

**HOW TO STAY
ON *Top*
WHEN THE
Bottom FALLS OUT**



REX HUMBARO



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HOW TO STAY ON TOP WHEN THE BOTTOM FALLS OUT

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All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the *King James Version*.

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Contents

Foreword by Benny Hinn	v
A Personal Word from Rex Humbard	ix
1 Freedom from Guilt	1
2 Win over Worry	15
3 God's Economy	25
4 Victory over Habits.....	43
5 Have a Happy Home	53
6 Rising above Depression	69
7 How Does Healing Happen?.....	81
8 Alone but Not Lonely	93
9 Thinking Right.....	105
10 Knowing God's Will	115
11 Shepherd for Life, Death, and Eternity	127

Foreword

Rex Humbard, a true giant of the Christian faith, went home to glory on September 21, 2007. Few people have blazed such incredible trails and fewer still have impacted me to the degree that that man did.

I am often reminded of the tremendous history and soul-winning legacy he and his family embodied.

Rex's father, Alpha Humbard, accepted Christ as Savior at sixteen and became instantly and unstoppably passionate about winning souls to the Lord. That legacy was passed on to his son Rex and the entire Humbard family, as chronicled in his autobiography, *The Soul-Winning Century: The Humbard Family Legacy...100 Years of Ministry*.

Rex was saved at the age of thirteen, in 1932, and immediately began his own radio broadcasts that launched what eventually became his worldwide pulpit.

In the 1940s and '50s Rex and his family traveled across America and Canada conducting tent meetings while his radio ministry continued to grow nationwide. In 1949 Rex became the first evangelist to broadcast the Gospel on television, and by 1952 he had both a daily program and a weekly one-hour church service on the airwaves.

In the early 1950s, Rex Humbard became one of the first visionaries to build a ministry that incorporated radio and television programming, and in 1958, the Cathedral of Tomorrow opened in Akron, Ohio—one of the world's first churches designed specifically to accommodate television equipment, crew, and choir, as well as seating for 5,400 people. Broadcasts of the church services were aired on 600 stations in America and more than 2,000 around the world in 97 languages.

Few people have touched more lives with the Gospel than Rex

Humbard. As well known as he was in the United States, he was even more popular throughout the world, especially in South America, where he packed the giant soccer stadiums for weeks at a time. During one notable 1979 crusade, over 1.2 million souls filled a network of soccer stadiums across Brazil to see him preach the Gospel, and in a crusade in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, more than 130,000 souls accepted Jesus Christ as Savior in a single service!

He preached to packed audiences in the Sydney Opera House, the Budokan in Tokyo, as well as Madison Square Garden and Carnegie Hall in New York. He also ministered to hundreds of thousands in services across Africa.

Pastor Humbard was inducted into the Broadcasters Hall of Fame in 1993 and was named one of the "Top 25 Principle Architects of the American Century" by *U.S. News & World Report* on December 27, 1999.

The *Saturday Evening Post* wrote about him: "Putting God on Main Street has been the goal of this dedicated preacher for more than 60 years. Now, thanks to the electronic media, his 'Main Street' stretches from Ohio around the world."

My friendship with Rex and his wife, Maude Aimee, spanned several decades. I had heard, seen, and read about the Humbards from the time I became a Christian. As I got to know them better and better through the early years of my ministry, and as he literally fathered and mentored me, I knew each time I was with him that I was in the presence of a true giant of the faith.

At our crusades throughout the 1990s Rex regularly preached a salvation message and gave the altar calls in our morning services, and he appeared many times with me on my television program, *This Is Your Day!* I consider those times with him, Maude Aimee, and the entire Humbard family one of the greatest privileges of my life.

I'll never forget one of the last times Pastor Humbard spoke to one of our large meetings. He said, "There's been tough times, and there's been joyful and wonderful times, but never one time has the Lord ever left us...and one of these days, if I'm not around when the trumpet sounds, Benny, I'm going to meet you in the air! Jesus is faithful. Don't ever forget it!"

I invite you to spend time with *How to Stay on Top When the Bottom Falls Out* discovering anew the deep faith that Rex Humbard stood for throughout his life. It is a shining testimony to the legacy of this amazing servant of God and his view of how to overcome your circumstances through the principles in God's Word.

Though written nearly three decades ago, every single word seems as fresh and relevant as the day Rex Humbard penned this now-classic book. And I believe the answers you receive through these powerful pages will change your life forever!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Benny Hinn". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the left.

A Personal Word from Rex Humbard



The Bottom Is Falling Out!

How many times have you heard this expression? It is not the message of some prophet of doom who stands on the street corner and proclaims that the world is coming to an end.

But it is the message that fills the evening news on television.

It is the headline of our newspapers.

It is the real issue of our day.

Today, the bottom is falling out! You don't need anyone to tell you that the bottom is falling out of our economy. You can give a firsthand report on the problem of spiraling inflation. You have been an eyewitness to the prices on everything increasing, while your earning power is decreasing.

And no one seems to have the answers. With all the great minds in the world today, no one has found a cure for inflation. The great economists of our age can't even agree on the direction we should take. And while this great debate continues, our economy is crumbling out from under us.

The bottom is also falling out of our judicial system. The world has always been plagued by crime and violence, but today we are plagued by a much deeper problem. Recognition for authority in our land is gone. Our system of law enforcement has been critically wounded to the point where it is nearly impossible and very dangerous to bring a criminal to justice.

But the problem that seems to hit me square in the face every day is that the bottom is falling out on our families and homes. Divorce, runaway children, trial marriages, sexual freedom and unfaithfulness are all tools Satan is using to rob us of the most precious relationship we have—the family.

I want to be very tender here, and choose my words carefully,

for you or someone you love has already faced this tragedy. You can probably describe how the bottom has fallen out on a family very close to you and shattered the lives of those you love.

We know that Satan wants to destroy our homes, for if he destroys our homes then he can destroy our churches; and if he destroys our churches he can destroy our communities; and if he can destroy our communities, he can destroy our country—and our world.

Yes, the bottom is falling out of our world. You and I are seeing trouble like the world has never known. God has called me to carry the gospel through television. Because of my travels, I have seen this problem firsthand. There are wars and rumors of wars. Nation is rising up against nation. Challenges of even the weakest cultures are heard halfway around the world.

There is no safe place to hide, and in many parts of the world, terrorism is becoming a way of life. The ever-present threat of one of these sparks igniting the world is now a frightening reality.

The Bible tells us these things would take place. They are signs of the time in which we are living. They are a fulfillment of prophecies in the Word of God.

In Matthew 24, Jesus told His disciples that some day He would come back to take His people to heaven. The disciples asked Him, “Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?”

And Jesus told them there would be great trouble in the land. He said as it was in the days of Noah, there would be eating and drinking, and giving in marriage until the flood came. What He was saying is that the people had time for everything else but God.

We have come to that time today when we rely on our own strength, our own ingenuity, and we think we can tackle the problems of life without God’s help.

The Bible says these are just the beginning of sorrows. The Scriptures are very clear to describe that it is this same kind of global upheaval that will carry us into the last days.

- **International turmoil.** *“And ye shall hear of wars and*

rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass” (Matthew 24:6).

- **Mass murders.** *“And thus I saw the horses in the vision, and them that sat on them, having breastplates of fire, and of jacinth, and brimstone: and the heads of the horses were as the heads of lions; and out of their mouths issued fire and smoke and brimstone. By these three was the third part of the men killed, by the fire, and by the smoke, and by the brimstone, which issued out of their mouths” (Revelation 9:17-18).*
- **The creation falls apart.** *“And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; and the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?” (Revelation 6:12-17).*

The world’s stage is set right now for all these predictions to come to pass. Yes, the bottom is falling out on this old world.

But the real purpose of this book is to talk about your own personal world, and what you can do when the bottom seems to fall out from under you.

Sickness, financial ruin, the pressures of life, sorrow, and the death of a loved one can pull the rug out from under us and turn an ordered life into chaos. If you have never been touched by any of these tragedies, you will, for sorrow is a part of life.

The philosophy of this world in recent years is to face these

problems head-on in your own strength. Use the resources available to you and work out your own problems.

Many go to counselors or psychiatrists. You've tried a thousand and one things and you have thought each time, "I'm going to get on top. I'm not going to fall apart when the bottom falls out of my life." But in spite of everything you've done, you still can't seem to get on top.

Far too often, our problems overwhelm us, and the bottom falls out.

But in spite of how bad things may be, for the Christian there is always good news, and I have written this book to tell you this—when you see these things beginning to come to pass, lift up your head and rejoice, for your redemption draweth nigh!

And as a child of God, you can have victory!

The bottom may fall out of your life, but the people of faith are going to stay on top! All these things that are happening are a fulfillment of prophecy. And they are telling us that Christ is soon coming. Some day soon, the trumpet will sound and the Lord will come back.

Then another prophecy will be fulfilled, for Jesus promised that He was coming to take us to heaven—a land where there will be no more twisted limbs, blinded eyes, heartaches, sorrow or trouble. No one will be sick or hungry in that place.

This book is not a handbook on human relations. It is not a guidebook on the power of positive thinking. It's not even a manual on Christian ethics.

It is, however, a book that will show you the way to cope with the problems of life.

But before these principles will work, our hearts must be right with God. We must know which way is up before we can stay on top.

Which Way Is Up?

There is a condition among pilots called vertigo. It means to be totally disoriented.

An aviation accident report once told the story of the tragedy of vertigo.

A rather inexperienced pilot was making his approach for a landing in a light plane. There was a dense fog, and visibility was zero. As he continued his approach, the pilot lost his sense of direction and suffered this unusual sensation of vertigo. Rather than trust his instruments, the pilot headed in the direction he thought was right. Before he knew what had happened, his plane dropped over into a tailspin. The frantic air controller screamed through the radio, "Pull up! Pull up!"

And the pilot's reply was, "Which way is up?" Those were his last words.

This is the cry and the hunger of the world today: Which way is up?

God's answer to this cry is in His only Son Jesus who said, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life.*" Men, women, boys, and girls are finding themselves in a tailspin. The bottom is falling out, and they don't know which way to turn.

But when everything is crumbling around you, you can stand on a sure foundation—Jesus Christ.

In Him you can be secure. You can be forgiven of your sins and find peace of mind. He will heal your body, mind, and spirit. And you can even find hope beyond the grave.

This all happens when you receive Christ into your heart.

Before you read another page, I want to make sure that if your heart were to quit beating today, you would go to heaven. If you're not sure, you can make sure right now. Here's how:

1. The first step we must take is to confess to God that we are a sinner.

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

2. The next thing to do is receive Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Saviour.

"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12).

