and Jethro thereby believed in the one true God (Exodus 18:1-12);

What to say when asked the reason for the Lord’s commandments (Deuteronomy 6:20-25);

Elisha’s healing of Naaman causes Naaman to want to worship God (2 Kings 2:1-17);

God’s creation and his word reveal his greatness (Psalm 19);

How to sing the praise of God (Psalm 96);

One day, everyone will worship God (Psalm 145);

Jonah fulfills his mission (Jonah 3:1-10);

Jesus tells disciples he will make them fishers of men (Matthew 4:18-22);

Jesus preaches the good news of the kingdom (Matthew 4:23-25);

Jesus asks prayers for workers (Matthew 9:35-38);

Jesus sends out the twelve to preach (Matthew 10:1-16);

The parable of the four soils (Matthew 13:1-23);

Jesus’ illustration about the lost sheep (Matthew 18:10-14);

The parable of the loaned money (Matthew 25:14-30);

The Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20);

Jesus sends out 72 on mission (Luke 10:1-24);

How Jesus dealt with Zaccheus as an example (Luke 19:1-9);

Jesus, on the road to Emmaus, as a model for (Luke 24:13-35);

Disciples are Jesus’ witnesses to the world (Luke 24:44-49);

Jesus and Nicodemus as an example (John 3:1-21);

Jesus and the woman at the well as an example (John 4:1-26, 39-42);

Peter’s sermon (Acts 2:14-41);

Peter heals and speaks (Acts 3:1-26);

Philip and the Ethiopian (Acts 8:26-40);

God makes it clear that the gospel is for all people (Acts 10:1—11:18);

Paul’s missionary journeys and his trip to Rome (Acts 13:1—14:28; 15:36—18:22; 18:23—21:16; 21:17—28:31);

Thessalonians as a witness and model (1 Thessalonians 1:2-10);

Timothy is encouraged by Paul to witness boldly (2 Timothy 1:3-12);

Peter teaches that we should always be prepared (1 Peter 3:8-16).

Evil (Wickedness)

“*[But] deliver us from evil.*” Matthew 6:13 (KJV)

According to *The New Bible Dictionary*, evil is the opposite of good. “Evil has a broader meaning than sin. The Hebrew word comes from a root meaning ‘to spoil,’ ‘to break in pieces,’ being broken and so made worthless. It is essentially what is unpleasant, disagreeable, offensive. The word binds together the evil deed and its consequences.” In this Scripture study we go a step or two beyond “unpleasant” and “disagreeable,” to situations regarded as “great evil,” “wickedness,” and things that were an “abomination” to God.

Genesis 18:16—19:29 tells about Sodom and Gomorrah. In verse 18:20, the Lord says to Abraham that the people of those cities are extremely evil, and that everything they do is wicked. God wanted to give the people a last chance to repent (v.21), and we have that wonderful portion of Scripture in which Abraham bargains with God to spare Sodom if just a few righteous people can be found (vv. 22-33). But, as the angels of the Lord came to assess the situation, the men of Sodom gathered outside Lot’s door demanding to have sex with them! Big mistake.

Wickedness is not to be associated solely with sexual sins, however. We can come under the influence of evil and display wickedness in our own lives by gossip, greed, pride, jealousy, mean-spiritedness and in a multitude of other ways. Evil is all around us, and we can too easily fall prey of it. What can we do?

Some Guidelines for Avoiding Evil

- (1) Always do the right/righteous thing. Righteousness is being in a right relationship with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, so that we know the right thing from the wrong thing.
- (2) Know Scripture in its fullness, not just a few verses or stories. To understand the Bible as God would have us understand it, we need a familiarity with the Bible as a whole. And, as Jesus has told us (John 14:26 and 16:13), we are to look to the Holy Spirit who will guide us in understanding what we read.
- (3) To the extent possible, avoid getting into situations that we know lead us into temptation.
- (4) Don’t even put a toe in the door of the occult (fortune telling, séances, horoscopes, New Age, etc.).
- (5) Never compromise God’s will or God’s word.
- (6) Deal with any pride that surfaces in our lives; pride is Satan’s gateway into our soul.
- (7) When we fail, repent and do better the next time.

Suggested Scriptural References/Evil

The situation leading to the Great Flood (Genesis 6:5-8);

Once settled in the promised land, following the death of Joshua, the Israelites continually did evil in the eyes of the Lord (Judges 3:7-11,12; 4:1; 6:1; etc);
Eli's sons (1 Samuel 2:12-17, 22-25);
Jeroboam, in making for himself other gods than Yahweh (1 Kings 14:1-20);
Rehoboam, in allowing pagan, ungodly practices while king of Judah (1 Kings 14:21-31);
Over and over again, with few exceptions, the kings of Israel and Judah (1 Kings 12:1—16:34);
Manasseh did great evil, offsetting what his father Hezekiah had accomplished (2 Kings 21:1-18);

Following the death of Jehoiada, Joash, king of Judah, allowed allegiance to God to deteriorate and had the prophet Zechariah killed (2 Chronicles 24:17-27);
Asks God to deal with the wicked (Psalm 28);
Contrasts the evil person with the goodness of God (Psalm 36);
God will deal with the evildoer (Psalm 52);
The responsibility to warn the wicked (Ezekiel 3:16-21);
Love of money is the root of all evil (1 Timothy 6:3-10);
Paul predicts wickedness to come (2 Timothy 3:1-17);

Evil Spirit

“When an evil spirit comes out of a man....” Matthew 12:43

The terms “evil spirit” and “unclean spirit” appear mostly in the New Testament. It can be assumed that such spirits existed prior to Christ entering the world, but his bringing in the Kingdom of God brought evil spirits to the fore. These spirits seem to have recognized Jesus as the Messiah even before humans did, and this brought dread upon them (Mark 1:24). These spirits usually caused physical disability in Scripture, and those so afflicted were not considered evil themselves (in Mark 1:23, the person was in the synagogue). However, the evil spirit is never to be considered benign, but is to be resisted and defeated. These spirits are part of Satan’s forces and are enemies of God and people.

Jesus does a teaching about evil spirits in Matthew 12:43-45. Cleaning out one’s life without filling it with God can have bad consequences. Not only do people need to rid themselves of any evil within, but they also need their lives filled with the Holy Spirit in order to prevent a re-entry that could leave them worse than they were before.

Referring to Romans 12:21 (“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good”), a clergy friend writes, “Evil is the absence of good and it only makes sense that to filled with good leaves no room for evil of any type. A heart filled with thanksgiving and praise has little room for evil thoughts and desires, and therefore gives no opportunity for Satan and his forces. There is a natural progression in most cases of demonic oppression/possession. We move from an improper thought to an action, from an action to a habit, from a habit to a lifestyle, and from a lifestyle to being out of control. We make choices along the way and give up our will to evil powers; and they move right in and our compulsions overtake us. It is only in turning our lives over to Christ that we can be returned to sanity and set free.”

We don’t see much casting out of evil spirits in our day, but there can be no doubt that evil exists in the world on an alarming scale. Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union under Stalin, racial repression in the U.S., the “killing fields” of Cambodia, “ethnic cleansing” in many places and “9/11” are part of our consciousness and have dominated recent history. These manifestations of evil should discourage any sense that evil is decreasing in the world.

Individually, we can’t do much about pervasive evil in the world, but how can we protect our own household?

How to Clean House

When there is a feeling in the home that something is going on spiritually that is just not right, it may be time for spiritual housecleaning. That can be done by getting rid of anything in the house that could be of an evil nature: tarot cards, Ouija boards, horoscopes, etc. and replacing them with signs and symbols of the faith: crosses, Bible verses, and plaques with Christian messages on them. But, after prayer for protection, it is also helpful to go from room to room in the house claiming each for Jesus by a command such as, “I claim this room in the name of Jesus Christ, and command in the name of Jesus Christ that anything foreign to the name of Jesus Christ

depart and return no more,” making the sign of the cross as you do so (if that is a comfortable part of your faith tradition). Then sing a hymn or two, or play some Christian music.

Suggested Scriptural References/Evil Spirits

Came upon Saul (1 Samuel 16:14-23, 18:10-11, 19:9-10);

Cast out by Jesus (Matthew 8:28-43, 15:21-28, 17:14-21);

Authority over given by Jesus to the twelve (Matthew 10:1-16);

Someone casting out in Jesus’ name (Mark 9:38-41);

The 72 are able to cast out demons (Luke 10:17-24);

Jews trying to drive out, invoking Jesus’ name (Acts 19:13-20);

Test the spirits (1 John 4:1-6).

Faith (Personal Faith)

“I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed....” Matthew 17:20

Everyone has faith in someone or something. The question is in whom or in what? To say that faith is a primary theme of the New Testament is very much an understatement. The noun for the word appears some 240 times and the adjective 67 times. The emphasis on faith is seen against the background of the saving work of God in Christ and is grounded in the experience of faith by the ancient people of the Old Testament. The fact that God sent his Son to be Savior of the world is central to the New Testament. Jesus accomplished our salvation by his death on the cross.

Faith can be thought of as though it were a very active verb. It is something we do rather than have or possess. In faith we abandon all reliance on our own efforts at salvation, whether they are acts of piety, morality or compassion. Faith is an attitude or working out of complete trust in Christ, of reliance upon him alone for our salvation. The incident in Matthew 8:5-13 is an illustration of such faith. A Roman officer comes to Jesus and asks him to heal his servant. The man has so much faith in Jesus that he does not believe it necessary for Jesus to accompany him to the servant’s sickbed. He believes and acts on the reality that Jesus can just say the word and the servant will be healed. And that is what happens.

Faith is a gift from God, but it is one in which we have an opportunity, and indeed an obligation, to cooperate. We can either accept that gift and believe, or reject it and remain agnostic. Jesus stands at the door and knocks (Revelation 3:20), but the choice is always ours whether to let him in and act accordingly as did the Roman officer.

Why should a person have faith in Jesus, and how can he or she take the step of faith?

Five Reasons to Believe

Corbin S. Carnell offers these in *Five Reasons to Believe*:

- (1) There is evidence of order and creativity in human beings. Human beings are creative because they were made in the image of God.
- (2) The existence of human reason points to an intelligent creator. From where would human reason come if not from God?
- (3) The persuasive evidence of the Incarnation. There is no real doubt that Jesus lived and died on this earth, and there is evidence enough that he came from God, in the power of God, to show us God.
- (4) The moral sense that humans have. Across cultural differences, people have a sense of right and wrong, and the need for divine forgiveness.
- (5) Our basic human longing for what we call the good, the true and the beautiful. Only Jesus Christ can fill the God-given vacuum within each of us.

How to Commit Your Life to Faith in Jesus Christ

Simply pray from your heart a simple testimony of what you intend to do. Here are some examples from the book *Sharing God's Love*:

- (1) "Dear Jesus, I just want you. I need you. I open my heart and ask you to come in. You can come into the dark corners of my life and do with me as you wish from now on, beginning right now. Thank you for doing that."
- (2) "Thank you, Lord, for accepting me as I am."
- (3) "Lord, I offer as much of myself as I can to as much of you as I understand."

Suggested Scriptural References/Faith (Personal Faith)

Shown by the woman with a bleeding problem (Matthew 9:18-26);

Shown by a blind man (Matthew 9:27-31);

Lacking in Jesus' hometown (Matthew 13:53-58);

Peter not having enough (Matthew 14:22-33);

Of the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21-28);

Disciples don't have faith the size of a mustard seed (Matthew 17:14-21; Luke 17:5-6);

Of four men who bring their paralyzed friend to Jesus (Mark 2:1-12);

Of young church, not strong enough (Acts 12:1-19);

Abraham was justified by (Romans 4:1-25);

Paul's teaching on justification by faith (Galatians 3:1-25);

Paul's teaching on being children of God through faith (Galatians 3:26—4:7);

The faith of those who have gone before us (Hebrews 11:1—12:13);

Relationship between faith and deeds (James 2:14-26);

Refined by the fire of suffering (1 Peter 1:3-9);

Belief in Jesus (1 John 5:1-12);

Shown by the church in Philadelphia (Revelation 3:7-13).

Family (Home)

“Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain.” Psalm 127:1

Too many Christians leave their faith at the door of the church as they depart the worship service on Sunday morning. There is not as much correlation as there should be between our faith and our family life or any other segment of our lives, for that matter. Most of us undoubtedly yearn for the integration of our faith into every aspect of our family life. This should be a place where justice and mercy are exhibited in a Christian manner, and our home should be a center of faith, hope, love and peace. Our children will learn much more about the Christian faith by seeing it lived out day-by-day in their parents than they will ever learn in Sunday school.

After Joshua had successfully led the Israelites into the promised land, the time came for him to bid farewell to the leaders of the nation and to renew the Lord’s covenant with the people (Joshua 23 and 24). In doing so, Joshua encourages them to serve God, but he mentions the other options that are before them and calls on them to choose whom they will serve. Then he says, “But as for me and my family, we will serve the Lord” (24:15b). It is a powerful statement, and one that all Christians must be willing to state clearly and emphatically. There is no way to build unity and faith more effectively than in our daily family experiences. How do we do this?

Parental Guidelines (from Parents Resource Bible):

A Godly Husband and Father

- (1) Makes a lifelong commitment to his wife (1 Corinthians 7:10-11)
- (2) Provides for the material needs of his family (1 Timothy 5:8)
- (3) Meets his wife’s emotional needs (Ephesians 5:25-30, 33)
- (4) Treats his wife with gentleness and respect (Colossians 3:19; 1 Peter 3:7)
- (5) Disciplines his children lovingly (Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21)

A Godly Wife and Mother

- (1) Submits to her husband’s leadership (Colossians 3:18; 1 Peter 3:1)
- (2) Makes a lifelong commitment to her husband (1 Corinthians 7:10-11)
- (3) Meets her husband’s need for affirmation and support (Ephesians 5:21-24, 33)
- (4) Develops inward charm and beauty (1 Peter 3:3-5)
- (5) Disciplines her children lovingly (Ephesians 6:4)

How to Honor the Family Name

Author Peter E. Gillquist said, “Many of us were raised by concerned parents who understood the value of an honorable family name. Being identified with that name, and with the parents who gave it to us, we behaved in a manner which honored it. I have a friend who often asks his children what their name is as they go out the door on their way to some special event. His children have been taught that whatever they do reflects on the family’s name, either for the better or for the worse. It is their name, individually and collectively, and they are expected to use the honor of that name as a reference point for their conduct, wherever they are.”

Suggested Scriptural References/Family (Home)

God's plan for marriage (Genesis 2:20b-24);

God has chosen Abraham to become a great and powerful nation, and expects him to direct his children and household in the way of the Lord (Genesis 18:17-19);

Children are to honor their parents (Exodus 20:12);

Responsibility for teaching children the Lord's commands (Deuteronomy 6:4-7);

That the Lord builds the house, and the blessing of children (Psalm 127);

When our home is the Lord's (Psalm 128);

Train a child in the way he should go (Proverbs 22:6);

The wife of noble character (Proverbs 31:10-31);

Jesus, in Peter's home, heals Peter's mother-in-law (Matthew 8:14-17);

Jesus' family becomes concerned about him (Mark 3:20-21);

Jesus in the home of friends, Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38-42);

Jesus raises Martha and Mary's brother Lazarus from the dead (John 11:1-44);

Paul teaches about children and parents (Ephesians 6:1-4);

Rules for Christian households (Colossians 3:18-21);

Responsibility for (1 Timothy 5:3-8);

Timothy had been influenced by his mother and grandmother (2 Timothy 1:3-7).

Fasting

“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do....” Matthew 6:16

As a spiritual discipline, fasting fell on hard times for many years, and is only now beginning to regain a place among Christians. In the history of the Church, fasting was often accompanied by more severe forms of self-denial and thus thought to be the practice of the ascetic and not ordinary people. Now, in an age of spiritual and physical enlightenment, fasting has become a more accepted practice. From time to time, religious and political leaders call for days of fasting and prayer as a means of showing the seriousness of a resolve or to deny funds to self that could be made available to the needy.

Scripture is filled with examples of fasting. Moses did it on special occasions (Exodus 34:28; Leviticus 16:29,31; 23:14; 23:27,32; Deuteronomy 9:9,18), as did David (2 Samuel 1:12; 3:35; 12:16-23), the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 17:6,14-16; 19:8), Daniel (Daniel 9:3; 10:2,3) and Paul (Acts 9:9). Jesus fasted for 40 days and nights immediately following his baptism (Matthew 4:2).

We might fast as a part of a call for fasting by spiritual leaders as mentioned above, or we might privately be led to fast. Some people fast during Lent as an act of self-sacrificial devotion to God. Others fast to seek the Lord’s guidance or to aid their prayer for someone who is ill or facing difficulties or challenges of some kind. For all of us, it is helpful to have some guidelines. How are we to fast?

Some Guidelines for Fasting

- (1) For the Christian, the purpose of fasting is the positive effect of self-denial. It is a way of humbling oneself before God that we might be in closer communion with him.
- (2) Simply skipping a meal can be an act of fasting. Jesus and Moses fasted for 40 days, and spiritual leaders down through the years have gone on extended fasts. One to three days is the more normal time for a serious fast.
- (3) The normal fast involves abstinence from solid food but not from water or other liquids. Absolute fasts (including abstinence from liquids) should never be for more than three days. The body can survive, even benefit from, the absence of solid food, but water is essential to good health.
- (4) Partial fasts can work for those people who, for health or other reasons, cannot consider a serious fast. A partial fast can involve denying oneself a normal meal in order to fast in a more humble way such as on bread and water, or abstaining from meat or alcoholic beverages.
- (5) Obviously, as indicated immediately above, people who have health problems should not undertake serious fasting without medical advice.

Suggested Scriptural References/Fasting

Aaron, on the occasion of the death of his sons Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10:1-20);
Israelite soldiers, in preparation for battle against the Benjamites (Judges 20:1-48);

As a part of the penitence of the Israelites following the return of the Ark of the Covenant. (1 Samuel 7:2-13);
David and his men, on learning of the death of Saul (2 Samuel 1:1-16);
David, over the death of Abner (2 Samuel 3:22-39);
David, over the illness of the son resulting from adultery with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12:1-23);
Decreed by Ezra of those returning to Judah from captivity (Ezra 8:15-36);
Nehemiah, over the situation in Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1:1-11);
The Israelites, in repentance (Nehemiah 9:1-38);
Mordecai, Esther and the Jews, because of the edict that they be annihilated (Esther 4:1-17);
Mercy and compassion asked for rather than fasting (Zechariah 7:1-14);
Jesus teaches about (Matthew 6:16-18);
John's disciples ask Jesus about (Matthew 9:14-17);
Barnabas and Saul (Paul) when the Holy Spirit leads them into the first missionary journey (Acts 13:1-3).

Fear

“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.”

Luke 12:32

There are several types of fear. Fear of God is a good thing; it really has to do with reverencing him rather than cowering in terror of him. When Christians fear that those who do not know Jesus will not experience salvation and eternal life with him, that is another appropriate fear. The fear we are dealing with here, however, is a strong emotional feeling of danger or great discomfort to ourselves or those we love. It is more than simply anxiety (worry), which is dealt with in another section by that name.

As we know from Numbers 13:27-33, except for Caleb and Joshua, those who were sent by Moses to spy out the land of Canaan so he could prepare the people for entering it, were fearful of what they found. They said the land was possessed by men of great size, “we seemed like grasshoppers” compared to them. As a result, the people rebelled and were not willing to enter the land. Moses had to wander in the wilderness with them for 40 years before Joshua led the conquest of Canaan.

The disciples certainly showed fear in Matthew 8:23-27. A furious storm came up on the Sea of Galilee while Jesus was asleep, and the disciples awakened him in panic, fearful for their lives. Jesus immediately rebuked the storm and the water became completely calm. “You of little faith, why are you so afraid?” Jesus asked of them. Two chapters later (10:17-42), Jesus is preparing his disciples for the persecution that will follow. He tells them not to be afraid of those who can kill the body but not the soul; instead, be afraid of Satan who can kill both the body and the soul (v. 28). So that, from Jesus’ point of view, explains how we should regard fear. But fear is a real emotion all of us nonetheless experience from time to time. How are we to deal with it?

How to Deal with Fear

A. A Practical Approach (similar to how we would deal with anxiety/worry)::

- (1) Try to think the thing through. Is this fear justified?
- (2) Ask yourself: What would be the consequences if what I fear actually happened?
- (3) What control do I have over what I fear?
- (4) *Why* am I fearful? Is there some underlying issue that I need to deal with?
- (5) Is there someone who could alleviate my fear or help me with it?
- (6) Is this an immediate fear or a recurring one? If it is a recurring one, do I need to get counseling to help me bring this cycle of fear to an end?
- (7) I need to remind myself that living in fear is not only contrary to God’s will for me, but also is detrimental to my emotional, physical and spiritual health, and needs to be stopped. This is getting the situation in perspective. Is my fear really worth the attention I am giving it?

B. A Biblical Approach: In addition to the above, consider:

- (1) Once our lives are truly committed to Christ, many of the things we used to fear should no longer cause us real concern because our value system has changed. If that is not the case, and we still fear such things as not being appropriately dressed or that our financial situation is in jeopardy because the stock market is down, we need to re-evaluate our relationship with Christ. (Matthew 6:25-34).
- (2) The ultimate fear, of course, is for our life. Do we have a life-threatening illness or are we facing some other threat of death or serious injury? Here, of course, the fear is real. Jesus faced it himself in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-46). The answer is the one Jesus gave above (Matthew 10:28). If we are right with God, we may lose our life here on earth, but we will inherit eternal life with him.

Suggested Scriptural References/Fear

At the Red Sea, the Israelites fear Pharaoh's approaching army (Exodus 14:10-12);
Announced as King of Israel, Saul is hiding in the baggage (1 Samuel 10:20-22);
The Israelites run in fear from Goliath (1 Samuel 17:24);
Elijah fears Jezebel (1 Kings 19:1-3);
"Fear of man will prove a snare" (Proverbs 29:25);
The disciples fear, seeing Jesus walk on water (Matthew 14:25-27);
Peter's fear as he sinks while trying to walk on water (Matthew 14:28-33);
At Jesus' arrest, the disciples flee (Matthew 26:56);
Peter, in fear, denies that he knows Jesus (Matthew 26:69-74);
The fear experienced by the woman with a blood disorder (Mark 5:25-34);
Jesus teaches not to be afraid (Luke 12:32-34);
Parents of blind man healed by Jesus fear being put out of the synagogue (John 9:22);
Jailer of Paul and Silas in Philippi (Acts 16:25-28);
The Spirit of sonship frees from fear (Romans 8:15).

See also **Courage, Anxiety (Worry)**

Forgiveness

“Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors.” Matthew 6:12

At the heart of personal conflicts is our need to forgive or be forgiven. In Scripture, God continually shows a willingness to forgive just by virtue of the fact that he did not completely destroy the Israelites in Old Testament times despite their frequent rebellion against and complacency toward him. The stories in the Old Testament that deal with forgiveness, however, lack the depth of understanding that Jesus taught and demonstrated. Jesus brought the subject to a new level. He not only made crystal clear that, through him, God forgives our sins, but he made it equally clear that we are to forgive others. Love and forgiveness may well be the two most important subjects in the Bible.

A classic example of forgiveness in Scripture is in Genesis 45:1-28 where Joseph forgives his brothers. Out of jealousy, Joseph’s brothers had first thrown him into a pit where they were thinking of leaving him to die, and then sold him into slavery to some Egyptians who happened by. Fortunately, what the brothers intended for evil, God intended for good (Genesis 50:20). Joseph prospered in Egypt, and ended up being the savior of his family as they faced famine.

Most of us would find it difficult to be as forgiving as Joseph. If you remember all of the problems Joseph faced and how they turned into good, you have to believe that Joseph is the Bible’s prime example of a person with a positive attitude. But, in our case, even if things had worked out for us in the long run (Romans 8:28), would we have been willing to forgive treachery of the dimensions that Joseph faced? That’s what God would want of us.

New Testament forgiveness has a certain imperative for us in the post-resurrection age. Jesus asks us to ask God to forgive us our trespasses as we forgive others. In the verses immediately following the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:14,15), Jesus states clearly that a *quid pro quo* exists that if we cannot forgive others, we may not expect forgiveness from God. Through New Testament teachings, we know that we are to forgive because we have been forgiven. See, for instance, Ephesians 4:32: “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” We forgive not only to be forgiven but, more importantly, because we have been forgiven. But, how do we truly forgive?

How to Forgive

A. The Practical Approach. According to Doris Donnelly, one of the principal Christian writers on forgiveness, here are the steps to forgiving another:

- (1) *Acknowledge the hurt; affirm the pain.* This is not as easy as it sounds; it means admitting our own humanity, that we’re not immune to the thoughtless, selfish acts of another person. It also means acknowledging that we have not been able to snap out of the bad feelings toward that person. That’s okay; it’s honest. And, it is the first step in beginning to forgive. Otherwise, the feeling festers and brings serious problems.

- (2) *Decide to forgive.* Make a conscious act of the will for the spirit to forgive. We don't have to decide at this point how we will forgive, only that we will.
- (3) *Recognize that forgiveness is a process and may take some time.* Just as most physical hurts take time to heal, so do hurt relationships. Don't look for the quick fix; be willing to give time to the healing process.
- (4) *Be realistic about the fact that forgiveness is not easy.* Some things that look like forgiveness are easy, such as the martyr's response ("That's all right; I always get slighted") and the phony reconciliation ("Don't worry; it didn't bother me a bit"). But real forgiveness always involves a little death that is not pleasant and is not easy to endure.
- (5) *Recognize that forgiveness is worth it.* Think of stories of others who have forgiven and been glad they did. Recall personal victories through forgiveness. Remember that Jesus taught forgiveness. Consider the horrible alternative of carrying the bitterness.

B. A Biblical Approach. In addition to the above, Donnelly recommends that we develop a plan of forgiveness and carry it out. Here are some ways to do that:

- (1) Pray. Seek God's guidance about the situation.
- (2) Try "walking in the other person's shoes" for long enough to experience their point of view. What was going on then in that person's life that caused the offense, or at least contributed to it?
- (3) Consider whether to tell the person who offended you that you are forgiving him or her. If sharing that information will help, do it; if it will only compound the problem, don't.
- (4) If possible, share your act of forgiveness with another person. This helps seal your commitment to forgive, and also tests it.
- (5) If appropriate, undertake some symbolic act—perhaps anonymously—to evidence the forgiveness. An example would be doing something nice for the offending person.
- (6) Pray for the person for some specified period of time. It will help the healing process and it will cause us to care for and perhaps better understand the other person.

Suggested Scriptural References/Forgiveness

Esau forgives Jacob (Genesis 32:1-31; 33:13-20);

God's forgiveness brings joy (Psalm 32:1-11);

Assurance of God's forgiveness (Psalm 130:1-8);

Jesus, in connection with the Lord's Prayer, teaches on forgiveness (Matthew 6:12-15);

Jesus forgives the paralyzed man (Matthew 9:1-8);

The Parable of the Unforgiving Debtor. (Matthew 18:21-35);

At the Last Supper, Jesus refers to his blood of the covenant, poured out for the forgiveness of sins (Matthew 26:20-26,29-30);

Jesus forgives the woman who anointed his feet, and explains to Simon the Pharisee the depth of love that follows forgiveness (Luke 7:36-50);

Jesus, from the cross, asks God to forgive those who are crucifying him (Luke 23:32-

34);

Jesus does not condemn the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11);

Jesus forgives Peter for betraying him (John 21:15-19);

Paul teaches on forgiveness for the sinner (2 Corinthians 2:5-11);

Forgiveness was attained for us by Christ (Colossians 2:6-15).

Freedom

“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.” Galatians 5:1

In an “anything goes” age, Christians need to seriously consider what they are free to do, and what God would have them refrain from doing. Appropriate guidelines can no longer be obtained in school, books or the media; in fact, those guidelines are as likely to be as wrong for the Christian as they are to be correct. What we are free to do or not to do can only be obtained from Scripture; and the Bible is, in that sense, a handbook for living.

Galatians 5:1-15 contains Paul’s dissertation on freedom in Christ. He is trying to make it clear that Christians are no longer bound by the restrictions of the Old Testament Law since Christ had freed them. It was not necessary to become a Jew (by circumcision) in order to become a Christian; they had been freed from that. They had also been freed from sin because of Jesus’ atoning death on their behalf. But, of course, they were to obey the Law on moral issues and to repent their sins when they had transgressed. In verse 13, Paul states it this way: “For you, dear friends, have been called to live in freedom—not freedom to satisfy your sinful nature, but freedom to serve one another in love” (NLT).

It is sometimes difficult to draw the line between freedom and license. Jesus does not want us bound by human rules and customs that have no basis in his gift to us of forgiveness and grace. Yet that is certainly not permission to act in ways that are unloving to others or harmful to ourselves. That is why all of us—unceasingly—need to be growing in our understanding of Scripture so that we may improve our discernment of righteous and unrighteous living. Yes, but can we be a little more specific?

Some Guidelines Concerning Freedom

The Bible has the answers to our questions about what we can or can’t do. Sometimes the answers are clear. For instance, is it all right for a Christian to get drunk? The answer is clearly “no.” The Bible says, “Don’t be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, let the Holy Spirit fill and control you” (Ephesians 5:18). But, what about those “gray” areas, where Scripture doesn’t seem to speak directly to the issue, such as is it all right for a Christian to drink alcoholic beverages? Here are some guidelines:

- (1) Will this activity harm me spiritually, emotionally or physically? (1 Corinthians 10:23b).
- (2) Will it strengthen me spiritually? (1 Corinthians 10:23a).
- (3) Is it something that tempts me (toward sin)? (1 Corinthians 6:12).
- (4) Does it make me uneasy in my spirit, my conscience? (Romans 14:23).
- (5) Could it cause someone else to stumble in their faith? (Romans 14:13b).

Suggested Scriptural References/Freedom

Paul’s teaching about freedom from being a captive to sin (Romans 6:1-23);
Paul’s instructions on food sacrificed to idols (1 Corinthians 8:1-13);
Freedom isn’t license (1 Corinthians 10:23—11:1);
Freedom from purely human standards (Colossians 2:6-23).

Frustration

“[How] often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.” Matthew 23:37

We live in an age of many options. An unlimited range of activities is before us: leisure pursuits, electronic communication possibilities, health and fitness training, entertainment in great variety, mental and artistic challenges...and the list goes on. A person can become frustrated just by having so many options, especially in not being able to keep up with the pace of them or with the people around us who are caught up in them. But there are many other frustrations as well: unhappiness with our work, our spouse or family, even our church. And, of course, we may be disappointed with ourselves. Frustration is nothing new, as we will see from those in the Bible who faced it.

Jesus must have been extremely frustrated with the disciples, especially with Philip in John 14:8. In response to Thomas, Jesus had just made what may be the most important statement in Scripture: “I am the way, and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” Then Philip blurts out, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” As a clergy friend notes, “If one could only *inflect* the tone Jesus must have used—perhaps like the parent whose child has done something repeatedly wrong saying ‘How *could* you!’—it would reflect the essence of frustration.”

Exodus 4:27—5:23 tells of the frustration faced by Moses when he followed God’s instructions about how to approach Pharaoh. What God told Moses to tell Pharaoh only seemed to make matters worse. Instead of letting the Israelites go, Pharaoh imposed additional burdens on them. This got Moses in trouble with the Israelite elders as well as Pharaoh! Moses goes to God with his frustration in verses 22-23: “Why did you send me? Since I gave Pharaoh your message, he has been even more brutal to your people. You have not even begun to rescue them!” (NLT)

Moses was more frustrated with God than with Pharaoh. Sometimes our frustration, although superficially with people or situations, may also be with God. How do we deal with that?

Dealing with Frustration

A. The Practical Approach. The nature of frustration is this: we are disappointed with something or someone because things aren’t working out as we think they should, and we have the feeling that the disappointment is not soon to be resolved; it is lurking out there irritating us. Usually we can deal with the frustration once we identify the source of it. Here is how to do that:

- (1) Is the frustration a result of my expecting too much of myself? Perhaps I need to be more realistic about who I am and what I can do.
- (2) Is it because of disappointment with someone or ones? Perhaps it would help to talk it out with the person or persons concerned; often the problem is simply one of communication.

- (3) Are there circumstances that are causing my frustration (job, house, car)?
Pinpointing the source of the problem often leads to an obvious solution.

B. A Biblical Approach: In addition to the above, consider these:

- (3) Is the problem God, or my relationship (or lack thereof) with him (God isn't present, or doesn't seem to care; or my spiritual life is not what it should be)?
- (4) If so, go back and look at our studies on Questioning God and Disappointment with God.
- (5) We may need to talk to our pastor, prayer partner, spiritual director or mentor.

Suggested Scriptural References/Frustration

The people complained to Moses about the lack of water (Exodus 17:1-7);

The Israelites were frustrated because Moses did not return from the top of the mountain right away, so they fashioned a golden calf to worship, which really frustrated Moses when he returned (Exodus 32:1-35);

The Israelites, faced with the opportunity of going into the Promised Land, were afraid to do so and once again challenged Moses' leadership (Numbers 14:1-12);

Moses, in frustration, disobeyed God's instructions regarding bringing water from the rock (Numbers 20:1-13);

Moses is not allowed to enter the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 3:21-28);

Job's bitter frustration over the disasters that have befallen him (Job 3:1-26);

Jonah's frustration over the fact that Nineveh repented (Jonah 4:1-11);

Jesus was unable to perform significant miracles in his own hometown because of the unbelief of the people (Mark 6:1-6);

Jesus, often frustrated by the disciples' unbelief, here finds them fearful of the storm while he sleeps in the boat (Matthew 8:23-27);

Jesus' frustration that the disciples were not able to bring healing to the epileptic child (Matthew 17:14-20);

Jesus laments over Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37-39).

Generosity

“Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.” 2 Corinthians 8:2

We can choose to sow seeds of generosity or of stinginess. Two passages of Scripture put generosity into perspective. The first is Galatians 6:7-8: “Don’t be misled; remember that you can’t ignore God and get away with it: a man will always reap just the kind of crop he sows! If he sows to please his own wrong desires, he will be planting seeds of evil and he will surely reap a harvest of spiritual decay and death; but if he plants the good things of the Spirit, he will reap the everlasting life that the Holy Spirit gives him”(TLB). The other is Hosea 10:12: “Plant good seeds of righteousness, and you will reap a crop of my love; plow the hard ground of your hearts, for now is the time to seek the Lord, that he may come and shower salvation on you” (TLB). The choice is ours.

After defeating the kings who had captured Lot, Abram gave a tithe of everything he had taken in the battle to Melchizedek, king of Salem, and basically the rest he left to the king of Sodom (Genesis 14:17-24). Giving a tenth to show appreciation for what God has done was customary. Even in pagan religions of Abram’s day, the people offered a tithe to the gods. Abram, however, gave it all away. For him, the victory itself was a sufficient gift from God. Christians today who realize that all they have is a gift from God reflect Abram’s generous attitude. We can give generously when we realize that what we possess is not really ours in the first place. But, maybe we are living on very limited income or are facing overwhelming debt. We want to be generous, but how?

Here Are Some Guidelines for Generosity:

A. Who? Every Christian should be generous, regardless of age or circumstances. Some argue that young couples cannot be expected to give generously to the Lord’s work because they are just starting out in life, have little income and many expenses. However, if young couples do not begin their life together giving their “first fruits” to the Lord, they will soon be locked into a standard of living equal to or above their income. Before long, they are committed to house and car payments, memberships, and a lifestyle that will make it increasingly difficult for them ever to find room to give generously. On the other hand, if they begin life by giving to the Lord first, they will better manage their money and are much more likely to develop a healthy lifestyle.

B. What? At least a tithe (10 %) of their income to the Lord’s work. Some sincere and knowledgeable Christian leaders argue against the principle of the tithe, saying that what God really wants is a freewill offering, a gift from the heart, and that that is the biblical standard. They believe that giving on the basis of obligation (i.e., a set amount such as 10%) takes away the spontaneous joy that should motivate Christian giving. In fact, God encourages us to give sacrificially from the heart, regardless of the amount. People do rationalize, however; if we do not have a minimum goal to guide us, we can talk our way into much less generous giving.

C. When? For our gift to our community of faith, giving weekly at a worship service is ideal, even though the amount we give should be budgeted from our income before anything else.

The advantage of giving weekly is that it makes us more conscious of the gift we are laying before the Lord in worship, and that makes worship more meaningful.

D. Why? Because God expects us to put him first. We should give generously to him and his work. Acquiring wealth should never be a high priority because it is eternally worthless (see Matthew 6:19-34).

E. How? Start now, rather than waiting to figure out whether we can, and we will be blessed. We don't do it to be blessed, but that seems to be a natural result. If, for some reason, we cannot possibly tithe at this time, we can begin with whatever percentage of our income we can handle, and work out a plan to increase that amount by at least one percent each year.

Suggested Scriptural References/Generosity

Gifts received by David for the building of the Temple (1 Chronicles 29:1-20);

Generosity shown in Hezekiah's time (2 Chronicles 31:1-21);

Boaz's generosity to Ruth (Ruth 2:1-23);

Cyrus' generosity in letting captives return to Judah (Ezra 1:1—2:70);

Shown by Artaxerxes, in allowing additional captives to return to Judah (Ezra 7:1—8:14);

The poor widow who contributed out of her poverty (Luke 21:1-4);

The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats (Matthew 25:31-46);

The generosity of the early believers (Acts 4:32-37);

A collection for God's people (1 Corinthians 16:1-4);

Generosity is encouraged by Paul (2 Corinthians 8:1—9:15);

The joy of giving (Philippians 4:2-20).

Glory

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.”

Luke 2:14

The glory of God is well stated in this brief summary from the *Disciple’s Study Bible*: “God is both transcendent and immanent. He towers over us as supreme Lord, and yet He is very close as He stoops down to make Himself known to us. In His sovereignty and holiness He is exalted far above us, but in His love He draws very near to us.”

Isaiah 6:1-8 contains one of the Bible’s most awesome descriptions of the glory of God. Isaiah sees the glory of the Lord sitting on a lofty throne, with his robe filling the Temple. The majesty, power and mystery of God are all wrapped into Isaiah’s vision. It is no wonder that, in comparison to God’s greatness, Isaiah is confronted with his own sinfulness and his need for contrition.

God’s glory is enough to cause us to fall on our knees in awe and praise; and, at the same time, it is like a searchlight exposing our darkest deeds and filling us with a desire to be whole, clean.

Exodus 24:1-18 tells of another experience of the glory of God: “The Israelites at the foot of the mountain saw an awesome sight. The awesome glory of the Lord on the mountaintop looked like a devouring fire” (v.17, NIV). Such an appearance of God in a physical form is called a theophany. Here are some other theophanies in Scripture: (1) Genesis 15:1-20, the Lord’s covenant with Abram; (2) Genesis 16:7, the angel of the Lord appearing to Hagar, announcing the birth of Ishmael; (3) Genesis 18:1-11, the Lord appeared to Abraham, foretelling Isaac’s birth; (4) Genesis 22:11,12, the angel of the Lord appeared to Abraham to stop him from sacrificing Isaac; (5) Exodus 3:2, the angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in a burning bush; (6) Exodus 33:11, the Lord spoke to Moses face to face; and (7) Daniel 3:25, one “like a divine being” appeared as the fourth person in the fiery furnace.

But, what about “theophanies” in our own time?

Experiencing God’s Glory

Christians experience theophanies today in a variety of ways:

- (1) Some people have actual experiences of seeing angelic beings at worship and at other times of deep spirituality.
- (2) Others encounter “angels” in human form in divine encounters, sometimes not realizing it until after the episode has happened.
- (3) Still others are able to see the hand of God in miraculous healings and answers to prayer.
- (4) “Believing is seeing” is the key to encounters with God; those of great faith will be much more likely to see the action of God in everyday situations than will the doubters.

- (5) To experience theophanies, we need to be open to what God would show us of his love and care for us in the simple, daily routines of life.

Suggested Scriptural References/Glory

God led the Israelites by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13:17-22);
The angel of the Lord defended the Israelites from the Egyptians by shifting the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire between the Egyptians and the Israelites (Exodus 14:19-20);
The glory of God is shown in the manna provided for the people to eat (Exodus 16:1-18);
When Moses went up on the mountain to be with God, the cloud covered the mountain and his glory settled on it; to the Israelites, it looked like a consuming fire (Exodus 24:1-18);
The cloud covered the Tabernacle and filled it with God's glory; when the cloud lifted, the people moved and when it stayed, they stayed (Exodus 40:34-38);
As the priests began their work (9:1-21) and Moses and Aaron went into and returned from the Tabernacle, the glorious presence of the Lord appeared to the people (Leviticus 9:22-24);
God tells Moses that he will be present in the cloud over the atonement cover (Leviticus 16:1-2);
When the Ark of the Covenant is brought into the Temple, the priests could not continue their work because the glorious presence of the Lord filled the Temple (1 Kings 8:1-11);
The heavens declare the glory of the Lord (Psalm 19:1-6);
About the King of Glory (Psalm 24);
At Jesus' baptism, glory is manifested in the form of a dove (Matthew 3:13-17);
Jesus is glorified at his Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-13);
The Son of Man will return on clouds of glory (Matthew 24:26-35);
An angel of the Lord appears to the shepherds announcing the birth of Jesus, and the glory of God shone around them (Luke 2:8-20);
The Word dwelt on earth and his glory was beheld (John 1:1-14);
Jesus ascends in a cloud of glory (Acts 1:6-11);
At Pentecost, God's glory rests upon the new church in the form of tongues of fire (Acts 2:1-13);
Stephen looks up to heaven and sees the glory of God and Jesus standing at his right hand (Acts 7:54-60);
Paul teaches about the glory of the New Covenant (2 Corinthians 3:7-18).

God's Love

“Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.” 1 John 4:8

Paul tells us that love is greater than faith and hope (1 Corinthians 13), and John says that God *is* love (1 John 4:8). We are told that God is holy and righteous, but not that he *is* holiness or righteousness. From this, we can conclude that love is the greatest of God's attributes; it is the one in which God's nature is most fully revealed. The death of Jesus on the cross is the supreme example of God's love; Jesus is God, and God, in Jesus, came to live with and die for us. God's love is shown in a very general but all-encompassing way throughout Scripture: by his creation, the calling out of a special people (the Israelites) and, as noted, his life and death for us through Jesus. There are, however, some Bible passages that speak specifically of God's love.

1 John 3:1-2 and 4:7-21 are examples of Scripture verses that specifically tell us of God's love. God loves us so much that he accepts us as his children. Love comes from God, and it is because of this love that we can love one another. “God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them” (4:16b NLT). Because we are God's children, he kindles the flame of love in our hearts and that flame of love can warm the hearts of others because its source is God. Yes, but how?

How God's Love Is to Be Shown through Our Love

The attributes of God's love are spelled out in 1 Corinthians 13. If we want to know what love is and how we are to live it, this is the passage of Scripture that tells us. Jesus is our model. Take the time to read 1 Corinthians 13, substituting the name of Jesus every time the word “love” appears in the passage. Then try to model Jesus' love in your own life.

A friend writes, “The beauty of this study is it is one of practicality and not just theology. It can empower us to live out our day-to-day, minute-by-minute lives in God's power. And since the love of God lives in us by the power of the Holy Spirit, we can show our love to others no matter what the situation is. ‘Love never fails.’ In the 1 Corinthians 13 exercise, why not go back through it one more time, substituting our own name every time *love* appears?”

Suggested Scriptural References/God's Love

In the beginning, God created everything out of his love (Genesis 1:1—2:3);

In the beginning was the Word (John 1:1-14);

Jesus teaches about love (Luke 15:1-32);

Nicodemus is told about by Jesus (John 3:1-21);

Jesus and his relationship with the Father (John 5:19-30);

In reaching Saul (Paul) on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-19);

God's gift to all through Jesus (Romans 5:1-21);

God's love shown through the life he offers us (Romans 8:1-39);

Paul's treatise on love (1 Corinthians 13:1-13);

The God of all comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3-11);

Shown through the blessings of Christ (Ephesians 1:3-14);

God comforts those who have come through the great tribulation (Revelation 7:1-17).

God's Will

"But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well." Luke 12:31

According to *The New Bible Dictionary*, "The will of God expresses primarily His attribute of self-determination by which He acts in accordance with His eternal power and Godhead. Though God's will cannot be said to be limited in any sense, His perfections ensure that He will never do anything that is incompatible with His nature." As God's people here on earth, we should always want to live in accordance with God's will for us as best we can perceive it, thereby cooperating in God's purpose for the world.

As a friend has said, "God's will is always that he be glorified by his actions and ours. We are servants. God is glorified by our serving him and others as he would have us do. We cannot be in his will without serving him first and foremost."

In Matthew 7:21-27 Jesus teaches on the importance of doing God's will. He does it by talking about how essential it is to build on a sound foundation. The decisive issue is obeying God. To know how to obey God, we have to build on a foundation of knowing God's will so that we can obey it. Knowing God's will involves knowing Scripture.

If we truly want to do God's will, but do the wrong thing in ignorance, God will forgive us. It's the matter of our heart and our will being in the right place that counts with God. So, as long as we are trying to do God's will, we are in God's will. If, on the other hand, we remain ignorant of God's word revealed in Scripture because we are unwilling to devote appropriate time to it, we cannot continue to plead ignorance of God's will. Yes, but specifically, how can we seek God's will?

How to Seek God's will

Here are Henry Drummond's guidelines for seeking God's will:

- (1) Pray.
- (2) Think.
- (3) Talk to wise people for their advice and counsel, but don't let them tell you exactly what you should do.
- (4) Beware of the bias of your own will, but don't be too afraid of it; God doesn't necessarily thwart a person's desire. Don't make the mistake of thinking that God's will and what you would like to do are always at odds.
- (5) Meanwhile, do the next logical thing that must be done, since doing God's will in small things is the best preparation for doing it in great things.
- (6) When the time of decision comes, act on the knowledge you have.
- (7) Never reconsider a decision, once you have acted.
- (8) Be patient. You may not find out until afterward, perhaps long afterwards, that God was leading every step of the way.

Suggested Scriptural References/God's Will

Whoever does God's will is Jesus' brother or sister (Matthew 12:46-50);

God's will is the first thing we are to seek (Luke 12:22-34);
Jesus submits to the Father's will in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-42);
Paul's instructions on living a holy life (1 Thessalonians 4:1-8);
Teaching on (James 4:13-17);
Teaching on (1 Peter 4:1-5);
Loving our brother or sister is in accord with God's will (1 John 2:7-17);
When we pray, we should ask according to God's will (1 John 5:13-15).

Good News

“Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.” Philippians 1:14

In a footnote to Matthew 4:23-25, the *Life Application Bible* says, “Jesus preached the gospel—the Good News—to everyone who wanted to hear it. The Good News is that the Kingdom of Heaven has come, that God is with us, and that he cares for us. Christ can heal us, not just of physical sickness, but of spiritual sickness as well. There is no sin or problem too great or too small for him to handle. Jesus’ words are good news because they offer freedom, hope, peace of heart, and eternal life with God.”

Acts 8:26-39 is about Philip and his sharing the Good News with the Ethiopian eunuch. There are several factors in this story that make it a particularly apt example of sharing the Good News. The first is that the Ethiopian believed in God; he was a man who had gone to Jerusalem to worship (v.27b). Second, the man was reading Scripture; it is hard to read Scripture and *not* be open to the Good News. Third, he was humble enough to admit that he did not understand everything he was reading. Fourth, the Holy Spirit had led Philip to the right spot at the right time. Fifth, once the Ethiopian had accepted the Good News, he wanted to be baptized; the Great Commission Jesus had left to his followers (Matthew 28:18-20) was that they “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (NLT).

In this one episode, the Bible demonstrates the way in which God can use any of us to share the Good News with those whose hearts have been prepared to receive the message. Yes, but I am not likely to run into an Ethiopian eunuch any time soon, so what do I do?

How to Share the Good News

Another example of how to share the Good News is demonstrated by Jesus in his encounter with the woman at the well (John 4:1-45). Here is how you can adapt Jesus’ technique to your own:

- (1) Engage in conversation. That is what Jesus did. He spoke to a Samaritan woman who was a stranger to him, an unheard of thing for a Jewish man to do in Jesus’ time. If you want to share the Good News, you must start with communication just as Jesus did. Be open to God’s leading with a willing heart (Acts 8:4-8, 26-28).
- (2) Entice personal interest. Jesus got the woman’s full attention by making provocative statements (John 4:10, 13). You don’t need special training in order to talk about what the Lord means in your life. Be natural, but be interesting as well (John 9:25).
- (3) Enliven through compassion, concern. Jesus cared about the woman at the well; he spent time with her although he knew her to be of loose morals. To be effective, all you need to do is let God’s love flow through you to the other person (1 Corinthians 13:4).

- (4) Enlighten with information. Jesus provided the woman with pertinent information about who he was and what acceptance of him could mean in her life (John 4:21-24). The more you know Scripture, the better equipped you will be to answer the questions of others (2 Timothy 2:15).
- (5) Enlist others in the cause. John 4 demonstrates how the Good News can spread (vv.39-42) when it is effectively communicated. When you reach one person for Christ, you are creating the opportunity for that person to reach others (v.35).

Suggested Scriptural References/Good News

Jesus preaches the Good News (Matthew 4:23-35);
Paul's teaching on the significance of the resurrection of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:1-58);
Paul's teaching on ministers of the New Covenant (2 Corinthians 2:14—3:18);
Christians are treasures in earthly vessels (2 Corinthians 4:1-18);
The authenticity of the gospel (Galatians 1:6—2:10; 3:1—6:18);
Spiritual blessings in Christ (Ephesians 1:3-15);
Paul is able to share the Good News while in chains (Philippians 1:12-30);
The supremacy of Christ (Colossians 1:15-23);
The return of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:13—5:11; 2 Peter 3:1-18);
The nature of Christ (Hebrews 1:1—7:28);
Being God's chosen people (1 Peter 2:4-10);
The Word of Life (1 John 1:1-4).

Gossip

“They are gossips....” Romans 1:29b

Webster defines a gossip as “a person who chatters or repeats idle talk and rumors, especially about the private affairs of others.” The Ten Commandments specifically forbid giving false witness against another. Gossip is more subtle than slander or outright lying as it usually only suggests one may be guilty. However, this often ends up being an outright lie by the time the rumor has been circulated awhile.

In Exodus 23:1-3, the Mosaic Law contains specific rules against false reports, malicious witnessing, false testimony in lawsuits, going along with a lynch mob mentality and favoritism. These kinds of gossip, slander and false witnessing, if unchecked, undermine families, strain neighborhood cooperation and make chaos of the judicial system. Trust between people is destroyed and the fabric of society can be torn apart by the resulting strife.

Destructive gossip still causes problems in families, neighborhoods, and churches and the only way to stop it is to refuse to participate. It is our duty to squelch rumors whenever we are confronted by them.

There is a story about a woman who went to confession and admitted the sin of gossiping. For penance, the priest told her to buy a chicken at the market and pluck its feathers out all the way home. She was then to go back and pick up the feathers. “But, how can I?” the woman asked. “They will be scattered all over town.” “That is what happens to your gossip,” the priest replied. It is a good lesson for us all.

How to Avoid Gossiping

Amy Carmichael is given credit for this three-fold test of what to say:

- (1) Is it kind?
- (2) Is it necessary?
- (3) Is it true?

Suggested Scriptural References/Gossip

King Ahab wanted Naboth’s vineyard, so Jezebel wrote letters in Ahab’s name telling the elders of Naboth’s city to get scoundrels to lie about Naboth so he would be killed (1 Kings 21:7-28);

A rumor reached David that all of his sons had been killed by Absalom (2 Samuel 13:23-33);

Short statements on the evils of gossip (Proverbs 11:13; 16:27-28; 18:8; 20:19 and 26:22);

Paul lists gossip along with other abominable sins (Romans 1:26-30);

What Paul is afraid he will find when he visits the church in Corinth (2 Corinthians 12:19-21);

What Paul has to say about busybodies (2 Thessalonians 3:11-12);

Paul cautions that the wives of deacons not be malicious talkers (1 Timothy 3:11);

James discusses the problem of the tongue and the need to curb it (James 3:2-10).

Grace

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith....” Ephesians 2:8

Grace is the indwelling, empowering presence of God that enables us to be and do all that God has called us to be and do.

In *Now, That’s a Good Question!*, R.C. Sproul says this of grace: “[G]race is unmerited favor—to receive something positive from the hand of God that we don’t deserve. But to understand the graciousness of grace in any depth I believe is a lifelong enterprise for the Christian....[I]t’s by God’s grace that we are Christians in the first place. It’s by God’s grace that we even draw a breath every moment, and it’s by God’s grace that we receive every benefit from his hand.”

Romans 5:1-21 contains Paul’s teaching on justification through faith. It is by grace we are saved and not by following the law or by our actions. If we live into the grace God provides us, we will obey the law and take right actions (James 3:14-26), but grace is a gift from God. We cannot earn our salvation. Obedience follows grace, and peace flows from obedience.

The life of the Christian is to be a life of growing in grace, accepting our salvation in Jesus Christ and pursuing sanctification: the inward transformation that will express itself in bearing the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). Yes, but how?

How to Grow in Grace

Here is how we are to grow in grace:

- (1) Scripture. The study of Scripture should be part of the everyday spiritual growth of the Christian. It is how we learn to know about God and his grace.
- (2) Prayer. Prayer is how we commune with God and experience his grace.
- (3) Worship. Worship is an outward expression of our inner conviction; the adoration and praise of God in worship opens channels for his grace to flow into our lives. Worship, like prayer, keeps us in God’s presence.
- (4) Fellowship. Through the ongoing relations with our fellow Christians, we give and receive mutual support, affirmation, encouragement and accountability. We become conduits of God’s grace to one another.
- (5) Ministry. If Christians—lay and ordained—are not engaged in ministry, we are spending our lives being trained for something we never do! Ministry is God’s grace in action through his people.
- (6) Repentance/Forgiveness. It is God’s grace, active in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, which convicts us and leads us to repent and receive forgiveness from God. Thus cleansed, we are free once more to live in God’s grace for the benefit of his people and all creation.
- (7) Love. We grow in grace by loving one another, especially when it is difficult to love.

Suggested Scriptural References/Grace

The redemption of Peter is a showing of God's grace through Jesus (John 21:15-19);

The Jews and the law (Romans 2:17-29);

God's faithfulness (Romans 3:1-31);

Becoming slaves to true righteousness (Romans 6:15-23);

Struggling with sin (Romans 7:7-25);

Faith and observance of the law (Galatians 3:1-25);

Improper teaching of the law (1 Timothy 1:3-11).

Greed

“Neither...the greedy...will inherit the kingdom of God.” 1 Corinthians 6:10

Drug trafficking is probably as good an example of greed in our day as any other. The sale of illegal drugs is one of the most profitable activities in our country, and thousands engage in it out of sheer greed, even though it is perhaps the major cause of misery, crime and death. But greed of many kinds is always rampant in a materialistic society, and that is what we live in today. The people of the Bible also experienced and dealt with greed.

Joshua 7:1-26 contains the story of Achan, whose greed cost him his life. It was an important object lesson for the Israelites as they began to take over the Promised Land from the hostile people who lived there. In a miraculous way, they had captured Jericho (Joshua 6). “But the Israelites acted unfaithfully in regard to the devoted things” (v.1 NIV). Achan took some of the bounty for himself, leading to defeat of the Israelites by the men of Ai. When the deed was discovered, Joshua had Achan and his family and all their possessions destroyed in order to command complete obedience from the people in the future.

Joshua’s methods were drastic in the extreme; but greed is an insidious sin that can lead to all sorts of evil. How can we combat it when we see tendencies of it in our own lives?

Remedies for Greed

Scripture contains some ways to combat greed:

- (1) In Colossians 3:1-5, Paul encourages us to set our sights on the realities of eternal life. “Let heaven fill your thoughts” (v.2). “Put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you,” including greed (v.5, NIV).
- (2) In 1 John 2:15-17, we are told to stop loving the evil world and all it offers us, because the world only offers physical things such as possessions that will soon fade away. Doing God’s will, however, lasts forever.
- (3) And, in Acts 2:42-47, we have a picture of the opposite of greed, as the early church unselfishly shares all that it has.

Suggested Scriptural References/Greed

Eli allowed his sons to take the best of the offerings in the Temple, to the dishonor of God (1 Samuel 2:12-17, 27-36);

Elisha’s servant Gehazi sought and received money from Naaman after Elisha had refused a gift from Naaman (2 Kings 5:1-27);

Statements about the evil of greed (Proverbs 15:27; 28:25);

In judging Jerusalem for the sins of the people, the prophet specifically mentions greed (Jeremiah 6:13, 8:10);

Jesus’ parable about the man who stored up grain (Luke 12:18-21);

Jesus’ teaching that you cannot serve two masters, God and money (Luke 16:13);

The rich young man who was possessed by his possessions, and therefore would not follow Jesus (Matthew 19:21-30);

Ananias and Sapphira, who seemed to be making a generous gift, but were holding back for themselves deceptively (Acts 5:1-10);
Paul exhorts the Corinthians not to associate with the greedy and others (1 Corinthians 5:10-11);
The greedy and others will not inherit the Kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9-11);
Deacons and elders must not be greedy (KJV), pursuing unjust gain (NIV) (1 Timothy 3:8 and Titus 1:7).

Grief, Grieving

“When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, ‘Don’t cry.’” Luke 7:13

In the course of our lives, we can experience many kinds of grief. Some grieving results from disappointment with others and with ourselves. This could happen when we have said something hurtful to our spouse that was unkind and uncalled for. In the Bible an example would be Isaac’s grief over having mistakenly given his blessing to Jacob rather than Esau (Genesis 27:30-37). For the purposes of this study, however, we will consider instances of profound grief caused by death or despair.

In 2 Samuel 12:15-20, David mourns the illness unto death of the child born to Bathsheba out of David’s lust and treachery. Through the prophet Nathan, God had told David that the child would die. David’s grief undoubtedly included a large measure of despair with himself for his sinfulness that had brought on the tragedy. Sometimes our grief includes disappointment with ourselves. Often this is caused by our feeling that we could have done more for the person who is now out of the reach of our care.

We all face periods of profound grief in our lives. As Christians, how are we to deal with grief?

How to Grieve

What are some practical ways of coping with grief?

A. The Practical Approach:

- (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.

B. A Biblical Approach. In addition to the above:

- (1) Let the tears flow. Mighty men of God, including Jesus himself, did so. There is healing in the tears of grief.
- (2) The reading of psalms can be helpful during periods of grief. The psalms often express human despair and anguish. Psalm 51, for instance, is believed to have

been composed by David as a result of his sin with Bathsheba and the disastrous consequences.

- (3) The good news we have in Jesus Christ does not eliminate pain in our lives. 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).

Suggested Scriptural References/Grief, Grieving

David's grief over the deaths of Saul and Jonathan (2 Samuel 1:1-27);

David grieves over the death of Abner (2 Samuel 3:22-39);

David's grief over his son Absalom's conspiracy against him (2 Samuel 15:1-30);

David mourns Absalom's death (2 Samuel 18:9—19:4);

Nehemiah grieves over the situation in Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1:1-11, 2:1-9);

God's grief over Israel (Isaiah 5:1-7);

Jeremiah's complaint over the condition of his life as a prophet. Note, however, that despite the way people treat Jeremiah, God's word is like a fire in his heart that cannot be held in (Jeremiah 20:7-18);

Jesus grieves over Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37-39);

Jesus grieves over Lazarus (John 11:1-44).

Growth (Spiritual Maturity, Sanctification)

“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

2 Peter 3:18

Psalm 1 speaks of the person who chooses not to go the road of the wicked, sinners and scoffers, but to delight in the Lord and to grow in the knowledge of him. Such a person is like a tree planted by the riverside where it receives constant nurture. The result is plentiful fruit every season and prosperity. The term *prosperity* here means that, when we apply God’s wisdom to the situations we face in life, we will bear good fruit to the glory of God. This is certainly reason to want to grow in the knowledge and love of the Lord.

In Luke 2:40-52 we are told a little about Jesus’ early years and his growth in wisdom and stature. We might be tempted to say that, because Jesus was God, he is too challenging an example for us. As a clergy friend has commented, “We often excuse ourselves for our selfish behavior by saying, ‘I’m only human.’ Jesus taught us, however, what it means to be fully human. Jesus wrestled with circumstances, people and even God, but remained faithful and obedient.” Jesus is to be our example; and we are expected to “imitate Christ” to the best of our ability. Yes, we will fall far short of his perfection; but, by the grace of God, we can follow his lead. If Jesus was everything God the Father wanted him to be, what better example do we have? But how do we follow that example?

How Jesus Grew Spiritually

What were Jesus’ means of spiritual growth, so that we may follow his example?

- (1) He searched the Scriptures. Jesus knew the Father’s purpose for his life because he knew Scripture. His knowledge of Scripture is what allowed him to stand up to the temptations of Satan in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11).
- (2) He found fellowship with the Father in prayer. Jesus’ whole life was one of prayer. There are numerous instances of Jesus in prayer. How did this help Jesus grow? It allowed him to experience the Father’s love, and to draw on the resources of God for guidance and strength.
- (3) He looked for fellowship with God’s people. At the age of twelve, he was already in the Temple, trying to know more about God. He chose twelve disciples into whom he poured his life.

How We Can Grow Spiritually

In addition to following Jesus’ example above, we can:

- a. Be in a support group (Bible study group, prayer group, Twelve Step group, etc.) where we can learn from others and be held accountable.
- b. Have a prayer partner or mentor to whom we can go with our questions, doubts, and challenges and get them in perspective.

- c. Take advantage of opportunities offered by our community of faith and other Christian groups to grow in our knowledge of our faith: retreats, conferences, seminars, etc.
- d. Keep a spiritual journal of what God is doing in our life.
- e. And, of course, be regular in worship, Sunday school, etc.

Suggested Scriptural References/Growth

While Eli's sons did evil, Samuel prospered by growing in the Lord (1 Samuel 2:18-22);

Following the road the Lord lays for us rather than the path of the wicked (Psalm 1);

The joy of living into the law of the Lord (Psalm 119);

Prophecy concerning John the Baptist, and the result: growing strong in the spirit (Luke 1:57-80);

Some plant, others water, but it is God who brings the spiritual growth in our lives (1 Corinthians 3:1-9);

We are being built into spiritual houses in which the Holy Spirit can dwell (Ephesians 2:19-27);

Growing individually and as the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:1-16);

Paul reminds Timothy of his spiritual roots (2 Timothy 1:3-7).

Hatred

“Do not hate your brother in your heart.” Leviticus 19:17

There is only one acceptable kind of hatred: we should all hate evil, as God does. Other kinds of hate are evident in the Bible and in all of life. Whereas forgiveness is at the heart of the Christian faith—it is why Jesus died for us—there are still many Christians who seem to think it is proper to hate someone who has wronged them. Is there anything that grieves God more than Christians who will not speak to one another?

Saul hated David because he was jealous of him (1 Samuel 18:1-11). An unlimited range of things could lead us to hate someone. But, for the Christian, hatred is equivalent to murder (Matthew 5:21,22; 1 John 3:15).

The question is not whether it is all right to hate someone under some circumstances. It is simply something we cannot do and still call ourselves Christians. The question is how we are to deal with feelings that seem to be driving us toward hatred of another.

Who Controls Your Life?

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).

Suggested Scriptural References/Hatred

Cain hated his brother Abel, and killed him (Genesis 4:1-16);
Esau hated his brother Jacob for stealing his blessing, but is later reconciled (Genesis 27:1-41);
Joseph’s brothers hated him and sold him into slavery (Genesis 37:1-28);
Absalom hated Amnon for raping Tamar, and later has him killed (2 Samuel 13:1-22);
Jezebel hated Elijah and wanted him dead (1 Kings 19:1-2);
Haman hated Mordecai and the Jews and tried to exterminate them (Esther 3:1-6);
Those who do evil hate the light (John 3:16-21);
Jesus is hated, and so will his followers be (John 15:18-25);
Jesus warns his disciples, in sending them out on mission, that they will be hated because of him (Matthew 10:5-22);
Jesus says that we are blessed when we are hated because of him (Luke 6:22, 23);
Jesus tells us to do good to those who hate us (Luke 6:27-31);
He who hates his brother is in darkness (1 John 2:7-11);
He who hates his brother cannot love God (1 John 4:7-21).

Healing and Wholeness

“He welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing.” Luke 9:11

In his book *Faith and Practice*, Frank E. Wilson wrote: “Modern psychology is catching up with the Christian practice of many centuries. It is now recognized on all hands that a human being consists of something more than muscle, bone, and sinew, and that a person’s health depends upon a mental attitude and spiritual condition as well as upon lungs and glands. If a person is to be really well, he must be *all* well, and if he falls sick, all of him needs to be treated. Therein lies the reason for the Church’s ministry of healing, which was part of the commission given by our Lord to the Church and exercised by the Church from the very beginning.”

2 Kings 5:1-27 Naaman is healed of leprosy on instructions from the prophet Elijah. In Scripture, healing occurs in a great variety of ways. Here, Elijah did not participate directly in the healing; he did not even see Naaman before the healing occurred. Naaman obviously needed something more than physical healing because he almost let his pride get in the way. Thus, God worked through Elijah to effect a broader healing.

When we think of Christian healing, it is often physical healing that we have in mind. Someone is injured or sick, and we want and pray for God’s healing. But, in such instances, there may be spiritual or emotional healing that is more important to God. The physical death rate is 100%; no matter how we pray that a person be spared, he or she will ultimately experience physical death. What is more important to God, and to us, is that a person attain eternal life. Many people who have not been physically healed have been led into a relationship with the Lord because Christians cared enough to pray for them.

As a bishop friend who had long been involved in the healing ministry says, “Spiritual healing comes when we align ourselves with God’s own revelation regarding healing. It comes with ever-expanding surrender. God has clearly shown that he is on the side of healing; therefore, we can confidently expect it. When Jesus says, ‘Your faith has made you whole,’ he knows that he is in the presence of a person who is in such a trusting relationship with God that he is embracing what he knows God is offering. That same trust does not dictate to God what form that healing should take. Faith says, ‘You know best what kind of healing I need—whether it be of mind, body, emotion, relationships, or reconciliation with God—and I am now thankful to receive it.’”

Yes, but how am I to go about seeking God’s healing power?

Seeking God’s Healing Power

It is obvious that, when we are ill, we need to get medical help. It is also obvious that it is a good idea to practice preventive medicine by getting regular checkups, not smoking, not overeating, and getting exercise. But, what else?

The following is adapted from *The Life Recovery Bible*: “When Jesus was on earth, he was so renowned for his healing power that crowds of sick people constantly pressed in on him. One

day ‘a woman who wanted to be healed came up behind him and touched him, for she had been slowly bleeding for twelve years, and could find no cure...But the instant she touched the edge of his robe, the bleeding stopped’ (Luke 8:43-48).” This woman can be an example to us all if we want to be well. We cannot afford to stand back, waiting for a cure. Of course, we should avail ourselves of the best in medical help; but our first step should be to approach God in prayer for our healing. And, like the woman in the passage, we should persevere rather than be squeezed out by the crowd (those who would ridicule our seeking the Lord’s healing). Faith always seems to have been involved in the healing stories in the Bible—and not always the faith of the person needing to be healed. Like this woman, we should step forth boldly in faith for our own healing and the healing of our loved ones.

Suggested Scriptural References/Healing

Jeroboam is healed by the man of God from Judah (1 Kings 13:1-10);
Elijah brings a boy back to life (1 Kings 17:7-24);
Elisha also does the same (2 Kings 4:8-37);
Hezekiah, who was dying, is healed (2 Kings 20:1-11);
A plea for healing (Psalm 41);
Authority to heal is given to the Twelve by Jesus (Matthew 10:1-16);
Jesus healed Peter’s mother-in-law (Mark 1:29-31)
Peter heals a lame beggar (Acts 3:1-10);
The Apostles heal many (Acts 5:12-16);
Peter heals Aenas and Dorcas (Acts 9:32-42);
James’ instructions for the prayer of healing (James 5:13-16).

Holy Spirit

“But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things.” John 14:26

The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Trinity. God has revealed himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Within the inner life of God there is fellowship and love among three divine persons. The Holy Spirit was active in creation (Genesis 1:2) and was known in the time of Joseph (Genesis 41:38). Full revelation of the Holy Spirit occurred, however, at Pentecost (Acts 2), when the Spirit was poured out on Christ’s followers. Jesus had promised the Holy Spirit in John 16:5-16.

In Matthew 10:1-20 Jesus instructed the twelve concerning an evangelistic mission he wanted them to undertake. This would be new territory for them, and so Jesus was specific about what to wear, what to say and how to react to the situations they might face. Perhaps their biggest fear, however, would be in knowing what to say when they were persecuted (which, it was assumed, would be an expected result). Thus, in verse 20, Jesus assures them that the Holy Spirit would give them the words to say in such critical situations.

Throughout Scripture, we are told many things that the Holy Spirit will do for us: guide, comfort, empower, convict, pray through us and produce fruit in our lives, to name a few. Christians are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, thereby assuring us of Christ’s presence with us at all times. Yes, but how can I better understand the person of the Holy Spirit and his effect upon me?

Ten Things Scripture Tells Us about the Holy Spirit

- (1) Courage is certainly an aspect of the Spirit; from the early days of the Church, those who were filled with the Spirit “spoke the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31).
- (2) The Holy Spirit will guide us; Jesus said, “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13).
- (3) Supernatural power comes from the Holy Spirit; “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you” (Acts 1:8).
- (4) It is the Holy Spirit who convicts us of sin; see, for instance, John 16:8-11.
- (5) Grace comes through the Holy Spirit; in John 14:16 (KJV), we are told: “And I will pray the Father and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever.”
- (6) The Holy Spirit gives us discernment, to be able to distinguish between good and evil; see, for instance, 1 Corinthians 12:3.
- (7) The Holy Spirit is our Counselor (John 14:16 RSV), especially helping us see things more clearly from God’s point of view.
- (8) When we do not know how to pray, the Spirit of God prays within us (Romans 8:26).
- (9) The Holy Spirit changes people, as we see from so many instances in the book of Acts; see, for example, 8:15-19.
- (10) The Holy Spirit produces spiritual fruit in our lives (Galatians 5:22-23): love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Note: The Holy Spirit is received into the Christian's life at baptism. However, many are not conscious of having released the Holy Spirit to work in their lives. If this is true with you, pray for the Holy Spirit to be made present in your life. A sample prayer would be: Come Holy Spirit and cleanse the heart of this, your faithful servant, and fill me with the fire of your love; then send me forth in the power of your Spirit and you shall renew the face of the earth. Amen.

Suggested Scriptural References/Holy Spirit

Mary is pregnant by the action of (Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38);
Comes upon Jesus at baptism (Matthew 3:13-17);
Leads Jesus into the desert (Matthew 4:1-11);
The grievousness of the sin against (Matthew 12:22-37);
John the Baptist filled with from birth (Luke 1:5-25, 57-80);
Being born again through the Holy Spirit (John 3:1-21);
Jesus promises, Holy Spirit comes at Pentecost (John 14:15-31; Acts 1:1—2:47)
Virtually the whole of the book of Acts is about the working of the Holy Spirit;
Simon the sorcerer wants to do miracles by the Holy Spirit for his own profit (Acts 8:9-25);
Guides Peter and Cornelius in the opening of the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10:9-48);
Leads Saul (Paul) and Barnabas on first missionary journey (Acts 13:1-3);
Paul in Ephesus (Acts 19:1-7);
Paul's teachings on life in the Spirit (Romans 8:1-39; Galatians 5:16—6:10);
Wisdom from the Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:6-16);
Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16-23; 2 Corinthians 6:14—7:1);
Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-23);
Paul's teaching on not to grieve the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30—5:2);
The Holy Spirit's work in Scripture (2 Peter 1:12-21).

Honesty

“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest...think on these things.” Philippians 4:8 (KJV)

The Life Recovery Bible says this about the subject of honesty: “Living a lie is miserable. We may know from personal experience the heavy burden of trying to hide our secret life. If we are avoiding God and withdrawing from people because of our fear of being found out, we are living in needless agony....Why should we live with the weight of dishonesty when relief is available to us?”

In 1 Samuel 3:1-18 young Samuel had to be honest with Eli that God was extremely displeased with Eli because of his sons. Eli threatened Samuel if he did not tell the truth, saying, “May God punish you if you hide anything from me!” (v. 17 NLT). Perhaps we could say, with a threat like that—especially considering that Eli was a priest of God and Samuel was just a boy who was dependent upon Eli for his subsistence—how could Samuel do anything but tell the truth? Yet, Samuel’s circumstances might have given him even more reason to rationalize himself into lying.

So it is with us. Sometimes being completely honest is so risky that we are tempted to at least shade the truth. At other times, lack of honesty may seem a small matter, such as taking an inappropriate deduction on our income tax because we consider it an “everybody does it” sort of thing. Whether in big things or small, however, dishonesty for the Christian is not an option. As a Christian, how can I be sure I am being honest?

Guidelines for Honesty

(1) Our word should be our bond. That is an expression that was widely used in former times to indicate that a written agreement was not necessary. What the persons said could stand as a contract between them because honesty was expected. In the Old Testament verbal agreements were binding upon the parties because they placed their reputations behind them. When the first deacons were chosen, it was because they were respected men (Acts 6:3).

(2) We should carry honesty into every aspect of our lives as Paul demonstrates in 2 Corinthians 7:2.

(3) We need to recognize that honesty will not necessarily make us popular in a society that doesn’t always want the truth known. The lives of the prophets of the Old Testament show this to be true.

(4) We will set a good example for others (Titus 2:6-8).