"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt

believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation"
(Romans 10:9-10).

3. Now it is time to pray.

Dear Lord Jesus, forgive all my sins, and cleanse my heart from all unrighteousness. I receive Jesus Christ as my only Savior, and my only hope of a home in heaven. By the Lord's help, I will live for Him the rest of my life. Thank You, Jesus. Amen. If you really meant what you just said, the Bible declares that you are a child of God.

Now that Christ is living in your heart, you have the foundation to face any problem that comes your way.

The chapters of this book were written to show you how Christ can help you cope with the problems of life.

You will find in every chapter a checklist of things to do. In order for your faith to work for you, you must have a faith that works. I call this an active faith. The Bible puts it this way: *"Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead"* (James 2:17).

So in each chapter, I have given you something to do which will put God and you to work together to solve your problem.

Each chapter also has a section of promises straight from God's Word in your area of need. For it is God's Word that we can hold on to when all else fails.

And each chapter contains a prayer. If you will pray these prayers from your heart, you will see God move to meet your needs.

I've also included an index of problems in the back of this book so when you're faced with a problem you can look that problem up and find out where it is discussed in this book.

Now may God bless you as you continue through the pages of this book, and always remember:

You can stay on top when the bottom falls out.

"But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57).

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Rex Humbard". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

1 Freedom from Guilt



*"If the Son therefore shall make you free,
ye shall be free indeed." —John 8:36*

Johnny and his sister Mary were spending the summer at Grandma and Grandpa's farm. Grandma had a big old white goose as a pet. It would come up on the porch and wander around, knowing it would get fed.

One day, Johnny and Mary were playing in the yard when the old goose came waddling around the corner of the house. Johnny told his sister, "Hey, Mary, I'm going to hit Grandma's old white goose." He picked up a brick and Mary screamed, "You better not! You better not!" But he threw the brick. He didn't really mean to hurt the goose, but he made a direct hit, and the old goose fell down dead. Johnny and Mary were afraid. "What should we do?" they both wondered. Then Johnny ran out to the barn and got a shovel and hoe. They dragged the old white goose out in back of the barn, dug a hole, buried the goose, and smoothed over the ground.

The next day, Grandma asked, "Children, have you seen Grandma's old white goose?" There wasn't a word from either of them, and Grandma went on her way.

That night after dinner, Grandma said, "Mary, you clean off the table and wash the dishes."

Mary went out to the back porch and called, "Johnny, come here a minute." When he did, she told him, "Go in there and clean off the table and wash the dishes."

"I'm not going to do that," he protested. "Grandma told you to do it."

"Remember the goose?" Mary asked. "If you don't do the dishes, I'll tell Grandma you killed the goose."

In Johnny went! He didn't want Grandma to find out about the goose, so he cleaned the table and washed all the dishes.

The next morning, Grandma told Mary to sweep the kitchen. Mary got out the broom and went in search of Johnny. When she found him, she handed him the broom and said, "Here, Johnny, Grandma wants the kitchen swept,"

"I'm not going to sweep the kitchen. Grandma told you to do it," he replied.

"Remember the goose?" Mary responded. And away Johnny went to sweep the kitchen.

Time after time, Johnny ended up doing Mary's chores because he felt guilty. He didn't want Grandma to find out what he had done.

One day, Grandpa hitched the team of horses to the old wagon to go into town for some groceries. He asked the children if they wanted to go along. Mary quickly said she did and climbed up in the spring seat next to Grandpa.

But Johnny said, "No, I don't feel good. I'll stay here with Grandma."

Johnny watched as the wagon went down the road. As soon as it turned the corner and was out of sight, Johnny nervously walked toward the house. He turned the knob and quietly pushed open the front door. There was Grandma, sitting in her rocking chair knitting. He carefully closed the door, then shuffled toward Grandma with his head down, biting his fingernails.

Grandma glanced up. "Why, Johnny," she said, "whatever is the matter with you? Come over here." She laid down her knitting and pulled him up on her lap.

"Grandma," he began, "you know your old white goose?" Then tears slid down his cheeks as the words tumbled out. "I didn't mean to, but I picked up a brick and threw it at the goose and hit it and it died. We buried it out in back of the barn, and I'm so sorry. Grandma, if you'll forgive me, when I get big, I'll buy you a whole yard full of geese."

Grandma held him tightly until his sobbing quit. Then she said, "Now, Johnny, you did the right thing by telling me about it. But it's all right now. I forgive you. And it's all forgotten!" She hugged him, gave him a big kiss, and let him down.

Johnny felt happy for the first time in a long time.

Later that afternoon, Grandpa came home in the old wagon. Mary was sitting beside him with a sack of candy, hollering, "Johnny, I've got some candy, I've got some candy!" She was real happy, but she didn't know that Johnny was even happier!

That night after dinner, Grandma said, "Mary, clean off the table and wash the dishes." So, just as she had been doing for so long, Mary called Johnny out on the porch and said, "Johnny, go clean off the table and wash the dishes."

"Grandma told you to do it," Johnny replied, "so do it yourself."

Mary looked at him surprised and asked, "What about the old goose?"

Johnny squared his shoulders and said, "Well, what about the goose? I told Grandma all about it, and she told me I was forgiven."

Mary cleaned the table and washed the dishes herself that night! And Johnny was free from the bondage of guilt.

A Cruel Taskmaster

Guilt is a cruel taskmaster, and it holds many people in captivity. The bondage of guilt has caused millions to suffer a lifetime of agony. It has wrecked emotions and driven its victims to self-destruction. This is especially tragic when we realize that God's full and free forgiveness is available to us for the asking.

There are two kinds of guilt: *constructive* and *destructive*. Constructive guilt comes from the Holy Spirit speaking to our hearts about some sin we need to confess to God.

Many times, we bring deep problems on ourselves. Oh, we may not intend to do so, just as Johnny really did not intend to kill Grandma's old goose. We start to slip, and instead of getting hold of ourselves, we just "let nature take its course."

That is what David did when he looked over the roof of his palace into the inner courtyard of his neighbor and saw the beautiful Bathsheba taking a bath. That one look was just the beginning of all the sorrow he brought on himself.

He *looked*, he *lingered* to see more, he *longed* to be near the woman, he *lusted* to have her, he *lay* with her, and he *lost* all that was dear to him as a result.

David made matters worse because from the very first he began trying to cover up what he had done. And the more things he had to cover up, the more other people he drew into his sin with him. Before he was through, he had broken every commandment, including stealing, adultery, and even murder!

David's cover-up lasted for more than a year until finally God used the prophet Nathan to confront him with his sins and bring him to his knees in repentance. But even then, the consequences of his sins followed him the rest of his life.

When there are sins in your life that you keep trying to cover up, remember there are two mighty forces at work in your life. One is the work of the devil adding more and more guilt, more and more sin, more and more condemnation, more and more broken commandments, all designed to completely break you and enslave you so firmly to guilt that you will feel you can never get rid of it.

On the other hand, the Holy Spirit is mercifully at work in your life working to convict you of your sins and to convince you that God is your only escape. He works constantly to bring you to the place where you can confess your guilt and helplessness. Then you will be in a position to accept His forgiveness, just as Johnny could finally take no more and told Grandma all about his dark secret.

That's the kind of guilt David was experiencing when he prayed:

Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness; that

the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. (Psalm 51:1-12)

Two for the Price of One

When we go shopping, we get very excited when we find a store that makes us a two-for-one offer, whether it is two hamburgers for the price of one, or two tubes of toothpaste for the price of one, or two suits for the price of one. But I am convinced the best two-for-one offer the world has ever seen is the one God offers in 1 John 1:9: *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

God has said if you will do one thing, CONFESS, that He will do two things, FORGIVE and CLEANSE.

Or, as I like to put it, God has offered to totally forgive and completely forget all our sins!

We cannot always erase the scars or the consequences of our past sins. Those scars may remain with us for the rest of our lives. But we must not let them defeat us. Rather than stumbling blocks, those scars can become stepping stones to help us climb back on top.

Remember, Jesus Christ is sinless; He is absolutely pure. But He became sin for us when He was nailed to the cross. He took all the sins you and I will ever commit, and He died for those sins in our place. He bears the scars of the nail prints in His hands and feet. Those scars forever remind God of His promise that if we will confess our sins, He will *forgive* and *forget* them!

Destructive Guilt

But there is another kind of guilt that comes when we keep on condemning ourselves for something in the past. God may have forgiven us and forgotten all about it. But Satan keeps dragging things up and trying to make us feel guilty.

It's kind of like the little boy I heard about whose pet cat died.

He put the dead cat in a shoe box, got all the children of the neighborhood together, and had a funeral for the cat.

They enjoyed the cat's funeral so much that they decided to leave the cat's tail sticking out of the grave so every few days they could pull it up and have another funeral. That went on for some time, until finally, one day when the boy pulled, the tail broke off, and the dead cat stayed buried.

That is what Mary kept doing to Johnny. Any time she wanted to make Johnny do something for her, she "dug up" the goose, even after Johnny had confessed everything to Grandma.

Satan will keep digging things up from our past, too, and trying to accuse us. *"And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night"* (Revelation 12:10).

The next verse tells us how to defeat Satan. *"And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony"* (verse 11).

One of the best ways to silence the devil is to make things right with those you may have hurt. But even when you do, you can always depend on the devil to act like the devil, and he will keep trying to dig up the past and condemn you with it.

I learned that great lesson when I was 13 years old. I had grown up in a preacher's home. Both my mom and my dad were preachers, but that did not save me. I had to confess my own sin. So one day, I went to an old-fashioned mourner's bench, knelt, and confessed my sin and guilt. In that moment, I became a new person in Christ Jesus.

God forgave and forgot all my past sin and guilt. But then I began remembering something I had done wrong in school.

The teacher of our shop class had a fine set of metal letters. One day I took three letters home with me: R—E—X. The teacher never knew what happened to them. But after God began to do a work in my life, I realized that what I had done was wrong.

The devil reminded me of how foolish I would look taking those

letters back, but I was determined to do so. Then the devil suggested that I try to slip them back without the teacher knowing. But I finally decided, “No, I’ve got to make this right with my teacher.”

When I took those letters back and handed them to my teacher, I told him what I had done, what had happened in my life, and I asked him to forgive me. From the way he responded, I realized for the first time that he suspected all along who had those letters. He shook my hand and assured me I was forgiven, but more than that—he wanted me to know that my confession meant more than he could ever tell.