Suggested Scriptural References/Honesty

Samuel stands before the Israelites and asks them to testify against him if he has been dishonest in his dealings with them, and they cannot (1 Samuel 12:1-5);

Nathan is honest with David about how God feels concerning David’s adultery with Bathsheba and death of Uriah (2 Samuel 12:1-25);

Prophets had to be completely honest in speaking God’s word to the people (i.e. Jeremiah 1:1-10);

Jonah is honest about why God has brought danger to the ship, and allows himself to be tossed overboard (Jonah 1:1-15);

Jesus says of Nathanael that he is an Israelite without deceit (John 1:43-47);

Paul declares his honesty in preaching and ministry (1 Thessalonians 2:1-6a);

Peter's teaching that all who want to live properly must banish deceitful conversation from their lips (1 Peter 3:8-12).

Honor

“Give everyone what you owe him: ...if honor, then honor.” Romans 13:7

Honor is an important word in the Bible. After God speaks of the ways in which we are to honor him in the Ten Commandments, his first command concerning our responsibilities to others is to honor our father and mother. Honor carries with it such concepts as prizing highly (Proverbs 4:8), caring for (Psalm 91:15), and showing respect for (Leviticus 19:3).

Psalm 29 honors God. It begins by calling on the angels to honor God for his glory and strength, the glory of his name and the splendor of his holiness. The psalm then goes on to talk about the qualities of God that are deserving of honor. It is a model for us; it gives us a framework in which we, too, can honor God in worship and prayer.

Furthermore, human beings are made in the image of God, and he wants us to honor one another as well. Yes, but how?

How to Honor Others

Here are some things to think about:

- (1) We will show others something about honoring one another by the way in which we honor our parents in accordance with the Fifth Commandment (Exodus 20:12). Our children, especially, will learn about honoring others as we honor our father and mother.
- (2) We honor by listening. One of the most important ways we can honor others is by the sacrifice of time and attention that is required by patiently and sincerely listening to what they have to say. In that way you are valuing them beyond measure.
- (3) We honor by treating people lovingly. The New Command from Jesus is that we love one another. There is no better way to honor others than to let God's love flow through us to them.
- (4) We demonstrate our honor for others by putting more value on people than on things. It is easy to get caught up in the ways of the world, and to begin to put our primary focus on material things as well as other things that temporarily fulfill us and occupy our time. As Christians, we are not here on earth to enjoy ourselves but to serve (Matthew 20:28); the paradox is that the more we serve in Christ's name, the more we enjoy life.

Suggested Scriptural References/Honor

Joseph is honored by Pharaoh (Genesis 41:41-45);

Joseph honors his father Jacob (Israel) (Genesis 46:28-30; 47:27-31);

The first five of the Ten Commandments have to do with honoring God and our parents (Exodus 20:1-12);

Ezra praises God for honoring him (Ezra 7:27-28);

Mordecai is honored by King Xerxes (Esther 6:1-11);

Jesus teaches about those seeking honor (Luke 14:7-14);
Jesus is honored on this entry into Jerusalem (Mark 11:1-10);
Paul's teaching on honoring one another (Romans 12:9-11);
Paul's teaching about honoring parents in the Lord (Ephesians 6:1-4);
Paul commends Epaphroditus, finding him worthy of honor (Philippians 2:25-30);
We are to honor leaders in the Lord's work (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13);
Caution against honoring out of prejudice (James 2:1-13).

Hope

“We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.” Hebrews 6:19a

As Christians, we are expected to be hopeful people. Many passages of Scripture, and illustrations in the lives of people in the Bible, call us to hope. See, for instance, Job 13:15, Psalm 33:17-20, Isaiah 40:31, Acts 24:15, Romans 4:18 and Ephesians 1:18. We are clearly to have hope as an integral characteristic of our lives as Christians; but how do we do it? Let’s look first at a couple of biblical illustrations of why we should have hope.

Paul, in his First Letter to the Corinthians, speaks of the Christian’s victory over death (15:54-56). In a footnote to these verses, the *Life Application Bible* says this: “Satan seemed to be victorious in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3) and at the cross of Jesus. But God turned Satan’s apparent victory into defeat when Jesus Christ rose from the dead (Colossians 2:15; Hebrews 2:14,15). Thus, death is no longer a source of dread or fear. Christ overcame it....Death has been defeated, and we have hope beyond the grave.”

In Colossians 1:25-27, Paul talks about his ministry. The Colossians had been receiving some false teaching to the effect that spiritual perfection was a hidden plan that only an elite few could discover. In contrast, Paul was proclaiming the word of God in its fullness. Any “hiddenness” was only until Christ could come to reveal the truth about God to all. Jesus can now live in all Christians—Jew and Gentile alike: “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (v. 27b).

As a bishop friend who has written a book on hope says, “As we look at our blessings we need to remember that God desires our ultimate joy, not simply our immediate pleasure. Some things are literally blessings in disguise.” By the grace of God, Christians have every reason to hope. Yes, but how?

How to Build Hope into Our Lives:

A. A Practical Approach

- (1) The best way to build hope into our lives is to be actively conscious of all we have to be thankful for, because gratitude is what builds hope. This is easier for those who are optimistic by nature, harder for pessimists, which means that they will have to try harder. We actively build hope by reflecting regularly on all we have to be grateful for. If so many things have gone well in the past and at present, why not in the future?
- (2) As our confidence grows that we are in the hands of a loving God who wants the best for us, hope is a natural result.
- (3) It also helps to have a “next thing on the horizon”—a special, godly objective we believe the Lord wants us to accomplish. That gives us something to look forward to, with hope.
- (4) In small groups or with friends, it is helpful to tell others what God has done for us and to listen to their testimonies as well. Shared stories about God’s faithfulness are great hope builders. It helps to give testimony to our own

experience of God's goodness and to hear others do the same as a great reminder that God didn't stop when the Bible was finished.

B. A Biblical Approach. In addition to the above, here are a few things to consider:

- (1) Hope is a key theme in the Bible. Throughout the Old Testament, God continued to offer hope to his people through many prophecies about a Messiah who was to come. The New Testament reveals that these prophecies came to fulfillment in Jesus Christ.
- (2) Jesus came as both the hope of Israel and the hope of all of us. Those who know Jesus have hope as a solid anchor in their lives (Hebrews 6:19).
- (3) Our hope is grounded in the faithfulness and trustworthiness of God. Because of Jesus' resurrection and return to the Father, Christians look, in hope, to his return, to the resurrection of the body and to eternal life in Christ.
- (4) Hope builds hope. In a world in which it is even easy for Christians to become discouraged, we need to be lanterns of hope to the world and to our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Suggested Scriptural References/Hope

When downcast, put your hope in the Lord (Psalm 42);

Hope of forgiveness (Psalm 130);

The hope of Israel (Isaiah 9:1-7);

The Lord Our Righteousness is coming (Jeremiah 23:5-8);

Paul before Agrippa speaks of hope in what God has promised (Acts 26:1-8);

The hope that was in Abraham (Romans 4:18-25);

Paul's teaching on future glory (Romans 8:18-27);

The hope of the Gentiles (Romans 15:7-13);

Hope is one of Paul's "big three" along with love and faith (1 Corinthians 13:13);

Put hope in God, not in material possessions (1 Timothy 6:17-19);

Our living hope (1 Peter 1:3-9);

Be prepared to give a reason for the hope that is in you (1 Peter 3:15-16);

The certainty of God's promise (Hebrews 6:13-20).

Hospitality

“Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.” Romans 12:13

The spiritual gift of hospitality is indicated by a concern for the comfort of others. Having a knack of making people feel at ease, so that they feel at home, would be another indication of the gift of hospitality, as would enjoying being in the presence of strangers and desiring to make our home available to serve the Lord by accommodating them. Those of us who do not have hospitality as a spiritual gift should, nonetheless, be concerned about and always willing to be hospitable to others. We never know when we might entertain an angel unawares (Hebrews 13:2).

That is what happened in Genesis 18:1-8. Abraham had three visitors show up unexpectedly. All the evidences of true hospitality are shown by Abraham in this passage. He ran out to welcome the strangers as soon as he was aware of their presence. He invited them to stop and rest, and had his servants wash their feet. Then he had a meal prepared to refresh them. Abraham waited on them when the food was ready. As a result, Abraham and Sarah were assured that they would have a son.

We shouldn’t show hospitality to others just so we will receive a blessing in return. We should do it because God expects it of us, and it is an opportunity to allow his love to flow through us for the benefit of others. Yet, in blessing others, we always seem to be blessed. Yes, but as a practical matter, how do we do it?

How to Practice Hospitality

Here are some hints toward how to show hospitality:

- (1) When you are expecting company in your home, pray before they arrive. This will put you in a better frame of mind to be open and attentive to them and may give you some insights into how best to be present to your guest or guests. It also invites Jesus’ special presence into “the two or three that will be gathered in his name” (Matthew 18:20).
- (2) Take care of any distracting noises (television, washing machine, children’s activities) in advance of the arrival of your company.
- (3) Focus on your guests and not the peripheries. You don’t have to have a gourmet meal, the finest place settings, etc. Your presence, interest and attention are of much more value to your company than the way things look and taste. Sometimes, when appropriate, ask about food allergies, special needs or requests.
- (4) If your home is too small for entertaining guests, prepare the meal and take it to their house, or invite them to a restaurant.
- (5) A special way to be hospitable to shut-ins is the “traveling tea.” You bring the ingredients and the china for a “tea party,” and put them together when you arrive at the home of the shut-in.
- (6) When entertaining overnight guests, a small vase with some fresh flowers, mints on pillows, or some small item of welcome is fun to do when possible.

Suggested Scriptural References/Hospitality

What happened to the angels visiting Lot in Sodom (Genesis 19:1-11);
Law about not mistreating aliens (Exodus 22:21);
The law carried a step further: love aliens (Deuteronomy 10:19);
Rahab, to Joshua's two spies (Joshua 2:1-16);
David, to Jonathan's son (2 Samuel 9:1-13);
A widow, to Elijah (1 Kings 17:7-24);
How the Twelve were to treat those who welcomed them, those who didn't (Matthew 10:5-15);
The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats (Matthew 25:31-46);
How Jesus was treated in the home of Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:36-50);
The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37);
Jesus in Martha's house (Luke 10:38-42);
How we treat friends in need (Luke 11:5-8);
Whom to invite as guests (Luke 14:12-14);
Lydia invites Paul and Silas into her home (Acts 16:13-15);
Paul's teaching on (Romans 12:9-13);
We may entertain angels without knowing it (Hebrews 13:1-2).

Humility

“Humility and the fear of the Lord bring wealth and honor and life.” Proverbs 22:4

According to *The New Bible Dictionary*, “Wherever [humility] is found in the Old Testament it is praised (e.g. Proverbs 15:33, 18:12), and God’s blessing is frequently poured upon those who possess it. Moses is vindicated because of it (Numbers 12:3), while Belshazzar is reproved by Daniel (5:22) because he has not profited by the experience of Nebuchadrezzar before him, which might have brought him the attitude of humility. 2 Chronicles in particular makes it the criterion by which the rule of successive kings is to be judged.”

The parenthetical note at Numbers 12:3 acknowledges that Moses was a humble man, more humble than anyone else on earth! Deuteronomy 34:1-12 contains a tribute to Moses at his death. Here was a man who spent the first third of his life being a “somebody,” the second third of his life being a “nobody,” and the last third showing what God could do with a nobody. The story of Moses makes up a large section of the Old Testament. A person cannot be a Bible reader and not know a lot about Moses. He was truly a great leader and a great man of God. But mainly, because of the close relationship he had with God, he was one who intimately knew exactly who God was and who he was in the service of God. But how can I be more humble?

Practicing Humility

There is really only one guideline concerning how to be humble: having a right relationship with God. If we are in a right relationship with God, humility is a natural consequence. We are aware of our insignificance in relation to God and our total dependence on him, but we are assured by our faith that we were made in the image of God and are very precious to him. It is in that balance that humility thrives. Phillips Brooks put it this way: “Humility is not seeing ourselves as less than we are but standing at our tallest height and measuring ourselves against Christ.”

A young friend who is a missionary said this: “I think humility is a natural consequence of the Gospel when we see the humility of Christ in his incarnation and suffering out of his great love for us. The worship that this understanding creates produces genuine humility. The guideline is to look at and savor the grace and humility of God and to have those powerful truths transform the way we think, feel and behave. That transformation results from searching the Scriptures diligently for deeper insights into the depths of the Father’s love for us in Christ, listening to wiser believers who teach us, reading books rich in Christian truth, and praying all along the way that God would ‘let us hear’ and ‘open our eyes to behold wonderful things from his law.’ Paul knew that *knowing* the ‘breadth and length and height and depth’ of Christ’s love was the way to transformation (Ephesians 3:14-19), and that is the road to humility.”

Guidelines for Building Humility into Our Lives:

From a series Donald M. Hulstrand wrote for the Bible Reading Fellowship’s *The Journey*:

- 1) Remember that everything we have, every skill or talent, is a gift of God. Disclaim all ownership of them along with all thoughts that they are products of our own cleverness.
- 2) We shouldn't look for praise for what we do nor feel slighted or undervalued if people don't give us recognition. Remember, we are not doing good things to be applauded but because we are reflecting Christ's life within us.
- 3) We shouldn't try to give status or importance to our family background as if we will be more highly regarded because our ancestors were people of note.
- 4) By the same token we shouldn't be ashamed of our parentage if they were poor and uneducated. Christ was born of simple peasants.
- 5) Treat everyone the same whether they be of the highest society or the lowest society.
- 6) We shouldn't try to build ourselves up by pointing out the faults of others.
- 7) If others are praised in our presence and we have actually done more than they have, join in the celebration of their good work with sincerity. Jealousy or resentment is corrosive to our own spirit.
- 8) When we know we have made a mistake, confess it to God and confess it to those who were affected by it. What pride it would be to pretend that we never make mistakes!
- 9) We have been taught by our culture that submission and serving in the background are demeaning, but Christ showed us that the people of his kingdom are willing to sit at the lowest place and even to wash the feet of others.

Suggested Scriptural References/Humility

How God felt about Moses when Aaron and Miriam expressed their jealousy of him (Numbers 12:1-16);

Joshua, when confronted by the commander of the army of the Lord (Joshua 5:13-15);

David, in allowing Shimei to pelt him with stones and dust because David thought the man might be acting according to the Lord's will (2 Samuel 16:5-14);

Trust in God produces (Psalm 131);

The Centurion, in asking Jesus' help (Matthew 8:5-13);

Jesus uses a child to illustrate (Matthew 18:1-6);

Peter, when Cornelius revered him (Acts 10:23b-48);

Paul and Barnabas, when thought to be gods (Acts 14:8-20);

Paul's, in coming to Corinth (1 Corinthians 2:1-5);

The effect of Paul's thorn in the flesh (2 Corinthians 12:1-10);

Paul, about imitating Christ's humility (Philippians 2:1-11).

Hypocrisy

“But Jesus knew their hypocrisy.” Mark 12:15

The word “hypocrite” comes from the Greek meaning a play actor. To us, a hypocrite is one who professes to be something he is not. Jesus’ judgments against the scribes and Pharisees was primarily because of their hypocrisy: they put on a good show of following the letter of the law without a trace of living the spirit of it. Apparently there is still a problem of hypocrisy in the Church today as evidenced by the number of non-Christians who continue to use the hypocrisy of Christians as their reason for disinterest.

In Matthew 15:1-20 and 23:1-36, Jesus accuses the Pharisees of hypocrisy. In the first passage, Pharisees had come to scrutinize Jesus’ activities and teachings. Over the centuries following the Israelites’ return from captivity, hundreds of traditions had been added to God’s laws. The Pharisees equated these traditions to the religious law, and that was wherein they ran afoul of Jesus’ teaching. Jesus uses a specific example to show how a tradition had circumvented the law, and he exposes their hypocrisy in following the tradition rather than the law.

In the second passage, Jesus condemns the Pharisees in a series of charges. He begins by telling the people that the Pharisees don’t practice what they teach (v.3b). Then he goes on to enumerate the ways in which they have been leading the people astray by their hypocrisy.

We, too, can let our traditions blind us to God’s truth. We can also put on a good show of being a Christian on Sunday mornings while continuing to live in worldly ways all the other times, what one person called praying *for* our fellow man on Sundays and preying *on* him the rest of the week. How can we ascertain our own hypocrisy?

Self-examination

The Life Recovery Bible says the first chapter of Romans is often used to condemn sexual sins or sexual addictions. People often skip over the last few verses, which condemn the more “acceptable” sins, such as backbiting, disobeying parents, or being a braggart. Right after this chapter, the apostle Paul speaks to people who see themselves as better than others: “‘Well,’ you may be saying, ‘what terrible people you have been talking about!’ But, wait a minute! You are just as bad. When you say they are wicked and should be punished, you are talking about yourselves, for you do these very same things” (Romans 2:1).

Every one of us is made of the same stuff, both good and bad. We may act out in different ways; but in God’s eyes, we are all the same. When we focus on admitting our wrongs, it helps us remember that we are not so different from others after all.

Suggested Scriptural References/Hypocrisy

We need to get the board out of our own eye rather than concerning ourselves about the speck in our brother’s eye (Matthew 7:1-5);
Simon the Pharisee’s reaction to the woman who anoints Jesus’ feet (Luke 7:36-50);
Jesus teaches about (Luke 12:1-12);

Of those who would have stoned the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11);
Ananias and Sapphira, pretending to share all of the income from sale of property (Acts 5:1-11).

Inadequacy, Feelings of

“But Lord,” Gideon asked, “how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least of my family.” Judges 6:15

According to psychiatrists, low self-esteem is the most prevalent emotional problem of our day. In a high-tech age in which change is the only constant, people feel increasingly inadequate to cope with the world around them. Some people in the Bible did as well.

1 Samuel 10:17-24 gives us an interesting example of feelings of inadequacy. Saul had been chosen to be the first king of Israel and had been anointed by Samuel (9:1—10:16). But, when the time came to call the people together for Saul to be acclaimed king, he was found to be hiding among the baggage!

There are times when most of us would like to be able to “hide among the baggage.” We have been called on to do something that stretches us somewhat and we become fearful of failure, afraid of what others will think or inept at deciding how to go about the task. There are few of us who do not know at least a little bit about feeling inadequate. This should help us sympathize with people who have bad self-images and feel inadequate a great deal of the time.

But, how would the Lord have us deal with our feelings of inadequacy?

Coping with Feelings of Inadequacy

A. A Practical Approach:

- (1) In what ways am I feeling inadequate and why? This requires honestly looking at ourselves.
- (2) Has this feeling come on me recently or has it been an ongoing problem in my life? Is it only occasional, involving specific challenges, or is it general and pervasive?
- (3) How seriously does this affect me: physically, emotionally and spiritually? Is there just some nervousness about it or is it deeply depressing?
- (4) If this condition only relates to my feelings of inadequacy to do a particular thing I am expected to do, it should be helpful to discuss my feelings with a wise friend, especially one who has experience with the situation I am facing. Objectivity and guidance, along with practical advice, can result.
- (5) If more serious, inner healing or professional help may be needed.

B. The Biblical Approach.

- (1) Remember that you were created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26). Be yourself; there is no one better qualified to do so.
- (2) God loves you so much he was willing to die for you (John 3:16).

- (3) God will never forsake you (Joshua 1:5; Hebrews 13:5).
- (4) God's love endures forever (Psalm 118:2-4).
- (5) Failure is not a sign of worthlessness. It is an experience to help guide you to do better and be better in the future (Philemon 10-12).

Suggested Scriptural References/Inadequacy, Feelings of

Moses, in being called to lead the Israelites out of Egypt (Exodus 3:1-14, 4:1-5, 10-17);

Gideon, in being called by God to be a leader (Judges 6:11-24);

Gideon, in testing God because unsure of victory (Judges 6:33-40);

Solomon says he is only a child and doesn't know how to carry out kingly duties (1 Kings 3:6-7);

Isaiah, in being called by God to be a prophet, says, "Woe is me, I am a man of unclean lips" (Isaiah 6:1-8);

Jeremiah, in being called to be a prophet of God, says he doesn't know how to speak and is only a child (Jeremiah 1:4-10);

Peter, when called by Jesus to be a "fisher of men" (Luke 5:1-11);

Peter, when Jesus prepares to wash his feet (John 13:1-9).

Jealousy

“When [Joseph’s] brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him.” Genesis 37:4

In Romans 13:12-14, Paul is encouraging Christians to put darkness behind them and clothe themselves in the armor of right living, “as those who live in the light.” He then goes on to spell out some of the things they shouldn’t do if they want to walk in the light, including adultery and immoral living, but also including jealousy. Paul, like Jesus (see Matthew 5-7), believed that attitudes are as important as actions. So, just as hatred could lead to murder, jealousy could also. It is important for us to be righteous in our attitudes as well as our actions.

Genesis 16:1-16 tells about Sarai becoming jealous of Hagar. When Sarai had failed to become pregnant in her old age despite God’s promise that her husband Abram would become the father of a great nation, they decided to take matters into their own hands. Sarai offered her servant girl Hagar to her husband that he might have sexual intercourse with her and produce a son. When this happened, however, and Hagar became pregnant, Sarai became jealous of Hagar and sent her away.

Many Christians are able to avoid the “big sins” (murder, theft, adultery) that expose us to serious consequences, but allow ourselves to engage in “secret sins” such as jealousy, which are not so easily discovered. As noted above, however, these “little sins” can lead to disastrous consequences (as almost happened in the case of Hagar, who was saved by an angel of the Lord) if we do not root them out and deal with them at the inception. Yes, but how?

How to Deal with Jealousy

In *Now, That’s a Good Question!*, R.C. Sproul says this: “I think one of the reasons jealousy is such a serious matter to God...is that at the root of feelings of jealousy toward other people is an unspoken, assumed criticism of God. We are, in a sense, expressing our dissatisfaction with the fact that God has been pleased to allow other people to have things that we do not have or to achieve things that we haven’t achieved. Instead of being grateful for the things God has provided for us—gifts, talents, and possessions—in our jealousy we not only hurt other people, but we are silently attacking God in his sovereignty and in his mercy. I think we need to look at it in its fullness if we are going to have the impetus to overcome it.”

Suggested Scriptural References/Jealousy

Cain was jealous of Abel (Genesis 4:1-8);

Joseph’s brothers are jealous of him (Genesis 37:1-11);

Joshua’s concern that Eldad and Medad received the Spirit of God even though they had not been where they were supposed to be (Numbers 11:16-17, 24-30);

Saul toward David (1 Samuel 18:1-30);

The elder son in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, jealous of his younger brother (Luke 15:11-32);

The Jews were jealous of Paul (Acts 13:13-52, 17:1-15).

Joy

“For the kingdom of God is...righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”

Romans 14:17

Joy is an inner quality in the life of the Christian. A fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22, 23), it is a work of the Holy Spirit within us. Our inner attitudes do not have to reflect the outer circumstances surrounding us. Joy is centered in our relationship with God. That is the anchor that holds us in place regardless of the situation we are in. If we truly know that our life is in Christ, and that what really matters at any given time is what he expects of us, we can have joy in the midst of the worst kind of trouble.

The Parable of the Lost Sheep (Matthew 18:10-14) is a wonderful word picture of joy. The teaching contained in the parable is that the Lord rejoices over the one lost sheep who is found (i.e., he “does not want anyone to perish,” 2 Peter 3:9 NLT). The picture many of us have in our minds as we think of this parable is Jesus as the shepherd, carrying the lamb on his shoulders, rejoicing as he brings it back to the fold.

The joy that comes to us in truly committing our lives to the Lord—we were all, at one time, “a lost sheep”—should carry over into all of life. As long as we remain in fellowship with Christ, we have every reason to rejoice. Yes, but how?

Incorporating Joy into Your Life

Here are some ways to do it:

- (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 relationship 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).

Suggested Scriptural References/Joy

Shown by David in bringing the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6:12-23);
Exhibited by the Jews when the edict for their annihilation is reversed (Esther 8:1-17);
The reason for joy in the Lord (Psalm 33);
In God’s abundance (Psalm 65);
The joy of worship (Psalm 84);

The joy of victory (Psalm 98);
The joy of God's presence (Psalm 100);
What brings joy to God's heart (Psalm 147);
A promise of future joy (Isaiah 9:1-7);
The joy of the redeemed (Isaiah 35:1-10);
The Parable of the Lost Coin (Luke 15:8-10);
The Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32);
Of the disciples following the Ascension (Luke 24:50-53);
In Samaria, because of Philip (Acts 8:1-8);
Paul and Silas praying and singing hymns in prison (Acts 16:16-40);
Comes from faith in Jesus (Romans 5:1-21);
Paul's joy (2 Corinthians 7:2-16);
Paul, filled with joy, despite being chained (joy is reflected throughout Philippians, see, for example, 1:12-30);
The inexpressible joy of faith (1 Peter 1:3-9);
The joy of sharing the Word of Life (1 John 1:1-4);
That the faithful are walking in truth. (2 John 4-6; 3 John 2-4).

Judgmental, Being

“Do not judge, or you will be judged.” Matthew 7:1

There is a tendency on the part of some people to build themselves up by tearing others down. We don't look as bad in our own eyes if we can think of something worse that someone else has done or is doing. Or, if another person is being complimented or built up to the extent that we begin to become jealous, the temptation is there for us to add a “Yes, but...” to bring the person's image back down. These are just a couple of the ways in which we can be judgmental of others.

John 8:1-11 tells the story of the woman caught in adultery. There is no question but that she had sinned, but her accusers wanted to stone her. They brought her to Jesus to ask his opinion of what they should do. After quietly letting the significance of what they intended to do sink in on them, Jesus then said, “Let the one who is sinless cast the first stone.” The accusers then slipped away one by one. Jesus told the woman to go and sin no more.

Jesus did not abrogate the law of Moses (although the law required that the man who committed adultery with the woman be stoned as well) in what he did. But, by adding the requirement that a sinless person cast the first stone, he emphasized the importance of compassion and forgiveness. It is a good lesson for all of us. If we are tempted to judge another person, it is a good idea to first take a hard look at ourselves.

Yes, but as a practical matter, how do we avoid being judgmental?

Encouragement Instead of Being Judgmental

A remedy for being judgmental is to become an encourager instead. As we develop an attitude of encouragement, and see how it blesses others, we will be blessed in return. Our focus then will be away from the negative aspects of the person and toward how to build on the positive ones instead.

Make a list of people you know and ask yourself what you can do today to encourage someone on that list. Pray for the people on your list, particularly the ones you have tended to judge in the past. Try to come to an understanding of how things are in their lives that have caused them to be a problem to you. Keep trying to find ways to encourage each of them, and be patient. Pray specifically for creative ways to be an encourager.

Suggested Scriptural References/Being Judgmental

The Israelite foremen against Moses (Exodus 5:1-21);

The Israelites against Moses as they seem trapped by Pharaoh's army (Exodus 14:1-12);

The Ten Tribes of Israel against those tribes on the other side of the Jordan (Joshua 22:9-31);

David's kindness misjudged by the Ammonites (2 Samuel 10:1-4);

Bildad against Job (Job's other “friends” misjudge him as well) (Job 8);

Jesus' primary teaching on “judge not, lest you be judged.” We need to get the board out of our own eye rather than worrying about the speck in our brother's eye (Matthew 7:1-5);

Nathanael shows prejudice against Nazareth (John 1:43-46);
Jesus is judged for healing on the Sabbath (John 7:21-24);
Jews who make charges against Paul, leading to his arrest (Acts 21:26-32);
Paul's teaching on God's righteous judgment (Romans 12:1-16);
Paul cautions against judging others who may be weaker in the faith (Romans 14:1-23);
James' teaching against judging (James 4:11-12).

Kindness

“For this very reason, make every effort to add...to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love.” 2 Peter 1:5-7

Kindness is one of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22) and is a characteristic in the life of Jesus. Jesus was the epitome of kindness, showing compassion to all with whom he came into contact. His divine compassion reached out to sickness (Matthew 14:14), sorrow (Luke 7:13), hunger (Matthew 15:32), loneliness (Mark 1:41) and bewilderment (Matthew 9:36). Likewise, the opportunity to show kindness to others surrounds us every day.

Moses gives us a good example of kindness in not allowing the shepherds to drive the daughters of Reuel (also called Jethro, 3:1) from the well in Exodus 2:15-22. Moses was a stranger, just having escaped for his life from Egypt. Yet, seeing the injustice done to the women, he immediately came to their aid. That kindness led to his becoming a member of Reuel’s household and the husband of Reuel’s daughter Zipporah.

Kindness often leads to kindness. Yes, but how? Simply smiling at someone at the supermarket can lead to that person smiling at someone else; the one smile can create a virtual epidemic of kindness.

Guidelines for Kindness

Here’s what 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 friend says: “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!”

Suggested Scriptural References/Kindness

When the area where they were staying could no longer support both Abram’s and Lot’s people and animals, Abram gave Lot the first choice of land upon their separation (Genesis 13:1-18);

Ruth, in accompanying her mother-in-law Naomi back to Bethlehem (Ruth 1:22);

Boaz, in making special provisions for Ruth (Ruth 2:1-23);

Shown by David to the men who had not accompanied him into battle (1 Samuel 30:1-13);

Shown by David to Mephibosheth (2 Samuel 9:1-13);

Shown by Nehemiah to the poor (Nehemiah 5:1-19);
The kindness of the Lord (Psalm 111);
The scope of God's care (Psalm 113);
God's, toward Nineveh (Jonah 4:1-11);
Jesus feeding the 4,000 (Matthew 15:32-39);
The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats (Matthew 25:31-46);
Joseph of Arimathea providing a tomb for Jesus (Matthew 27:57-61);
Jesus turning water into wine (John 2:1-11);
The early Church, caring for one another (Acts 11:27-30);
Lydia, following her conversion, offers home hospitality to Paul (Acts 16:11-15);
Paul in stopping the jailer from injuring himself (Acts 16:16-40);
Priscilla and Aquila in taking Apollos in and teaching him (Acts 18:23-28).

Kingdom of God (of Heaven)

“But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.” Luke 12:31

In *Now, That’s a Good Question!*, R. C. Sproul says this about the kingdom: “When Jesus came on the scene...he made the strange announcement: ‘The kingdom of God is among you.’ He said, ‘If you see me cast out Satan by the finger of God, then you will know the kingdom of God has come upon you.’ In a certain sense, the kingdom of God broke into history and began with the ministry of Jesus and certainly with the crucial moment at which Jesus ascended to the right hand of God for his coronation, where he now rules as King of kings and Lord of lords...What I’m trying to stress is that the kingdom of God has *already begun*. It hasn’t been finalized and it hasn’t been consummated—that won’t happen until Christ returns in glory.”

A bishop friend put it this way: “The kingdom of God broke into history with the Incarnation, when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The kingdom is wherever and whenever God rules. Jesus wanted to do only what the Father wanted, even unto death, death on a cross. I am living in the kingdom now whenever ‘I want what the Father wants.’ Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit at his baptism and was thus empowered to ‘want what the Father wants.’ It is by grace (the presence and power of the Holy Spirit acting in us) that we are able to trust Jesus (Ephesians 2:8-9) and enter into his kingdom now—let him rule our life—and want what he wants. I cannot enter into the kingdom daily just by trying hard, or obeying rules, but by trusting in Jesus and being filled again by the Holy Spirit. Even then we will face difficulty, just as Jesus did in Gethsemane: ‘Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me; nevertheless not my will but yours be done.’ Living in the kingdom is a lifetime process of being filled with the Holy Spirit daily—sanctification—which enables us day by day to trust Jesus with our life, to acknowledge his victory over sin (I want what I want) and death, and enter into the fullness of his kingdom.”

In Matthew 4:23-25 Jesus preaches about the kingdom of God. Jesus preached the Good News about the kingdom to everyone who would listen. He wanted people to know that God loves them, and that love would be demonstrated through Jesus’ life, death and resurrection.

The message is the same for us today. The kingdom has begun, and we can avail ourselves of the benefits of living in the kingdom. There is no sin or problem too great to be handled when we realize that Jesus is with us. How do we enter?

Entering the Kingdom

There seem to be three prerequisites for entering the kingdom of God:

- (1) Repentance. We must admit that we are sinners and be repentant.
- (2) Belief. We must accept Jesus as the Lord and Savior of our lives.
- (3) Dependence. We must live a life dependent on God.

The Nature of the Kingdom

A good way to review the nature and elements of the kingdom of God is to look at Jesus’ teachings (mostly through parables) on the subject as set forth below.

Suggested Scriptural References/Kingdom of God

Jesus teaches about (Matthew 7:21-27; Luke 17:20-37);

The Parable of the Four Soils (Matthew 13:1-23);

The Parable of the Weeds (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43);

The Parable of the Mustard Seed (Matthew 13:31-32);

The Parable of the Yeast (Matthew 13:33-35);

The Parable of the Hidden Treasure (Matthew 13:36-44);

The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price (Matthew 13:45-46);

The Parable of the Fishing Net (Matthew 13:47-52);

Childlikeness is a prerequisite for entering (Matthew 18:1-6, 19:13-15);

The Parable of the Wedding Feast (Matthew 22:1-14);

The Parable of the Great Banquet (Luke 14:15-24);

Disciples face hardships for (Acts 14:21-25);

Not inherited by the wicked (1 Corinthians 6:1-11).

Listening

“He who has ears, let him hear.” Matthew 11:15

The book of Proverbs tells us that it is good to listen to parents and other experienced elders; and that it is by listening to God that we attain wisdom. God communicates with us in various ways through prayer, the reading of Scripture and in our contacts with other people. We cannot receive his guidance unless we are willing to give him the time and attention to listening he deserves.

The importance of listening to others is emphasized in several Proverbs. Proverbs 12:15 says that fools think they don't need advice, but the wise listen to others. In Proverbs 13:1 a wise child accepts the discipline of parents, but the foolish child refuses to listen. Proverbs 15:31 and 32 deal with constructive criticism; if we listen to it we will grow in wisdom and understanding; if we do not, we only harm ourselves.

Proverbs are practical guidelines for living, and certainly those having to do with listening speak to us in our day. We live in an age in which many things seem to demand our immediate action. It is easy to be driven by these demands to the exclusion of intimate relationships with our loved ones and others deserving of our attention. We need, instead, to stop and listen.

Listening is one of the Christian's most important ministries, and is one to which we are all called. Whether it is in listening to the concerns of a friend or loved one or taking the time to listen to a lonely person who has no one else who will take them seriously, being a good listener is being a servant minister of Christ himself. But, how can we gain perspective of how God would use us in listening?

The Art of Listening

A. The Practical Approach:

- (1) A good listener places maximum value on what is going to be said. He or she listens as though the success or failure of something major is at stake.
- (2) Other people are important. They deserve to be listened to.
- (3) We learn when we listen. We remain ignorant to what we do not hear.
- (4) Do we hear just words or do we seek to understand what is being said?
- (5) The good listener listens more than with the ear, and takes due account of the person who is talking and whether (for instance) that person tends to overstate or to downplay the points they are making.
- (6) Yet, the good listener accepts with an open mind what others have to say. Preliminarily judging the other person can impede effective listening.
- (7) The desire to formulate an answer or observation to what is being said before the talker is finished is often the reason we don't listen well. Focused listening can often lead to a more measured response than if you tried to think too far ahead.
- (8) Finally, the good listener is a patient listener.

B. The Biblical Approach. In addition to the above, remember that listening is a key element in loving. If you need to remind yourself what true love is all about, read once again 1 Corinthians 13. Also, a good listener is one who listens to God that he may search our souls for his correction and exhortation, and who studies Scripture for the same purposes (2 Timothy 3:16,17).

Suggested Scriptural References/Listening

If God's people would only listen to him (Psalm 81:8-16);

The importance of listening to the Lord (Proverbs 1:8, 33; 8:33, 34);

One of a number of instances where Jesus says, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (Matthew 11:15);

Mary chooses to listen to Jesus instead of helping Martha, and is affirmed while Martha is rebuked for being too busy to listen (Luke 10:38-42);

Faith comes by hearing the word of Christ (Romans 10:14-17);

We are to be doers of the word, and not hearers only (James 1:22-25);

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29).

Loneliness

“Elijah was afraid, and ran for his life.” 1 Kings 19:3

As strange as it may seem, as our world grows smaller, as population increases, and as we live physically closer together, there seems to be a proportional increase in loneliness. Farm families separated by significant distances maintain closer relationships than many people living right across the hall from others in apartment complexes and condominiums. Loneliness is a serious malady of our day, but it was experienced in the Bible as well.

When Naomi’s husband and sons died, she found herself alone and away from her homeland (Ruth 1:1-19). Fortunately for her, her daughter-in-law Ruth had compassion on her and refused to leave her. Ruth followed Naomi back to Bethlehem and remained loyal to her.

A woman came to her pastor and asked him to pray for her neighbor. “What is the problem she is having that I need to pray about?” the pastor asked. “She is very lonely,” was the reply. If our neighbor is lonely, it is certainly a situation to pray about; but, mostly, our prayers should be directed toward asking God how we can be used by him to cure her loneliness. But, in addition to reaching out to others who may be lonely, how do we deal with loneliness when we experience it ourselves?

Dealing with Loneliness

Here are some guidelines:

- (1) Have faith in Jesus Christ. We are never really 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.