The teacher had his letters back, and I was free from my guilt.

You don’t have to live under the burden of guilt. You can have pardon and forgiveness from God. And all you have to do is ask for it.

But until you do, Satan will keep you trapped like a man named Jock who lived many years ago during the reign of Great Britain’s Queen Victoria.

Jock went to work in a counting house where he sat on a high stool and worked on the books. He was always very nervous. Every time a door opened, he would quickly look to see who was entering. Before he would leave work, he would look up and down the street. If he saw a military man or policeman, he would quickly duck back inside.

One day, another clerk leaned across the desk and said, “Jock, I’m not making enough to live on; let me have a couple of shillings to tide me over.”

“I can’t do it, my wages are too small,” Jock answered.

“Well, let me tell you something,” the man said, and whispered a secret in Jock’s ear. Poor Jock turned pale, quickly reached into his pocket and said, “Please, don’t tell anybody.” The other clerk walked away thinking, “I’ve struck a silver mine!”

Every few days, he would go back to Jock and say, “Let me have half a crown,” and poor Jock would give it to him, until he was nearly destitute. Then one day, Jock noticed the headline of a newspaper: “Free pardon offered to all deserters of Her Majesty’s Forces.” It was Queen Victoria’s Jubilee, and a decree

had been made to celebrate by giving free pardons to all military deserters.

That was Jock's secret. He was a deserter.

He rushed home and wrote a letter telling about his situation. He carefully explained that he had not really meant to desert, but when he had been ordered to Egypt, he had gone home to visit his aging mother. When he got back, his ship was gone. He was afraid and went into hiding.

He waited for a reply, and after some time a letter came. It explained that the pardons were for deserters, and since he apparently had not planned to desert, the pardon was not for him.

"What a fool I've been," Jock thought. "I missed the pardon trying to justify myself and what I did, and I made too good a case for myself." So he wrote another letter. In it, he said he had been attached to such and such a regiment at such and such a place. Then he simply said, "I am a deserter, and if there is a pardon for me, I would very much appreciate it."

He mailed his plea, and waited. When a letter came back, he quickly tore it open, and there was his full pardon!

A few days later, Jock's tormentor slipped up and said, "Jock, I haven't had anything from you for over a week."

Jock looked him straight in the eye and said, "You have had the last bit of silver you will ever get from me!"

"Oh, we are getting uppity all of a sudden," responded the tormentor. "If it isn't worth your while to keep me quiet, I can tell your secret."

"Go tell anybody you like; shout it everywhere. Tell them I'm a deserter. Tell them all about it," Jock loudly declared.

"Are you crazy?" the tormentor asked.

"No, I am not. But before you tell anyone, read this," Jock said and held up the pardon before the man's eyes. He added, "I've been pardoned. I'm forgiven. I'm free!"

Even after we confess our guilt to God, there will be others around us, including the devil, who will keep trying to dig up the past. But when that happens, stand firm on God's promises that when we *confess* our sins, He will completely and totally *forgive* and *forget* our sins.

We Must Learn to Forget

Life is filled with sorrow, problems, and heartaches. Many times we have little or no control over these things. But we compound those difficulties by letting ourselves feel guilty for whatever happens. We torture ourselves by thinking, "Oh, if I had just done something else, this would not have happened." You let guilt and condemnation build up inside until the bottom falls out of your life.

It is in those times that you need to learn to pray what has been called the Prayer for Serenity: "O God, give us serenity to accept what cannot be changed, courage to change what should be changed, and wisdom to distinguish the one from the other."

When these times of self-condemnation come for something over which we have little or no control, we must learn to do as commanded in I Peter 5:7: "Casting all your care on him; for he careth for you." Also, "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved" (Psalm 55:22).

Commit the entire burden to the Lord. Cast it all upon Him. Ask Him to completely remove it from your memory!

Just as there may have been other geese in Johnny's life, there may be other times of sinning in our lives. Fortunately, God knows that and He has given us this promise in 1 John 2:1: *"My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."*

That verse promises us that whenever we make a mistake, whenever we fall into sin, we are not alone, but Jesus Christ is with us, serving as our attorney, pleading our case. Here again, all we need to do is admit our need to Jesus, confess we have sinned, and ask Him to forgive us—and He will do just that.

It is very important to remember that when God forgives us; it is as though our past never existed.

It is blotted out: *"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out"* (Acts 3:19).

"There is therefore now; no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit," Romans 8:1 tells us.

Whenever God has forgiven you of past sins, and you feel condemned, just remember, that is not God accusing you! He loves you. He wants you to be forgiven and to live a life free of guilt.

How to Be Free From Guilt

1. **Face the feelings of guilt.** Never try to deny they are there, or ignore them, or hide or cover them up.
2. **Recognize the source of the guilt.** If you really do have unconfessed sin in your life, the guilt is from the Holy Spirit doing His work in your life. If the guilt is from sins of the past that you have already confessed to God, the guilt is from the devil.
3. **Totally and completely forgive others.** Search your heart for anyone toward whom you have hatred and misgivings, then deliberately forgive them, regardless of how they may have hurt you in the past.
4. **Totally and completely forgive yourself!** Anything from your past that condemns you, deliberately forgive yourself for it.
5. **Totally and completely confess your guilt and need to God.** Admit your helplessness and inability to handle the situation alone and ask God for His mercy.
6. **Totally and completely accept God's forgiveness and cleansing.** Whether or not you feel anything, walk by faith, knowing God promised to forgive and forget. God always keeps His promises.
7. **Resist the devil.** Since God does not condemn you for sins of the past after He has forgiven you, realize that such condemnation is from the devil and refuse to listen to him. Quote God's Word to him.
8. **Make restitution where you can.** In some circumstances, there is no way to make restitution, and in others it would do more harm than to keep silent. Accept the things you cannot change, but quickly change what you can!

Pray This Prayer from Your Heart

Dear Lord Jesus, I confess to You my sins and ask for Your complete forgiveness. Cleanse me from all unrighteousness. You know I also feel guilty for things in my past. I have already asked You to forgive me, but I can't seem to forget them and forgive myself. Help me to do that. Help me to forgive others, and to make things right with those that I have hurt. I confess my helplessness to deal with this guilt that I feel, and I ask You to blot it out of my life. Free me from its bondage. By faith, I know that You have completely forgiven me. And I thank You for helping me forgive myself and others. Amen.

Promises *from* God's Word

"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile." —Psalm 32:1-2

"I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." —Psalm 32:5

"Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people, thou hast covered all their sin." —Psalm 85:2

"As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us." —Psalm 103:12

"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." —Isaiah 1:18

"I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." —Isaiah 43:25

"I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee." —Isaiah 44:22

"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." —Isaiah 55:7

"But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die." —Ezekiel 18:21

"And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses." —Mark 11:25

"For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." —John 3:17-18

'Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.'" —John 5:24

"When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more." —John 8:10,11

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." —John 8:32, 36

"And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men." —Acts 24:16

"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." —Romans 8:1

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." —2 Corinthians 5:17

"And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." —Ephesians 4:32

*"Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye."
—Colossians 3:13*

"For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." —Hebrews 8:12

"Let us draw; near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water." —Hebrews 10:22

"Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." —James 4:7

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." —1 John 1:9

"For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things." —1 John 3:20

"And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death." —Revelation 12:10-11

2 Win over Worry



*"Casting all your care upon him;
for he careth for you." —1 Peter 5:7*

The famous American author and humorist Mark Twain said, "I am an old man and have known a great many troubles, but most of them never happened!" I wonder how many of us are just like that, because most of the things we worry about never happen to us. I would say 90 percent of the things that trouble people never happen. The bottom does not *fall out* of our lives; we *worry it out*! Psalm 91:13 tells us that we shall *"tread upon the lion and adder [snake]: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet."*

This verse of Scripture is talking about things that happen in our lives. The lion represents trouble, seen and expected. Death is part of life; so is sickness. These are troubles we all expect, and God will give us strength to overcome.

Snakes generally attack without warning. This represents the unexpected heartbreak that each of us experiences from time to time—the sudden loss of a child or a mate. Or perhaps we lose our financial security through circumstances beyond our control. Again, Christ will help us through.

Then there are the dragons in our lives. Dragons are imaginary creatures. They represent the things in life that are not real, the things we worry about but that never really happen. We must learn to deal with our "dragons" by taking our burden to the Lord and leaving it there.

What to Do with Burdens

Whether your problems and concerns are very real, and a great many of them are, or whether they are imagined, and some of them

are, if you let them begin to close in upon you, you will soon begin to feel like the bottom is falling out of your life.

Leave your burden at the altar. My dad used to preach about worry, and he used an illustration I have never forgotten. Right in the middle of his sermon, he would reach over and pick up a chair and hang it over his shoulder. Then he would go down to the altar.

"This is like some of you," he would say. "You go to the altar with your burden." Then he would kneel with the chair on his back and continue, "You say, 'Lord, I've got this heavy burden.' Then, there at the altar, you take off your burden just like this chair and set the thing down."

Dad would take the chair from his back and set it down beside the altar. Then he would say, "When you get all through praying, something inside you says, 'I'm not sure anything is going to happen,' or, 'Am I really going to be healed?' or, 'Is God really going to meet my need?'"

Then Dad would ask the people, "You know what you do? You start to worry and doubt!" At that point he would pick the chair up, put it back on his shoulder, and walk around the altar all stooped over, carrying that chair.

"What you need to do," Dad would continue, "you need to go to the altar, you need to pray, and you need to leave that burden at the altar." With that he would dump the chair beside the altar, and walk away from it. By that time, he would have everyone's attention, because we knew he was talking about us and the way we handle too many of our problems.

We let things build up inside us. And instead of taking them to God in prayer and leaving them at the altar, we pick them back up and worry over them some more.

Several years ago, a man and his wife from Ontario, Canada, came to see me in Akron. They did not go to church anywhere, but they watched me on television. He had a drinking problem, he had lost his job, and their financial problems were growing very fast. And, of course, they had a spiritual problem.

Things were so bad that they were talking about getting a divorce. They had four little children.

But one day the man shocked his wife by saying, "Before we get a divorce, why don't we go down and talk to Rex?"

So early one Sunday morning they drove to Akron and attended the morning service. After the service, they came by and shook hands with me and asked if they could talk to me.

They told me the whole story, about all the problems and all the financial trouble and all the worries they had. I listened, and when they got all through, I asked them, "If I had a million dollars to give you, would you be willing to give up your eyesight or your hearing? Would you be willing to never see again or hear again for the rest of your life if I gave you a million dollars?"

They sat there sort of stunned for a moment. Then they looked at each other and agreed, "Well no, of course not!"

I said, "Well, if I gave you a million dollars, would you let someone cut off your tongue so you could never talk again?"

"No!" they said, and I continued.

"Would you let someone cut your arms and legs off for a million dollars?"

And again they both firmly said, "No!"

I looked at them and said, "You both just told me that you are multimillionaires. Your eyes, ears, tongue, arms, and legs are worth more than a million dollars to you. It seems to me that multimillionaires ought to be able to solve these other problems and worries."

I had prayer with them and they went out, happy for the first time in a long time. They went back home, worked out their problems, and got into a church.

They realized that they had been concentrating on the wrong things. They had lost sight of the important values in their lives. All of their energies were being wasted in worry.

Too many of us forget the real values of life such as the love of a husband or wife or a son or daughter, the value of sight and hearing, and, most of all, our opportunity to live for Christ and receive His free gift of salvation.

Sure, you have very real problems. We all do. In many instances, you may have little or no control over the circumstances in your life.

You may not be able to control what happens to you. But you can control your *reaction* to what happens.

You can be a thermometer or a thermostat. A thermometer merely reflects the environment around it. You can worry and fret because things around you aren't just right. Or you can be a thermostat, and change things for the better. So, when problems come, and they surely will, you must not let them confuse you and your sense of values. You must not let them make you focus on the wrong things, like a man during the Great Depression in the 1930s. His business folded up and caved in on him. He sent a desperate message to his pastor saying, "I have lost everything." He begged the pastor to come and help him.

The pastor rushed to his side and said, "I am grieved to learn of the death of your dear wife."

"Oh, but you misunderstood me. My wife is quite well. She is standing by me bravely and faithfully in this terrible misfortune," the man said.

"Then have your sons turned against you?" the comforting pastor asked.

"Certainly not!" the man replied. "Where did you get such an idea? My four sons have come to my aid and pledged every dollar they can raise to help me out."

"Oh, then it is your fair-weather friends who have deserted you?" wondered the pastor.

"Sir! Let me tell you, I never knew I had so many true and loyal friends, ready and anxious to help me, until I had this trouble."

"Then," said the pastor, "I confess I do not understand how you could have 'lost everything.' You are still vigorous in mind and body with an expectancy of many years of usefulness ahead of you. Your wife, sons, and friends are beside you with their love, devotion, and loyalty. All that seems to have happened is that some of your plans for getting money have been temporarily disrupted. Please tell me, what do you mean by saying, 'I have lost everything'?"

Sometimes the bottom seems to fall out of our lives because of things over which we have no control. When that happens, we must

not let those things break our spirits. If we do, the results may make us physically sick and can even shorten our lives. Many doctors say that worry, anxiety, stress, and anger can make you sicker than a virus.

Jesus told a parable about a man who was planting seed. Some of it fell among thorns. Jesus compared that to those of us who let ourselves be overcome by the cares of this world. Just as the thorns choked the seed before it could take root, so we get our eyes on the thorns of life instead of sinking our roots into God's Word, the Bible.

We all have a choice between being worriers like Martha or worshipers like Mary. In Luke 10, Jesus had gone to visit His good friends Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. Mary and Martha both had chores to do. And they knew Jesus could only be with them a little while, and then He would be gone.

Mary decided her work could wait until later. She sat down at the feet of Jesus, listening to Him and talking to Him. She would be able to remember, cherish, and draw strength from those moments with Jesus for the rest of her life.

But her sister, Martha, put her first priority on washing the dishes, scrubbing the pots and pans, baking the bread, cooking the stew, sweeping the floor, and on and on.

Not only did she keep right on doing those things, but she let her attitude go sour. She began feeling sorry for herself and angry that Mary was not helping her. So she grumbled and found fault until she finally went to Jesus and accused Him of not caring about her and all she had to do.

Jesus turned to Martha and said, *"Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her"* (Luke 10:41-42).

A worrier can take a small problem and build it up until things look impossible. They are like the clock that started thinking about its future. It figured that it had to tick two times every second. That would be 120 times each minute, or 7,200 times every hour. In 24 hours, just one day, it would tick 172,800 times, and a total of 63,072,000 ticks every year. In 10 years it would have to tick

630,720,000 times! By this time, things looked so impossible that it collapsed from nervous exhaustion.

We are told in 1 Peter 5:6-7, *"Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you."*

But all too often we are like the man who was walking along a road on a hot day carrying a heavy load on his back. A man in a fine car took pity on him and offered him a ride. The man got in the backseat of the car. After a while, the driver glanced back and saw that the old man still had the heavy bundle on his back.

"Why don't you put your bundle on the seat beside you?" the driver asked.

"Oh, isn't it enough that you are carrying me?" replied the old man. "Must you also carry my burden?"

Give It to Jesus

Jesus wants to carry your burden. He doesn't want you to be weighted down by the cares of this life. He gives you this invitation: *"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light"* (Matthew 11:28-30).

Paul wrote in Philippians 4:6, *"Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God."* Another clearer translation of the first part of that verse says, "Don't be overanxious about anything."

How to Win over Worry

- 1. Have a right relationship with God.**
- 2. Take your burden and your worries to God in prayer, and leave them there!**
- 3. Stand on the promises in God's Word.**
- 4. Keep your trust and faith in the Lord, no matter what the problem is.**
- 5. Learn to accept what you cannot change.**

- 6. Instead of sitting around worrying, get up and do something active.** Get involved in a hobby. Read the Bible. Get out in the open and take a walk so the wind can blow the cobwebs from your mind.
- 7. Share your worries with a trusted friend.** Talk to a minister.
- 8. Be sure to balance your work with your leisure time.** Everyone needs some time off.
- 9. Avoid self-medication.** Pills can never teach you how to cope with stress and worry. By all means, see your doctor. You owe it to yourself and your family to be sure there is nothing physically wrong. Many worries do come from physical causes.
- 10. Avoid obsession with yourself.** When you are worried, do something for someone else. You will be like the man who said, "I complained because I had no shoes until I met a man who had no feet."
- 11. Avoid loneliness.** There is a whole chapter on loneliness in this book. Be sure to read it. When you are worried, get out and go where there are people. Be interested in others.
- 12. Get proper rest.** You will be amazed at how many of your worries will disappear during a good night's sleep.
- 13. Eat right.** A poor or imbalanced diet can be the source of more worry and stress than most people realize.
- 14. Live your life one day at a time.** Don't worry about what *might* happen tomorrow. Live each day as a gift from God.

Vance Havner said, "Worry is like a rocking chair. It will give you something to do, but it won't get you anywhere." So I ask you, why worry when you can pray and trust God?

Let's pray together now.

Pray This Prayer from Your Heart

Dear Lord Jesus, You know all about the circumstances behind my worries. You understand them better than I do. I confess that I feel helpless and I do not have the strength to carry these burdens. But You do, and You have offered to carry them for me. I give You my cares and my worries, and I ask You to help me leave them with You.

Thank You, Lord Jesus, for hearing me and for accepting my burdens. Help me live in Your strength day by day. Amen.

Promises *from* God's Word

"I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety." —Psalm 4:8

"Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance." —Psalm 32:7

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." —Psalm 46:1

"Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved." —Psalm 55:22

"He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust." —Psalm 91:1-2

"For the LORD shall be thy confidence, and shall keep thy foot from being taken." —Proverbs 3:26

"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee." —Isaiah 26:3

"Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and tomorrow is cast

into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.” —Matthew 6:25-34

*“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.”
—John 14:1*

“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” —John 14:27

“These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” —John 16:33

“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” —Romans 5:1

“For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men. Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.” —Romans 14:17-19

“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” —Philippians 4:6-7, 19

“And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.” —Colossians 3:15

3 God's Economy



"Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over." —Luke 6:38

Take water for instance. If I want a drink, I just go to the kitchen and turn on the cold water faucet. If I want a shower, all I have to do is mix the hot and cold water to get the right temperature, pull another knob and I'm ready. If I want to water my yard, all I have to do is hook up a hose on the outside faucet and attach a sprinkler.

But it wasn't always that way. When I was growing up, people didn't have such conveniences. If they wanted a drink, they had to draw a bucket from a well. A lot of folks caught rainwater from their roofs in a large tin tub and used that to bathe in. If they needed to water their fields, well, they depended on "mother nature" to take care of that.

I remember how excited people were when they had electric pumps installed. Nestled into a small building near the well, the pump had a pipe inserted down into the well which, when turned on, sucked up water into the house.

They no longer had to trek out to the well for a drink. The pipes brought the water into the house. Many had tubs installed so that they no longer had to endure the outside elements to take a bath.

There only seemed to be one problem with those pumps. They didn't always work just right unless you went out and primed them. For some reason, the pipe would lose its suction, and although the pump would turn on, the water wouldn't flow.

The way to correct that was to unscrew a small cap on the top of the pump and pour some water down it. Then, after it had been primed, the water would begin to flow again.

There were many cold mornings when I was growing up that I would have to walk out and prime our pumps. Although things

today have drastically changed, I am convinced that there is a dynamic truth to be learned from those days of yesteryear.

That truth is this: We have to prime God's spiritual pump in order to receive the flow of His blessings.

I want that to sink deep into your heart. If you want to start receiving something from God, then you have to prime the pump.

You ask me, "Well, Rex, how in the world do I go about doing that? I understand you have to put water in a pump, but how in the world do you prime a spiritual pump?"

You prime God's pump by giving. That's probably the last thing you wanted to hear. Like everyone else, you have a hard time just making it from week to week. Gasoline prices have soared out of sight, home costs have skyrocketed, and Sunday roasts in the oven have been replaced by chicken.

According to a poll, the number one concern of the citizens of this country is the high cost of living. Like an advancing horde of locusts, inflation is destroying everything in its path. The American dream of a nice home, two cars, and college educated children has been shattered by harsh reality.

We are all trying to conserve and cut back. We've turned thermostats down, cut out Sunday drives, and learned how to fix chicken 40 different ways. We pinch pennies in every manner conceivable. Like the federal government, we have entered into an era of deficit spending.

In your mind, you simply don't see how you have anything left to give. Your pocketbook is as thin as a piece of sliced cheese.

Yet, it is in the midst of such financial turmoil and lack that God calls you to give. It is out of your poverty that He wants you to discover His richest blessings. It has always been so, and it will always be that way. Just take a look at some of the most famous pump primers in the Bible.