Suggested Scriptural References/Loneliness

Hagar, mother of Ishmael, is sent into the desert alone with her baby (Genesis 21:8-20);

Joseph's brothers toss him into a pit, then sell him as a slave (Genesis 37:19-28);
Elijah, pursued by Jezebel, thinks he is the only faithful person left (1 Kings 19:1-10);
After losing his children, even Job's wife turns against him (Job 2:6-10);
The cry of separation from God that Jesus repeated on the cross (Psalm 22:1-8);
John the Baptist lived a lonely desert life (Mark 1:4-8);
Jesus was driven into the desert for 40 days of fasting and prayer, and temptation by the devil
(Matthew 4:1-11);
The demon-possessed man was an outcast (Luke 8:26-39);
Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-45);
Jesus on the cross (Mark 15:25-37).

Love, Selfless (*Agape*)

“But the greatest of these is love.” 1 Corinthians 13:13b

Selfless love is not illustrated in the Old Testament as well as it is in the New Testament. As taught by Jesus, Paul and John, *agape* (selfless love) is revealed to us in the life and actions of Jesus. Jesus’ miracles and healings fall into this category and can be looked at under those headings in the Appendix (i.e., Jesus, Healings; Jesus, Miracles). The fact that selfless love comes to the fore through Jesus demonstrates the awakening revelation of God’s love that Jesus’ life, death and resurrection brought to humankind. Followed closely by forgiveness, love is undoubtedly the most important subject in Scripture.

1 Corinthians 13:1-13 is Paul’s classical treatise on the nature of love. It is the standard by which we measure selfless love. Its words are just as pertinent today as when they were written, and this passage is often read as a part of the wedding ceremony.

Yes, but how do we, as Christians, learn how to reflect *agape* in our lives?

Showing Selfless Love

There is a story about a seminary where the theological students were put to a special test of showing selfless love. Each one was to preach on the Parable of the Good Samaritan in the chapel, located across the campus from the classroom. Just a minute or two before each was to preach, the professor would send the student from the classroom to the chapel, and on the way would be a person appearing to be desperately in need of help.

There are so many 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.
- (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.
- (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.

Suggested Scriptural References/Selfless Love

Love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:1-18);

Jonathan loved David as himself (1 Samuel 18:1-4);

Ruth pledges to go with Naomi instead of staying among her own people (Ruth 1:1-22);

Jesus teaches that we are to love our enemies (Matthew 5:43-48);

The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37);

Jesus tells three parables of the love of God, the kind of love that should be reflected through Christians to others (Luke 15:1-32);

Jesus loves Lazarus (John 11:1-44);

Jesus, in his teaching about the vine and the branches, tells his followers to love one another (John 15:1-17);

Paul teaches on how to show love (Romans 12:9-21, 13:8-10);

The Corinthians are asked to demonstrate love (2 Corinthians 8:1-15);

Paul prays for the Ephesians that they may know and show love (Ephesians 3:14-21);

Love shown by Paul to the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 2:1—3:5);

John's teachings on loving one another (1 John 2:7-17; 3:11-24; 4:7-21);

Walking in love (2 John 4-6);

Love in action (3 John 5-8);

The problem of the Ephesian church having forsaken its first love (Revelation 2:1-7).

Loyalty

“And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself.”

1 Samuel 18:3

In a relativistic age that does not rely on ultimate truth and is too quick to compromise, loyalty takes a beating and commitment comes into disfavor. Loyalty is based on the commitment of one person to another. For a healthy society, loyalty is an essential ingredient.

According to a friend who led a national Bible study organization, “The loyalty between David and Jonathan was a covenant relationship based on brotherly love. ‘Covenant’ implies more than simple agreement; in biblical times a covenant was considered a commitment in which God had a part. Christians are beneficiaries of the New Covenant through Christ’s death on the cross for our redemption. Thus, there is a sense in which our loyalty to others is more than a casual commitment. Our ability to be loyal is because of the loyalty of the Son to the Father, as we live in the grace of Christ through the Holy Spirit.”

An incident in Genesis 9:20-29 tells of the loyalty of Shem and Japheth in covering their father Noah’s nakedness. Following the flood, Noah and his family had settled down, Noah became a farmer, grew grapes, made wine, became drunk and lay naked in his tent. It was Noah’s other son, Ham, who came upon the scene. Instead of covering his father’s nakedness, Ham came and told the two other brothers, apparently with a mocking attitude. Shem and Japheth, however, showed loyalty in the modest way in which they handled Noah’s dishonor.

One of the easiest temptations to our loyalty is when one to whom we are loyal lets us down. We can too easily rationalize that such action justifies our disloyalty. It is, however, at such times that our professions of loyalty are put to their proper test. How do we best demonstrate our loyalty?

Elements of Loyalty

According to a footnote in the *Life Application Bible* (at 1 Samuel 18:1-4), these were the foundation stones of the relationship of loyalty between David and Jonathan:

- (1) they based their friendship on commitment to God, not just each other;
- (2) they let nothing come between them, not even career or family problems;
- (3) they grew closer together when their friendship was tested; and
- (4) they remained friends to the end.

Suggested Scriptural References/Loyalty

Abram, in rescuing Lot, his family and his possessions (Genesis 14:1-16);

Jonathan and David were loyal to one another (1 Samuel 18:1-4);

Jehoiada showed loyalty to the House of David in making Joash king (2 Kings 11:1-21);

Barnabas to John Mark, despite disagreement with Paul (Acts 15:36-41).

Marriage

“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” Matthew 19:5

A contract is an agreement between two or more people; whereas a covenant, in the sense that Christians use that term, is an agreement in which God is a party. God has made several covenants with his people, and holy matrimony is a covenantal relationship. Marriage is not entered into solely by the man and the woman; God is also a party to it. When things aren't going just as they should between husband and wife, it is good for them to remember that God is an integral part of the relationship.

Friends of ours who lead marriage retreats say, “On your wedding day you took vows to each other and to God. You entered into the sacrament of Holy Matrimony. In Holy Matrimony, a couple is joined in a sacramental relationship. They become a living sign of God's loving and caring presence to each other. Their life together becomes a sign of Christ's love to this sinful and broken world.”

Matthew 19:1-12 contains Jesus' primary teaching on marriage. The scene begins with Pharisees testing Jesus by asking him a question about the justification for divorce. Jesus refers to the fact that God had created man and woman for one another (Genesis 1:27) that they be joined as husband and wife. No one is to separate this union because it is God who created it. Jesus points out that Moses had only allowed divorce in the case of hard-hearted wickedness; divorce was not a part of God's plan.

One of the great failings in most Christian churches today is their failure to instruct couples more effectively about marriage. When two people fall in love and marry, there is often more emphasis on the wedding preparations than on the seriousness of the covenant being entered into. No wonder there is so much divorce—even among Christians—in our day.

Marriage is one of the most difficult commitments people can make during their lifetime. For two people to come together in an intimate and sharing relationship calls for the blending of two different sets of expectations, needs, and goals. Add to that each person's struggles, secrets and past problems; their separate—but equal—prerogatives; and their faith differences, which are sometimes small but highly sensitive, and the mix can sometimes be volatile. That is, if they have to go it alone. Christian marriage does not exist in a vacuum. God, the partner in the marriage, works through the Holy Spirit and the Body of Christ to affect growth in marriages just as individual growth is supported.

According to the book *This Love We Share*, although each person in a marriage is a precious child of God, marriage brings into existence a new entity: the couple. Although each person maintains everything God created him or her to be, there now exists something greater than the two individuals who comprise it. The great wonder of marriage is that one plus one equals one. As two people “become one flesh,” this unique, God-given relationship happens. Wholeness becomes possible in a way that would not be so by the two individuals living separately. Yes, but how?

Recommendations for a Successful Marriage

Couples need instruction in the fundamentals of the marriage relationship prior to and during marriage, ongoing courses to help them continue in a successful marriage, and courses in Christian parenting. Mature couples need an occasional “retreat” to rekindle and reevaluate their relationship. Married couples with children need a strong marriage/family ministry for support and validation. Our churches are the best place for such instruction.

Suggested Scriptural References/Marriage

God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16);

Some instructions from Paul (1 Corinthians 7:1-40);

Caution against marrying unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14—7:1);

Paul, on husbands and wives and their responsibilities to one another (Ephesians 5:22-33);

Marriage is to be honored (Hebrews 13:4).

Mercy (Compassion)

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.” Matthew 5:7

Toward the end of Deuteronomy, Moses forewarns the Israelites what will happen to them for disobeying the covenant they have with God. He calls them to return to the Lord (30:1-10). Basically, Moses was telling the Hebrews about God’s mercy. When they were ready to return to God, he would be ready to receive them. God’s mercy goes far beyond anything we can conceive of. Even if the Israelites obstinately turned away from him and repeatedly disobeyed him, God would still take them back. God’s mercy is shown repeatedly in Scripture, and there are a number of instances of his people showing mercy as well.

In 1 Samuel 24:1-22, 26:1-25 mercy is shown by David to Saul when he could have killed him. Saul had tried to kill David, and at the time of these episodes, David was a fugitive from Saul. David had a profound respect for Saul’s position as king. He believed Saul had been divinely appointed, and to harm him would be an offense against God. Thus, despite Saul having been delivered into his hands, David had mercy on him.

There are many things that can properly motivate our mercy. If an instance of injustice occurred to us or someone we love, perhaps even many years ago, we may have a strong sense of mercy toward those who are suffering injustices. If we have known what it is like to be poor, we may tend to be especially merciful to the poor. However, like David, it is best for our mercy to be motivated by a deep and lasting respect for God and his mercy.

God has demonstrated his mercy many times within Scripture, and he would have us be merciful as well. Yes, but how?

How to Show Mercy

Here are some examples to guide us:

- (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).

Suggested Scriptural References/Mercy

Shown by Saul to those who opposed his kingship (1 Samuel 11:1-15);
Shown to David by Abimelech in letting him have the holy bread (1 Samuel 21:1-9);
Shown by David to his men who had not accompanied him into battle (1 Samuel 30:1-31);
Shown by David to those who had opposed him in his conflict with Absalom (2 Samuel 19:9-39);
A plea for God's mercy (Psalm 25);
A plea for mercy because life is short (Psalm 39);
A plea for mercy, forgiveness and cleansing (Psalm 51);
Thanksgiving for God's mercy (Psalm 116);
A prayer in desperation (Psalm 142);
Mercy and compassion sought (Zechariah 7:1-14);
Shown by Jesus in healing the blind men (Matthew 9:27-31);
Jesus' teaching on how many times we are to forgive (Matthew 18:21-22);
Jesus demonstrates unselfconscious showing of mercy (Matthew 25:31-40);
Shown by Jesus to the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11);
Paul, thankful for the mercy shown to him by Christ (1 Timothy 1:3-17);
Jesus is able to sympathize with us (Hebrews 4:14—5:10);
Mercy triumphs over justice (James 2:12-13)

Ministry (Lay Ministry)

“For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body....” 1 Corinthians 12:13

All Christians are called by God to participate in the ministry of Christ. All ministry is his ministry. That which we call “our ministry” is, more accurately, our role in his ministry. For too long, the term “minister” has been understood to be only those ordained.

When Paul outlined the gifts for ministry in Romans 12:1-8, he was not talking about the ordained ministry. He was talking about the gifts that God provides to all Christians to do his work in the world. As Christ’s people, we need to know our gifts and put them into operation so that Christ’s ministry may be made manifest in a world desperately in need of the benefit of those gifts.

According to a useful definition, the ministry of lay persons is to represent Christ and his Church; to bear witness to him wherever they may be (i.e., to have ministry as an attitude of life); to carry on Christ’s work of reconciliation in the world according to the gifts given them (i.e., using our spiritual gifts, we are to engage in the work of bringing people into relationship with God through our vocation and in any other ways available to us); and to take their place in the life, worship and governance of the Church (i.e., to perform those ministries related to the life of the church to which God calls us).

How do we find our gifts for ministry and begin to function in the lay ministry or ministries to which God calls us within the body of Christ? See the section on Spiritual Gifts for that purpose. But there are ministries to which all people are called.

Some Ministries to Which All Are Called

- (1) *Witnessing.* Christ would have us share, by word and deed, our love for him and what he is doing in our lives as the opportunities present themselves.
- (2) *Making Disciples.* In Matthew 28:19, Jesus tells us to go and make disciples. That’s what we do when we aid newer Christians in growing in their faith so that they, too, may become dedicated followers of Christ who do his ministry in the world.
- (3) *Intercessory Prayer.* God expects all of us to be praying for others.
- (4) *Reconciliation.* We are to be ministers of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:19), bringing people into relationship with God and with one another as best we can.
- (5) *Presence.* Christ wants us to be present to others in need, because it is in that manner that we bring to them the presence of God through the Holy Spirit in us.
- (6) *Healing Prayer.* Some people are especially blessed with the spiritual gift of healing, but all of us can pray healing prayers for our loved ones and others in need as we have the opportunity to do so, and God will bless those prayers.
- (7) *Servanthood.* Christians are on earth to serve (Matthew 20:25-28). We are to serve in any way the Lord would choose to use us.
- (8) *Generous Giving.* We are to share what we have with others, giving generously to the Lord’s work and other worthwhile efforts.

Suggested Scriptural References/Lay Ministry

Moses' father-in-law Jethro shows Moses how to share with other leaders his ministry to the people (Exodus 18:13-27);

The Spirit falls on 70 who prophesy (Numbers 11:24-30);

Jesus teaches on the nature of ministry (servanthood) (Matthew 20:20-28);

The choosing of Matthias to take part in the apostolic ministry (Acts 1:12-26);

The choosing of the seven deacons for ministry (Acts 6:1-7);

About gifts for ministry and how those gifts are to be used in the church (1 Corinthians 12:1-31; Ephesians 4:1-16);

Ministry among Paul's companions (1 Corinthians 16:10-18);

Paul encourages others through his ministry (2 Corinthians 4:1-18);

The ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:16-21);

Paul instructs Timothy in how to minister (2 Timothy 4:1-5).

Miracles

“This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee.” John 2:11

A Bible dictionary would define a miracle as an event in the physical world that is outside the operation of known laws. It would be an extraordinary happening that seems to upset the laws of nature and that brings the supernatural into the realm of the natural. The Bible, of course, is filled with miracles.

The birth of Isaac to Sarah in her old age (Genesis 21:1-7) was certainly one of the early miracles in the Bible. Although scholars can argue about the actual ages of people in Genesis, there is no doubt that Sarah was well past the normal age for childbearing. The name Isaac means “he laughs,” and there was certainly reason to laugh at Isaac’s birth! God had promised Abraham a son; indeed, God’s plan for the future lay in Abraham’s seed. Yet, years had passed without Sarah giving childbirth. Then the miracle happened.

God has always allowed most things to follow in their natural course. But he is the creator, and he can do whatever he wills. At important times in history, God has chosen to step into the human scene and cause the unexpected to happen. Less momentous things—what many Christians call “God-incidents”—happen every day to those who are open to God’s intervention in their lives. But, what about miracles in our day?

Miracles in Our Day

In the early days of the Christian faith (as seen in the Acts of the Apostles), the kinds of miracles Jesus worked continued to be worked by the apostles. When they witnessed “in word and deed,” the “deed” part was often something miraculous. And, of course, the Church grew rapidly in those times.

Today, when Christians witness in “deed,” that normally means acts that will meet human need, such as feeding the hungry and ministering to prisoners. There are many Christians who believe that miracles occur today just as they did in Bible times and that Christians should continue to witness in “deed” both by miracles and by meeting human needs in practical ways. Other respected Christians do not believe in miracles in our time. Often, those who do not are very steeped in Scripture. It is even because of their reliance on the Bible that they disbelieve current day miracles; they think that, once we had Scripture to guide us, there was no longer a need for miracles.

Regardless of where you may stand on this issue, many faithful, educated and respected Christians contend that they have seen God work miracles in their lives and in the lives of others. Friends of ours who are missionaries say, “Miracles are common in places where the church is growing exponentially; in fact it is one of the reasons for the dramatic growth. This is primarily in the so-called Third World countries where the church functions much as it did in its early days.” One who believes in these miracles and has written extensively on the subject has developed a checklist of seven items that can be used to test whether an event is truly a miracle of God:

- (1) It neither contradicts Scripture, nor would it violate any general biblical principles.
- (2) It brings glory to the triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- (3) It conforms to the known will of God.
- (4) It blesses the people who have been touched by the event.
- (5) It measurably advances God’s kingdom here on earth.
- (6) It is affirmed by at least two or three credible witnesses.
- (7) The conclusion merits agreement by responsible and like-minded colleagues.

Suggested Scriptural References/Miracles

In the covenant with Abram, a smoking firepot and flaming torch pass between carcasses of animals (Genesis 15:1-21);
 God hears Ishmael crying, and leads Hagar to water (Genesis 21:14-21);
 A ram, caught in a thicket, provides Abraham a substitute sacrifice for Isaac (Genesis 22:1-19);
 Pharaoh’s daughter finds Moses floating in a basket as she bathes, and adopts him as her own (Exodus 2:1-10);
 Moses and the burning bush (Exodus 3:1-12);
 Signs God gave Moses to show he had God’s authority (Exodus 4:1-17, 29-31; 7:8-13);
 Plagues visited upon Egypt because Pharaoh would not free the Israelites (Exodus 7:14—12:30);
 God parted the sea for the Israelites to escape Pharaoh’s army, then brought it back together, drowning Pharaoh’s horsemen (Exodus 14:1-31);
 God showed Moses how to turn bitter water into sweet (Exodus 15:22-27);
 God provided quail and manna for the Israelites in the wilderness (Exodus 16:1-35);
 God provided water from a rock at Horeb (Exodus 17:1-7);
 By holding up the staff God had given Moses, the Israelites prevailed in a battle with the Amalekites (Exodus 17:8-16);
 God provides quail so the people will have meat to eat (Numbers 11:4-35);
 God demonstrates the leadership role of Aaron by causing his staff, and only his staff, to bud. (Numbers 17:1-13);
 God brings water out of rock (Numbers 20:1-13);
 God got Moses to make a bronze snake on a pole so that anyone bitten by a snake could look at it and be healed (Numbers 21:4-9);
 God spoke through Balaam’s donkey (Numbers 22:21-41);
 God spoke through Balaam (Numbers 22:1—24:25);
 God parted the Jordan River (Joshua 3:1—4:24);
 The fall of Jericho (Joshua 6:1-27);
 The sun stands still (Joshua 10:1-15);
 Meat and bread are consumed by fire by an angel of the Lord (Judges 6:1-40);
 The angel of the Lord ascends into flames before Manoah and his wife (Judges 13:1-25);
 The defeat of the Philistines (1 Samuel 7:2-17);
 In connection with Saul becoming king of Israel (1 Samuel 9:1—10:27);
 The healing of Jeroboam’s hand by the man of God from Judah (1 Kings 13:1-10);
 Elijah is fed by ravens (1 Kings 17:1-6);
 Widow of Zarephath feeds Elijah from a jar that refills; Elijah brings son to life (1 Kings 17:7-24);

Elijah and the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:1-46);
An angel brings sustenance to Elijah (1 Kings 19:1-9);
The Lord appears to Elijah (1 Kings 19:10-18);
A series of miracles occur to Elijah and Elisha (2 Kings 1:1—4:44; 7:1—8:5);
Elisha gets a borrowed ax head to float (2 Kings 6:1-7);
Elisha captures the Arameans who came to kill him (2 Kings 6:8-23);
Hezekiah's shadow moves backward (2 Kings 20:1-11);
Remembering God's miracles in the past can help us through hard times (Psalm 77);
Daniel's friends are unharmed after being thrown into the fiery furnace (Daniel 3:1-30);
A hand writes on the wall (Daniel 5:1-30);
Daniel in the lion's den (Daniel 6:1-28);
The birth of Jesus (Matthew 1:18-25, John 1:1-18);
The star in the east (Matthew 2:1-12);
What happens as Jesus dies (Matthew 27:45-56);
Jesus rises from the dead (Matthew 27:62—28:20);
Jesus ascends into heaven (Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:1-11);
Jesus' post-resurrection appearances (Luke 24:36-53);
Jesus appears to the disciples as they are fishing (John 21:1-14);
Pentecost (Acts 2:1-47);
Peter brings Dorcas back to life (Acts 9:32-42);
Peter's release from prison (Acts 12:1-19);
Miraculous signs and wonders follow Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14:1-10);
Paul casts out a spirit of divination, earthquake occurs after imprisonment (Acts 16:16-40);
Paul's extraordinary miracles (Acts 19:11-22);
Paul brings Eutychus back to life (Acts 20:7-12);

Obedience to God

“[We] take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” 2 Corinthians 10:5

Living according to the will of God is fundamental to the Christian faith. That means being obedient to God’s call upon our lives. But, how do we do that?

Helen Smith Shoemaker said this, “The great things of life emerge out of small obediences. One thing comes from another; it is seldom let down out of heaven in its totality, but comes out of the simple obedience of taking one step at a time.”

In Luke 1:26-38 we find what may be considered one of the two most important acts of obedience in the history of the world (the other being Jesus’ submission in the Garden of Gethsemane). That act of obedience is Mary’s. She would become the mother of Jesus by the Holy Spirit.

The acts of obedience to which God calls us are mild indeed compared to what Mary was asked to do. Yet, every obedience to God is important. It is how God seeks to carry out his plan in the world. Next to love of God, obedience to him should be the priority of the Christian.

How to Become More Obedient to God:

A. A Practical Approach

- (1) Reflect on what we have learned by our own obedience in the past, to God and to those having authority over us (especially our parents).
- (2) Think about the obedience we expect from our children and those we are called upon to manage. If we have a right to expect that kind of obedience from them, realize how much more God has a right to expect obedience from us.
- (3) Disobedience to God is sin. We need to face up to that reality rather than rationalizing our actions.
- (4) Reflect on the consequences of disobedience in our own lives.

B. The Biblical Approach. In addition to the above, consider this:

The Life Recovery Bible tells us this: “Jesus said, ‘Come to me and I will give you rest—all of you who work so hard beneath a heavy yoke—and let me teach you; for I am gentle and humble, and you shall find rest for your souls’ (Matthew 11:28-30). Taking a yoke on implies being united to another in order to work together. Those who are yoked together must go in the same direction, but when they do so, their work is made considerably easier. Jesus is saying that when we finally decide to submit our life and our will to his direction, our burdens will become manageable. When we let him do the driving, we will be able to ‘find rest’ for our soul. He knows the way and has the strength to turn us around and get us on the road toward life.”

Suggested Scriptural References/Obedience

The story of Noah (Genesis 6:5—8:22);

The calling of Abram (Abraham) (Genesis 12:1-9);

The Israelites in following Moses' instructions concerning the passover and the exodus (Exodus 12:21-51);

The Israelites in following instructions concerning the making of the Tabernacle, the Ark, the Altar and the priests' garments (Exodus 35:1—39:43);

Jesus teaches about (Matthew 21:28-32);

Saul (Paul) on being encountered by the Lord on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-22);

Cornelius and Peter (Acts 10:1-48).

Obstacles, Overcoming

“They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out.” Acts 5:18,19

All of us face obstacles in life. We can see them as problems or as opportunities. If we just look at them as problems, we can easily become discouraged and get bogged down in our own misery. If we see them as challenges or opportunities, God can take our situation—as bad as it might be—and bring some blessing out of it (Romans 8:28).

In Genesis 39:1-6, Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers. Now that was an obstacle! Suddenly he had gone from being his father’s favorite son to slavery in a foreign land. Yet, because of his positive attitude, he was able to work his way into a trusted position in a wealthy man’s home. Joseph learned from this experience; and, despite staggering setbacks that lay ahead of him, Joseph was able to overcome obstacles and become the second most powerful person in the land.

Attitude is the key. We can give in to the obstacles we face and allow them to weigh us down or we can look for the opportunity in the obstacle, and do the best we can. Yes, but how?

Overcoming Our Obstacles

What are some practical ways to deal with the obstacles all of us face in life?

A. The Practical Approach:

- (1) The first thing to do is to back off and try to get the situation in perspective. Often, we simply react to the obstacle we face and try either to bull our way through it or give up in defeat. If we will just take time to analyze the situation and where it fits into the whole of life, often either the obstacle will go away or we’ll see a way to rise above it. As someone once said, “The obstacle was still there, but it was like I was in a boat and the water just rose and let me float over it!”
- (2) Within almost every obstacle there is an opportunity. Look for that opportunity rather than letting the obstacle blind you to it.

B. A Biblical Approach: In addition to the above, we might consider:

- (1) Praying. The Lord can help us see a solution, or at least get our priorities right, so the obstacle doesn’t loom above us as it seemed to before.
- (2) God does not call us to be successful, only obedient. If we are being obedient to the Lord in the situation, that is all that counts.
- (3) Always look for what God is doing, and move in that direction.
- (4) And here is a fresh way to look at a particular obstacle many people face. A clergy friend tells of the difficulty he has had in overcoming obstacles that seem to prevent reconciling with his brother. But he got an insight from Genesis 32:22-32 (wherein Jacob had been face-to-face with God) that has helped.

When, following that experience, Jacob encountered his brother Esau, thinking that his brother would want revenge (because Jacob had stolen his birthright), Jacob saw the face of God in Esau (Genesis 33:10). My friend says, “I am convinced that if I am to overcome the obstacle of the lack of response of my brother to my desire for reconciliation, I must concentrate on seeking the face of God. As I wrestle with the areas of my own life that need to be cleaned up, I will see God’s face more clearly. Ultimately, I am confident that the day will come when I see the face of God in my brother, and perhaps he will even be able to see God in my face.”

Suggested Scriptural References/Overcoming Obstacles

- Joseph, framed by Potiphar’s wife and imprisoned, uses dreams given to him by God to become the second most powerful person in Egypt (Genesis 41:1-44);
- Moses, guided by the Lord, does signs and wonders and brings plagues, as a way to get Pharaoh to release the Israelites from captivity (Exodus 5:1—12:33);
- God showed Moses how to turn bitter water into sweet (Exodus 15:22-27);
- God provided water from a rock at Horeb (Exodus 17:1-7);
- Under Zerubbabel, seductive arguments and direct intervention to stifle the rebuilding of the Temple are overcome (Ezra 4:1—6:15);
- Under Nehemiah, intimidation against the Israelites trying to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem is overcome (Nehemiah 4:1-23);
- Daniel and his companions refused to eat the special food and wine provided them by the king, got away with it, and prospered (Daniel 1:1-21);
- Daniel’s three friends survive the fiery furnace (Daniel 3:1-30);
- Daniel survives the lions’ den (Daniel 6:1-28);
- Hosea was able to use his reconciliation with his adulterous wife as a means of trying to bring Israel back from its waywardness (Hosea 3:1-5);
- Apostles are put in jail, but let out by an angel (Acts 5:17-21);
- Peter is released from prison by an angel (Acts 12:1-19);
- Paul and Silas are released from bondage by an earthquake (Acts 16:22-40);
- A plot to have Paul killed is uncovered by Paul’s nephew, and Paul is taken safely to Caesarea (Acts 23:12-24);
- Because the Roman commander takes Paul’s advice seriously, all hands reach shore safely following a shipwreck (Acts 27:27-44).

Obstinacy (Stubbornness)

“For the Lord your God had made his spirit stubborn and his heart obstinate.”

Deuteronomy

2:30

Stiff-necked, stubborn, rebellious and obstinate are all words used in Scripture to describe the Israelites. Obstinacy against evil and wrongdoing is a virtue, but obstinacy against the Lord can only mean destruction. Christians must be on their guard that they not be in rebellion against God. Murmuring and griping are present-day signs, just as they were in Scripture.

In Luke 13:34, 35 Jesus weeps over the stubbornness of Jerusalem. Jerusalem was Israel’s biggest city and the nation’s political and spiritual center. Jesus had given his all to convey the message of God’s love, but he had been rejected. It was logical that the focus of his concern would be Jerusalem. It had a history of rejecting God’s prophets (1 Kings 19:10; 2 Chronicles 24:19; Jeremiah 2:30; 26:20-23). Jesus knew that its rejection of him as Messiah simply followed the pattern of the obstinacy it had always shown.

We all know people who seem to be obstinate to the Good News of Jesus Christ. Depending upon the depth of our faith commitment and the relation of the obstinate person to ourselves, we may well be brought to tears about them. Never give up. (As Paul points out in Romans 9-11, God has not given up on the Jews). Every person has a God-shaped vacuum within them. It is waiting to be filled with the love of God, no matter how hard the shell of resistance seems to be. Yes, but how?

How to Reach the Obstinate

There is a temptation to say that the obstinate simply can’t be reached. However, we have the responsibility to try. Here are some ways:

- (1) Pray for them; and, as appropriate, let them know you are praying for them.
- (2) Love them. Reach out to them in as loving a way as you can as often as you can. This can build a relationship, and you are not likely to reach them until you are in relationship with them.
- (3) Listen to them. They have a point of view. There are reasons they are the way they are. You will have more credibility with them the more you are willing to listen.
- (4) Identify with them to the extent you can. It is highly unlikely that they are wrong or sinful in everything they think and do. Wherein you can identify with their griefs and gripes, let them know that you do. This will also build up credibility.
- (5) Challenge them to change when the opportunities present themselves. Help them to see the error in their thinking, and show them a better way. Let the Holy Spirit guide you; and, as we noted in the first step above, keep praying.

Note: A friend points out that, although this section has dealt with those who are obstinate toward God and how to reach them, we are sometimes obstinate ourselves. She says it is helpful to remind ourselves that a two-year-old stamping its feet and shouting “No” at its parent thinks it is in control. The child isn’t, but certainly feels like it! We sometimes are like this toward God, and need to remind ourselves who is really in control.

Suggested Scriptural References/Obstinacy, Stubbornness

Pharaoh’s heart was so hardened that even after the plagues he still pursued the Israelites (Exodus 14:1-31);

The Israelites grumble against Moses, being fearful of entering the land God had promised them, leading to 40 years of wandering in the desert (Numbers 14:1-45);

God calls Ezekiel to speak his words to the obstinate people of Israel (Ezekiel 2:1-9);

On the one hand, the Jews condemn Jesus for eating and drinking with sinners while opposing John the Baptist who lived an austere life (Matthew 11:16-19);

Jesus predicts that some towns will be condemned for refusing to accept God’s messengers (Luke 10:10-16);

Stephen rebukes the Jewish leaders for persecuting the prophets and resisting the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51-54);

King Agrippa hears the Gospel but will not repent (Acts 26:2-32);

Warning not to be stubborn against God as were those whom Moses led out of Egypt (Hebrews 3:8-13).

Openness

“See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.” Hebrews 3:12

Openness to God is a priority for Christians. By spending time in prayer and meditation, we can make it possible for God to speak to our deepest longings. And, God can come to us in many ways, if we are open. He can speak to us through Scripture, the Church, the experiences of life, and other people. Openness to God also makes us more open to others, that he might use us to serve them.

Why does the Bible give Abram (Abraham) such a prominent place? Because he is one who hears the Lord’s call upon his life and obeys (Genesis 12:1-5). From Abram would come the Jewish belief in the one God, and from that foundation the Messiah would come into the world. If it had not been for the openness of Abram to God, someone else would have had to be chosen to be the patriarch of Judaism.

God is a God of surprises. He is always trying to communicate with his people that they may know and do his will. God has a call upon each person’s life; the question is whether we will be open, attentive and obedient to that call. Those who are open are (to use C. S. Lewis’ term) surprised by joy. But, how do we make ourselves open?

How to Be Open

There is a simple, three-fold prescription for openness, and it can be remembered by the word **FAT**: be **F**aithful, be **A**vailable and be **T**eachable. As a friend has said, “Faith is trusting that the God who cares about us is in charge. So, we are to be *available* to walk through the open door and have *faith* (trust) that we will be *taught* something in the moment we are in. God uses everything we go through for his good, so we should be constantly open to him in all circumstances. We close the door on the things the world tells us and open up to God and let him minister to us. We are to be faithful, available and teachable through Scripture, communication with God and with fellow believers. We are to be open to the Lord’s voice in all circumstances. When we are open, our old self is transformed into the new self that God desires to give us. We live above the line (with godly attributes) instead of below the line (with worldly/selfish attributes). Are we open to what God has for us today?”

See also **Vulnerability**

Suggested Scriptural References/Openness

Noah hears God and obeys (Genesis 6:9-22);

King Artaxerxes responds to Nehemiah’s plea (Nehemiah 2:1-9);

Peter, Andrew, James and John respond instantly to Jesus’ call to follow him (Mark 1:16-20);

Though she was not a Jew, a Syrian woman asks Jesus to heal her daughter (Mark 7:24-30);

Blind Bartemaues believes Jesus can heal him (Mark 10:46-52);

Mary accepts the call to bear Christ (Luke 1:26-32);

The Centurion believes Jesus can heal his servant even from afar (Luke 7:1-10);

Zacchaeus is so open to Jesus that he climbs a tree to be able to see him pass by (Luke 19:1-9);

Nicodemus, a Pharisee, is open to learning more from Jesus (John 3:1-12);

The Samaritan woman at the well was open to Jesus' teaching as were people from the village (John 4:1-42);

Ananias, despite his fear of Paul, responds to the Lord's command to go to Paul and pray for him (Acts 9:10-19);

As a result of a vision, Peter, a devout Jew, is willing to go to the Gentile Cornelius' home and lead him and his family to the Lord (Acts 10:9-29);

A call to remain open to the things of God and not to harden our hearts (Hebrews 3:7-19).

Pain and Suffering

“Look upon my affliction and distress....” Psalm 25:18

Christian author Keith Miller says, “Advice we listen to, pain we obey.” John Coburn said, “Don’t waste your pain.” And Christian psychiatrist Paul Tournier said he hoped his patients wouldn’t get rid of their pain until they knew the meaning of it. Pain and suffering are certainly things we don’t want, but they could be alerting us to a deeper problem or need, and definitely have the potential of leading us to a greater maturity of faith.

Luke 7:11-15 tells about a widow whose only son died. Because this was the woman’s only son and she was without a husband, she was totally without a support system. When the mourners had gone away, she would be left alone and destitute. Probably too old for childbearing, she would be very unlikely to marry again. Unless some relative took pity on her, she would be reduced to begging for her existence. Jesus felt the depth of her pain and brought the young man back to life.

It doesn’t take any of us very long to be able to picture similar instances of pain in our own lives and in the lives of our friends and loved ones. 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 bring relief to the pain in the manner that Jesus did in the Bible passage. But, we can bring everything we have, starting with but not limited to our prayers, that God will help us in our pain and use us to help others in theirs. How?

How to Deal with Pain

A. The Practical Approach:

- (1) Try first to get at the root of the pain. What is the underlying cause, and what can be done about that?
- (2) Look for the challenge in the midst of the pain.
- (3) The secret of life isn’t its circumstances, but what you do with those circumstances.
- (4) As difficult as it is, pain is not without value; “don’t waste your pain.”
- (5) Your mind, soul and body are all important in God’s eyes. As a clergy friend has said, “In times of suffering, your connection with God is your soul, and your mind may be the place where help begins to be received before it comes to you body.”.
- (6) To the extent possible, surround yourself with positive and light-producing people and circumstances, avoiding negativism and darkness.

B. A Biblical Approach. In addition to the above ideas:

- (1) Pray that God will take away or reduce your pain.
- (2) Even as pain may be removed by faith, if necessary it may be endured by faith.

- (3) God always gives us strength equivalent to the burden or pain that he allows us to suffer.
- (4) Lay yourself on the altar of God (Romans 12:1) to do with as he will.

Suggested Scriptural References/Pain and Suffering

Sarai's, over her barrenness and Hagar's attitude when the latter becomes pregnant (Genesis 16:1-5);

Hagar's, over rejection and fear that leads her to flee (Genesis 16:6-10);

Jephthah's, over his foolish oath that leads to the sacrifice of his daughter (Judges 11:29-40);

Samson's, blinded and put to do the work of an ox (Judges 16:15-21);

Hannah's, because of her barrenness and the taunting she suffers because of it (1 Samuel 1:1-8);

David's remorse over the sin he has committed with Bathsheba and the disastrous consequences (2 Samuel 12:1-19);

David's cry of pain and penitence (Psalm 51);

Jeremiah is thrown into a cistern for speaking the words of God (Jeremiah 38:1-13);

Woman with the bleeding problem (Matthew 9:20-22);

Jairus, over the illness unto death of his daughter (Matthew 9:18-19, 23-25);

Martha, Mary and Jesus over the death of Lazarus (John 11:1-44);

Jesus at Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-46);

Jesus' passion and death (Matthew 27:27-50);

Paul is stoned at Lystra (Acts 14:19-20);

Paul's "thorn in the flesh" (2 Corinthians 12:2-10).

Patience

“But if we hope for what we do not have, we wait for it patiently.” Romans 8:25

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. Yes, but how can we practice patience and deal with our impatience?

How to Practice Patience

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.

How to Deal with Our Impatience

A clergy friend has suggested these steps:

- (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? (d) am I just being selfish?
- (3) Ask God, through his Holy Spirit, to reveal what is behind my 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.

Suggested Scriptural References/Patience

Joseph is left for a long time, forgotten in jail (Genesis 40:7-15, 23);
Trust in the Lord (Psalm 37:1-7);

Waiting patiently on the Lord (Psalm 40:1-5);
A day of rejoicing because the Lord has come (Isaiah 25:1-12);
Simeon's patience in waiting for the Messiah (Luke 2:25-32);
Anna, who had been fasting and praying in the Temple (Luke 2:36-38);
The leader of the synagogue who had to wait for his daughter to be healed because of the interruption of the woman who touched Jesus in the crowd (Mark 5:22-43);
Jesus teaches about patience, using a fig tree as an illustration (Luke 13:6-9);
The parable of the weeds among the wheat (Matthew 13:24-30);
Paul teaches about the value of patience (Romans 5:3-5);
Patience of the Thessalonians commended (1 Thessalonians 1:1-6);
Paul uses the example of his own patience to encourage Timothy (2 Timothy 3:10-17);
Encourages patience (Hebrews 10:35-39);
Let your patience grow (James 1:1-4);
Examples of patience given (James 5:7-11).

Peace

“And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:7

Peace, a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22), is much more than simple absence of fear or anxiety. Peace comes from being better able to see things from God’s point of view. Anxiety can paralyze us, draining our energy and preventing us from making the right decisions and doing the right things. Peace allows us to back off and gain perspective on the situation, seeking God’s guidance and inspiration, and creatively dealing with whatever problems we face. Peace comes from deep within, where God dwells in us through his Holy Spirit. It is not unrealistic about the real challenges we face in life. As a bishop friend has said, “God’s peace is having the security of being concerned about the present and future without its terror.”

Romans 5:1-11 contains a teaching from Paul that true peace comes from faith in God. “Therefore, since we have been made right in God’s sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us” (v.1 NLT). Despite what we face in life, our relationship with God through Christ is there to sustain us and point us to a better way. “So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God—all because of what our Lord Jesus Christ has done for us in making us friends of God” (v.11 NLT).

Yes, but how can we gain this attribute of peace in our everyday lives?

How to Have Peace

There are some definite steps we can take toward attaining peace.

- (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).

Suggested Scriptural References/Peace

There was peace in the land during Solomon’s reign (1 Kings 4:20-28);

A prayer for peace (Psalm 122);

The promise of a peaceable kingdom (Isaiah 11:1-9);

On the mountain of the Lord (Micah 4:1-5);

Jesus calms the storm (Mark 4:35-41);

Zechariah prophesies that John will prepare the way for the Messiah who will guide us on the path of peace (Luke 1:76-79);

Jesus leaves his disciples with peace (John 14:25-29);
In a resurrection appearance, Jesus greets his followers in peace (John 20:19-20).

Perseverance

“[Keep] alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.”

Ephesians 6:18 (RSV)

To the Christian, one of our most disheartening experiences is when someone we knew to love and serve the Lord at one point in their lives is now turning their back on him. There are many enticements of the world to distract people from following the Lord today, and yet that was a concern in the early Church as well. God calls us to persevere in the faith, and to encourage others to do so as well.

God encourages us to persevere in prayer (Matthew 7:7-11) as well as in other aspects of our lives. Quitters aren't of much use in the kingdom of God. The Lord needs people who will witness to his love in every situation that gives them the opportunity to do so, and keep on doing so despite the odds.

Abraham was a model of perseverance in pleading that Sodom be spared. Evil was so rampant in Sodom that God had decided that the only solution was to destroy it. Abraham, however, had relatives there and didn't want to see them destroyed. So, he started bargaining with God. His point was that if there were only a few people who were righteous, the city should be spared because of them. Boldly and honestly he went before the Lord to plead his case. How can we persevere?

How to Persevere

Here are some thoughts that can help us persevere:

- (1) Perseverance gets results. Like seeds planted in good soil, those who hear the Good News and cling to it bring in a manifold harvest for the Lord (Luke 8:15). Often, we do not know the good results of our perseverance in the lives of others; but, if we are faithful, it will happen.
- (2) Perseverance builds character and makes us stronger to face the trials of life (James 1:2-4). Problems can then be seen as opportunities for growth rather than as obstacles that impede our path.
- (3) Perseverance was demonstrated by Christ (Hebrews 12:1-3). Jesus endured great pain for us so that, following his example, we might be encouraged to keep our faith regardless of the consequences we face.
- (4) Perseverance leads to a crown of righteousness (2 Timothy 4:7-8). It is as we “run the race” of life in faith that God will reward us for our perseverance.
- (5) A clergy friend notes that we need to exercise our will, making it a strong muscle, in order to persevere. God needs this “muscle” within us if he is to work in and through us.
- (6) The same friend also points out that hope is instrumental in persevering. He says, “Without it we are certainly disheartened. Hope is the hallmark of faith. Here is where the community of faith comes into action for a person who is flagging. We need to hear and claim this hope that is within us, and indeed is our story (of faith in God), in

order to persevere in what God calls us to do. The encouragement/cheerleading of faithful friends and community function best in this endeavor.”

Suggested Scriptural References/Perseverance

Jacob’s perseverance in seeking Rachel as his wife (Genesis 29:14b-30);

Joseph endured a lot of things; this is about his persistence in protecting Egypt from famine (Genesis 41:41-49);

The person who pursues good and avoids evil (Psalm 1);

Persevering in God’s law (Psalm 119);

Jesus encourages persistence in prayer (Matthew 7:7-8);

The parable of the persistent widow (Luke 18:1-14);

Nothing can separate us from Christ’s love (Romans 8:35-39);

God’s pursuing faithfulness (1 Corinthians 1:4-9);

Protecting ourselves by the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-18);

Paul encourages Timothy to persevere (2 Timothy 2:1-7);

Perseverance in spiritual growth (Hebrews 6:1-6);

A call to perseverance in faith (Hebrews 10:19-39);

Run the race with perseverance (Hebrews 12:1-3).

Planning (Practical Advice, Strategy)

“The Lord said to Moses, ‘Send some men to explore the land of Canaan, which I giving to the Israelites.’” Numbers 13:1

Although God expects us to be dependent upon him for guidance and direction in our lives, he has also given us minds that he intends for us to use. If we seek his will in all that we do, he will inspire our minds toward his goals for us. That is the reason many Christians lay their day before the Lord in prayer the first thing every morning, that God might set our priorities, inspire our actions, and show us how we can best use our brains and our talents to glorify him during the day.

Wise planning is illustrated in Genesis 32:1-32 as Jacob prepares to meet Esau. Jacob had cheated Esau out of his birthright and his blessing. Having escaped the wrath of Esau, he is now returning home after years have passed. He is concerned that his brother, who is coming out to meet him, will kill him and his family. First, he divided his household so that, if Esau attacked one group, the other could escape. Then he prayed. Next, he sent gifts ahead to Esau in hopes of making peace. Finally, he sent his family and possessions across the river, remaining alone to wrestle with God. The result was that Esau met Jacob in peace. There was nothing wrong with the other cautionary steps that Jacob took, but the most important step was to pray.

Yes, but how can we better plan?

How to Plan

A. The Practical Approach:

- (1) Think through, as best you can, step by step, what needs to be done.
- (2) Write it all down.
- (3) Prioritize the items.
- (4) Undertake them one at a time, according to priority, being flexible enough to shift to other items when necessary.

B. A Biblical Approach. In addition to the above, consider this. The book *Experiencing God* says: “The constant presence of God is the most practical part of your life and ministry. Unfortunately we often assign God to a limited place in our lives. Then we call on Him whenever we need help. That is the exact opposite of what we find in the Word of God. He is the One who is working in our world. He invites you to relate to Him, so He can accomplish His work through you. His whole plan for the advance of the Kingdom depends on His working in real and practical ways through His relationship to His people.”

Suggested Scriptural References/Planning, Practical Advice, Strategy

Joseph tells Pharaoh how to manage the years of plenty and of famine that have been predicted in Pharaoh’s dream (Genesis 41:33-57);

How the mother of the baby Moses saved him from death (Exodus 2:1-10);

Jethro telling Moses how to organize his leaders, divide his responsibilities (Exodus 18:13-27);

How trumpets are to be sounded to gather the assembly (Numbers 10:1-10);
 Moses convinces Hobab, who has knowledge of the desert, to accompany the Israelites (Numbers 10:11-36);
 Moses sends a dozen men to spy out the land that had been promised to them by God (Numbers 13:1-33);
 Moses, directed by God, deals with the property rights of the daughters of Zelophehad (Numbers 27:1-11, 36:1-13);
 Moses, following the directions of God, appoints Joshua as his successor (Numbers 27:12-23);
 God gives Moses his “marching orders” for conquering the land (Numbers 33:50—35:34);
 Joshua prepares the Israelites for crossing over into the promised land (Joshua 1:10-18);
 Joshua sends two spies into the land in preparation for crossing the Jordan (Joshua 2:1-24);
 Joshua leads the Israelites into the promised land (Joshua 3:1—4:24);
 God instructs Joshua on the specific way to capture Jericho (Joshua 6:1-27);
 God instructs Joshua on the specific way to capture Ai (Joshua 8:1-29);
 The land is divided between the tribes of Israel (Joshua 13:1—21:45);
 How God led Gideon to defeat the Midianites with such a small force of men (300) that everyone would know that God had done it (Judges 7:1-25);
 Arrangements between David and Jonathan (1 Samuel 20:1-42);
 David captures Jerusalem by sending his men through a water tunnel (2 Samuel 5:6-12);
 Nathan, Bathsheba and David, in making Solomon king (1 Kings 1:1-53);
 David’s charge to Solomon (1 Kings 2:1-12);
 Solomon builds the Temple (1 Kings 6:1-38);
 Ezra, in leading the captives home to Judah (Ezra 8:15-36);
 Nehemiah, in approaching the task before him (Nehemiah 2:11-20);
 Nehemiah, in rebuilding the walls (Nehemiah 4:1-23);
 Planning and doing are senseless without God (Psalm 127);
 Count the cost (Luke 14:28-31);
 Matthias is chosen to replace Judas among the Twelve (Acts 1:12-26);
 The choosing of the first deacons (Acts 6:1-7);
 The Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-35);
 Practical advice for living the Christian life (Ephesians 4:17—5:21);
 Titus is sent to Corinth (2 Corinthians 8:16-24).

Praise

“From you comes the theme of my praise.” Psalm 22:25

Praise or adoration is thought to be the highest form of prayer. Through it, we express our love of God, allowing love to flow through us in an uninhibited way. Praise is abandonment to God, manifesting our complete reliance on him. It has, or should have, a cleansing effect, and it opens the door to our other prayers.

An interesting example of praise occurs in 2 Chronicles 20:1-24, especially at verse 21. King Jehoshaphat was facing a vast army of Moabites and Ammonites. He talked with his people and led them in prayer. Then, as he went out to engage the enemy, he appointed singers to march at the head of the procession singing praises to God. As a result, his enemies turned on one another wiping out the opposing armies.

Amazing things can happen when we praise God. In the depths of despair, if we can bring ourselves to praise God, our mood can change from one of concentration on our own problems to joy in the Lord. When we realize that our lives are dependent on God (as Jehoshaphat did), and we praise him for his gracious goodness, our situation can come into the right perspective and we can rejoice in the midst of our pain. Yes, but how?

The Nature of Praise and Adoration

In *The Workbook on Abiding in Christ*, Maxie Dunnam says this: “The movement of prayer is essential because it moves us out of ourselves and our own situation into the realm of God’s grace and power. We bring our whole self—all that we are—to praise God. ‘Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name’ (Psalm 103:1). In Hebrew the word for *ble*ss is *barachi*, and it originally meant ‘to bend the knee before,’ that is, to bow and offer homage to one’s king, one’s sovereign. When we express our adoration and praise, we are bowing before our God, knowing that all life, *our* life, belongs to God. We praise God for redemption, healing, reconciliation, and forgiveness, because that is what God has done. We adore God for God’s mercy, justice, lovingkindness, providential care—for that is who God is.” Dunnam goes on to say: “To praise God in the midst of tragedy, suffering, defeat, and loss is to find the source of power to overcome, and if not to overcome, then to be sustained in the midst of every circumstance. Adoration and praise take our eyes off our own problems and limitations and enable us to see and receive the limitless resources of the Holy Spirit.”

The Prescription for Everything

Whatever is going on in your life, the most satisfying thing you can do is to praise God. The ultimate in praise is the prayer of oblation. Oblation is the offering of ourselves—our lives and our labors—in union with Christ for the purposes of God. The greatest act of praise is putting ourselves on the altar of God (Romans 12:1).

Suggested Scriptural References/Praise

The song of Moses upon the crossing of the sea (Exodus 15:1-19);
The song of Miriam. (Exodus 15:20-21);
The victory song of Deborah (Judges 5:1-31);
Hannah's prayer (1 Samuel 2:1-10);
David dances before the Ark of the Covenant (2 Samuel 6:12-16);
David's prayer (2 Samuel 7:18-29);
David's song of praise (2 Samuel 22:2b-51);
David's psalm of thanksgiving (1 Chronicles 16:8-36);
David's prayer of praise for the generosity of the people (1 Chronicles 29:10-13);
Levites, upon laying the foundation of the Temple (Ezra 3:11);
Levites, upon renewing the covenant with God (Nehemiah 9:5-38);
Job, facing disaster, still praises the Lord (Job 1:21);
In praise of God's creation (Psalm 8);
Exalting the Lord (Psalm 30);
This and many other psalms (especially 145-150) are in praise of God (Psalm 145);
Unto us a child is born (Isaiah 9:1-7);
Jeremiah praises God in adversity (Jeremiah 20:11-13);
Daniel in praise of a saving vision from God (Daniel 2:20-23);
Habakkuk's prayer (Habakkuk 3:2-19);
Mary's song (Luke 1:46-55);
Zechariah's song (Luke 1:68-79);
Simeon's song (Luke 2:29-32);
Paul and Silas praise God in prison and a miracle happens (Acts 16:22-40);
God of all comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3-4);
Rejoice (Philippians 4:4-7);
There are many verses in the book of Revelation in which God is praised. (See, for example, 4:8, 5:9-10; 11:16-18; 12:10-12; 19:6-8).

Prayer

“[He] went up on a hillside by himself to pray.” Matthew 14:23

Christian spirituality is centered in the Bible. Scripture represents our instruction book on how to grow in the love and knowledge of God. Thus, if we are going to learn about prayer, the Bible is the primary source book from which to learn. Set forth below are the prayers in the Bible. In a sense, virtually all of the psalms are prayers, so they are not included in this listing.

Genesis 24:1-67 tells about Abraham’s servant seeking a wife for Isaac. In many ways, it must have been an uncomfortable journey. The expectations were high because Isaac was to father a great nation. The prayers at verses 12-14 and 26-27 are the key. The first one is for guidance, and that guidance is provided. The second is in praise and thanksgiving for the guidance received. When God answers our prayers, we should always honor him for his faithfulness. But how are we to pray?

How to Pray

A Biblical Approach: the five facets of prayer. Many people find it helpful to pray daily by way of a method that is commonly called “the five facets of prayer.” This involves beginning with Adoration (Praise), then going to Thanksgiving, next to Confession, then Intercession and finally Petition, in this manner:

- (1) Adoration/Praise. This is praising God, loving him for who he is, and is the ideal way to begin prayer. The Bible, especially the psalms, can be helpful in praising God, as can a hymnal.
- (2) Thanksgiving. Here we thank God for all he does for us, for our family and friends, for faith in him, for good health, a happy home, the work he gives us to do, and whatever else we have to be grateful for.
- (3) Confession. We ask God to forgive us for anything we have done that we shouldn’t have done, or have failed to do that we should have done.
- (4) Intercession. This is our opportunity to pray for others, especially our loved ones and people in any kind of need.
- (5) Petition. Finally, we pray for ourselves, that we may be in God’s will and that our life may be spent as he would have us spend it. We especially ask for God’s help and guidance in specific situations we are facing.

Suggested Scriptural References/Prayer

Noah’s, concerning Shem and Jephath (Genesis 9:26-27);

Abram’s, despairing of his childlessness (Genesis 15:2-3, 8);

Jacob’s, following the dream in which angels were ascending and descending a ladder to heaven (Genesis 28:20-22);

Jacob’s, preparing to meet Esau (Genesis 32:9-12);

Moses’, following rejection by both Pharaoh and his own people (Exodus 5:22-23);

Moses’, responding to the Israelites’ cry for water (Exodus 17:4);

Moses’, following the golden calf incident (Exodus 32:31-32);

Moses', seeking the Lord's glory (Exodus 33:12-13, 15-16, 18);
 Moses', asking God to remain present to the Israelites (Exodus 34:9);
 The priestly blessing (Numbers 6:24-26);
 The prayers of Moses upon beginning and ending a march in the wilderness (Numbers 10:35-36);
 Moses', for Miriam (Numbers 12:13);
 Moses', to see the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 3:24-26);
 Joshua's, that the sun stand still so the battle could continue in daylight (Joshua 10:12-13);
 The prayer of Manoah, Samson's father (Judges 13:8);
 Samson's, seeking strength to gain revenge on the Philistines (Judges 16:28);
 Boaz blesses those harvesting his field (Ruth 2:4);
 Hannah's, for a son (1 Samuel 1:11);
 David's, seeking the Lord's guidance (1 Samuel 23:10);
 David's, upon God's covenant with him and his household forever (2 Samuel 7:18-29);
 David's, that Absalom's adviser's words would be turned to foolishness (2 Samuel 15:31);
 David's, of thanksgiving on Solomon being anointed king (1 Kings 1:48);
 Solomon's, for wisdom (1 Kings 3:6-9);
 Solomon's prayer of dedication of the Temple (1 Kings 8:23-53);
 Elijah's, that the child be brought back to life (1 Kings 17:20-21);
 Elijah's, to die (1 Kings 19:4b);
 Elisha's, that his servant might see the heavenly host protecting them, and that the enemy be blinded (2 Kings 6:17-18);
 Hezekiah's, for deliverance from capture by the Assyrians (2 Kings 19:15-19);
 Hezekiah's, not to die from his illness (2 Kings 20:3);
 The Prayer of Jabez (1 Chronicles 4:10);
 David's prayer of praise for gifts toward the building of the Temple (1 Chronicles 29:10-20);
 Jehoshaphat's, in the approaching battle with Moab and Ammon (2 Chronicles 20:6-12);
 Ezra's, in shame for the disobedience of the exiles who had first returned to Judah (Ezra 9:5-15);
 Nehemiah's, concerning the situation in Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1:5-11);
 Nehemiah's, that God would remember his kindness to the poor (Nehemiah 5:19);
 Nehemiah's, for strength to deal with intimidation (Nehemiah 6:9b);
 Nehemiah's, that God would punish those who opposed him (Nehemiah 6:14);
 All of the psalms are in the nature of prayers (Psalms 1-150);
 Jeremiah's prayer (Jeremiah 32:17-25);
 Daniel's prayer (Daniel 9:15-19);
 The prayer of those on the ship with Jonah (Jonah 1:14);
 Jonah's prayer (Jonah 2:2-9);
 Habakkuk's prayer (Habakkuk 3:1-19);
 The Lord's prayer (Matthew 6:9-13);
 Jesus', in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:39, 42);
 Jesus', on the cross (Matthew 27:46);
 Jesus' prayer for himself, his disciples and future believers (John 17:1-26);

Of the infant Church (Acts 4:24-30);
Ananais prays for Paul (Acts 9:17);
Paul's, for the Ephesians (Ephesians 1:15-18; 3:14-21);
Paul's, for the Philippians (Philippians 1:9-11);
Paul's, for the Colossians (Colossians 1:9-14).

Prejudice

“*Nazareth! Can anything good come out of there?*” Nathaniel asked.” John 1:46

Prejudice, in the sense it will be used here, is an opinion or learning of an adverse nature without just grounds or sufficient knowledge to reach that state of mind. It is an unsound attitude or hostility toward others of a particular class or kind. It is clearly contrary to what God commands of us (i.e., that we love our neighbors as ourselves).

In Esther 3:1-6, we see prejudice against the Jews. Haman was the second most important person in the Persian empire, and all people bowed down to him when he passed by except Mordecai who, as a Jew who worshiped only the one God, could not do so. Haman became so enraged against Mordecai that his prejudice spread to all Jews, whom he would have liked to see annihilated. (His plan to destroy the Jews backfired on him because of the heroics of Esther).

Our prejudices can have their roots in a great variety of things. We may find that we react negatively to people just because they look or act differently from ourselves. There may be a deeper, underlying cause tied to something that happened to us in the past, perhaps when we were young (such as having been cheated or bullied by someone of a different race or group). And, as was illustrated in the show *South Pacific*, some prejudice is “carefully taught”—that is, it comes to us from our parents or others who shape our future. In any event, prejudice is not a healthy attitude and can have ungodly consequences. How should we, as Christians, deal with prejudice?

Seeing Others.

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 the section on 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.

Suggested Scriptural References/Prejudice

The Egyptians were prejudiced against the Jews (Exodus 1:8-22);

The Jews were not to mistreat aliens and others (Exodus 23:1-9);
The Jewish people are accused of doing just what they were forbidden from doing in the Exodus
23 passage above (Ezekiel 22:29);
Jesus teaches that we are not to judge others (Matthew 7:1-5);
Jesus heals the daughter of a Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21-28);
Jesus teaches that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-40);
The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37);
Nathanael shows prejudice against Nazareth (John 1:43-46);
Peter accepts the Gentiles (Acts 10:24-35);
One of many instances of the Jews' prejudice against Paul and his companions (Acts 17:5-9);
Renouncing the prejudice that had been shown by "Judaizers" (Jewish Christians who believed
that Gentiles should become Jews—i.e., be circumcised—in accepting Christ), Paul states
that we all become children of God through faith in Jesus Christ: Jew and Greek, slave and
free, male and female (Galatians 3:26-29);
Teaching against showing favoritism to the rich and powerful at the expense of the poor (James
2:1-7);
He who hates his brother or sister walks in darkness (1 John 2:9-11).

Presence of God

“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.” Psalm 46:1

Teresa of Avila said this: “You need not go to Heaven to find God, or to regale yourself with God. Nor need you speak aloud as if he were far away. Nor need you cry for wings like a dove to fly to him. Settle yourself in solitude and you will come upon God yourself. And then entreat him as your Father and relate to him your troubles.”

There are few holier moments in Scripture than the giving of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:1-26. God was present with Moses and (in a sense), through him, with us. Guidelines for living that would forever be there to mark the way for the people of God were communicated directly from God to a human being. It’s an awesome thought!

Yet, in a great variety of ways, God communicates with his people today. All he asks is that we give him the time and attention to do so. God is always present with us; the question is whether we are being present to him. Yes, but how?

Drawing near to God.

James 4:7-10 is one place in the Bible where we are given suggestions concerning how to draw near to God:

- (1) We are to humble ourselves before God (v.7a). Humility is understanding who God is and who we are in relation to him.
- (2) We are to resist evil (v.7b). If we stand up to Satan, we can send him running.
- (3) We are to draw close to God (v.8a). We do that by having regular prayer time, reading Scripture, worshiping God, being in fellowship with other Christians, serving others, and in a variety of other ways.
- (4) We are to wash our hands and purify our hearts (v.8b). As long as we have sin “on our hands” or in our hearts, we cannot experience the closeness of God’s presence unless it is in a searing conviction about what we have done or how we feel.
- (5) We are not to be merely “sorry” for our sins but deeply repentant concerning them (v.9). God knows what is on our hearts; we may not get relief from our sins until we have felt our repentance so thoroughly that we experience tears of grief about them.
- (6) We are to bow down before the Lord that he might lift us up (v.10; see also 1 Peter 5:6). Here, James gets us back to where he started: showing humility before God. Once we have examined ourselves before the Lord and been cleansed of our sins, there is joy in obeisance before the God who gave us physical life and then spiritual rebirth in Christ.

Suggested Scriptural References/Presence of God

God on the mountain at Sinai (Exodus 19:1-25);

God on the mountain at Sinai again (Exodus 24:1-18);

In the tent of meeting (Exodus 33:7-11);
 In showing Moses his glory (Exodus 33:12—34:35);
 In the Tabernacle constructed in accordance with his instructions (Exodus 40:1-38);
 As Aaron and his sons begin their ministry (Leviticus 9:1-24);
 To Moses, in the tent of meeting, when God spoke to him from between the cherubim (Numbers 7:89);
 Providing guidance for the journey in the wilderness (Numbers 9:15-23);
 Joshua encounters the commander of the Lord's army on the way to Jericho (Joshua 5:13-15);
 To Gideon, calling him to action (Judges 6:1-40);
 Rare during the early days of Samuel's life (1 Samuel 3:1-21);
 God's awesome acts because the Ark of the Covenant had been captured by the Philistines (1 Samuel 5:1—7:1);
 To David, in the time of his misery (1 Samuel 30:1-31);
 With David, in the conquering of surrounding lands (2 Samuel 8:1-18);
 In the Temple built by Solomon (1 Kings 8:1-66);
 To Elijah (1 Kings 19:9b-18);
 With the captives returning to Judah (Ezra 8:15-36);
 God's love for humankind (Psalm 8);
 The benefits of relationship with God (Psalm 16);
 Gratitude for God's love (Psalm 18);
 The comfort and assurance of God (Psalm 23);
 God's help is present to us (Psalm 27);
 Trust in God and wait patiently (Psalm 37);
 Seeking the Lord's presence (Psalm 40);
 Thirsting for the Lord's presence (Psalm 42);
 Confidence in the Lord's presence (Psalm 47);
 Desiring God's presence (Psalm 63);
 God's constant help (Psalm 71);
 God's protection in times of danger (Psalm 91);
 God is present in his creation (Psalm 104);
 Praise to the living God (Psalm 115);
 The watchfulness of God on our behalf (Psalm 121);
 God's love endures forever (Psalm 136);
 God is everywhere and knows everything (Psalm 139);
 Life is meaningless apart from God (Ecclesiastes 1:1—2:26);
 Invitation to the thirsty (Isaiah 55:1-13);
 God's love for Israel (Hosea 11:1-11);
 Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38-41);
 Peter on the rooftop (Acts 10:9-23);
 In our "earthly tent" (2 Corinthians 5:1-10);
 Draw near to God (James 4:7-10).

Pride

“Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.” Proverbs 16:18

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 more 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 that if we are someone of importance people will go out of their way to cater to our needs. 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?

Dealing with Pride

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.

As a youth minister friend points out, “Daily surrender is the answer, as Jesus modeled for us by surrendering his authority, power and agenda, to become the very opposite of prideful. Practicing daily surrender tears down the walls of pride and independence, while building a foundation of humility and dependence on God. Of course, that’s counter-cultural, but it is God’s desire for our lives.”

Suggested Scriptural References/Pride
The tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9);

Barak would have no pride of victory because he needed Deborah the judge to go with him in fighting Sisera (Judges 4:1-24);
Abimelech had his sword-bearer kill him so that it could not be said that he was killed by a woman (Judges 9:1-57);
Got the better of Saul, so that he became great in his own eyes (1 Samuel 15:1-35);
Saul's pride was injured by the greater admiration shown toward David (1 Samuel 18:1-30);
Michal's was injured by David dancing before the Ark of the Covenant (2 Samuel 6:12-23);
Rehoboam, in failing to listen to his father's advice (1 Kings 12:1-19);
Hezekiah, in showing off to the Babylonians all his wealth and finery (2 Kings 20:12-21);
Haman, in his reaction to Mordecai's not kneeling before him (Esther 3:1-15);
God abhors the pride of Israel (Amos 6:8-14);
Forced Herod to keep his oath (Matthew 14:1-12);
Disciples argue about who is greatest among them (Matthew 18:1-6);
James and John want a special place (Matthew 20:20-28);
Those seeking places of honor (Luke 14:7-14);
Consequences of Herod's (Acts 12:18-24);
Shown by a member of the church in Corinth (1 Corinthians 4:1-21);
Problem of boasting (James 4:13-17).

Priorities

“First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.”

Matthew 5:24b

A priority is what we put first. In a sense, the term “top priority” is an oxymoron, because whatever is prior is automatically at the top and bears no competition. As Christians, it is essential that God, and living according to his will, be our priority.

Jesus’ teaching about worry in Matthew 6:25-33 illustrates the point. He talks about how we have a tendency to be concerned with what we will eat and what we will wear. He then gives examples of how God provides for the birds of the air and the flowers in the field; if so, he will most assuredly provide for his people. So, what have we to worry about? His illustration then reaches its climax in the command to seek first the kingdom of heaven, and then all else will follow. That simply means putting God first in our lives, living the way he wants us to live based on a growing relationship with, and knowledge of, him and his ways. Yes, but how do we set our priorities for living?

First Things First

Here are some general thoughts about priorities:

- (1) Let’s compare the word *priority* with the word *unique*. The definition of unique is: being the only one; being without like or equal. Therefore, we cannot properly say something is most unique; it is either unique or it is not. The definition for priority is: superior in rank, position or privilege; something meriting prior attention. In other words, a priority is of first importance.
- (2) Although as mentioned above, *top priority* is a redundant term, when we think of our *priorities*, it is appropriate for us to rank them. They are not unique. Something can be of first priority, another thing second, etc.
- (3) A common saying among Christians is “God first, family second, others third.” That is a ranking of priorities, and is undoubtedly the proper one for Christians.
- (4) It could be argued that an equally proper ranking of priorities could be “God first, family second, *vocation* third. That depends, of course, on how a person views his vocation. If we see our work place as an opportunity to serve God, it puts God in first place. It also provides us an income to provide for our family. And it gives us an opportunity to minister to our fellow workers and to provide financial support for those in need.

Here are some tips from Scripture about priorities:

- (1) Put Christ before all else (Philippians 3:4-11).
- (2) In putting Christ first, Christian service and worship need to be in balance (Luke 10:38-42). Time with God should not be neglected in order to be “doing things,” yet our love of Christ is shown in our service to others (Matthew 25:31-46).
- (3) Stay focused; concentrate on the ministry you have been given. The good is the enemy of the best (2 Timothy 4:5).

- (4) Do those things that will help you grow in your relationship with Christ; “crave pure spiritual milk” (1 Peter 2:1-3 NLT).
- (5) Be enthusiastic (“enthusiasm” comes from a Greek word meaning to be possessed by God) (Romans 12:11). One way we show that God is first in our lives is by being enthusiastic (reflecting God’s love).

Suggested Scriptural References/Priorities

Of the Ten Commandments, the first four have to do with God as our priority (Exodus 20:1-11);
We are to trust in the Lord always and not rely on our own insight (Proverbs 3:5,6);
We are to be reconciled with our brother before taking our offering to the altar (Matthew 5:23-24);
Strive first for the kingdom and all else will follow (Matthew 6:33);
Treasure in heaven (Matthew 6:19-24);
We need to clear our own vision first (Matthew 7:3-5);
Following Jesus before tending to our own matters (Matthew 8:18-22);
People are more important than a herd of pigs (Matthew 8:28-32);
Treasure in the field and the pearl of great value (Matthew 13:44-46);
The first and great commandment (Matthew 22:34-38);
Gaining the whole world but losing your soul (Mark 8:34-38);
Mary, rather than Martha, had her priority right (Luke 10:38-42);
Duty first (Luke 17:7-10);
Discern what is best (Philippians 1:9-11).

Purity

“Keep yourselves pure.” 1 Timothy 5:22b

According to Philip Yancey, “[Francois] Mauriac concluded that self-discipline, repression, and rational argument are inadequate weapons to use in fighting the impulse toward impurity. In the end, he could find only one reason to be pure, and that is what Jesus presented in the Beatitudes: ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.’ In Mauriac’s words, ‘Impurity separates us from God. The spiritual life obeys laws as verifiable as those of the physical world....Purity is the condition for a higher love—for a possession superior to all possessions: that of God. Yes, this is what is at stake, and nothing less.’”

In Matthew 15:1-20 Jesus teaches about purity. He does so by challenging some of the traditions of the Pharisees that demonstrated superficial purity that worked against inner purity. “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far away” (v.8 NLT). Outward appearances mean nothing; it is what is in our hearts that counts. God is in the business of changing us from deep within. But how?

Guidelines for Purity

Here are some things to consider:

- (1) First of all, remember the Francois Mauriac quote. Impurity separates us from God.
- (2) Avoid getting into situations that might tempt you to sin.
- (3) Guard your thoughts.
- (4) Be careful of relationships that are unhealthy.
- (5) Steer clear of things that, often in a subtle way, tend to saturate you mind with filth (dirty jokes, Internet surfing, magazines, books and movies).
- (6) When you sin, be quick to seek God’s forgiveness and get back into a right relationship with him.
- (7) Live to serve God.

Suggested Scriptural References/Purity

Jacob had his people bury any foreign gods they had, and purify themselves, in moving from Shechem to Bethel (Genesis 35:1-5);

Standards for God’s people concerning sexual relations (Leviticus 18:1-30);

Joshua’s demand that the people consecrate themselves in the process of determining who among them had committed a grievous sin (Joshua 7:1-26);

The Temple is purified under Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 29:1-36);

The Lord blesses the pure heart (Psalm 24);

The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12);

Offering our bodies as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1-2);

Paul’s encouragement to think about such things as purity (Philippians 4:8).

Rationalization

“Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!”

Exodus 32:24b

Although there aren't many stories in Scripture in which the issue of our tendency to rationalize is the focus, the Bible is chockfull of illustrations of rationalizing. It begins with Eve and the apple, and goes on from there. To rationalize is “to provide plausible but untrue reasons for conduct,” according to Webster. In other words, it is finding a reason not to do what we ought to do or, conversely, finding a reason to do something we shouldn't do.

An example, found in Genesis 16:1-2, is Abram and Sarai's decision to let Abram have intercourse with Hagar as a way of fulfilling God's promise concerning Abram's offspring. God had promised Abram that he would be the father of a great nation, but he and Sarai were both old, and Sarai seemed to be both barren and past child bearing age. When no miracle occurred—according to Sarai and Abram's timetable—they rationalized another way to accomplish God's purpose. That was not God's way, and difficulties arose as a result.

One of the problems with rationalizing is that it is so easy to do. We know what we want and, when something interferes, all sorts of ideas may come wafting our way that provide a solution. When it is a matter of compromising our principles, we try to justify our action on the basis of keeping the peace or doing the logical thing, when we know that God expects more of us than that. When what we rationalize ourselves into doing is clearly contrary to God's will for us, we sin.

How can we deal more effectively with our tendency to rationalize?

Dealing with Rationalization

Because rationalizing is one of those subtle sins (“everyone does it”), it might be helpful to look at four reasons it is especially bad:

- (1) It is dishonest. We know that dishonesty is a sin, and rationalizing is just another form of dishonesty. It usually manifests itself in outright lying or in playing God (taking it upon ourselves to alter a situation because we don't like what otherwise has or hasn't happened).
- (2) We fool ourselves. In addition to being dishonest with others, rationalization allows us to be dishonest with ourselves as well. And, the more we fool ourselves, the easier it is to do it the next time.
- (3) We blame others. To justify ourselves, rationalizing often results in our blaming someone else (perhaps God) for the situation that leads us to the rationalization, and that is a sin against that person.
- (4) We hurt others. Many times our rationalization includes others, either as partners in the act or as victims. Either way, whether we lead another or enable another to sin, or whether we hurt someone with our actions, we are causing harm.

And here are a friend's suggestions for dealing with our tendency toward rationalization:

- (1) We should pray, asking the Lord to show us if we are rationalizing and how and in what situations we may be doing this. Just stopping long enough to put the matter into God's hands is an important start.
- (2) The Holy Spirit will speak to us if we ask, showing us that we are rationalizing; and the first thing to do when that happens is to confess it and ask for forgiveness. If we let him, the Holy Spirit is in the constant process of fine-tuning our conscience to better help us see right from wrong.
- (3) Then we should ask God to change our behavior and show us how to act in accordance with his will in the situation, and for strength to change.
- (4) Additional help may be needed, and that can come from being accountable to a spiritual director, prayer partner, or small group that can be honest with us and give us feedback
- (5) Rationalization is a hard habit to break, but recognizing the behavior and thus gaining a clear picture of the truth, is the first step in getting in line with God's will for our lives.

Suggested Scriptural References/Rationalization

Adam, Eve and the snake in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:1-14a);

Abram/Abraham, in passing his wife Sarai/Sarah off as his sister (Genesis 12:10-20; 20:1-17);

Isaac, in passing his wife Rebekah off as his sister (Genesis 26:1-11);

Aaron, in explaining why he allowed the Israelites to worship the golden calf (Exodus 32:1-35);

Saul, in performing priestly duties that he was forbidden by God from doing, because Samuel was late in arriving on the scene (1 Samuel 13:7b-14).

Reconciliation

“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.” 2 Corinthians 5:18b

In Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, we find, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Matthew 5:9). This seventh Beatitude reminds us of Paul’s words: “And God has given us the task of reconciling people to him” (2 Corinthians 5:18b NLT). As Christians, we are God’s instruments of reconciliation in the world.

Paul’s letter to Philemon is an excellent example of what reconciliation is all about. Onesimus, a slave of Philemon’s, had run away from his master and had come to Paul. Paul had led Onesimus to Christ, and was now sending him back to Philemon for, hopefully, reconciliation between the two. Paul pointed out not only Onesimus’ usefulness, but also the fact that he was now a brother in Christ rather than just a runaway slave.

Our circumstances today are quite different from those in the story, but we are often confronted with situations calling for reconciliation, either from a rift that has occurred between us and someone, or a wounding of relationships among friends, neighbors or co-workers. How do we go about that?