Pump Primers in the Bible

In 2 Kings 4, the prophet Elisha encountered a certain woman. She was obviously in dire need. *"Thy servant my husband is dead; and*

thou knowest that thy servant did fear the LORD: and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen."

Now that woman had a bad problem. In fact, it sounds like today's modern creditors. They may not try to take our children away, but they'll sure take your house and car and everything else you may have. She needed some help, and she needed it fast.

Elisha asked her what she had in her house. All the poor lady had was one pot of oil. Some of you may feel like you don't have much more than a few dollars or a few cans of food left. What you do have, you certainly can't give away.

But look how God used that one pot of oil. Elisha told the woman to go and borrow some empty vessels from her neighbors—and "*not a few.*" She was then to pour the oil she had into those borrowed pots. She began to pour as Elisha instructed.

"And it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said unto her son, Bring me yet a vessel. And he said unto her, There is not a vessel more. And the oil stayed." She then used the oil to go and pay her debt and had enough left over to live on for quite a while.

She learned the secret of priming God's pump by giving. She gave all that she had left—one pot of oil—and God took care of her needs.

Another noted pump primer described in 1 Kings 17 was also a poor widow. This widow lived in a city called Zarephath. One day she was out gathering sticks when Elijah called out to her and asked her to get him some water and some bread. Her response indicated she was on the brink of starvation due to severe drought and famine.

"As the LORD thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die."

Elijah told her to go and make him a little cake, and then make a few for her and her son. I imagine she might have thought to herself, "Here I am about to die, and this man wants to take what little I have left for himself." But Elijah gave her a promise.

"The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth." The widow

made Elijah his cake and the word of the Lord was confirmed. She had plenty to eat until the famine ended.

Both of these stories are similar. Each widow was in poor financial condition. Each was asked to give what little she had left in order to receive more. Each of the widows activated her faith, and God met her need.

You may have some very difficult financial problems. You may be deeply in debt. You may not have enough money to buy clothes; you may not even have enough money for food.

It is out of our lack of resources that God will provide. But you first have to give. It's God's way. I feel certain that if the widow in 2 Kings 4 had not obeyed Elisha, she would have lost her children. I am also sure that if the other widow had not baked Elijah his cake, she and her son would have died.

Likewise, I have a hunch that the reason many good people, including Christians, go bankrupt is because they refuse to give. They hoard what they possess, and pretty soon it's gone. If they had given some to God, they would have seen Him marvelously meet their needs.

Jesus understood this principle of spiritual pump priming.

In Luke 6:38 Christ said, *"Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again."*

Jesus is telling us that if we give, God will give back to us. He will meet our needs. This isn't a wishy-washy statement. It's a promise; just like Elijah's promise to the widow that her oil and bread would not be lacking. We can count on what Jesus says.

The second part of that verse tells us that we will receive back in proportion to what we give. Actually, that's the simple law of sowing and reaping. *"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap"* (Galatians 6:7).

No farmer ever expects to reap a crop unless he first puts the seed into the ground. He plants at the proper time, and then he harvests. He doesn't understand how that seed springs up to life and

produces an abundance, but he knows that unless he buries it in the ground, he can forget about a crop.

Now I can't explain to you why God's economy is primed by giving. All I know is that it works.

I also know that whatever you sow, that's what you're going to reap. Watermelon seeds don't produce cauliflower, they produce watermelons. Similarly, if we have financial problems, we must make sure that we are giving to God's work. If we need time, we invest time in someone or something else. If we need love, we start loving someone.

We give what we need, and then we receive. I remember one time when this ministry was in bad straits. We had bills upon bills to pay. A lady came up to me during this time of difficulty and said she needed \$600. God let me know in my heart that I should help her. Well, I didn't have it, but I knew that if I wanted God to meet the financial needs of this ministry, that I had better give her what she asked for. I did, and within days, my bills were paid.

Had I been stingy with that lady and only given her a portion of what she asked, I have a feeling that God would have only given me a portion of what I needed. That is the law of sowing and reaping. *"But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully"* (2 Corinthians 9:6).

You may already be familiar with another promise from God's Word that talks of provision. These are the words of the apostle Paul in Philippians 4:19: *"But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."*

That verse tells us a lot. It says that if you have the right relationship with God (He is your heavenly Father), He will supply (He is our source) all our needs (not our wants) according to His riches in glory (not our bank account).

Paul is specifically addressing financial matters in this verse. Starting with verse 15, he tells how the Philippians supported him *"concerning giving and receiving."* In verse 18, Paul tells us that he has

received their financial gift *“an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God.”*

The Philippians gave their money to help support Paul, and in return Paul said God would supply all their needs. This verse deals directly with the Philippians’ faithfulness in financial affairs, just as many of the Bible’s parables concern the use and investment of money. In 2 Corinthians 8, Paul commends the Corinthian church for their zeal in giving. Yet it was not out of abundance they gave, but rather out of *“affliction,”* out of *“deep poverty,”* and *“beyond their power.”* We too are called to give, even though we may be in terrible economic shape. We have no excuse not to give. In fact, we should be afraid of the consequences of not giving.

Where to Begin

There’s no better place to start than to tithe. If you haven’t begun, then start this Sunday. If you tithe already, don’t let anybody dissuade you from continuing.

The word *tithe* means “a tenth.” The concept of tithing has been around for a long time. When Abel brought his offering before God, it was *“the firstlings of the flock.”* In Genesis 14, when Abraham defeated the enemy, he brought back some spoils. Later, when he met with Melchizedek the priest, Abraham gave him the *“tithes of all.”*

Actually, if we don’t tithe, we’re nothing but thieves. I know that may sound pretty strong, but according to God’s Word, if you don’t tithe, then you’re locked up in a spiritual jail, unable to receive God’s blessings.

“Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings” (Malachi 3:8).

What’s the answer? Tithe! *“Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now here-with, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it”* (Malachi 3:10).

Start tithing, and watch God start blessing you. Even more, in verse 11, He says that He will *“rebuke the devourer.”* Is disease devouring your wallet? Is debt interest flattening your pocketbook? Begin

to tithe and expect God to give you health instead of disease and start earning interest instead of paying it. This is the Word of the Lord. God says to prove Him. Go ahead and put Him to the test. He wants to reveal to us that He is our source. He is our supply.

Have the right attitude. Money is not to dominate our lives. Remember it is only a medium of exchange, just a means to an end, not the end itself. I've often wondered, if we used tennis shoes instead of money, how many of us would spend our lives trying to accumulate tennis shoes?

It is what we do with the money and our attitude toward it that is important.

While we expect to receive back from God, we should not expect to keep it all. God's economic plan is a full circle. That we give to receive is only a partial truth.

The whole truth is that we give to receive to give to receive to give to receive. When we receive something from God, we should begin thinking of ways we can turn around and give back. The instant we begin to hoard it for ourselves is the instant that God's school of economics quits functioning. You see, God wants us to give of our possessions so that our possessions will not possess us.

When the widow's oil and cake were multiplied, she didn't store it all up. She fed Elijah with her newly filled cupboard. When Jesus was asked to pay a tax, he told Peter to go and find a fish and he would find tax money not only for the Master but also for himself (see Matthew 17:24-27).

The purpose of giving is so that *"always having all sufficiency in all things, [you] may abound to every good work"* (2 Corinthians 9:8).

We give so that we may have enough to help others. Hebrews 13:5 says that our way of life is to be free of the love of money, being content with what you have. It's not the money itself that's wrong, but our love of it, or placing too much value on it. Proverbs 23:4-5 states, *"Labour not to be rich . . . for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven."*

Don't let your single goal in life be the accumulation of money.

Solomon says that if you do, you'll be disappointed. And remember, Solomon was the wisest man who ever lived. He should know what he's talking about.

Also, be content with what you have. Quit worrying about keeping up with the Joneses. They're probably trying to keep up with you, too. Matthew Henry said, "Whatever you have of the world in your hands, keep it out of your heart." Learn to be content, as Paul commanded, and you'll be a much happier person for it.

Give with thanksgiving. I want you to notice something about Jesus when He fed the multitudes.

John 6:11 says that before He fed the five thousand with five loaves and two fish, He *"gave thanks."* In Matthew 15:36, it says that before Jesus fed the four thousand with seven loaves and a few small fish, He first *"gave thanks."*

Until we learn to give thanks to God for our financial condition, the pump will not kick on. Thanksgiving is a key to priming God's pump. If we are bitter or resentful of our state in life or level of social standing, God is not at liberty to pour out His blessings upon us. Giving with praise is just another way we can activate our faith. Praise is putting our love into action. It is doing something that pleases the Lord. That kind of faith moves the heart of God.

I believe that when Jesus gave thanks to the Father, He unlocked the key to the multiplication of the bread and the fish. Likewise, when we begin to *"sing with thanksgiving in our hearts"* to God, we unlock a door, we open a window for God to bless us.

Give responsibly. God has called us to be responsible givers. We must diligently manage our financial resources. We can't abuse what God has already given to us and expect Him to bless us.

If you go out and charge several thousand dollars' worth of goods every month and you only bring home \$800, then you are breaking God's commandment to *"owe no man anything"* (Romans 13:8). You are putting yourself in debt to the world and violating a biblical principle.

You also must learn how to take care of your own household first. If you spend your money on other causes, no matter how

good, and your family goes without food and clothing, then the Bible has this to say, *"But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel"* (1 Timothy 5:8).

Responsible giving involves giving with the proper motive. If I give only to get in return, then I am guilty of the sin of selfishness. *"Ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts"* (James 4:3).

We should give so that we can help others in their time of need. This must be the cornerstone of our giving.

Keep in mind that money isn't the only area we're required to give in. We should be willing to give our time, our talents, and our energies to others also. Often an investment of time in someone else's life is much more demanding than simply writing out a check.

The most important thing is the giving of our lives completely to the Lord's service. *"But first gave their own selves to the Lord"* (2 Corinthians 8:5). We must totally surrender our lives to the Lord so that He can use us as He pleases. If we give our money to the Lord, but don't give Him our will, then we are in error. God must have control of everything.

Riotous living or sin of any sort will cancel out the blessings of giving. We are nothing more than hypocrites if we give of our tithe on Sunday then spend money foolishly on alcohol, drugs, or some other harmful habit during the week. Our lives must be clean before God if we are to enjoy His benefits.

Now you might ask, "All these are good principles to keep me out of financial trouble, but what do I do if I am already in financial trouble?"

"How can I give if my debts are about to devour me?"

"How can I be a responsible giver if I am already in financial ruin?"