The Need to Reconcile

Our lives are surrounded with bruised and broken relationships. Those relationships need healing for our sake as well as for the sake of others involved. Left unreconciled—unhealed—this sin festers until it becomes a cancer that destroys individual lives and whole communities.

Any reading of the New Testament makes it clear that Christians are to be forgivers, and that means also being reconcilers. It is a primary ministry for all of us. God wants us not only to be in relationship with him, but with one another, especially within the body of Christ, the Church. Even if we have been estranged from one another for a long period of time, a story such as that of Jacob and Esau (Genesis 33:1-20) should encourage us to take those steps the Holy Spirit would lead us to take to try to effect reconciliation with that person.

Forgiveness is at the heart of reconciliation. We become reconciled to God by admitting our sins, seeking forgiveness and being restored to relationship with him. Likewise, we become reconciled to one another by seeking forgiveness for those things we have done or left undone that have caused a breach in our relationship with the other person. One of the ways in which we can become effective ambassadors of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:20) is by being a forgiving person ourselves, modeling for others what forgiveness is all about. Another is by sharing with others in need of reconciliation the processes of forgiveness that have worked for us. See, for further information, the section on Forgiveness.

Suggested Scriptural References/Reconciliation

Between Jacob and Esau, upon Jacob’s return to Canaan (Genesis 33:1-20);

Between Joseph and his brothers who had sold him into slavery (Genesis 42:1—45:28);

Reassurance given by Joseph to his brothers that he has forgiven them (Genesis 50:15-21);
After destroying much of the tribe of Benjamin, the Israelites grieved for them and made arrangements for those remaining Benjamites to have wives so the tribe could continue to exist (Judges 21:1-25);
Between David and Absalom (2 Samuel 14:1-33);
Between David and Gibeonites because of the wrong Saul had done to them (2 Samuel 21:1-14);
Between Job and God (Job 42:1-6);
Between Hosea and his adulterous wife Gomer (Hosea 3:1-5);
Between Jesus and Peter (John 21:15-25);
Paul's teaching on the ministry of (2 Corinthians 5:11—6:2);
Oneness in Christ, through the reconciling act of God (Ephesians 2:11-22).

Repentance

“Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation....” 2 Corinthians 7:10

John the Baptist, Jesus, and Peter all began their ministry with the call to repentance. They recognized that, left to our own devices, we are headed away from God and need to turn around. Why is repentance important in our lives? In answer to that question, R. C. Sproul said, “The reason it’s of supreme importance in our lives, according the New Testament, is because it is an indispensable requirement for entrance into the kingdom of God....If Jesus taught anything, he taught that it is absolutely essential for someone who has offended God to turn from that sin and repent.”

John the Baptist called for repentance in Matthew 3:1-12. All people need to repent (turn away) from the self-centeredness that can so easily dominate our lives. Israel had been without a prophet for 400 hundred years before John the Baptist appeared on the scene. Not only were the people guilty of all the sins common to humankind, but the Pharisees had been constructing their own rules of religiosity for centuries that concentrated on trying to observe the *letter* of the law rather than the *spirit* of the law. There was much for which to repent! They needed to turn around!

As we repent of our own sins, we must also be aware of the sins of our society and its institutions in which we live and work. Because we are members of our society, we must also be repentant of society’s sins. No one can remain guiltless, for no matter how personally repentant we may be, there is always the corporate sin that must be confessed and forgiven. There is much to be repentant about today. Yes, but how?

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--feeling sorry for 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
- (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.

Suggested Scriptural References/Repentance

David, over his sin with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12:1-23);
Ahab, for his sin against Naboth (1 Kings 21:1-29);
Of the exiles who had inter-married with pagans upon returning to Judah (Ezra 10:1-44);
Of the people, upon renewing the Covenant (Nehemiah 9:1-38);
A song of national repentance (Psalm 106);
A call for (Isaiah 1:1-20);
Comfort for the contrite (Isaiah 57:14-21);
God's call to Israel for repentance (Hosea 14:1-9; Joel 1:13-20, 2:12-27);
Saves Nineveh (Jonah 3:1-10);
Jesus preaches (Matthew 4:12-17);
Jesus condemns cities that have not repented (Matthew 11:20-24);
Joy in heaven over one sinner who repents (Matthew 18:10-14);
Woman who anoints Jesus' feet (Luke 7:36-50);
Parable of the rich man and the beggar (Luke 16:19-31);
Zacchaeus repents (Luke 19:1-9);
Warning against coming judgment (John 8:21-30);
Peter preaches (Acts 2:14-41, 3:11-26);
Repentance unto life guaranteed to the Gentiles (Acts 11:1-18);
Helping those back who have wandered from the faith (James 5:19-20);
Churches called to (Revelation 2:1-7, 12-17, 18-29; 3:1-6, 14-22).

Restoration (Spiritual Renewal)

“The Lord is my shepherd...he restores my soul.” Psalm 23:1-3

In a motion picture about a family that owned a vineyard, there is a terrible fire that sweeps through the vineyard destroying not only the fruit but also the vines themselves. At the point of despair, however, it is found that the original root from which the stock throughout the vineyard got its life is still alive!

Sometimes, perhaps, we feel the pain of Isaiah’s prophecy of the vine (Israel) that has borne bitter fruit (5:1-7), or maybe we identify with the guilt of the religious leaders whom Jesus condemns in Matthew 21:33-43, that they have been bad stewards of his vineyard. We sense that we, too, have failed to be the people of God that he wants us to be. Yet, despite the bitter fruit we sometimes yield and/or our lack of tending God’s vineyard as we should, the “original root,” Jesus, is always there offering us new life!

In 2 Kings 22:1—23:30, we are told of the restoration of faith brought by King Josiah in Jerusalem. During Josiah’s reign, Hilkiah the high priest discovered “the Book of the Law” (either Deuteronomy or the entire Pentateuch) in the Temple. Apparently it had become lost during the reigns of a long line of evil kings in Judah. Realizing the extent that his predecessors had gone against the teachings of the Law, Josiah sought God’s forgiveness and guidance (22:13). Josiah then read the Law to the people, pledging to obey it himself, and the people did likewise. Following various reforms, there was a celebration of the Passover.

In our day, Jesus brings renewal in the lives of individuals and churches in a great variety of ways. The key thing is that there is openness to letting God deal with us in his own way, and being willing to change our lives in accordance with his will. How do we do that?

How to Pray for Restoration:

Whether our plea is for renewal of Christ’s Church, or for our own spiritual restoration, the ideal verse of Scripture to answer our prayer is 2 Chronicles 7:14. “If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”

Here we have the elements of:

- (1) humility, i.e., reliance on God rather than ourselves;
- (2) prayer;
- (3) seeking God’s will; and
- (4) repentance.

Spiritual renewal can take place in the household of God and among the people of God when those steps are seriously undertaken.

Characteristics of Spiritual Renewal (from The Bible For Personal Revival):

A consciousness of God’s presence.

An increased and intense participation in worship.
An outpouring of love to one another.
A heightened sense of holiness, with accompanying confession, repentance and restitution.
An eager renewal of interest in all outlets of Christian service.
The preaching and hearing of Scripture as anointed by the Holy Spirit.
A growing boldness in all aspects of prayer.
A remarkable sense of confidence in our witness.
A display of both wisdom and maturity when spiritual warfare begins.
A consensus that our wellbeing is because of being a part of God's family.

A Final Note: There are multitudes of ways to introduce restoration/spiritual renewal/revival into a congregation (and therefore into the lives of the members of the congregation) and resources for doing so. These vary greatly between Christian denominations and across denominational lines, including from para-church organizations, but they are readily available to those earnestly seeking them.

Suggested Scriptural References/Restoration

Under Hezekiah, king of Judah (2 Chronicles 29:1-36);
Captives returned from Babylon begin rebuilding (Ezra 3:1-13);
Under Ezra and Nehemiah (Nehemiah 8:1—10:39);
A cry for restoration and renewal (Psalm 80);
Dry bones rise again (Ezekiel 37:1-14);
Promised by God (Amos 9:11-15);
Called for (Revelation 3:1-6).

Righteousness

“For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 5:20

Righteousness means doing what God wants us to do—obeying the laws of God. It has to do with being in a right relationship with God. It leads us to a holy life. There is not a thing wrong with righteousness; it’s what God supremely wants of us. The problem comes when we become conscious of our righteousness and/or the lack of it on the part of others. That leads to self-righteousness, and is where the word “righteous” gets a bad name.

In Genesis 39:7-20, Joseph, in refusing to have sexual relations with Potiphar’s wife, gives us an excellent example of righteousness. Joseph saw that the woman’s advances toward him were a sin against God as well as a betrayal of his master who had put complete trust in him. Joseph had his priorities in order and was willing to do the right thing despite the consequences.

The most important thing in our lives is our relationship with God. We can suffer a lot of abuse and injustice if we know we are in a right relationship with God, and that is what righteousness is all about. Yes, but how do we live a righteous life?

Jesus’ Guidelines for Righteousness

In a study they did for the Bible Reading Fellowship, John and Shirley MacNaughton, citing recent biblical scholarship, pointed out that the “Blessed be” or “Blessed are” of the Beatitudes (Jesus’ teaching on righteousness in Matthew 5:3-11) should more accurately be translated “Blessedness comes to.” Looked at in this light, the Beatitudes become helpful guidelines for righteous living.

- (1) Blessedness comes to us when we are penitently conscious of our own spiritual poverty. At that moment of honesty before ourselves and God, we are already living in the Kingdom of God.
- (2) Blessedness comes to us when we are able to share in the sufferings of others, for, through that offering of sorrow, we will discover the power of God’s comfort for ourselves.
- (3) Blessedness comes to us when we seek to solve problems and not to control people, for, in dealing with people in that way, we will inherit a piece of eternity.
- (4) Blessedness comes to us when we long for righteousness as a starving person longs for food or a thirsty person longs for water, for, in that moment of longing, the peace of God will belong to us.
- (5) Blessedness comes to us when we try to understand others rather than to judge them, for, when we try to see with their eyes, others will do the same for us and we well know what God has done for all of us in Jesus Christ.
- (6) Blessedness comes to us when our motives are morally right even though our actions may be clumsy, for, in that internal purity of intention, we shall stand in the presence of God.

- (7) Blessedness comes to us when we work to resolve differences between ourselves and others and between others and others, for then we will be doing God's work as his sons and daughters.
- (8) Blessedness comes to us when we stand for what is right in spite of anything those around us do or say, for in that moment we will know that we belong to no one but God.
- (9) Blessedness come to us when we stand our moral ground even though we are ridiculed and people make fun of our faith, for then we will know that we stand in a long line of people whose faith is known in heaven.

Suggested Scriptural References/Righteousness

Noah and the great flood (Genesis 6:5—8:22);

Moses points out to the Israelites that it is not because of their righteousness, but the wickedness of the nations living in Canaan, that God was going to give the Israelites possession of the land (Deuteronomy 9:4-6);

David shown to be righteous when Saul was delivered into his hands but he did not harm him (1 Samuel 24:1-22; 26:1-25);

Asa, king of Judah (1 Kings 15:9-24);

Obadiah, in hiding the priests from Jezebel (1 Kings 18:1-15);

Elijah and 7,000 others who had not bowed down to Baal (1 Kings 19:9b-18);

Job was a righteous man (Job 1:1-5);

The one who walks in the law of the Lord (Psalm 1);

How to live a godly life (Psalm 15);

A kingdom of righteousness (Isaiah 32:1-8);

The responsibility to warn the righteous of their sins (Ezekiel 3:20-21);

The righteous man (Ezekiel 18:5-9);

Daniel, in refusing to eat defiled food (Daniel 1:1-21);

Jesus teaches about (Matthew 6:1-4);

Cornelius as an example (Acts 10:1-8);

No one is righteous by the law alone (Romans 3:1-20);

Righteousness comes by faith (Romans 3:21-31);

Slaves of righteousness (Romans 6:15-23);

Rules for holy living (Colossians 3:1-17, 4:2-6);

Living to please God (1 Thessalonians 4:1-12);

Paul calls Timothy to (1 Timothy 6:11-16);

More guidelines for Christian living (2 Timothy 2:1-26);

Right living in the church (Titus 2:1-15);

Right living in society (Titus 3:1-11);

Solid spiritual food needed to mature in (Hebrews 5:11—6:3);

Continuing to follow God (Hebrews 12:14-28);

Practical advice for Christian living (Hebrews 13:1-21);

On listening and doing (James 1:19-27);

Faith and deeds (James 2:14-26);

Taming the tongue (James 3:1-12);

Submit yourself to God (James 4:1-12);

Prayer of the righteous is effective (James 5:13-18);

Be holy (1 Peter 1:13—2:3, 2 Peter 3:1-18);
Living for God (1 Peter 4:1-11);
Being children of God (1 John 3:1-10).

Risk

The Lord had said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.'" Genesis 12:1

Risk implies going out on a limb. We might call it gambling on God. It involves an extra measure of faith: knowledge of, and confidence in, a God who acts.

Rahab, in helping Joshua's spies, as told in Joshua 2:1-21, is an example of one willing to take a risk. Joshua had sent two spies into the land on the other side of the Jordan River, especially around Jericho, as a prelude to his invasion of the land. The two men spent the night at the house of Rahab, but someone alerted the authorities to the fact that they were there. Rahab, however, hid the men and gave misleading information as to where they had gone, thus saving their lives. She did so at the risk of her own life. She knew the story of how the Israelites had fled Egypt across the Red Sea and she instinctively believed that God was with these people. Therefore, despite her past as a prostitute, she opened a pathway to a new life in following God.

God doesn't place us in life-or-death situations of risk very often today, but our reputation, or job, or our standing in the community (including our church community!) can be affected by positions we take in obedience to him. Life is not without risk, but our biggest risk is that we get out of relationship with God, because that has eternal consequences. How should we face risk in our lives?

Dealing with Risk

A. The Practical Approach:

- (1) Don't be totally impetuous. Why are you taking this particular risk?
- (2) Consider the "horrible alternative" to taking this risk. If you think you're "getting cold feet," weigh the risk against what will happen if you don't take it.
- (3) Don't go it alone when there are others you respect with whom you could discuss your options.
- (4) And, if it is just fear of change that is holding you back, show some courage!

B. The Biblical Approach: There are four primary characteristics needed by those who will take risks for God, able to be recalled by the word ROAR:

- (1) **R**emembering (that God will equip you for anything he calls you to do),
- (2) **O**penness (to what God would have you do),
- (3) **A**vailability (having God's will as your priority), and
- (4) **R**eadiness (always being as prepared as you can be).

Suggested Scriptural References/Risk

Noah, doing exactly what God had told him to do, as unlikely as it sounded (Genesis 7:13-22);

Abram, in going where the Lord told him to go, although he had no idea what lay ahead of him (Genesis 12:1-5);
Moses' mother, in disobeying Pharaoh and providing for the baby (Exodus 1:22—2:1);
Ruth goes with her mother-in-law to Bethlehem (Ruth 1:3-22);
David against Goliath (1 Samuel 17:34-51);
Elijah challenges the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:16-40);
Esther, in entering the king's chamber though it could have been fatal (Esther 4:16—5:14);
Daniel and his friends in declining to eat defiled food (Daniel 1:1-21);
The first disciples in following Jesus (Matthew 4:18-22);
Jesus' teaching on the cost of discipleship (Luke 14:25-35);
Stephen's speech to the Sanhedrin (Acts 7:1-53).

Rivalry

“The older brother became angry and refused to go in.” Luke 15:28

The word “rivalry” arose from the use of the word “river.” It referred to people who live on opposite sides of any river. They were “rivals,” facing each other yet in some sense opposed to each other. In the Bible, interestingly, much of the rivalry was between brothers and between wives.

In Genesis 25:24-33 we encounter the rivalry between Jacob and Esau. Esau was the firstborn of twins, and therefore entitled to the birthright, an honor awarded to the elder son that included a double portion of the family inheritance as well as being regarded as the leader of the family. Jacob wanted these privileges for himself and, catching Esau at a point of vulnerability, enticed Esau to surrender the birthright to him. This led to bitterness between them that could have had disastrous results for Jacob.

In our day, rivalry can raise its ugly head in issues involving family inheritance just as in Old Testament days. The problem is especially compounded when the parents have been partial toward a certain child or where one parent has favored one child and the other parent another child, as was the case in the Bible passage. Grandparents can be guilty of the same thing. God would have us show impartial love among our siblings, parents, children and grandchildren.

Rivalry in a sporting contest, for example, is not a bad thing. How do we, as Christians, balance healthy competitiveness with rivalry?

Roots of Rivalry

Rivalry is rooted in selfishness, jealousy and competitiveness. If you have a rival, it is important to determine the root of that rivalry. If you simply want your own way and the other person stands in the way, you need to confess your selfishness and give it to God. The same is true if the basis of your rivalry is jealousy.

Competitiveness is a little trickier. Some competitiveness is healthy. If, in an athletic contest, you fail to do your best, you are being unfair to your team, your opponent and to yourself. Scripture uses athletic contests in a favorable light; in both 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 and Hebrews 12:1 we are urged to try to win the race set before us. The problem arises when the rivalry is carried beyond reasonable bounds, and vengeance or aggressiveness rooted in selfishness or jealousy is involved.

Suggested Scriptural References/Rivalry

Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1-8);
Sarah and Hagar (Genesis 16:1-6);
Ishmael and Isaac (Genesis 21:1-11);
Rachel and Leah (Genesis 29:31—30:1);
Joseph and his brothers (Genesis 37:1-28);
Hannah and Peninnah (1 Samuel 1:1-7);

Two harlots contesting for the baby each claimed (1 Kings 3:16-22);
The prodigal son and his brother (Luke 15:11-32).

Sabbath

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.” Exodus 20:8

From *The New Bible Dictionary*: “In the Bible the principle is laid down that one day in seven is to be observed as a day holy to God. From the reason given for keeping the Sabbath day in the Ten Commandments we learn that the example for the Sabbath rest had been set by God Himself in the creation. The Sabbath therefore is a creation ordinance (Exodus 20:8-11).”

God let the Israelites know how important he thought the Sabbath was in Exodus 16:5, 22-30. When God gave the Israelites manna in the wilderness, he gave them a double portion on the sixth day and none on the Sabbath. This was a clear message that, as Moses states in the passage, the Sabbath had been appointed as a day of rest from the normal tasks. God knew that a continuance of the daily routine on the Sabbath would distract them from focusing on God and the worship of him.

The same is true for us today. The Sabbath is intended for worship and rest. We should treat God as special every day of the week, but the Sabbath is a very special day. As a friend has wisely said, “We need the Sabbath in order to survive the other six days of the week, not only for our health, but as a special time to worship God, hear his voice, and prepare for the week ahead, seeking his help and protection.” So, how do we do that?

Sabbath in Perspective

Taking Exodus 20:8-11 and Matthew 12:1-8 into consideration, here are three implications of how we are to treat the Sabbath:

- (1) God cares enough about us to command that we take care of ourselves by setting a day aside each week for that purpose.
- (2) Today, despite all of the distractions of the basically non-Christian world around us, we have a responsibility to keep the Sabbath holy by putting the worship of God first on that day.
- (3) We should not do anything that robs others of their Sabbath. God has given us the Sabbath to worship, rest and re-create, and those are blessings that should be available to all.

Suggested Scriptural References/Sabbath

God rested on the seventh day, blessed it and made it holy (Genesis 2:2-3);

The fourth of the Ten Commandments: “Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8-11);

An Israelite who gathered wood on the Sabbath is put to death (Numbers 15:32-36);

Keeping the Sabbath day holy (Jeremiah 17:19-27);

Jesus teaches about, heals on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:1-14);

Sabbath-rest for God’s people (Hebrews 4:1-13).

Sacrificial Acts

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God....” Romans 12:1

David Livingstone, the great medical missionary to Africa, said this: “Forbid that we should ever consider the holding of a commission from the King of Kings a sacrifice, so long as other men esteem the service of an earthly government as an honor. I am a missionary, heart and soul. God Himself had an only Son, and he was a missionary and a physician. A poor, poor imitation I am, or wish to be, but in this service I hope to live. In it I wish to die. I still prefer the poverty and missions service to riches and ease. This is my choice.”

A sacrificial act is certainly demonstrated for us in Jesus’ Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). Here was a man looked down upon by the Jews who finds one beaten and bloodied by the roadside. Instead of passing by without helping him, as two prominent Jews had done, he bandaged his wounds, took him to an inn where he could recover and stood for the expenses involved. Jesus used this story to illustrate who is our neighbor and to whom we are to be a neighbor. It certainly gives us a model of sacrificial action on behalf of another.

As a friend has said, “There are lots of issues involving sacrifice in the parent/child relationship. Good parents willingly give up their personal wants in order to fulfill their God-given commission as parents. To me, sacrifice is giving or offering something for the greater good just as the parent does. Sacrifice is pitching in to meet the needs of others. It’s what Jesus asks us to do and modeled for us in the Parable of the Good Samaritan.” If we can grasp the concept that God gives us so much that sacrificial acts on our part are simply returning to him what is his in the first place, we can find greater freedom and joy in sacrifice. Yes, but how?

Adjustments

The book *Experiencing God* lists six categories of adjustments God may require us to make in our lives if we are willing to follow him:

- (1) In our circumstances (job, home, finances);
- (2) In our relationships (family, friends, business associates);
- (3) In our thinking (prejudices, methods, potential);
- (4) In our commitments (to family, church, job, plans, traditions);
- (5) In our actions (how we pray, give, serve); and
- (6) In our beliefs (about God, his purposes, his ways, our relationship with him).

Suggested Scriptural References/Sacrificial Acts

Abraham asked by God to sacrifice his son Isaac (Genesis 22:1-19);

Moses asks the Israelites to give of their possessions and their time and talents for the construction of the Tabernacle (Exodus 35:1-29);

Following Jesus means giving up everything else (Matthew 10:37-39; John 12:23-26);

The poor widow’s sacrificial gift (Mark 12:41-44);

Sharing of possessions in the infant Church (Acts 2:42-47, 4:32-37);

We are to be living sacrifices (Romans 12:1-8);
Rights versus sacrifice (1 Corinthians 9:1-27);
The giving of all things is worth it to gain Christ (Philippians 3:1—4:1).

Satan (Devil)

“Then Peter said, ‘Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit...?’” Acts 5:3

R. C. Sproul says this: “Satan is described as an accuser, a liar, and a tempter. We see him lying, distorting truth, we see him involved in temptation, and we see him accusing the saints. One of the difficulties for the Christian is to recognize an assault of Satan when it comes. Remember that Satan is an angelic being; he’s a spirit being and he’s invisible. It’s not always easy to discern the presence of the enemy, although the New Testament warns us that the struggle in which we’re involved is not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers and spiritual wickedness in high places, including attacks from satanic sources.”

Matthew 4:1-11 tells of Satan’s temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. This is, of course, one of the most crucial incidents in Scripture. If Jesus had given in to Satan’s temptations, his mission on earth would have been lost. Jesus is able to resist by standing on Scripture, including an understanding of the fullness of Scripture when Satan attempts to quote Scripture himself.

Yes, but how about us? We not only need to recognize that Satan is at work in the world today but to be growing in our knowledge of Scripture so that we are not deceived.

Maintaining Balance.

“There are two equal and opposite errors in which our race can fall about the devils,” said C. S. Lewis. “One is to disbelieve their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors....”

How to Resist (adapted from the writings of Francis de Sales).

“The devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). When the devil begins pounding at our door, the first line of defense is not to answer. Avoid hearing what the enemy says. We shouldn’t so much as ask, “Who is there?” The essential thing is to not even let him get his toe in the door. We know his seductive ability to entice us into temptation once we begin to give thought to what he would whisper in our ear. We should learn from experience and allow him no ground on which to influence us.

We might say that we know this, yet Satan manages to trouble us nonetheless. He drowns out our better thoughts with his accusations or temptations. The second line of defense, then, is to throw ourselves on the mercy of God. We should be patient with ourselves, giving time for God’s peace to permeate our souls and drive away the lies of the evil one. Beware again, however, that we never open the door to him, even to peep out to see if he is still there.

In time, the devil will tire of assaulting us and leave us in peace. We should not be impatient, but resolute. So long as no entrance is made, we are safe. Perhaps it is helpful to remind ourselves that it is a good sign that the enemy storms violently at our door. It proves that he is not attaining his desires concerning us. If he were, he would have come in and been satisfied.

Suggested Scriptural References/Satan

The snake in the Garden of Eden is thought to be Satan or one of his agents (Genesis 3:1-7);

It is Satan who wants Job's righteousness tested (Job 1:6—2:10);

Jesus is accused of being under Satan's power (Matthew 12:22-37);

Jesus accuses Peter of letting Satan influence his thoughts (Matthew 16:21-28);

False prophets as agents of Satan (2 Corinthians 11:13-15);

Paul talks about a "man of lawlessness to come" (2 Thessalonians 2:1-17);

Resist the devil and he will flee (James 4:1-7);

The enemy who stalks us (1 Peter 5:8-9);

About the antichrist (1 John 2:18-27);

He who does what is sinful is of the devil (1 John 3:4-10);

Heretical teaching seen as being from the antichrist (2 John 7-11).

Scripture

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness....” 2 Timothy 3:16

Donald M. Hultstrand said this, “I can think of no question of God’s will or man’s ways that is not answered in the Holy Scriptures. It requires very diligent reading, searching and meditation. It requires a constant building up of resources of godly knowledge within ourselves so that we can refer to this foundation at any time.”

In Joshua 1:6-9 we see God’s instructions to Joshua about meditating on the Book of the Law and following it in all ways. In this passage, as Joshua prepares to enter the promised land and take it for the Lord, God impresses on Joshua three things. First, he is to be strong and courageous; he will need to be because an arduous task is before him. Second, he is to obey God’s law. Third, he is to be diligent in studying God’s law (Scripture). Unless he knows Scripture, he cannot be obedient to it; and, unless he is obedient to it, God’s plan for him and the Israelites cannot succeed.

Scripture is the foundation on which Christians are expected to build their lives. We cannot be the people God calls us to be unless we are diligent in our study and application of Scripture. Yes, but how can I study Scripture?

How to Study Scripture

Here are some approaches; any one of more of them can be helpful. Find what works best for you.

To Gain Understanding. Find a resource that provides daily Bible study with commentary on the readings. This helps develop a discipline of daily growth in the knowledge of Scripture by assigning a passage in the Bible to be read and then providing information about the passage to help understand it fully. If you do not know of such a resource, your pastor can recommend one to you.

To Study Scripture Devotionally. As an alternative to the above, there are also methods of daily Bible reading for which devotional thoughts (as distinguished from commentary) are provided. These resources aren’t designed primarily to help you *intellectually* understand the passages of Scripture as much as to *spiritually uplift* you. Some people use both methods daily. If you are not familiar with a resource of this type, your pastor can probably recommend one.

To Analyze a Passage. One of the simplest, yet most effective, ways of analyzing a passage of Scripture is done by turning an 8 1/2 x 11 sheet of paper horizontally and dividing it into three sections, with the left and right hand sections each taking up about one-fourth of the page, and the center section representing the middle half of the page. Label the left-hand section “What does it say?” The center section is labeled “What does it mean?” The right-hand section is captioned “How does it apply to me?” This method works best with a narrative passage—something that tells a story. Analyze the passage according to these three categories.

To Analyze a Passage in Depth. This is a more detailed method of analyzing a Bible passage. In it, the passage does not need to be a narrative, but can be any section of Scripture. It is analyzed in seven different ways, as follows:

- a. *Background.* As we look at the passage of Scripture, we should try to understand the background in which it occurs. What is going on? Who is doing what to whom? This helps get the passage in proper context.
- b. *Perspective.* We should take a common sense approach to what we read, so that we can get in into perspective. We should avoid absurd conclusions or trivialities that have nothing to do with the heart of the message.
- c. *Affirmation.* There may be, in the passage, something that affirms us in the kind of life we are leading, that supports us and tells us that we are on the right track in following the Lord. What makes us feel good about the passage?
- d. *Uncomfortable Truth.* On the other hand, we should look for “the uncomfortable truth” in the passage. What is said that threatens our complacency, that convicts us of sin, that shows us that God is calling us another step forward that we would just as soon not take? What gets our attention about the passage?
- e. *Principle Involved.* We should next try to find the principle or principles involved. We should look below the surface of what has been said to discover the thing of lasting effect that should serve to guide us in the days and years ahead. What are the universal principles in the passage?
- f. *Application.* We should then seek the specific thing the passage says to us. What change or changes in our attitudes, habits and/or lifestyle is indicated by this passage?
- g. *Response.* Finally, what are we going to do about what we have found? Bible study is of no real value unless it leads us to resolve that we will be guided by what it has taught us.

Suggested Scriptural References/Scripture

Moses’ instructions about meditating on and passing along to children God’s commandments (Deuteronomy 6:4-9);

The Book of the Law is found and read in Josiah’s reign in Judah (2 Kings 22:1—23:30);

The Book of the Law is read to the people (Nehemiah 8:1-18);

In praise of God’s law (Psalm 119);

The writing, and re-writing, of the prophecies of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 36:1-32);

Jesus stands on Scripture in refuting Satan (Matthew 4:1-11);

Jesus came to fulfill the law, not to change it (Matthew 5:17-20);

Pharisees, observing their tradition, but getting around the law (Matthew 15:1-20);

Jesus says the religious leaders don’t know Scripture (Matthew 22:23-33);

Greatest commandment given (Matthew 22:34-40);

Why written (Luke 1:1-4);

Jesus and the religious leaders (Luke 2:41-52);

Opened up to the two on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35);

Opened up to the disciples (Luke 24:44-49);
Gospel of John's closing remarks (John 21:24-25);
Philip explains to the Ethiopian (Acts 8:26-40);
Exists for our encouragement (Romans 15:1-13);
Warnings against false teachers (1 Timothy 1:3-11, 2 Timothy 4:1-5);
Need for devotion to (1 Timothy 4:11-16);
Paul affirms the essentiality of (2 Timothy 3:14-17);
The Word of God is living and active (Hebrews 4:12);
Don't just listen to the word, do it (James 1:19-27);
The authenticity of (2 Peter 1:12-21);
Warnings against false prophets (2 Peter 2:1-22).

Self-Control (Temperance)

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace...and self-control.” Galatians 5:22-23

William Barclay says that self-control as a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23) “is the spirit which has mastered its desires and its love of pleasure. It is used of the athlete’s discipline of his body (1 Corinthians 9:25) and of the Christian’s mastery of sex (1 Corinthians 7:9). It is the virtue which makes a man so master of himself that he is fit to be the servant of others.”

2 Samuel 16:5-13 gives us an example of self-control as David faces the insults of Shimei. Following the rebellion of Absalom, David’s son, David is fleeing Jerusalem. On the way, he is continually cursed by Shimei, a relative of Saul’s. The curses were unjustified because David had had no part in Saul’s death. Nonetheless, David and his entourage quietly tolerated Shimei’s abuse. If we cannot squelch unjustified criticism, it is best simply to ignore it. That is not easy, because it is a strain on our emotions to face accusations of which we are innocent. At such times, it is important to remind ourselves that we live this life for God only; he knows we are in the right, and that is all that counts in the long run.

In the face of a confrontation that he knew would lead to his death, Jesus remains in control of himself (Mark 15:1-5). He doesn’t argue with Pilate. In response to the second question, he doesn’t even answer. It would have been human nature to defend oneself, to lie if necessary to save one’s life, even to grovel and beg for mercy. Jesus will have none of that; he is our example of self-control. Jesus’ self-control was rooted in his relationship with the Father. He didn’t have to react; he could look within for the Father’s will in the situation and act accordingly. The fruit of the Spirit we know as self-control comes from resolving conflicts within ourselves by the grace of God so that we don’t have to react, but can act according to God’s will.

Jesus is certainly our example of self-control, but, in the everyday circumstances of life, there are a multitude of ways we can lose control and be intemperate. How are we to deal with them?

Steps to Self-control

- (1) We begin by looking at ourselves, who we are and where we are going in life. It is in diverting from our path that we get out of control.
- (2) What tends to upset us and drive us out of control? Why?
- (3) What are the areas of our life we seem able to control easily? Why?
- (4) Now, taking a “giant step,” are we willing to look at how the following may be affecting our life and driving us out of control: unhealthy desires, bad habits, compulsions or addictions, obsessions, distractions, bad attitudes, lack of discipline, recurring irritations, wastefulness and even anger, rage and wanting revenge? Getting to the bottom of any of these conditions that apply is essential to a life that reflects self-control as a fruit of the Spirit.

Note of Caution: We need to live temperate lives, but we don’t want to become “control freaks.” Here, again, balance is important in the Christian life. We don’t want to become “control police”

over others (especially family and loved ones), nor to be so controlling in our lives that we lose sensitivity and spontaneity.

Suggested Scriptural References/Self-control

Joseph before his brothers (Genesis 42:7; 43:29-31);

Israelites walking around the walls of Jericho (Joshua 6:9-16);

Saul before those who despised the thought that he had been made king (1 Samuel 10:26-27);

David, in sparing Saul (1 Samuel 24:1-15; 26:1-20);

What a person without self-control is like (Proverbs 25:28);

Daniel and his friends in refusing to eat defiled food (Daniel 1:14-16);

Jesus' silence before his accusers (Matthew 26:62-63a; 27:12-14; Mark 15:1-5);

A fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23);

How to live in this world (Titus 2:11-14).

Self-examination (Soul Searching)

“A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup.”

1 Corinthians 11:28

Samuel M. Shoemaker said this: “It is a thrilling thing to discover a human soul. There are some unbelievable surprises, more desperate needs and immense aspirations, locked up in a personality than anywhere else in the world. To coax a man out of himself, till you know the best and the worst; till he is his own real self, dealing honestly with both his sins and his deepest and highest hopes for himself; till he finds that he may make his limitations his assets if only he will use them to understand other people, and that he can turn these secret longings for better things into constructive decisions which will begin to draw him towards his own goal—this is the great spiritual art. Jesus had that art as no one else ever has had. If we follow very simply behind him, we may catch a little of it from him.”

Psalm 77:1-9 tells of deep soul-searching on the part of the one who composed it. He cries out to the Lord without holding anything back. He has prayed all night long, lifting his plea, overwhelmed with his need for God’s help. He remembers the past when things were better, and examines himself to seek what has made things different.

Self-examination gives us the opportunity to get real with God. In good times or bad, it is helpful to look at ourselves and our relationship with God and others. Certain times of the year such as during Lent especially challenge us to self-examination. But, to some extent, soul searching should be an ongoing process in our lives. Yes, but how?

Examining Self

One way of examining ourselves is to use the Ten Commandments for our guidelines:

- (1) We are to have no other gods than God. What other “gods” am I worshiping: money, power, myself, my own pre-conceived notions and prejudices, my rights and privileges, pleasure, my vocation, alcohol, drugs or other chemical dependency, sensual desires, my family?
- (2) We are to make for ourselves no idol to worship. What idols am I building or worshiping: a comfortable lifestyle, wealth, a home that’s a showplace, an automobile others will envy, possessions, prestige, reputation, memberships (“belonging”), inordinate nationalism, the Church rather than the Lord?
- (3) We are not to take the name of the Lord in vain. Might I be doing that by: lukewarmness of faith, irregularity of worship or praise, failure to give generously to the Lord’s work, not exercising my gifts to God’s glory, not putting God first in my life, failure to do the things God wants me to do, not being open to his guidance in my life, failure to witness to his love, blaming God when things don’t suit me, cursing?
- (4) We are to keep the Sabbath day holy. In what ways have I failed to follow the spirit of this commandment: not providing a day of rest each week for myself, making it difficult for others (especially my family) to have a day of rest,

engaging in activities that detract from the sacredness of the Sabbath, not worshiping God regularly, not spending enough time learning about God, failure to prepare for and participate fully in worship services, not spending quality time with God, failure to develop a sense of holiness in my life, not fulfilling ministries in and of the Church in which God would have me involved, and not inviting others to worship with me?

- (5) We are to honor our father and mother. In what ways might I be failing in this: am I taking good care of them, do they know I love them, do I remember them on special occasions, do I seek their advice and counsel, am I living up to their reasonable expectations of me, do I pray for them daily, am I being a good steward of those intangible gifts and blessings they handed down to me, am I teaching my children to respect their elders, am I staying in touch with the older members of my family, am I showing adequate concern for the needs of older people?
- (6) We are not to commit murder. What forms of “murder” might I be guilty of: thinking evil thoughts of others, engaging in acts of violence, not adequately discouraging others (particularly children) from acts of violence, not working for peace, not trying to bring reconciliation to situations in which God would use me, allowing my anger to get out of control, murdering others with my tongue through sarcastic and unkind remarks, otherwise creating disharmony, failure to voice my concerns about what seem to me to be the murderous activities of others, thoughtlessness for the lives and needs of others?
- (7) We are not to commit adultery. In what ways might I violate the spirit of this commandment: committing adultery in my heart through lustful thoughts, desires and looks, exposing myself to opportunities for lustful thoughts and actions, not fighting pornography and other factors that degrade human life, not helping others (especially young people) understand their sexuality, failure to reverence my body as a temple of the Holy Spirit, telling dirty jokes or engaging in stories that downgrade the sanctity of life, not maintaining high moral standards, failure to stand against anything that cheapens the value of life, reading books, magazines, and other materials of a sensuous nature or watching movies, television and the internet containing sensuous material, developing an unhealthy relationship with another person?
- (8) We are not to steal. In what ways do I steal from others: Careless use or overconsumption of food or of natural resources, cheating on my taxes, expense account or other trust relationships, not doing my share of the workload in the community, creating inconveniences or problems for others (robbing them of their rights, time, health or happiness), not providing adequately for my family, insensitivity and lack of availability to others, failure to fight injustice and oppression, not using my time wisely?
- (9) We are not to bear false witness against our neighbor. In what ways have I violated this commandment: saying unkind things about another, not defending those unjustly accused, encouraging or even listening to gossip or slander, unnecessarily thinking or speaking negatively about a person even when true, not loving my neighbor as myself, not getting to know my neighbor, not helping my neighbor and allowing reciprocity, not bearing positive witness *for* my

neighbor, not bearing positive witness *to* my neighbor, allowing my “neighborhood” to be too small (i.e., lack of concern for people in other parts of the world)?