God's Word has something to say about this predicament. The Bible promises that you can stay on top of financial problems. Here is what to do.

Solve Your Financial Problems

Get your heart right with God. Your financial problem is not just a financial problem. It is simply the result of a spiritual problem. So if you have not surrendered your life to Christ, go back to my preface

to this book. Follow the steps that I have outlined, and surrender your life to Jesus.

As a child of God, you can trust your heavenly Father to meet every financial and physical need that you have. Jesus even said, *"If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?"* (Matthew 7:11).

This scripture promises that when you become a child of God, you come under the care of your heavenly Father. Not only will He give you His Spirit, but the power of the Spirit will also meet even your financial needs.

The psalmist David recognized the power of God to provide for His children when he said in Psalm 37:25, *"I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread."*

When you trust God for your salvation, it will build your faith to trust God for the other needs in your life, including your financial problems.

Once you recognize your financial problem as a spiritual problem, you can then draw upon the Holy Spirit of God to meet your need. And remember, the Spirit is given to those who obey. So you will never be able to draw upon the spiritual power of God to meet your financial needs until you give yourself in obedience to God's Word.

As I have already discussed, obedience to God's Word means a tithe, or 10 percent of your income. What I am saying is simply this: You will never be able to draw upon the resources of God to meet your financial need until you determine that you are going to obey God and give 10 percent to the work of the kingdom. Once you have taken this step, you can then take the following steps to help solve your financial problems.

1. Count the Costs

Jesus said in Luke 14:28, *"For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?"* This verse of Scripture tells us simply that we are responsible for our debts. You will never be able to solve your financial

problems until you know exactly what they are. After you have counted the cost, you must develop a plan (we normally call it a budget) to meet your bills.

So here's what to do. First, figure your total income for a period of time. Most people use one month or 30 days. Immediately deduct a tithe, or 10 percent, from your monthly income. Now deduct enough to supply the basic needs of your family, including shelter, food, and clothing.

Then list all of your outside bills. You will certainly want to pay what you have agreed on monthly payments. But even if you can't, be sure to send something each month to every creditor.

2. Confess Your Faults

The Bible says in James 5:16, *"Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."* There is real power in confession. Something spiritual happens when we confess that we have done wrong.

This third step to meeting your financial problems is extremely important. Write a letter of confession to each of your creditors. Explain to them that you are very sorry that you have not been able to meet the original commitment that you made. Let them know that you are striving to get yourself back on a sound financial basis, and then ask their permission if you can send them the amount that you have already determined you can send. Then keep your word.

After you have made this commitment, remember that your testimony for the Lord Jesus Christ is at stake. These people will be looking at you as an example of a Christian. Most creditors will be happy to work out an arrangement with you like this until you can get yourself on a sound financial foundation.

3. Be Faithful

Trust God to meet your needs. You may go through some very lean times. Remember that Satan would like to tempt you to spend more than you have coming in. He would like to tempt you to go further into debt when he knows you do not have the money. Satan knows

that if he can tempt you, he can defeat you in this area and then cause you many more problems.

You must be faithful. You won't solve years of misspending in a month or even six months. Sometimes it may take years before you will see the total healing of your financial problems.

But during this time, God will take care of you. If you obey Him and trust Him and be faithful to Him, you can claim the wonderful promises of His Word. Jesus further said, *"His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord"* (Matthew 25:21).

Stay on Top of Finances

Yes, you can stay on top of your financial problems. Through the Lord Jesus Christ, you can be free of financial worries. This does not mean that God is obligated to make you wealthy. For a millionaire was once asked, "How much money does it take to truly be wealthy?" His answer was, "Just a little bit more."

Staying on top of your financial problems is not found in merely the accumulation of money.

Real financial freedom is living within your means, trusting God to supply your needs as you live a quiet and peaceable life in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is your promise as a born-again believer. God is interested in you, and if you follow the above steps, He will get your finances under control.

The Eternal Crop

Sowing and reaping is a natural law. When you plant a crop of corn in the spring, you expect to reap it within a few months. That's the way God has commanded it: *"Seedtime and harvest . . . shall not cease"* (Genesis 8:22).

Sowing and reaping is also a spiritual law. But I want you to understand one thing. God's crop is not always reaped in this life. I'll say it again.

God's harvest isn't always reaped in this life on earth. There are many people who faithfully tithe of their income but are

never blessed with what I would call an abundance of money. Millions of people who are dedicated Christians struggle for a daily existence. They wonder how their bills are going to be paid, how to keep up with inflation, and how to fix a hamburger in yet one more different way.

There is no sin in their lives and they are cheerful givers, not begrudging the Lord His due tenth of their income. They apply all the principles I have mentioned in this chapter, but they have just enough to take care of life's essentials. They have not yet reaped their spiritual investment. Rest assured though, their barns will be overflowing with a godly harvest in eternity.

The apostle Paul sowed seeds for the kingdom of God as no other man. Yet his life was ended in a Roman jail. He did not enjoy luxury or comfort on this earth. He knew that his reward was a heavenly one.

"I have fought a good fight," Paul wrote, "I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord . . . shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

Paul did not receive his reward while in this world. Neither did many of the Bible's most famous heroes. Hebrews 11 is called by some the "Hall of Fame chapter." Such biblical giants as Noah, Abraham, Jacob, and others are mentioned. Look at verse 13 though: *"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth."*

In fact, in verses 37 and 38, it goes on to describe what happened to some of the "Hall of Famers": *"They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented . . . they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth."*

Their crop did not come in during their stay on earth. They died "in faith." You may also die "in faith," not having fully received some of the Bible's promises. That's okay. You will receive your reward

when you get to heaven where there is laid up for you a crown of righteousness.

My mom and dad gave their entire life to the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. Not only did they give of themselves, they also gave away all the money they ever received. I can vividly remember my parents taking in unwanted children. And I knew from my earliest memories what it was like to share food with others when I did not even have enough for myself. My dad died after 53 years of preaching. He did not leave me a penny, but he left me something far more valuable than the riches of this world.

He left me an inheritance of faith. In my life, I have had to face many difficult times, when I had to draw upon all the faith that I had. And in those difficult times, I have stood upon the inheritance of faith that my parents left me. As I write this, my mother is still living. Even though she does not have much of this world's goods, God has kept her and provided for her so that she does not have to worry about anything.

You can experience that same blessing of God. You can stay on top of your financial problems. You can put God's economy into practice and see your needs met.

How to Put God's Economy into Practice

1. Have a right relationship with God.
2. Prime God's pump by giving.
3. Expect to receive.
4. Have the right attitude in giving.
5. Be content with what you have.
6. Start giving thanks for your financial condition.
7. Be a cheerful giver.
8. Be a responsible giver.

Pray This Prayer from Your Heart

Dear Lord, I give You my all, including my finances. Teach me, Lord, to trust You and to give to Your work with joy in my heart. Thank You for all of the blessings You have given me and for Your care over me and my loved ones. As I give of my means to You, I trust You to meet

all of my needs. With this prayer I claim freedom from every financial problem. In Your name I pray. Amen.

Promises *from* God's Word

"And he will hue thee, and bless thee, and multiply thee: he will also bless the fruit of thy womb, and the fruit of thy land, thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep, in the land which he sware unto thy fathers to give thee." —Deuteronomy 7:13

"And Azariah the chief priest of the house of Zadok answered him, and said, Since the people began to bring the offerings into the house of the LORD we have had enough to eat, and have left plenty: for the LORD hath blessed his people; and that which is left is this great store." —1 Chronicles 31:10

"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want." —Psalm 23:1

"The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the LORD shall not want any good thing." —Psalm 34:10

"I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." —Psalm 37:25

"He hath given meat unto them that fear him: he will ever be mindful of his covenant." —Psalm 111:5

"The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing." —Psalm 145:15-16

"The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep." —Ecclesiastes 5:12

"And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: and my people shall never be ashamed." —Joel 2:26

"Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." —Malachi 3:10

"Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, what shall we eat? or, what shall we drink? or, wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." —Matthew 6:30-34

"If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" —Matthew 7:11

"Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again." —Luke 6:38

"And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseseth." —Luke 12:15

"If then God so clothe the grass, which is today in the field, and tomorrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith?" —Luke 12:28

"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me." —John 14:1

"Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come."
—1 Corinthians 16:2

"Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." —Philippians 4:11

"But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." —Philippians 4:19

"But godliness with contentment is great gain. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content." —1 Timothy 6:6, 8

"For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." —1 Timothy 6:10

"Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." —Hebrews 13:5

4 Victory over Habits



"Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." —Galatians 5:1

Many years ago, an Italian artist was commissioned to paint the Last Supper. He searched the city for models and soon found a ruddy, burly sort of fellow with flowing hair to portray Peter.

Next he found an esthetic youth with a brooding mouth and questioning eye, and chose him for doubting Thomas. An eager, outgoing type of a man became Andrew. A young man with features of sensitive nobility was picked to sit for Christ. Within a month, the painter had models for all of his apostles except one. But try as he would, he could not find a model for Judas Iscariot. So an important part of the canvas was unfinished. Without the demonic impact of the betrayer, the Last Supper lost much of its meaning. Wherever the artist went and whatever he did, he looked for a model of a man who sold his Lord for thirty pieces of silver.

At last, several years later, he found his Judas. There, slouched at a table in a cheap cafe, sat a sullen drunk. His face was ravaged by self-indulgence. His eyes could not hide the bad conscience which smoldered behind them. His mouth was weak and cynical. He might have almost been Judas in the very flesh.

Unimpressed by the opportunity of becoming a living part of the Last Supper, the man sneered his refusal to cooperate. But the artist finally won him over by promising a bag of coins worth far beyond the call of duty.

Just as the painter was applying the finishing touches to the

canvas, the model suddenly burst into tears. Between sobs, he blurted out his question, "You don't know me, do you?"

"No, I'm afraid I don't," said the painter.

"You never saw me before you picked me up that day at the cafe?" asked the ravaged man.

"No, at least not to my knowledge."

Then the drunk shocked the painter by saying, "I am the man who sat for you many years ago as your model of Jesus Christ."

Sin requires a heavy wage. It takes its toll on lives, and the Bible tells us the wages of sin is death: *"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord"* (Romans 6:23).

Those habits that start out small can soon take control of our lives.

But how can you stay on top of those habits? Is it possible to overcome habits that are destroying you? The good news is: Yes. And God's Word tells you how.

Overcoming Destructive Habits

The first step is to recognize your habit as sin, and what that sin will do to your life. When you do, you will have taken a giant step to finding real victory over your habits. Then you can do something about eliminating them from your life.

A story of four lepers is recorded in 2 Kings 7. They lived in Samaria, and begged at the city's gate. Their days were spent sitting by that gate, begging for anything they could get. Some would ignore them. Others would toss them a coin or perhaps bring them a bit of food.

Then one day the Syrian army marched upon Samaria and surrounded the entire walled city. The soldiers closed the gate to the city and sat watch beside it. They were going to wait until the people inside ran out of food and water and they would have to surrender.

Their plan worked. Starvation soon began to sweep through the city.

The four lepers were caught right in the middle. They were prisoners inside the gate, and I'm sure they felt that no one, not even God, cared whether they lived or died. They could have sat there and felt sorry for themselves, but they decided to do something about their situation.

Since they didn't have anything to lose, they decided to go to a

little opening in the gate and beg for food. They did something to get out of their bondage.

The Bible says they got up and marched outside. They began to exercise their faith, and God Almighty came to their rescue. For the supernatural power of God amplified their footsteps in the sand. And the Syrian army thought a great army was charging. They fled for their lives. And the people of Samaria, and the four lepers, were left with all the gold and the food.

This great miracle happened because those four lepers did not sit down and wait to die. They got up and did something with their faith.

The Bible says that faith without works is dead. You may have been struggling with a habit for years and years. It may have you in bondage much like leprosy. You may not feel as though there isn't anywhere to turn, and there's no way out. But rather than sitting there and dying, get up and do something with your faith, and you'll see God come on the scene and give you victory over that habit that has you in bondage.

God's Word promises that you can live a life of victory over sin. *"For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness"* (Romans 6:14, 18).

This is not just an emotional freedom. This is a very real, actual, powerful freedom that God gives to everyone who puts his faith in Christ.

Chapter 1 will show you how you can be free from the guilt of past sins. You need to be sure you read that chapter because you will never experience victory over your present habits and sins until you experience freedom from your past sins.

Healing our past is entirely a work of Christ. But victory over our present habits and sins only comes as we work with the Lord to see this victory accomplished in our lives.

Overcoming Recurring Sin

So if you have a habit, a sin, a problem that keeps coming back and bringing you into bondage, here is what you are to do.

First, see your sin. Jeremiah 3:13 says, *“Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the LORD thy God.”* Before we can ever find real victory over our sin, we must be honest with God and recognize the sin or habit that is in our lives. Before we can ever be honest with God, we must be honest with ourselves and see that habit and sin for what it is and for what it is doing to our lives.

The second step to finding real victory is to surrender that habit. The same promise of salvation also promises us freedom from the bondage of sin. *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:9). This is your guarantee of freedom from every sin and every weakness in your life.

This glorious promise is given to every believer. When you become a new creature in Christ Jesus, old things are passed away and all things become new. Instead of becoming a servant to sin, God’s Word promises that you are a victor over sin when you surrender that sin to Christ: *“Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin”* (Romans 6:6).

Now what does “surrender to Christ” mean? When you surrender your life to Christ, it means you give Him everything you are. He becomes your Lord and your Master, so you no longer live your own life. You live a life that is pleasing to the Lord Jesus Christ. You do the things He wants you to do and you refuse those things that would displease your heavenly Father.

When you confess your sins and surrender your habits, your problems, and your weaknesses to Christ, He masters those sins for you.

You see, the Lord Jesus shed His blood on the cross of Calvary to cleanse us from all our sins. He took sin upon himself so that you no longer had to serve sin. So when Jesus died on the cross, He not only became your Lord and your Master, He also conquered sin. Therefore, as you surrender your life to Christ and say, “Take me, I’m Yours,” He becomes the Lord and Master of your life. But He also becomes the Lord and Master of your sins, your habits, and your weaknesses.

After we have surrendered our sins to the Lord, then it is up to us to starve that sin. This is where active faith comes in. This is where we replace our old habits with good habits. This is where we become personally involved in doing something to find victory over sin.

We starve our sin by separating ourselves from temptation. *"But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof"* (Romans 13:14). Many people are defeated because they flirt with temptation. They crawl away from temptation, hoping it will overtake them.

But the best way to overcome temptation is to avoid it. *"Make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof."* As we avoid the very appearance of evil, we will starve our sin.

When we do this, we create a vacuum in our lives.

You see, there is a God-shaped vacuum within each and every one of us. That vacuum must be satisfied. Every alcoholic is searching for something. He is reaching for some way to replace that old habit with something that really satisfies. And the only thing that really satisfies the heart of man is a personal relationship with his Creator.

It's just like an empty cup. As long as that cup is empty, it will hold anything you put in it: bugs, water, anything. But if you fill that cup with water, there is no room for anything else. Try to pour something in, and it won't hold it.

Our lives are the same way. If we are empty, we are like a vacuum, and we will take in anything that comes our way: sins, habits, bitterness, and hatred. But if we fill our hearts and our minds with the things of God, then there is no longer any room for the things of this world to crowd their way in.

The secret is found in Philippians 4:8: *"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."*

This is how we replace our old habits with good habits.

Replacing Bad Habits with Good Ones

After we have recognized what our sin is doing to our lives, after we have surrendered that sin to the Lord, and after we have separated ourselves from temptation, then we must fill our hearts and our minds with the good things of God.

The Bible says that we should set our affections on things above, not on the things on this earth. The love of Jesus Christ can fill that God-shaped vacuum in your life. As you read your Bible, as you pray, as you attend the house of God, you will fall in love with Jesus, and He will fill you with the power of His Spirit: *"And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit"* (Ephesians 5:18). Let me add here that a real effort to be free from a bad habit must be accompanied by wisdom. Suppose an architect came into the Cathedral of Tomorrow and told me the supports of the building were not in the right place and would have to be replaced. I wouldn't go in and rip the old ones out. If I did, the building would collapse. First, I would put up the new supports, then remove the old ones.

When we have a habit in our life that we want to get rid of, we need to put something good in its place before we rip it out of our life.

How many people's lives have collapsed because they tried to get rid of a habit without filling that vacuum with something good. They curse their cigarettes and throw them away then wonder why they don't have the strength to stay away from them. They promise themselves they won't nag anymore, but when pressure comes along, they collapse.

Why? Because they have tried to rip out their bad habits without replacing them with new supports. We need to ask God to show us what in our personality makes us smoke, nag, be unfaithful to our spouse, or whatever habit we have. Then we need to let Him start building positive, good habits to replace the old.

I've been a pastor for many, many years. Over the years I've made some changes in my ministry. One of the changes concerns the way I deal with alcoholics. In my early years of pastoring, a great many alcoholics would come to me because they watched the program on television or heard me on the radio.

And every time I got a call, I would run out to the home and visit

with the man and his wife and try to talk to him. I would beg the man to give up his drinking. I would show him what his habit was doing to his family and how he was going to lose everything that he held dear to him.

I would try to show him how much it cost to continue his drinking and how it would destroy his health, home, future, and his very life.

These men would make the grandest promises you ever heard. They would promise to quit drinking, straighten up their lives, be good husbands and fathers, and quit wasting their lives away.

And the very next time I saw them, they were drunk and needing help again. So I made a change. That change came about when an alcoholic called me and asked me for help. My response was, "If you want help, you come here and see me." I wanted him to do something positive toward overcoming his habit.

On another occasion, a man called me and said, "I want to get rid of drinking. My wife has locked me out of the house and won't let me in. Would you call her?"

I answered back, "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll call her if you'll promise me that you will be in church Sunday." Now the reason that I took this approach is very simple. If you just try to take a man's drink away, you will never solve his problem. Because the first time he gets near a bar with his buddies, he's going to go right back to drinking.

But if you replace his bad habits with good habits like coming to church, reading the Bible, and praying, He will receive something in his life that he doesn't get from alcohol.

The book of James tells us that the body without the spirit is dead. If you would take my spirit out of me, I'd have hands, feet, eyes, ears, and a tongue. But my hands wouldn't move, my tongue wouldn't talk, my eyes wouldn't see, my feet wouldn't walk, because the body without the spirit is dead.

It is therefore the Spirit of God that will empower you to find victory over the sins that have you in bondage. And the Bible also tells us that the Spirit is given to those who obey: *"And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him"* (Acts 5:32).

This gets right back to the central theme of this book and that is a

live, active faith. You can stay on top of the habits that have you in bondage by exercising an active faith in God, by doing something with your faith instead of sitting there and dying in the bondage of sin.

How to Have Victory over Habits and Sins

1. See your sin.
2. Surrender your sin.
3. Starve your sin.
4. Replace that sin with the goodness of God, and the love of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Pray This Prayer from Your Heart

Dear Lord, I confess all my sins to You. I know I have this habit, but I know You can help me to overcome. I surrender this habit to You and claim Your mighty power to give me victory. Please give me the strength to separate myself from every appearance of evil. Fill me with the power of Your Spirit so my life will overflow with Your goodness and love. Take away my bad habits, Lord, and help me replace them with good habits so my life will be a shining light in this dark world. In the name of Jesus I pray. Amen.

Promises *from* God's Word

"Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee."
—Psalm 119:11

"For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace." —Romans 6:14

"But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof." —Romans 13:14

"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye

are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” —1 Corinthians 10:13

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.” —Galatians 5:1

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.” —Ephesians 6:10-11, 16

“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” —Philippians 4:13

“Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.” —Colossians 3:2

“For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” —Hebrews 4:15-16

“Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.” —James 1:12-14

“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” —James 4:7

“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.” —1 Peter 2:9

“Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.” —1 John 4:4

5 Have a Happy Home



"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" —Psalm 133:1

Billy Graham tells of the modern woman who asked, "Why do I need a home?" She went on to say, "I was born in a hospital, educated in a college, courted in an automobile, married in a church. I live out of a delicatessen—tin cans and paper bags. I spend my mornings on the golf course, my afternoons at the bridge table, and my evenings at the movies. And when I die, I will be cremated and buried in a brass urn. All I really need is a garage." Tragically, millions of people live like the woman just mentioned. Our homes have become mere parking places for portions of the night, places where we pass one another like ships in the night, without closeness of contact. But we are paying a great price for our lives of distraction. God never intended our homes to be mere parking places for busy bodies needing rest and refueling.

Rather, there is purpose for homes, and directions are found in God's Word for their survival.

God's Plan for Marriage

When God created man, He looked on His creation and saw that it was good. Still, there was something missing. God knew that man needed a "helpmate." That's when God decided to make a woman. When God completed His work and like a proud father presented her to Adam, the man burst out in poetic exclamation: *"This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man"* (Genesis 2:23).