- (10) We are not to covet. In what ways do I covet: envying things others have, being jealous of another, trying to keep up with worldly lifestyles, being inordinately discontent or ungrateful, playing the “what if” game rather than getting on with life, desiring an unattainable or unchristian lifestyle, seeking personal gain at the expense of others, making value judgments irrespective of faith guidance, seeking goals that are not in accord with God’s will for my life, so desiring the acceptance of others that I let it affect my behavior such as failing to speak the truth in love?

Balanced Self-examination

The above method of self-examination is for the purpose looking for sin areas in our lives for which we need to repent. We may have our weaknesses that we should deal with, but there is also much we can be thankful for in our lives. These thoughts from *The Life Recovery Bible*: “If we have lived in bondage to our compulsive behaviors for a while, we probably see more bad inside us than good. Many of us tend to see life in terms of all or nothing. As a result, we probably think of ourselves as being all bad. But...we need a balanced understanding of ourselves. We need to see that along with our bad points we have also been gifted with some strengths. It’s not an either/or proposition. A balanced view of ourselves will help us better understand our shortcomings while also giving us greater hope in our potential.”

Suggested Scriptural References/Self-examination

The psalmist asks for God to examine him (Psalm 26);
David’s classic psalm of repentance (Psalm 51);
Nothing we do is hidden from the Lord (Psalm 139);
Let us examine our ways (Lamentations 3:39-40);
People questioning how they could be saved, and wondering about the Messiah (Luke 3:7-15);
The disciples question themselves about who will betray Jesus (Luke 22:20-24);
Jesus’ soul searching concerning the sacrifice he is about to make (Luke 22:39-44);
Peter’s betrayal and grief (Mark 14:66-72);
Judas, in remorse, hangs himself (Matthew 27:1-10);
Self-examination before receiving the body and blood of Jesus (1 Corinthians 11:23-30);
Fidelity to the faith needs to be tested (2 Corinthians 13:5-9);
Paul’s warning to be objective about ourselves and our motives (Galatians 6:3-5);
The need to look at ourselves to see if we are doing what we have learned (James 1:22-25).

Selfishness

“Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

Philippians 2:4

Selfishness is at the heart of virtually all of our sins. It seems inherent in us from the moment we're born. As a friend says, “The second word a child learns (after Mama or Papa) is ‘No’.” We simply want things our own way, in our own time. Our insistence on getting what we want, rather than what God wants and others need from us, leads us into doing those things we ought not be doing.

In 2 Samuel 11:1-27 we see the selfishness of David in sending others out to battle while he stayed home and committed adultery with Bathsheba and plotted the murder of Uriah. The story shows how selfishness, step by step, can lead us into increasing sinfulness. David first neglected his duty by sending Joab out to do battle for him. Focusing on his own desires, when temptation came his way, he easily succumbed to it. He satisfied his own sexual lust by committing adultery, and then tried to cover it up. Finally, he committed murder in order to have Bathsheba for his own.

Hopefully, our selfishness does not lead to such dire results. However, it is a fact that one act of selfishness easily leads us into another, then another. It is much better to be God-centered than self-centered, to be selfless rather than selfish. Yes, but how?

Questions That Reveal Selfishness

- (1) Is this thought or action for me, to the detriment of someone else?
- (2) Am I indulging myself without justification?
- (3) Am I rationalizing?
- (4) While I do this for myself am I missing an opportunity to do something for someone else?
- (5) How am I using my time, energy, talents, spiritual gifts, home, possessions, resources?

Breaking the Back of Selfishness. Reflect on, or recall, the unselfishness that parents normally show toward their children. Resolve to show that kind of unselfishness, in the service of Christ, toward others.

Suggested Scriptural References/Selfishness

Abram, on entering Egypt, has his wife Sarai pose as his sister (Genesis 12:10-20);
Jacob in wanting Esau's birthright (Genesis 25:27-34);
Jacob in wanting Isaac's blessing (Genesis 27:1-39);
Onan, in not wanting Tamar to have a child by him (Genesis 38:1-10);
The Israelites who tried to keep manna overnight (thus, hoarding it for their own purposes) (Exodus 16:13-20);
Eli's sons (1 Samuel 2:12-17);
Nabal, in refusing to give provisions to David (1 Samuel 25:1-42);
Ahab and Jezebel in wanting Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 21:1-16);

Selfish Shepherds (Ezekiel 34:1-19);
Jesus' teaching on those who did not feed the hungry, etc. (Matthew 25:41-46);
James and John wanting places of honor (Mark 10:36-45);
Parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:13-21);
James' remedy for selfishness (James 4:1-7).

Separation from God

“How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?” Psalm 13:1

There is an expression often used among Christians, “If God seems to be far away from you, guess who moved!” In fact, there are times when our own sinfulness and disobedience to God create a separation between him and us. But there are also times when God seems to withdraw himself from us for a period of time. Those who have written on “the dark night of the soul” believe that God does this for our own good, that we may grow spiritually from being dependent upon feelings to being solely dependent upon him. Some Psalms reflect this pain of separation from God as did Jesus from the cross.

Psalm 6:1-7 presents a classic example of the pain of separation from God. The writer (assumed to have been King David), senses rebuke from God, and begs for mercy. He wants God to return to him with his unfailing love. His pillow is wet with weeping; he drenches his bed with his tears.

If our relationship with God is primary to us, and we have experienced the sort of separation from God described by the psalmist, we can undoubtedly feel the psalmists’ pain and anguish. Those are times we would rather forget; and, if we are sensing separation at the present time, we want to do all we can to re-establish our relationship with God. How?

What to Do When God Seems Absent from Us

In “What to Do When the Sugar Runs Out,” David Sumner recommends the following:

- (1) Learn to appreciate silence and recognize that you don’t have to say anything or do anything when you want to be with God. (See Ecclesiastes 3:7, Habakkuk 2:20, Zephaniah 1:7, Zechariah 2:13).
- (2) In your times of reflection and meditation, recall what God has already done for you and realize that he will never abandon you.
- (3) Find a soul friend, someone with whom you can be honest and openly share your feelings and doubts.
- (4) Keep on living the Christian life. Don’t use your emptiness or discouragement as an excuse to fall into temptation.
- (5) Wait patiently on the Lord. Don’t succumb to the temptation that filling your life with religious activities will help you feel closer to God.

Suggested Scriptural References/Separation from God

The entire book of Job, in a sense, deals with feelings of separation from God (Job 1:1—42:17);

One seeking relief from despair (Psalm 13:1-6);

The plea of one feeling forsaken. It was from this psalm that Jesus quoted on the cross (Psalm 22:1-21);

Sorrow for sinfulness (Psalm 38:1-22);

David, after his sin with Bathsheba and confrontation by the prophet Nathan (Psalm 51:1-19);

A cry of distress (Psalm 69:1-18);

A plea on behalf of people who were feeling deserted by God (Psalm 74:1-11);

A cry for help (Psalm 77:1-9);
When no relief is in sight (Psalm 88:1-18);
Jesus on the cross (Mark 15:33-34).

Servanthood

“[Do] not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.”

Galatians 5:13b

It is error to think that work is not Christian work nor of service to God unless it is done in and for the Church. Actually, the witness made, usually unconsciously, in routine everyday life may be at least as significant and meaningful as that of overtly Christian work. God calls us to serve him in many kinds of activity and secular work, however menial; but, when carried out with commitment to him, it is a holy enterprise.

In the first of the Servant Songs, Isaiah 42:1-6, we are given two central features of the Servant. Looked at as both Israel and the Messiah, the Servant mentioned in this passage would bring the world to knowledge of God (Israel's part) and fulfill this work by revealing to the world God himself (the Messiah's part). This passage is quoted in Matthew 12:18-21, showing that Jesus, the Messiah, was manifesting just these characteristic of servanthood that Isaiah had described centuries before.

Servanthood is at the center of the Christian life. Jesus came not to be served but to serve (Matthew 20:28). As his people in the world today, serving others is why we are here. But, what is expected of us?

Having a Servant's Heart in an Affluent World

Here are some things to consider:

- (1) Discover your ministry. All Christians are called to ministry; find yours, and get involved.
- (2) Give sacrificially. If you aren't "giving till it hurts," you're not giving sacrificially.
- (3) Have a servant attitude. See all aspects of life as opportunities to serve.
- (4) Get involved in your church and community.
- (5) Take action to meet human need; don't just give money for good causes.
- (6) Give blood regularly.
- (7) Witness to Christ in your life. People need help, but most of all they need Jesus.
- (8) Give priority to your spouse and family. This is your most important service.

Suggested Scriptural References/Servanthood

Joshua reminds the people of the choice before them: whether to serve "gods" or the one true God (Joshua 24:14-28);

Israel is seen to be the servant nation (Isaiah 49:1-6);

The Obedient Servant (Isaiah 50:4-9);

The Servant modeled by Jesus the Messiah (Isaiah 52:13—53:12);

The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-32);

The duty of servanthood (Luke 17:7-10);

Jesus washes the disciples' feet, to show what real servanthood is all about (John 13:1-20);

The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats (Matthew 25:31-46);

Paul's view of his own ministry of servanthood (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

Sexuality

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” Matthew 5:27,28

Stephen A. Hayner, in *Life Issues*, says this: “We are sexual beings. There is no other way that we can live in the world other than as sexual beings—as males and females. Our sexuality affects how we see ourselves, how we interact with others, even how we relate to God. Our emotions, thoughts, physical sensations, affections, longings for relationships, and our ways of treating each other are all affected by the fact that we are either men or women. Why did God make us like this? Besides the obvious function of procreation, our sexuality is a clue to God’s nature and how He wants us to live with Him and with each other. Sexuality is not principally about sex but about relationship.”

The Bible passages listed below look primarily at ungodly sexual acts and how they distort relationships.

In Genesis 19:1-11 the men of Sodom demanded to have homosexual relations with Lot’s guests. It is a strange and upsetting story, especially because Lot offered his daughters to the crowd if they would just leave his guests alone. That may have been because he knew the Sodomites were only interested in homosexual relations. In any event, Sodom was so sexually evil that only the actions of the guests (angels) in blinding the men saved the situation.

The sexual drive in human beings is a powerful force that can be used for good or ill. It is, therefore, extremely important to yield our bodies to God (Romans 12:1) so that our sexual activities may be blessings and not sin. Yes, but how?

Sexual Purity.

The *Parents Resource Bible* says this about sexual purity: “The law of Moses clearly spells out God’s design for sexual expression. The restrictions he placed on sexual expression protect the purity of that design. God has set boundaries on sexual expression because of his holiness and as a means of protecting us from physical and emotional harm. By living within the borders of sexual purity, we can experience this wonderful gift from God as he intended.” The restrictions on sexual expression listed are: **Incest** (near relatives, Leviticus 18:10-18; immediate family, Leviticus 18:6-9); **Fornication** (promiscuity, Deuteronomy 22:23-25; adultery, Deuteronomy 22:22; prostitution, Deuteronomy 23:17-18); and **Perversion** (homosexual expression, Leviticus 18:22; bestiality, Leviticus 18:23).

Suggested Scriptural References/Sexuality

Shechem had intercourse with Jacob’s daughter Dinah (perhaps raped her), leading to his destruction by Jacob’s sons (Genesis 34:1-31);
Reuben had intercourse with his father’s concubine Bilhah (Genesis 35:22);

Onan had intercourse with his widowed sister-in-law at his father's command (as was custom at the time) but spilled his semen outside her womb because any child she had would not be his (Genesis 38:1-10);
 Tamar posed as a prostitute and had relations with her father-in-law because she had not been given to his youngest son (Genesis 38:11-30);
 Potiphar's wife tries to seduce Joseph (Genesis 39:7-10);
 Standards for God's people concerning sexual activity (Leviticus 18:1-30);
 Israelites with Moabite women (Numbers 25:1-18);
 In Gibeah, the men of the town demand a male guest be brought out so they can have sex with him (Judges 19:1-30);
 Eli's sons, who were priests, had sexual relations with the women who served in the Tent of Meeting (1 Samuel 2:22-25);
 David, in committing adultery with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:1-27);
 Amnon's lust for and rape of his half-sister (2 Samuel 13:1-38);
 Absalom, in having relations with his father's concubines (2 Samuel 16:15-23);
 There were male prostitutes in the southern kingdom in Rehoboam's time (1 Kings 14:21-31);
 Wisdom will help avoid ungodly sexual activity (Proverbs 2:1-22, 5:1-23, 6:20—7:27);
 Adultery against God ("whoring after other gods") (Jeremiah 3:6-13);
 Hosea's wife is an adulteress (Hosea 1:2—3:5);
 Jesus teaches about (Matthew 5:27-32);
 Herod and Herodias (his brother's wife) (Matthew 14:1-12);
 Jesus does not condemn the woman taken in adultery, but tells her to sin no more (John 8:1-11);
 Disorder in the Corinthian church (1 Corinthians 5:1-13, 6:12-20);
 Reference to the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah (Jude 7).

Shame

“I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I am naked; so I hid.” Genesis 3:10

Many people, including many Christians, live in a state of shame. They feel they have failed in some way or ways important to their self-image. It could be no more than a case of “comparisonitis,” that malady of comparing ourselves with others and coming up short. Or, it could be a moral failure, a sin against God and others. People laden with shame can suffer serious mental, emotional and physical ailments.

Shame shows up early in Scripture; in just the third chapter of Genesis as a matter of fact. God had a special relationship with Adam and Eve, and there was just one thing that could ruin it: disobedience. When they did the one thing God had asked them not to do—to eat from the tree in the middle of the garden—they realized they were naked and were so ashamed that they hid from God (vv.1-19).

Later, we see in Hannah a different kind of shame (1 Samuel 1:1-7). Hannah was ultimately to become the mother of Samuel. But, before that happened, she long suffered the shame of barrenness. To not be able to produce children in those days was a sense of great failure; and, because Hannah’s husband had another wife, Peninnah, who lorded over Hannah her ability to reproduce, Hannah’s shame was even greater.

So, whether our shame is the result of our own bad self-image or sin, it needs to be dealt with. But how?

Deal with Shame

- (1) If our shame is the result of a bad self-image, the steps to consider are those listed in the section entitled “Inadequacy, Feelings of.”
- (2) If, on the other hand, it is because of a moral failure—what we Christians regard as sin—the remedy is confession. For more detail on how to deal with confession, see the section entitled “Repentance.”

Suggested Scriptural References/Shame

Before their sin against God, Adam and Eve were naked but it caused no shame (Genesis 2:25);

The shameful way the Israelites were acting at the golden calf episode (Exodus 32:25);

Nathan’s confrontation with David over his sin with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12:1-10);

Peter’s shame for denying Jesus (Matthew 26:69-75);

Paul tells of Peter’s shameful behavior in not sitting with the Gentiles (Galatians 2:11-14);

Jesus scorned shame in dying on the cross for our sins (Hebrews 12:2).

Sorcery

“[For] by thy sorceries were all nations deceived.” Revelation 18:23 KJV

The New Bible Dictionary says that sorcery is an “attempt to influence people and events by supernatural or occult means....There is no doubt that...sorcery is not always mere superstition, but has a reality behind it. It must be resisted and overcome through the power of God in the name of Jesus Christ.”

In 1 Samuel 28:1-25 Saul consults the witch of Endor. Saul was a study in contrasts. As the first king of Israel, he did some good things. Among them, he had banned all mediums and psychics from the land (v. 3b). But, Saul had strayed from the Lord, and Samuel, the prophet of God who had tried to keep him in line, had died. When Saul, confronted by a vast Philistine army, failed to perceive God’s guidance, he sought help from a witch at Endor. This was clearly contrary to the will of God (Exodus 22:18; Deuteronomy 18:9-14) and led to Israel’s defeat and Saul’s death.

Unfortunately, witches, mediums, and sorcerers are common in our day. Even Christians get involved, having their fortunes told or reading their horoscopes. Such activity, though it might seem innocent, opens the door to sorcery and has dire consequences for those who do not repent and renounce such involvements. So, how are to deal with this matter?

Anathema to God.

In *Now, That’s a Good Question!*, R. C. Sproul is responding to an inquiry about Saul and the witch of Endor (1 Samuel 28:1-25). He says, “Let me say what we know for sure. If we can contact the dead today and conjure them up as you say, we’re certainly not allowed to. There’s no question about that. We’re simply not permitted to be involved in séances, in spiritualism, or in the use of mediums. That is anathema to God, and in fact, people who do that are included in the final chapter of the New Testament as those who are excluded from the kingdom of God. The warnings are severe and weighty about being involved in these kinds of activities.”

Suggested Scriptural References/Sorcery

Counterfeit miracles performed by Pharaoh’s magicians (Exodus 7:8-24);

Its practice in Israel one of the reasons the Lord allowed the Israelites to be taken into captivity (2 Kings 17:1-41);

Mediums and spiritualists gotten rid of by Josiah (2 Kings 23:1-30);

Warning about consulting with mediums and spiritualists instead of God (Isaiah 8:18-22);

Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8:9-25);

Paul confronts Bar-Jesus (Acts 13:4-12);

The girl with a spirit of divination (Acts 16:16-40).

See also **Evil, Evil Spirits, Satan**

Spiritual Gifts

“We have different gifts, according to the grace given us.” Romans 12:6a

All Christians are empowered by the Holy Spirit through the imparting of gifts. To do Christ’s work in the world, we need help. We can’t do all that God would have us do unless we are empowered by him. This happens as spiritual gifts are entrusted to us in great variety that, together, the body of Christ, the Church, can have all of the gifts present that may be needed.

Romans 12:1-8, 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 and Ephesians 4:11,12 are the primary places in Scripture where gifts of the Holy Spirit are listed. These gifts differ in their nature, power and effectiveness. All are for the common good. One is not elevated over the other. They are to be used to do Christ’s work.

It is not enough to know what our spiritual gift or gifts may be, we need to see that God has a purpose for our life. God has imparted these gifts to us. We need to find how to use them to help others. Doing this will show that we are maturing in our faith and becoming the people God created us to be. God loves us and wants us to know our place in the body of Christ and our purpose in life. Yes, but how do we find our spiritual gifts?

Finding Our Spiritual Gifts

There are a number of “spiritual gift inventories” available whereby Christians can seek to identify the spiritual gift or gifts they have been given by God, such as those spelled out by Paul in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4. A less sophisticated but helpful way of considering the gifts you may have involves discovering:

- (1) the people you most admire, and why;
- (2) your most satisfying moments in life;
- (3) your favorite activities;
- (4) your “philosophy of life”; and
- (5) the specific ways you believe God has equipped you for ministry through talents, education and training, vocation, hobbies and the special (good and bad) experiences of your life.
- (6) By reflecting prayerfully on these ways of discovering ourselves, we have a good opportunity to discover what spiritual gift or gifts we may have for ministry.
- (7) It is helpful to review our results with a trusted Christian friend who will objectively evaluate what we have learned and guide us accordingly.

Suggested Scriptural References/Spiritual Gifts

God gave special gifts to Bezalel and Oholiab, as well as to unnamed others, to craft the Tent of Meeting, the Ark of the Testimony and other sacred objects (Exodus 31:1-11); see also Exodus 35:30—36:7;

God sends his Spirit upon 70 of the Israelite elders to help Moses carry the load of leading the people (Numbers 11:4-30);

In this instance, the Spirit came upon a sorcerer (Balaam) whom God nonetheless used to speak his message (Numbers 24:1-9);
The Spirit of the Lord comes upon Othniel and made him a judge and successful in battle (Judges 3:7-11);
The Spirit of the Lord comes upon Gideon (Judges 6:1-40);
The Spirit of the Lord comes upon Samson (Judges 14:1-20);
The Spirit of the Lord comes upon Saul, Israel's first king (1 Samuel 10:1-11, 11:1-11); leaves him (1 Samuel 16:14);
The Spirit of the Lord comes upon David at his anointing by Samuel (1 Samuel 16:1-13);
Wisdom is given to Solomon (1 Kings 3:1-15, 4:29-34);
Parable of the loaned money (talents) (Matthew 25:14-30);
Speaking in an unknown language (Acts 2:1-13);
Speaking in tongues (Acts 10:23b-48, 19:1-7);
Paul's teachings on the gifts of the Spirit (Romans 12:1-21; 1 Corinthians 12:1-27, 13:1—14:40; Ephesians 4:1-16);
God's revelation in Christ accompanied by (Hebrews 2:1-4);
Test the spirits (1 John 4:1-6).

Spiritual Warfare

“Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” James 4:7b

As someone has well said, “Jesus Christ has defeated Satan, he has won the war for us; the problem is that there is still a ‘mopping up’ operation going on.” We need not fear Satan; Jesus has truly won the victory over him. However, we are naive if we think that there is no spiritual warfare going on around us that can cause us problems.

In Acts 16:16-18 Paul casts out a spirit of divination. A demon-possessed slave girl was telling fortunes to the great profit of her owners. In the situation described in the passage, she was following along behind Paul and his compatriots shouting, “These men are servants of the Most High God...” (NLT). What she said was true but her source was a demon. If Paul had failed to silence the girl, it would have appeared that truth and evil were somehow intermingled, and this would have destroyed the effectiveness of Paul’s mission.

It is in Ephesians 6:12 that Paul writes, “For we are not fighting against people made of flesh and blood, but against the evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against those mighty powers of darkness who rule this world, and against wicked spirits in the heavenly realms” (NLT). Paul is talking about demons under the control of Satan. They are arrayed against Christ’s Church, and there is a battle going on. Because of our belief in Christ, these are our enemies. We will be engaged in a struggle with them until Christ returns. That is why we need to be clad with the “whole armor of God” (Ephesians 6:10-18). Yes, but how?

The Whole Armor of God

In Ephesians 6:10-18, Paul advises putting on the whole armor of God as protection against the wiles of the devil. This is spiritual warfare, and is something we should all take seriously.

- (1) The belt of truth (v. 14) is how we fight against the lies of Satan which sometimes sound like the truth because they can be very seductive (as Eve can testify); however, only Christians have God’s truth that can defeat Satan’s lies.
- (2) The breastplate of righteousness (v. 14) protects our heart; being in a right relationship with God (righteousness) assures us of God’s love in any attack upon our emotions (heart).
- (3) The shoes of the Good News of peace (v. 15) prepare us to tell others of God’s love through Jesus Christ, something that Satan definitely does not want us equipped to do.
- (4) The shield of faith (v. 16) is a protective device against the intimidation, temptation and insults Satan will fire our way, and gives us confidence in Christ’s victory and our vindication.
- (5) The helmet of salvation (v. 17) protects our mind from doubting God’s saving work in us.
- (6) The sword of the Spirit (v. 17) is a weapon for offensive battle: the Word of God with which we can go forth in confidence to win the world for Christ.
- (7) Verse 18 reminds us to pray in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Suggested Scriptural References/Spiritual Warfare

An expression of sure confidence in the Lord in the face of evil (Psalm 27:1-3);

Jesus combats Satan (Matthew 4:1-11);

Jesus casts out evil spirits (Matthew 8:28-34; 9:32-34; 15:21-28; Luke 8:26-39);

Jesus heals the demon-possessed (Matthew 12:22-37; 17:14-21);

Paul's struggle between his sinful nature and the Holy Spirit within him (Romans 7:9-11);

Christ the victor over evil (1 Corinthians 15:21-25);

How to put on the whole armor of God to protect against the wiles of Satan (Ephesians 6:10-18);

Resist the devil and he will flee (James 4:7-8);

The devil prowls around like a roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8-9);

Test the spirits (1 John 4:1-6);

A prophetic vision of Christ's ultimate triumph (Revelation 12:1—13:1).

Stealing

“Do not steal.” Romans 13:9

“You shall not steal” is the Eighth Commandment. When we steal from someone else, we are stealing from God because he is the ultimate owner of all things. Furthermore, violation of this commandment is a sin against God because it accuses him of not providing adequately for us. And, it is a sin against our neighbor from whom we steal, for it denies loving him as we love ourselves.

In Genesis 31:19-55 we have the story of Rachel stealing her father’s household gods. The relationship between Jacob and his father-in-law Laban had been an uneasy one, to say the least. So, when the time came for him to depart with his family, he decided to sneak away rather than facing a confrontation with Laban. What he did not know was that the wife he dearly loved had stolen her father’s household gods (wooden or metal idols). When Laban appears and announces the theft, Jacob is so bold as to say that whoever has taken them will die! Rachel deceptively prevents her father from finding the idols, and ultimate peace is reached between Jacob and Laban. Nonetheless, Rachel’s crime was a serious one; she was simply fortunate that she didn’t get caught.

Yes, but how are we Christians to look at stealing in our own day? We are guilty of stealing when we cheat on our income taxes, fudge on our expense account, or engage in the reckless over-consumption of natural resources. All of these things ultimately result in deprivation to someone else.

Giving Instead of Stealing

In Matthew 5:38-48, Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, enlarged upon the commandments of God in an attempt to get us to see the importance of the spirit of the law rather than the letter of it. It is there that he tells us that if someone takes our shirt, we should give him our coat as well. He is telling us to love our enemies; God does. Thus, not only are we not to steal, we are to find ways to give; God does. If we want to be sons of our Father (v.45), we are to do what he does.

Suggested Scriptural References/Stealing

Jacob steals Esau’s birthright (Genesis 25:27-34);

Jacob steals Esau’s blessing (Genesis 27:1-39);

The Eighth Commandment (Exodus 20:15);

Withholding the tithe is just like stealing from God (Malachi 3:6-10);

John the Baptist teaches about stealing (Luke 3:12-14);

Jesus affirms the Eighth Commandment (Matthew 19:18);

Jesus, in talking about the responsibility of the shepherd for his sheep as an indictment against false shepherds (i.e., the scribes and Pharisees), condemns stealing (John 10:1-6);

Paul calls those who would steal to do good instead (Ephesians 4:28).

Stewardship (Including Financial)

“So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God.” 1 Corinthians 4:1

In “Fulfilling Your Need to Give,” David E. Sumner said that a steward is one employed by a large household or estate to manage domestic concerns. “That’s where we get the word stewardship,” he says. “Stewardship means taking care of—managing—the resources of God. ‘The earth is the Lord’s, and all it contains; the world, and those who dwell in it,’ declares the Psalmist (Psalm 24:1). This principle is the primary foundation for stewardship: God owns the earth; God owns all the bank accounts, all the corporations, and all of the houses and lands. We are merely the managers, or the stewards of the properties and resources of the earth.”

The Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:14-30 is a helpful teaching on stewardship. In a sense, the story is about how important it is to be ready when Jesus returns, and it follows the Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids that makes the same point. But this particular parable has to do with the necessity to use well the gifts the Lord has entrusted to us. The Master distributed money among his servants according to their abilities. None was given more or less than he could handle. The amounts given represented the spiritual resources to be managed. The servants were to be good stewards over what they were given. The point is not how much we have but how well we use what God has given us. Yes, but how?

How Much Should a Christian Give to God?

As David E. Sumner points out, several factors should be considered:

- (1) Stewardship is not about fund raising to support the church’s needs; it is about our relationship with God.
- (2) When we give to God and the church, we are not giving what is “ours.” Everything we have belongs to God. We are just giving back a portion of what God has given us.
- (3) Giving is based on our trust and faith in God. We don’t give because the church, or God, needs our money. We need to give. Giving does more for the giver than the receiver.
- (4) The more we give, the more we are risking for God. The more we risk for God, the more dependent upon him we become. The more dependent upon God we become, the more we grow in our relationship with him.
- (5) The more we love God, the more we will give.

Suggested Scriptural References/Stewardship

God created human beings and gave them dominion over the earth (Genesis 1:27-31);

Joseph becomes Potiphar’s steward (Genesis 39:1-6a);

Joseph becomes a steward in the jail where he is a prisoner (Genesis 39:20-23);

Joseph becomes steward to Pharaoh (Genesis 41:37-45);

Gehazi, Elisha’s steward, proves dishonest (2 Kings 5:19-27);

The Parable of the Shrewd Steward (Luke 16:1-13);

Stewards of the mysteries of God (1 Corinthians 4:1-5);

About being a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:6-8);
Stewards of God's gifts for raising up others in ministry (Ephesians 4:11-14).

Temptation

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.” Matthew 6:13

Gale D. Webbe wrote this about temptation: “In short, temptation is annoying, wearying, constant and—as we persevere—increasing, but it is not a negative or useless element. Nor is it, like a sand fly at a picnic, an intruding interruption into the otherwise good life. Temptation is of the everlasting nature of things. It obviously existed even before the fall of man; indeed it was the inciting cause of that disaster. Human freedom is real, even in a state of grace, as Adam and Eve discovered to our sorrow. Temptation is merely harder to fight, now that we are weaker.”

2 Samuel 11:1-27 tells of King David’s temptation on the occasion of seeing Bathsheba bathing. David was immediately consumed with lust, a strong temptation to do the wrong thing. At that point, he had the opportunity to resist the temptation; he could simply have turned aside and left the roof the moment he saw the naked woman. Instead, he indulged himself, found out who the woman was, sent for her and had sexual relations with her. It was a case of yielding completely to the temptation.

All of us are tempted in one way or another all day long. We are continually tempted in the “smaller things” such as going our own selfish way instead of doing what Jesus would do. Sometimes we also face the “bigger” temptations to be unfaithful, to steal, or to commit a violent act. In all of these situations, by the grace of God, we can resist. Yes, but how?

Resisting Temptation

Here are some guidelines:

- (1) Protect our thought life. Much temptation comes from allowing ourselves to think about unhealthy matters. Instead, focus on God and our love of and service toward him. “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (Philippians 4:8).
- (2) Avoid, as best we can, getting ourselves into situations that tempt us.
- (3) If we see we will be facing a challenge that could involve temptation, pray for protection in advance.
- (4) Realize that it is Satan who is tempting us. A large part of success in resisting temptation comes from recognizing who is causing the problem, catching him at it, and telling him where he can go. Satan is the mastermind behind all of our temptations (see Ephesians 6:10-12).
- (5) Resist the devil. Scripture tells us that if we resist Satan’s enticements, he will flee from us (see James 4:7-8).
- (6) Rejoice that the victory is ours in Jesus Christ. We do not have to be subject to the wiles of Satan. God promises that he will always provide a way of escape when we are tempted (see 1 Corinthians 10:13).

Suggested Scriptural References/Temptation

Adam, Eve and the snake in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:1-10);

A prayer for help when facing temptation (Psalm 141);

Jesus is tempted by Satan in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11);

Jesus warns against (Matthew 18:7-9);

We will not be tempted beyond our ability to bear it (1 Corinthians 10:1-13);

Jesus has experienced temptation and so is able to sympathize with our weakness (Hebrews 4:14—5:3);

Doesn't come from God (James 1:2-18).

Testing

“Test me, O Lord, and try me, examine my heart and mind.” Psalm 26:2

Testing, like the experiences of life, comes in all shapes and sizes.

For most of us, we often face the sort of “garden variety” of testing. The car breaks down just at a crucial time, we get passed over for a promotion we thought we had earned, or a good friend or our child lets us down just when we are counting on them for big things. Charles Swindoll has said, “God’s hand is in your heartache. Yes, it is! If you weren’t important, do you think he would take this long and work this hard on your life?” Max Lucado has put it this way: “Should God place you on his anvil, be thankful. It means he thinks you’re worth reshaping.”

On the other end of the scale are the real tragedies of life some of us must face. The famed Princeton theologian B. B. Warfield’s wife was struck by lightning on their honeymoon and remained paralyzed and in need of special care the rest of her life. Friends of ours had a daughter who suffered virtually constant pain all her life, unable to sleep peacefully at night and needing close attention for over seventeen years. As my friend said, “In the midst of our daughter’s illness and death, we would have become enraged by the quotes above.”

In considering traumatic testing such as those immediately above, think of Genesis 22:1-19. God tested Abraham by indicating to him that he was to sacrifice his own son. God’s purpose was to strengthen Abraham’s capacity to obey God whatever the consequences might be. Abraham, by faith, had been obedient to God in many crucial ways. For him to be the father of the Israelites, however, it was important for Abraham to prove his faithfulness under the most stringent test God could devise. Abraham proved totally obedient although God, of course, stayed his hand at the last moment and spared Isaac.

Fortunately, we don’t face tests that parallel Abraham’s and most of us will not face tests like Warfield’s or our friends whose daughter was so ill. That kind of testing can only be survived by maintaining a close relationship with God in the midst of it. It is at such times that we really need the support of the body of Christ, because those tests are too difficult for us to handle alone.

For the lesser testing we face in life, as someone has well said, “God loves us just as we are; however, he likes us too much to let us stay that way!” If we are to grow, we need to be tested. Yes, but how are we to respond?

Being Tested

These are the concluding words in an article by James Dobson in the *Parents Resource Bible*: “Throughout our remaining days in this life...let me urge you not to be discouraged by temporal cares. Accept the circumstances as they are presented to you. Expect periods of hardship to occur, and don’t be dismayed when they arrive. ‘Lean into the pain’ when your time to suffer comes around, knowing that God will use the difficulty for his purposes—and, indeed, for your own good. The Lord is very near, and he has promised that your temptation will not be greater than you can bear (1 Corinthians 10:13). I leave you with these wonderful words from Psalm 34:

‘Yes, the Lord hears the good man when he calls to him for help and saves him out of his troubles. The Lord is close to those whose hearts are breaking; he rescues those who are humbly sorry for their sins. The good man does not escape all troubles—he has them too. But the Lord helps him in each and every one (vv.17-19).’”

Suggested Scriptural References/Testing

God tests the Israelites, just out of Egypt, by promising to spare them from disease if they will listen to him, do his will and obey his decrees (Exodus 15:22-27);

God tests the Israelites by no longer fighting with them against their enemies (Judges 2:1—3:6);

Gideon tests God to get proof that God would do what he said (Judges 6:33-40);

God then tests Gideon by getting him to reduce his fighting force to so few men it would be obvious that only by an act of God could the victory be won (Judges 7:1-25);

A testing between God and gods occurs when the Ark of the Covenant is taken by the Philistines. (1 Samuel 5:1—7:1);

A test between Elijah (on behalf of the God whom he was obeying) and the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:1-46);

The whole book of Job is about testing (Job 1:1—42:17);

Asks God to test us (Psalm 26);

A contest between Jeremiah (on behalf of the God he served) and the false prophet Hananiah (Jeremiah 28:1-17);

Peter’s claim that he would not deny Jesus (Matthew 26:31-35);

Comes from God (James 1:2-18).

Thanksgiving

“Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Ephesians 5:19b, 20

As human beings, we have much to be thankful for: we have life. As Christians, we have much more to be thankful for: we have eternal life! It is extremely important to live thankful lives, and our children particularly need to see an attitude of gratitude in us. We will live longer, happier lives the more thankful we are. It is in our thankfulness that we show God how much we appreciate him and all he does for us. God likes to hear our thanksgiving and praise, and he likes even more to see those traits lived out in our lives.

As a friend has said, “It is easy to put a concern under our ‘worry microscope’ and forget our unbelievably, blessed circumstances.”

Psalms 100 is a beautiful hymn of thanksgiving. This is a psalm to lift us out of ourselves and our deadly little circle of self-love. We did not create ourselves; God is our Creator (v.3). As we are thankful for this life that God has given us, it is natural to want to share with others what we have from God in such abundance (2 Corinthians 9:8). Yes, but how?

Thanksgiving Living

A wonderful way to realize how much we have to be thankful for is simply to sit down and make a list, and then to pray a prayer of thanksgiving to God for all those people and things that are on that list. In addition to praying our gratitude, here are some ways we can live it:

- (1) Call a loved one.
- (2) Write a letter to someone for whom you are grateful.
- (3) Send money to a church project or charity for which you are thankful.
- (4) Work in your yard or around your home to make it even more beautiful.
- (5) Do something special for a friend or neighbor whom you appreciate.
- (6) Make a serious attempt genuinely to smile at everyone with whom you come into contact today. Let God’s joy and love flow through you.
- (7) Plant a flower or take some other action that will create beauty in the world.
- (8) If you have young children, grandchildren or Sunday School students, get them involved. Consult with them concerning others to whom appreciation should be shown. Help them write a letter to someone for whom they are grateful. Get them involved in cooking, planting, cleaning, etc. for the benefit of someone else.
- (9) Have a Thanksgiving Box (or piggy bank) into which you can put a coin (or larger amount) every time you have occasion to be especially thankful, and, when it is full, donate the money to a worthwhile cause.

Suggested Scriptural References/Thanksgiving

David’s song of thanksgiving upon the Ark of the Covenant being moved to Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 16:8-36);

Psalm of thanksgiving. Just as there are many psalms of praise, there are also many psalms and portions of psalms where the focus is thanksgiving (Psalm 107);
Paul's, to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 1:4-9);
Paul's, for the Ephesians (Ephesians 1:15-23);
Paul's, for the Philippians (Philippians 1:3-11);
For generosity (Philippians 4:10-20);
Paul's, to the Colossians (Colossians 1:3-14);
Thanksgiving for all that Christ has done (Colossians 2:6-7);
Paul's, for the Thessalonians' faith (1 Thessalonians 1:2-10);
Thanksgiving that it is God's will that they belong to Christ Jesus (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18);
Paul's, for what Christ has done for him (1 Timothy 1:12-17);
Paul's, for Philemon (Philemon 4-7).

Treachery

So Judas came to the grove, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and Pharisees.” John 18:3

One of the wonderful things about the Bible is its stark honesty. We don't have “stained glass saints” in Scripture, but real people. People today have a tendency to say that we live in a very different time from Bible days, and that we face situations and decisions about which the Bible can't guide us because those things just weren't happening back then. People who say that have either never really read the Bible, or haven't been able to read it objectively. There's no new sin. Every human tendency for good or evil is right there in the pages of Scripture. And, there was quite a bit of treachery among the people in the Bible.

Genesis 34:1-31 is a story of revenge and treachery. Shechem, son of Hamor, had raped Dinah, daughter of Jacob and Leah. Shechem claimed to be in love with Dinah and wanted to marry her, but Jacob's sons were bent on revenge. The proposed solution was that Hamor and Shechem and their men would be circumcised so that their people and Jacob's could live in peace with one another and intermarry. Jacob's sons Simeon and Levi waited until three days after the circumcisions had been performed and then led an attack on the men in their vulnerable condition and slew them all.

Evil actions are always wrong, but those couched in treachery are especially heinous. We may believe that, as Christians, we are exempt from feelings of treachery; but, anytime we have even an hint of revenge on our minds, we are slipping toward treachery. How do we deal with this?

Coping with Treachery.

As Christians, we are to be people who forgive. Jesus died that we might be forgiven our sins and restored to relationship with God; likewise, we are to forgive others and be restored to relationship with them. When we feel that we have been victims to treachery, the guidelines in the section on Forgiveness would apply to coping with treachery as well. However, treachery is much harder to cope with than other forms of physical, psychological, emotional or spiritual damage we may have suffered at the hand of another. Therefore, inner healing and/or psychological counseling may be necessary.

Suggested Scriptural References/Treachery

- Potiphar's wife and her treatment of Joseph (Genesis 39:7-20);
- The Egyptians' treatment of the Israelites (Exodus 1:1-22);
- The Philistines, in threatening to kill Samson's wife and her family unless she discovered and revealed Samson's riddle (Judges 14:1-20);
- The Philistines, in getting Delilah to find the source of Samson's strength (16:1-22) and in how they treated Samson after capturing him (Judges 16:31);
- The way in which the men of Gibeah treat a concubine of a guest in the city (Judges 19:1-30);
- Doeg the Edomite, in killing the priest of Nob and wiping out the city to gain favor with Saul (1 Samuel 22:1-23);

Joab, in killing Abner (2 Samuel 3:22-39);
The murder of Ish-Bosheth by Recab and Baanah (2 Samuel 4:1-12);
David's treatment of Uriah (2 Samuel 11:1-27);
Amnon's rape of Tamar (2 Samuel 13:1-39);
Jezebel, in gaining Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 21:1-29);
Dismay over the treachery of a friend (Psalm 55);
Herodias, asking for the head of John the Baptist (Matthew 14:1-12);
Judas betrays Jesus (Matthew 26:14-16, 47-56; 27:1-10).

Truth

“Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” John 8:32

“The scientist must not think of the result he wants from his experiments,” said William Temple, “he must look to see what really does happen. He has got to put all his predilections aside; he must not be primarily interested, for example, in providing evidence for the theories on which his reputation rests. He must be concerned with the facts and not with his desires; otherwise he will be no true scientist. And it is the same in religion. We must give ourselves over to the search for the real truth concerning God and his word. ‘Thou had made us for thyself, and our souls are restless until they find rest in thee.’ It is only in the truth that they will find rest, and not in any devices of our contriving that may accord with what we suppose will bring satisfaction.”

“What is truth?” Pilate asked Jesus, but, instead of staying around for a reply, he went out and tried to work a compromise with the people (John 18:38-40). In John 17:6-18, Jesus prays that the Father will sanctify his followers by his truth (v.17). Jesus is naturally concerned about what will happen to his followers after he is no longer physically with them. He wants them to have protection and guidance. That can happen only by their learning the words of truth. The ways of Jesus and the words of Jesus are truth, and we can know this truth through Scripture. Yes, but how?

Finding Truth.

William Barclay said this: “Christian truth is not only an intellectual exercise; it is not only something which is the object of the search of the mind; it is not an academic affair; it is not a matter of knowledge and of opinion, of argument and of debate. Christian truth is always moral truth.”

Truth is found in Christ, and the Christ we know is the Christ of Scripture. It is in the Bible that we find truth. It is only as we become increasingly knowledgeable of Scripture and let it shape our lives that we can grow in truth.

Being Truthful (adapted from the writings of Fenelon, in one seeking godly counsel).

“O Lord, you have searched me and you know me” (Psalm 139:1). As Psalm 139 makes clear, we cannot hide from God. He knew us while we were still in our mother’s womb. The relationship with God needs to be one of openness and candor. So does the relationship with anyone to whom we go for spiritual counseling. That relationship should be considered the same as going to God, for that is what we are doing when we seek godly counsel from one we consider to be farther along the path of maturity in the Lord than ourselves.

We are to open our heart. We don’t heal our wounds by holding onto them. Simplicity, honesty and vulnerability are the keys to the best relationship with God and with those from whom we seek godly advice. It is humbling to have to admit that we don’t have all the answers for the issues of life that face us, but God calls us to humility. Few things can be more blessed than opening our hearts and laying bare our failures.

This does not mean bombarding our spiritual friend with every trifle going on in our minds. We can do that with God; there are no limits on what we share with him. But it is not fair to bring every trivial matter in our lives to one whose time and emotional energy we are seeking. Instead, in those cases, we should focus on the real issues which trouble us and on which we need help. In doing so, we should hold nothing back out of untruthfulness or shame. A medical doctor cannot give us the proper remedy for our physical ailments unless we are entirely honest about our symptoms; likewise, our spiritual doctor must also know the truth. We cannot be helped if we are unwilling to be as honest and forthright with our helper as we would be with the Divine Helper.

Suggested Scriptural References/Truth

One who walks in truth (Psalm 26);
The way of the law. See especially v.43 (Psalm 119);
God speaks truth (Isaiah 45.1-19);
The Word made flesh is grace and truth (John 1:14);
Living by the truth brings light (John 3:16-21);
The truth will set us free (John 8:31-47);
Jesus is the truth (John 14:1-14);
Jesus with Pilate (John 18:28-40);
Those wandering from the truth (James 5:19-20);
The truth in Jesus Christ (1 John 5:18-20).

Vulnerability

“So [Zacchaeus] ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see [Jesus].” Luke 19:4

Vulnerability is a word that will not be found in the Bible, but it is an important word in our day. The kind of vulnerability that God calls Christians to is a combination of openness and guilelessness. God wants us, in a sense, to be transparent to one another so that his love may flow smoothly between us and those with whom he puts us into contact. We are not here considering vulnerability to temptation and sin.

Jonathan’s vulnerability toward David is shown in 1 Samuel 18:1-4. The two men had become friends from the first. Their friendship is said to be the closest and deepest in the Bible. There could have been room for jealousy between them. Saul had kept David right by his side where Jonathan might otherwise have been; yet David had every reason to believe that it would be Jonathan who would succeed Saul as king and not himself. Nonetheless, here is Jonathan pledging himself to David in an open and guileless way. And, this vulnerable loyalty toward David survived even Jonathan’s realization that it would be David, and not he, who would succeed Saul (23:17).

If we are to follow Jesus, this is the way we are supposed to live as well. There is no room for jealousy and pride in the Christian life. But how do we live that out?

Vulnerable and Reflective.

Christians are to live vulnerably and reflectively. We are to be vulnerable in the sense of being “out there” in the world where God can use us. God can’t reach other people through us unless we are willing to be fully available to him for that purpose. Yet, on the other hand, vulnerability for its own sake can soon wear us out. People (including church people) will take advantage of us, expect too much of us, and get us over-involved. That is where the need to be reflective comes in. We should continually be going to God in prayer and Scripture with what is happening in our vulnerable lives, processing, evaluating, and taking any corrective action that is needed. We are no good to God if we allow ourselves to become overworked, overtired, and generally depressed. As in so many aspects of the Christian life, balance is needed.

Vulnerable Living (adapted from Don’t Sweat the Small Stuff by Richard Carlson).

You don’t need attention; let others have the glory.
Imagine that everyone is enlightened but you, and learn from them.
Smile at strangers; look into their eyes and say, “Hello.”
Spend a moment every day thinking of someone to thank, and do so.
Become more interested in understanding others than in having them understand you.
Become a better listener.
Practice random acts of kindness.
Practice humility.
Agree with criticism directed toward you (and watch it go away).
Make service of others an integral part of your life.
Open your heart to “what is” instead of insisting that life be the way you want it to be.

Suggested Scriptural References/Vulnerability

One feeling scorned and despised (Psalm 22);

A plea for mercy (Psalm 51);

The pain of treachery from a friend (Psalm 55);

The cry of one who is overwhelmed (Psalm 142);

Mary's "yes" to Gabriel (Luke 1:26-38);

Jesus' teaching that we are to come into the kingdom like little children (Matthew 19:13-14);

The Syro-Phoenician woman who comes to Jesus to beg that her daughter be healed (Mark 7:24-30);

The woman with the bleeding problem (Matthew 9:18-26);

Zacchaeus was very vulnerable in climbing a tree to see Jesus (Luke 19:1-9);

Nicodemus took a big risk in coming to see Jesus (John 3:1-12);

Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, in providing for and burying Jesus (John 19:38-42);

The openness of the members of the early Church to one another (Acts 2:42-47);

How serious the obligation of this openness and mutual responsibility really was (Acts 5:1-11);

The vulnerability of Ananais in being asked to pray for Saul (Paul) (Acts 9:10-12);

The discerning of gifts and the sending forth of missionaries in the early Church (Acts 13:1-3).

Waiting

“Wait for the Lord and keep his way....” Psalm 37:34a

The pattern of waiting is evident throughout Scripture and is integral to God’s relationship with people. This pattern seems to highlight the significance of waiting in how God deals with us and in the formation of our faith.

The idea of waiting for the Lord appears several times in the Psalms (27:13-14; 33:20-22; 40:1-3). In Isaiah 49:31 is the famous passage: “But they that shall wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint” (KJV).

Perhaps the most poignant statement about waiting on the Lord is Matthew 26:40. Jesus is in agonizing prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, facing the horror that lies before him. His disciples are nearby, supposedly supporting him in prayer; but he finds them asleep! “Could you not keep watch with me one hour?” he asks them.

Whether it is awaiting a word from the Lord or just simply waiting, we can feel frustrated, inadequate, impatient. How can we deal with this?

Dealing with Waiting.

- a. *Its Purpose:* What is the purpose of waiting? Several things are involved. Waiting certainly tests our faith; are we willing to wait rather than hastily making a decision that may not be in accordance with God’s will? It can purify our motives, giving us time to think through the matter before us, and how God would have us handle it. Waiting keeps us from acting impulsively to our damage and perhaps the injury of others. It allows us to get things in perspective, to see things from God’s point of view. And, waiting allows us to shape events to our greatest benefit and impact rather than settling for the immediate and inadequate.
- b. *Its Types:* What are the different kinds of waiting we face in life? One is anticipation, looking forward to something that is expected to happen, but hasn’t. We find ourselves in a period of suspense, and it is often unpleasant. Of course, there is also joyful waiting, as we look toward the birth of a child, a wedding, or the visit of a longtime friend. But there is the dread of waiting when we are expecting the results of a medical procedure that could change our lives, or when a child is missing, a marriage seems to be falling apart or bills will be arriving that cannot be paid. Then there are the seasons of life when we are awaiting God’s direction and purpose for us. These can be times of ambiguity, uncertainty, self-doubt, anxiety, confusion, powerlessness, discontent, despair, frustration, brokenness and loneliness. These can be desert times, full of fear and temptation.
- c. *Coping with Waiting:* How can we handle painful experiences of waiting? First, slow down or stop and be quiet before the Lord (Lamentations 3:25-26). Admit

where we are to God and possibly another person. Then, surrender the matter to the Lord; give up control of it and ask God to take control. Accept the fact that God loves us and wants the best for us; faith and trust in God is key to waiting the matter out. Don't judge by our own understanding; look to what God is trying to do. In the meantime, be gentle and compassionate with our self. Pray with gratitude for the way God is shaping us in the situation; ask him to teach us the lessons he would have us learn through it. Come to him as a child (Matthew 18:1-6) and listen attentively and expectantly. Wait on the Lord (Hosea 12:6). Keeping our eyes on Jesus and not our own circumstances is vital (Isaiah 26:3-4). And, don't be like the disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, stay alert!

Suggested Scriptural References/Waiting

Wait for the Lord, (Psalm 27:13-14);

Wait in hope for the Lord (Psalm 33:20-22);

Good things happen when we wait for the Lord (Psalm 40:1-3);

Amidst disaster, the prophet waits in hope for God his Savior (Micah 7:7);

Paul's teaching on future glory (Romans 8:18-25).

Walking with God

“Walk in the way that the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live and prosper and prolong your days....” Deuteronomy 5:33

Brother Lawrence, the humble monk who wrote *Practicing the Presence of God*, was certainly one who walked with God. He wrote: “Think often on God, by day, by night, in your business, and even in your diversions. He is always near you and with you; leave him not alone. You would think it rude to leave a friend alone who came to visit you; why then must God be neglected? Do not, then, forget him, but think on him often, adore him continually, live and die with him; this is the glorious employment of a Christian. In a word, this is our profession; if we do not know it, we must learn it.”

In Genesis 5:21-24, we learn of Enoch who walked with God. There is too little information about him to know any details. We are simply told that he had a close relationship with God, and God took him away without Enoch’s having passed through the trauma of physical death. It was enough for him to be included in the “Faith Hall of Fame” in Hebrews 11 (v. 5).

The most important thing in life is to be in relationship with God through Jesus Christ. The closer our walk with God, the more fulfilling our life will be. Yes, but how?

Ways to Walk with God

- (1) If we want to have a close relationship with God, the obvious things are being regular in reading Scripture, prayer, worship, fellowship and service. We can do all of these things, however, and still not be conscious of what God is doing in our lives every minute of every day. It is as we begin to see God in the small things, in the routines of life, that we are truly walking with him.
- (2) If we begin each day by committing ourselves into the Lord’s hands, and then commit our spirit into his hands before we go to sleep each night, that is a start.
- (3) If we have someone, or a small group, to whom we are accountable at least each week to tell about our encounters with Christ and the ways in which we have fulfilled Christ’s mission (or failed to do so), that will keep us more focused on what God is doing for and through us.
- (4) We can pray all through the day, in all of the situations we face and for all of the people we see around us or who are called to our mind by the Lord.
- (5) We need to keep “short accounts” with God, keeping the confessing of our sins up to date (1 John 1:9).
- (6) There is no end to the opportunities each of us has to be conscious of walking with the Lord; and, the more conscious we are, the more we will enjoy the walk!

Suggested Scriptural References/Walking with God

Abram is told to do so (Genesis 17:1-27);

Of Joseph it is said, “The Lord was with him” (Genesis 39:1-6, 21-23);

Jacob (Israel), in being told by God to take his family to Egypt (Genesis 46:1-7);

Moses, encountering God in the burning bush (Exodus 3:1-22);

David is a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:13-14);
The advantages of doing so (Psalm 112);
Walking in the Light (1 John 1:1—2:14);
Walking in truth and love (2 John 4-6).

Wisdom

“For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.” Colossians 1:9

“When looking back on the lives of the men and women of God,” according to Oswald Chambers, “the tendency is to say, ‘What wonderfully astute wisdom they had! How perfectly they understood all God wanted!’ The astute mind behind their thought is the mind of God, not human wisdom at all. We give credit to human wisdom when we should give credit to the Divine Guidance of God through childlike people who are foolish enough to trust God’s wisdom and the supernatural equipment of God.”

In 1 Samuel 25:1-44 wisdom is exercised by Abigail in supplying provisions to David when her husband Nabal had refused to do so. David had protected Nabal’s flocks and duly expected hospitality from him, but was refused. David therefore took up the sword against Nabal, but was intercepted by Abigail, who had wisely brought provisions for David and his men along with an apology for her husband’s rudeness. It could be argued that Abigail was simply using human wisdom to protect her life and the life of her family. However, in showing obeisance to David, she invokes the name of the Lord seven times. And David, in response, acknowledges that it is the Lord who has sent Abigail to him that day (v.32).

It is a common experience of Christians today to begin praying about a serious situation they face and then suddenly getting the inner guidance to the Holy Spirit who provides a solution, an alternative, or an insight (sometimes a conviction!) that solves the problem or puts it in a totally new light. At other times, the direction we are to go comes to us from Scripture. In either of these events, we are experiencing the wisdom of God. But, how do we live this out on a day-to-day basis?

Acquiring Wisdom

A. A Practical Approach: Here is some practical advice on how to exercise wisdom and reduce mistakes:

- (1) There is a humorous saying that wisdom is knowing, when you make a mistake the second time, that it was a mistake the first time. It is better, of course, to realize the first time that we have made a mistake and to try to learn from the mistake.
- (2) It is important to remember that the only people who don’t make mistakes are those who don’t make decisions.
- (3) Something that doesn’t work is not necessarily a failure. That may have been a saying of Thomas Edison, who had to discover a lot of things that didn’t work in order to find the things that did.
- (4) Dwelling too much on past mistakes can develop a mistake-prone pattern in your life. Dwell on the positive instead.

- (5) Wisdom is doing things in a good spirit rather than a bad one. Things done in the wrong spirit are doomed to failure.

B. A Biblical Approach

- (1) A friend takes the position that John 15:1-17 is the key to godly wisdom. It is Jesus' teaching on the vine and branches. She says, "'Abiding' (15:4 KJV), what does it mean? It is part of our single-minded search for God; and that means daily time of going to him, with complete trust, in prayer, knowing that God will keep his promise to give us the desires of our heart that are in line with his purposes for our lives. We need to move the Scriptures from our head down to our heart, where the relationship with Christ is nurtured. Thus, when we seek God and ask him to give us his wisdom, he will give it, for that is his great pleasure. How a person arrives at godly wisdom depends on our individual relationship with God and our level of trust in hearing and obeying his voice."
- (2) A quiet mind will produce much more wisdom than a confused or distracted mind. Take time to be with God, so that you can be at peace and able to perceive his guidance.

Suggested Scriptural References/Wisdom

Exercised by the Philistine commanders in not wanting David to join them in battling the Israelites (1 Samuel 29:1-11);

Shown by Nathan in using a parable to convict David of his sin (Samuel 12:1-13a);

Demonstrated by Joab and the woman of Tekoa, in using a parable to convince David to reach out to Absalom (2 Samuel 14:1-33);

By the woman of Abel Beth Maacah who saved the city (2 Samuel 20:14-22);

Demonstrated in Solomon's prayer (1 Kings 3:1-15);

Demonstrated by Solomon in resolving the dispute between the two prostitutes (1 Kings 3:16-18);

More evidence of Solomon's wisdom (1 Kings 4:29-34);

Demonstrated by the Queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10:1-13);

Shown by Naaman's servants in talking him into doing what Elisha had told him to do (2 Kings 5:1-27);

Shown by Zerubbabel in dealing with opposition to rebuilding the Temple (Ezra 4:1—6:15);

Exercised by Nehemiah in approaching king about the situation in Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2:1-9);

Demonstrated by Nehemiah in how he went about rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 4:1-23);

All of the book of Proverbs is about wisdom (Proverbs 1—31);

Christ, the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:18—2:16);

Two kinds of wisdom (James 3:13-18).

Worship

“Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; worship the Lord in the beauty of his holiness.”
Psalm 29:2

In *Learning to Worship with All Your Heart*, Robert E. Webber wrote this: “When we gather together to worship, we are celebrating the most important events in human history—the events through which God brings salvation to the world. Through our celebration, these events become contemporaneous to us. That is, the saving and healing power of God becomes available to the worshipping community. How do we do it? We tell the story; we dramatize it, sing it and festoon it. In this way we celebrate God’s saving deeds.”

Ezra 3:10-13 tells of the worship at the completion of the rebuilding of the foundations of the Temple in Jerusalem. Ezra had returned to Jerusalem from captivity to rebuild the Temple. When it was completed, the instructions King David had given long ago concerning the use of music in worship services in the Temple (1 Chronicles 16; 25) were followed. In addition to music, there was praise, thanksgiving, weeping and joyful worship.

Christians worship in a variety of ways. Some find that quiet beauty moves them most deeply in praising and thanking God. For others, exuberance in words and action is more appropriate. We can be grateful that there are opportunities to express ourselves in worship in ways that seem most fitting to our own spirituality. But, how can all of us make worship more meaningful?

Some Guidelines for Effective Worship

- (1) Prepare in advance. Anticipate the beauty of the worship service. Have time with God. If you know what Scriptures will be read and preached on at the service, familiarize yourself with them in advance.
- (2) Be quiet and reflective when you arrive. Others may be praying, and you will want time to pray and become present to God.
- (3) Pray for those who will be leading the worship.
- (4) Pray for the one who will be preaching both before the event and while it is going on.
- (5) Respond clearly when the service provides for the congregation to do so.
- (6) Sing heartily.
- (7) As appropriate, let your whole body get into the worship experience.
- (8) Abandon yourself before the majesty and awe of a loving God.
- (9) And remember, when the worship is ended, the service begins! Go forth to be Christ in the world.

Suggested Scriptural References/Worship

Jacob prepares to go to Bethel to worship God (Genesis 35:1-3);

Moses’ song of praise for deliverance from Egypt (Exodus 15:1-2);

The first four of the Ten Commandments have to do with worshipping God and reverencing him (Exodus 20:1-12);

The acceptance of the Covenant (Exodus 24:1-18);

The Ark of the Covenant is brought to the Temple Solomon had built (Chronicles 5:1-14);
The dedication of the Temple (2 Chronicles 6:1—7:22);
A song of praise to God to whom everything belongs (Psalm 24);
A song of desire to worship God in his Temple (Psalm 27);
Honor to God who reveals his great power in nature (Psalm 29);
In praise of God who loves us (Psalm 103);
Why God doesn't want the people's worship (Isaiah 1:10-17);
The glory in which Isaiah was called to be a prophet of God (Isaiah 6:1-8);
The time is coming when God will be worshiped everywhere (John 4:21-24);
Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13);
The early Church at worship (Acts 2:42-47);
Called to be living sacrifices to God (Romans 12:1-2);
Paul gives guidelines for orderly worship (1 Corinthians 14:26-33);
Make music in the heart to God (Ephesians 5:19-20);
Living stones for God's house (1 Peter 2:5-10);
The Book of Revelation is full of instances of worship.

Appendix

Jesus, Healings of

Leper (Matthew 8:1-4);
Centurion's servant (Matthew 8:5-13);
Peter's mother-in-law (Matthew 8:14-17);
Evil spirits cast out (Matthew 8:28-34; Luke 8:26-39; Matthew 9:32-34; 15:21-28);
Paralyzed man (Matthew 9:1-8; Mark 2:1-12);
Woman with a bleeding problem (Matthew 9:18-26);
Blind men (Matthew 9:27-31);
On the Sabbath (Matthew 12:9-14; Luke 13:10-17, 14:1-6);
Demon-possessed (Matthew 12:22-37; 17:14-21);
All who touch him (Matthew 14:34-36);
Blind beggar (Matthew 20:29-31);
Blind man who needed a second prayer (Mark 8:22-26);
Crippled woman (Luke 13:10-17);
Man with dropsy (Luke 14:1-6);
Ten lepers (Luke 17:11-19);
Government official's son (John 4:46-54);
Lame man beside pool (John 5:1-18);
Man born blind (John 9:1-41).

Jesus, Messiah

About the word Messiah, *The New Bible Dictionary* says, "This word, used as the official title of the central figure of Jewish expectation, is a product of later Judaism. Its use is, of course, validated by the New Testament, but the term is found only twice in the Old Testament (Daniel 9:25, 26)." However, there is, of course, much in the Old Testament that points to the Messiah and the kind of Messiah he would be:

To us a child is born (Isaiah 9:1-7);
A branch from Jesse (Isaiah 11:1-9);
The servant of the Lord (Isaiah 42:1-9);
The future redeemer (Isaiah 49:1-7);
The suffering servant (Isaiah 52:13—53:12);
The Spirit of the Lord is on me (Isaiah 60:1-3);
One "like the Son of God" (NKJV) is in the fiery furnace with Daniel's friends (Daniel 3:1-30);
The coming of the King of Zion (Zechariah 9:9-17);
Jesus is born (Matthew 1:18-25, Luke 2:1-20);
The visit of the Magi (Matthew 2:1-12);
Preparing the way (Matthew 3:1-12);
The Father acknowledges Jesus as his Son (Matthew 3:13-17);

Jesus taught with authority (Matthew 7:28-29);
Jesus fulfills prophecy (Matthew 12:15-21);
Peter says Jesus is (Matthew 16:13-20);
The Transfiguration of Jesus (Matthew 17:1-13);
Jesus' triumphal entry (Matthew 21:1-11);
Discussions with the religious leaders (Matthew 22:41-46);
Jesus anointed with perfume (Matthew 26:6-13);
Caiaphas and Jesus (Matthew 26:57-68);
Pilate and Jesus (Matthew 27:11-26);
Crucifixion (Matthew 27:27-56);
Jesus' resurrection (Matthew 27:62—28:20);
Simeon and Anna's prophecies (Luke 2:21-40);
Jesus with the teachers of the law (Luke 2:41-52);
Jesus eases John the Baptist's doubts (Luke 7:18-23);
Jesus shows the Messiah in Scripture (Luke 24:13-35);
The Light comes into the world (John 1:1-18);
The role of John the Baptist (John 1:19-34; 3:22-36);
Jesus and the woman at the well (John 4:1-26);
Jesus claims to be God's Son (John 4:19-47);
Jesus is the bread of life (John 6:22-40);
Jesus' teaching comes from the Father (John 7:10-52);
Jesus is the light of the world (John 8:12-20);
Jesus says he is eternal (John 8:48-59);
Jesus is the good shepherd (John 10:1-21);
Jesus tells why he must die (John 12:20-36);
Ascension (Acts 1);
Paul states the fact of Messiahship in summary form (Romans 1:1-6).

Jesus, Miracles of

Calms storm (Matthew 8:23-27);
Girl brought back to life (Matthew 9:18-26);
Asked for by Pharisees (Matthew 12:38-45);
Lacking in his own hometown (Matthew 13:53-58);
Feeds 5,000 (Matthew 14:13-21);
Walks on water (Matthew 14:22-33);
Feeds 4,000 (Matthew 15:32-39);
Large catch of fish (Luke 5:1-11);
Widow's son brought back to life (Luke 7:11-17);
Turns water into wine (John 2:1-11);
Lazarus raised from the dead (John 11:1-44).

See **Jesus, Healings of**

Jesus, Opposition to

Accused of blasphemy (Matthew 9:1-8);
Pharisees wonder about Jesus eating with sinners (Matthew 9:9-13);
Pharisees say it's by Satan that he casts out demons (Matthew 9:32-34);
For healing on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:9-14);
Accuse Jesus of being under Satan's power (Matthew 12:22-37);
Pharisees ask for a sign (Matthew 12:38-45, 16:1-4; John 2:12-25);
From those in his own hometown (Matthew 13:53-58);
Pharisees, about divorce (Matthew 19:1-12);
From Jesus cleansing the Temple (Matthew 21:12-17);
Religious leaders challenge his authority (Matthew 21:23-27);
About paying taxes (Matthew 22:15-22);
About the resurrection of the dead (Matthew 22:23-33);
About which is the greatest commandment (Matthew 22:34—23:36);
Plotting Jesus' death (Matthew 26:1-5);
Betrayal, arrest, trials and crucifixion (Matthew 26:47-68; 27:1-55);
Over Jesus being bread from heaven (John 6:41-59);
Leads some to desert Jesus (John 6:60-71);
From his own brothers (John 7:1-9);
To his teaching in the Temple (John 7:9-52);
Continually, in challenging his teachings (John 8:12—9:41);
Religious leaders plot to kill Jesus (John 11:45-57);
Many do not believe out of fear of the Pharisees (John 12:37-43).

Parables

The object of teaching by parables is to enlighten the listener by presenting interesting illustrations with which the person can identify, and thereby draw out applicable moral and religious truths. By the use of parables, Jesus and others presented word pictures that made for easier assimilation of the truth taught, and a greater likelihood that the teaching would remain fixed in the person's memory.

The one Nathan used with David to convict him of his sin with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12:1-18a);
A prophet to Ahab, to point out his disobedience to the Lord in seeking a treaty with Ben-Hadad (1 Kings 20:35-43);
Jehoash to Amaziah, warning him not to start a war between them (2 Kings 14:1-14);
Two adulterous sisters (Ezekiel 23:1-49);
The valley of dry bones (Ezekiel 37:1-14);
The four types of soil (Matthew 13:1-23);
Of the weeds among the wheat (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43);
Of the mustard seed (Matthew 13:31-32);
Of the yeast (Matthew 13:33-35);

Of the hidden treasure (Matthew 13:44);
Of the pearl of great value (Matthew 13:45-46);
Of the fishing net (Matthew 13:47-52);
Of the lost sheep (Matthew 18:10-14);
Of the unforgiving debtor (Matthew 18:21-35);
Of the laborers in the field (Matthew 20:1-16);
Of the two sons (Matthew 21:28-32);
Of the wicked tenants (Matthew 21:33-46);
Of the wedding feast (Matthew 22:1-14);
Of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-13);
Of the loaned money (talents) (Matthew 25:14-30);
Of the sheep and goats (last judgment) (Matthew 25:31-46);
Of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37);
Of the rich fool (Luke 12:13-21);
Of the fig tree (Luke 13:6-8);
Of the great feast (Luke 14:15-24);
Of the lost coin (Luke 15:8-10);
Of the lost (prodigal) son (Luke 15:11-32);
Of the shrewd manager (Luke 16:1-18);
Of the rich man and the beggar (Luke 16:19-31);
Of the persistent widow (Luke 18:1-14);
Of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9-14);
Of the king's ten servants (Luke 19:11-27).

Acted-out Parables

A linen loincloth (Jeremiah 13:1-11);
The potter (Jeremiah 18:1-12);
The clay jar (Jeremiah 19:1-15);
Two baskets of figs (Jeremiah 24:1-10);
Jeremiah buys a field (Jeremiah 32:1-44);
Symbols of the siege of Jerusalem (Ezekiel 4:1—5:17);
Hosea's wife and Israel are both harlots (Hosea 1:2—3:5);
Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey (Matthew 21:1-11);
The cursing of the fig tree (Matthew 21:18-19);
Jesus washes the feet of the disciples (John 13:1-20);
Agabus, predicting what would happen to Paul in Jerusalem (Acts 21:1-16).

Parables today.

People who teach are conscious of the fact that, because of television, the Internet, and other electronic devices and games that are available today, those we would teach are much more visually oriented than prior generations. People like pictures; and, if they cannot get visual pictures, they want word pictures, which is what parables are. In teaching, it is helpful to develop parables of our day to illustrate our points.

Jesus, Teachings on Various Points

Anger (Matthew 5:21-26);
Anxiety (Luke 12:22-34);
Blessedness (Matthew 5:1-12);
Children, God's True (John 8:31-47);
Christian Living (Matthew 5:13-16, 48; 7:13-20);
Commandment, Greatest (Matthew 22:34-40);
Commitment to God (Matthew 13:41-44);
Criticizing Others (Matthew 7:1-6);
Death (His Own) (Matthew 16:21-28; 17:22-23; 20:1-16; 26:1-5; John 12:20-36);
Discipleship, Cost of (Matthew 8:18-22; Luke 14:25-35);
Divorce (Matthew 5:31-32; 19:1-12);
Enemies (Matthew 5:43-48);
Evangelism (Matthew 10:1-16; John 4:27-38);
Fasting (Matthew 6:16-18; 9:14-17);
Forgiveness (Matthew 6:12-15; 18:21-35);
God's Love (Luke 15:1-32);
Hardheartedness (Matthew 21:33-46);
Haughtiness (Matthew 18:10-14);
Holy Spirit (John 14:15-31; 16:5-15);
Hypocrisy (Luke 12:1-12; 18:9-14);
Judging (Matthew 7:1-5);
Kingdom of God (Heaven) (Matthew 7:21-27; 11:1-19; 13:1-52; 20:1-16; 22:1-14; Luke 13:18-21; 17:20-37);
Law (Matthew 5:17-48);
Life, Abundant (John 10:1-10);
Life, Bread of (John 6:22-40);
Life, the (John 14:1-14);
Light (of the World) (John 8:12-20);
Lust (Matthew 5:27-30);
Marriage (Matthew 19:1-12);
Message (His, in Brief) (John 12:44-50);
Messiah (Matthew 11:27; 22:41-46);
Money (Matthew 6:19-24);
Oaths (Matthew 5:33-37);
Obedience (Matthew 21:28-32);
Parables (See **PARABLES**);
Persecution (Matthew 10:17-42);
Perseverance (Matthew 7:7-12; Luke 18:1-8);
Possessions (See **Wealth**);
Power (by which He Healed) (Matthew 12:22-37);
Prayer (Matthew 6:5-15; 21:18-22; Luke 11:1-13; 18:1-8, 9-14; John 16:16-33.);

Pride (Luke 14:7-14);
Purity, Inner (Matthew 15:1-20);
Repentance (Luke 13:1-8; 19:1-9);
Rest (for the Burdened and Weary) (Matthew 11:28);
Resurrection (Matthew 22:23-33);
Retaliation (Matthew 5:38-42);
Righteousness (Matthew 6:1-4);
Sabbath (Matthew 12:1-14; Luke 13:10-17; 14:1-6);
Second Coming (Matthew 24:26-51);
Servanthood (Matthew 20:17-28; 25:31-46; Luke 10:25-37; John 13:1-20);
Shepherd, Good (John 10:1-21);
Simplicity (of Faith) (Matthew 11:25-26; 19:13-15);
Sin, How to Deal with Brother/Sister Who Sins (Matthew 18:15-20);
Sin, Warning against Causing Others to Sin (Matthew 18:1-6);
Sinners (Matthew 9:9-13);
Taxes, Paying (Matthew 22:15-22);
Teaching, Guarding against False (Matthew 16:5-12; 23:1-36);
Teaching, on the Nature of His Own (John 7:10-52);
Temptation, Warning against (Matthew 18:7-9);
Thankfulness (Luke 17:11-19);
Truth, the (John 14:1-14);
Vine and Branches (John 15:1-17);
Watchful, Being (Matthew 24:26—25:46);
Water, Living (John 4:1-26);
Way, the (John 14:1-14);
Wealth (Matthew 19:16-30; Luke 12:13-21, 22-34);
Will, God's (Matthew 12:46-50);
Worry (Matthew 6:25-34).

How to Teach from This Book

(for adult Sunday school classes, Bible study groups, etc.)

For the last four years I have used this method as the teaching at a highly successful Monthly Men's Breakfast at our church. It would be just as usable at any similar type of meeting, as noted above.

Here's the recommended way of proceeding. Choose a topic from the book that would be of interest to the group, preferably one that can be reprinted on a single sheet of copy paper, back and front. Copy that topic out of the book, adding discussion questions you choose at the end. (On the sample that follows, you'll see how I do it and the questions I add). Then, print it in enough copies for everyone to have one.

In preparation for the teaching I, of course, familiarize myself with the topic so I can speak from the sheet that everyone would have in front of them. That preparation involves being able to elaborate, clarify and use personal illustrations as appropriate to make the presentation more effective. I find that the more I can demonstrate from my own life how to apply the teaching, the more effective the teaching is.

Making the presentation takes me about 20-30 minutes. Others substitute for me from time to time and this works out about the same for them, so it should be a time frame you can rely on. I take any questions, if something has been unclear. Very seldom are there any.

Then, in groups of four...the ideal number, but three or five would be all right...I ask them to discuss the topic that has been presented to them and to answer the questions. I give them about 30 minutes for this. They seldom get past the second question, but good discussion results.

In this simple way, you have an hour of teaching and discussion for almost any group. See the sample that follows.