Man alone does not express all the qualities of our God. Woman alone cannot express all the qualities of our God. God created man and woman, and together they express the image of God: *"So God*

created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them” (Genesis 1:27).

Marriage was ordained to bring man and woman together as a unit, completing God’s creation. Jesus adds utmost importance to this principle by insisting, *“But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder”* (Mark 10:6-9).

God formed families also to give people closeness. Not having someone to care and love is the deepest hurt man can know. A prominent social worker says, “I have come to realize that it is being unwanted that is the worst disease that any human being can ever experience. For all kinds of diseases there are medicines and cures, but for being unwanted...I don’t think this terrible disease can ever be cured.” We who know Christ know that He can provide warmth and friendship. Still, we need human companionship. Thus, an important purpose of the family is to provide human warmth, and touch, and friendship.

God gave us families to give each other strength. Husbands look at life in a different perspective than wives. Wives see things husbands overlook. It is the wise husband who listens to his wife and the wise wife who hears her husband. God’s Word still says, *“Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counselors there is safety”* (Proverbs 11:14).

Ecclesiastes 4:11-12 tells us of that human warmth that is part of family experience: *“Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone?”* He goes on to add, *“And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.”* Thus we get strength, encouragement, human warmth, and joy in a family relationship. It is also significant that the preacher mentions the “threefold cord.” Our marriage will only really be strong as we take God into it and make Him a partner in our marriage.

God's purpose and plan for marriage, simply stated, is that two people can become together what they could never be alone. Each completes the other as they become one unit. However, no marriage can really be complete without a living relationship with God through Jesus Christ. God created marriage, and it is foolish to think it would ever be complete without Him being the foundation of it.

How to Be a Good Husband

God's Word insists that husbands *"live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun."* (Ecclesiastes 9:9). It is important that we not just endure our husband-wife relationship, but that we bring joy to it.

1. Understand her needs.

God's Word is clear and concise when it comes to the husband's sexual responsibility: *"Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency"* (1 Corinthians 7:3, 5).

We were created with sexual drives and needs. It is the foolish husband or wife who uses this intimate part of marriage as a "reward" or a "weapon." The Bible teaches us, *"The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but, the wife"* (1 Corinthians 7:4).

2. Assume your role.

In the divine plan of God, man was made head of the home. That is not because he is any better than the wife, but simply because someone has to be in authority. And because man was created first, God gave him this role: *"But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve"* (1 Timothy 2:12-13). This is not a male chauvinistic view, but simply a statement concerning lines of authority.

This does not mean he will “lord” it over his wife. We must remember Christ is Head of the church, yet we see Him as He takes the towel and bowl to wash the disciples’ feet. Real leadership is humility. Jesus said, *“And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant”* (Matthew 20:27).

Thus, as husbands assume their role of leadership in the home, it must be with the attitude of Christ. From the very beginning, God established husbands and fathers to be provider-protector. The Bible has some strong statements about those who refuse to fulfill this role: *“But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel”* (1 Timothy 5:8).

This is strong language, but we must keep in mind that God created fathers to be miniature representatives of himself. That is, they reflect the heavenly Father’s nature and provision. Tragically, many youngsters have a distorted picture of the heavenly Father because their earthly fathers did not portray an image of love and responsibility.

In addition to provider, God wants the husband also to be protector. The Bible says, *“Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered”* (1 Peter 3:7). The husband is to hold up his wife and give her the support she needs. He is the shepherd of his family, protecting the sheep from the enemies.

How to Be a Good Wife

Regardless of how women’s libbers howl, woman is deeply entwined with man and man with woman. *“But the woman is the glory of the man. For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man. Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God”* (1 Corinthians 11:7-9, 11-12).

When we selfishly disregard this divine principle, we only hurt

ourselves. The man who insists on having his own world, excluding his wife, is asking for great grief. The woman who insists on her own world and excludes her husband can never develop a meaningful and lasting happiness. God molded man and woman together in the life process. Woman was made out of man, and man comes out of woman. It is the eternal life cycle.

1. Give respect.

It is the rare person who can see the best in everyone. But the Bible tells us that is the happiest way to live. In love relationships to their mates, wives have an awesome responsibility: *"And the wife see that she reverence her husband"* (Ephesians 5:33). Husbands should earn this reverence and respect. Some husbands make the commandments of Christ hard to fulfill. However, there are no "ifs" included in this verse of Scripture.

When the wife learns to see the good in her mate, then respect can grow. Men can be motivated by criticism, but they become bitter and angry. On the other hand, men motivated by respect and love become loving husbands.

2. Submit.

In our day, perhaps the most difficult word in the Bible is *submission*. We are all rebels. We do not like stop signs and resent having to follow rules. However, rules make life possible and without them not even a friendly game of recreation could exist.

There have to be lines of authority and rules of behavior. Thus God's Word says, *"Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything"* (Ephesians 5:22-24).

In a living love relationship, this matter of submission is no problem. In every case where the Bible tells wives to be submissive, there are strong statements that the husbands must love the wives.

It is not hard to be submissive to one who deeply loves you.

"For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous" (1 John 5:3). It is easy to follow someone who leads with selfless love. Thus, husbands who insist on wives being submissive should also remember they are called on to a deep love that will not make this demand hard to endure.

3. Learn to love.

Love is something we learn. It is also something that can be taught. Paul writes, *"The aged women likewise, that they be in behavior as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; that they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed"* (Titus 2:3-5).

Love often is swallowing our pride and enduring. We must learn to turn the other cheek, and go the second mile. This is what Paul talks about when he speaks of learning to love.

One of the most difficult areas in marriage involves physical love. Already discussed is how neither husband nor wife is to use sex as a weapon or reward. The reason sexual difficulties are deep is that a man reaches his peak of sexual desire between the ages of 18 and 25. The woman only reaches her peak of sexual awareness in the early 30s. This difference was designed by God to allow women greater biological control during courtship.

However, it does create some misunderstandings in marriage, and these must be dealt with. All these things, like all other areas of marriage, require that we learn to love. And the wise woman can do much to make the learning process as comfortable as possible.

4. Emphasize the inside.

Wives have an influence on their husbands. If the wife's influence is to be great, it will be because her priorities are right. An ancient philosophy says, "The things for which a woman longs are adornments." Another quotation from the ancients is, "A woman's thought is only for her beauty." And an old proverb says, "The

woman of sixty, the same as the girl of six, runs to the sound of the timbrel." It is true that women are concerned about appearance, and this is one of the reasons men appreciate them. But Peter gives a warning.

Writing to the ladies, he says, *"Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price"* (1 Peter 3:3-4).

A popular television commercial had a husband saying to his wife, "You're not getting older, you're getting better." This can be true of the wise woman who gives more attention to developing a beautiful spirit than a beautiful body. An interesting thing is that most men who stray from their marriage bed are attracted to women not nearly as physically beautiful as their wives. The spirit wins out over the physical every time.

If the wife gives such proper emphasis, when the wrinkles appear and the body becomes weak, her love and security will grow stronger.

How to Be a Good Parent

Perhaps the key Scripture to understanding a parent's attitude toward children is the famous Proverbs 22:6. Here the Bible says, *"Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it."* However, we often misunderstand that Scripture because we do not really know what the verb *train* means here.

In our Western and modern minds, the verb *train* speaks of discipline. We can almost see the rough sergeant dressing down the new recruit. We can see a teacher telling his student what to do. We can imagine a demanding father insisting a son do something right.

However, in the original Hebrew of the Scripture, that is not at all what the verb *train* means. In the ancient language of the Eastern world, *train* denoted the action of the midwife when she would dip her finger in oil and rub the tiny palate of the newborn baby, causing that baby to have a desire to suck.

Thus, what that verse really means is, "Create a taste for God in

the heart of your child, and when he is old nothing else in life will satisfy his hunger.”

What a difference our understanding of this simple verse makes. As godly parents, we are not to always “straighten out our kids.” Rather, we are to love them deeply and provide a climate of love and security coming from our relationship with God. The child raised in such an atmosphere is a lot closer to Calvary than one raised in a hostile or cold setting. Three things parents are to do.

1. Teach.

God’s Word plainly says the parents’ responsibility is to teach. And the best way to teach is by example. God talks about this: *“And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. . . . And when thy son asketh thee in time to come”* (Deuteronomy 6:7, 20).

It is not enough to tell our children how to act; we must show them.

2. Discipline.

Every child is a bundle of raw emotions and energies. The role of the parent is to help that child get control of himself to where these emotions and energies are not destructive, but constructive. Discipline is simply putting a child in control of himself.

We must understand there is a vast difference between punishment and discipline. Punishment is getting even. Discipline is inflicting a smaller amount of pain on a person than he would receive if he were permitted to go on unchecked in his action. An example will help.

Your small child reaches out to touch the hot stove. You grab his hand and slap it sharply. You have inflicted pain on that child, but the pain you have inflicted is far smaller than what he would receive if he were permitted to go ahead and touch the stove. That is discipline.

While modern child psychologists debate about the merits of spankings, God’s Word has some pretty clear things to say. “He

that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes" (Proverbs 13:24). Also, *"Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul"* (Proverbs 29:17). But discipline must start early. The parent who waits until the child is in the teens before disciplining cannot do at sixteen what he should have done at three. Part of our responsibility is discipline.

3. Give.

There is no financial reward in being a parent. Parents are made to give. One parent complained he now knew what "C.O.D." meant: Collect on Dad.

This does not mean a parent gives the child everything he wants. Sometimes the best thing possible for our child is to withhold from him. It is still true: "Give a hungry man a fish and he will hunger again. Teach him how to fish and he will never hunger." Thus, when we say parents are to give, we mean they are to be selfless. Their children come before their own pleasure and prestige. The children are not showcases of the parents' pride, but individuals to love and cherish.

Launching children on the road of life has its anxious moments. And a parent may have provided the best of homes and still see a son or daughter rebel. Jesus told of such a family, that of the prodigal son. Children still have a free choice either to accept or reject Jesus Christ. However, we can do much to prepare the soil for the seed of the gospel. Loving children come from loving homes.

Destructive Devices

But what do you do when something goes wrong in your marriage? A famed psychiatrist said recently, "Seventy-five percent of all marriages in our land are unhappy." Another marriage counselor suggested that, while one out of every three marriages ends in divorce, another third are not so much married as just being in a state of "undivorced." They live together for convenience, but any warmth and happiness in the relationship is gone.

The answer to this strange problem is that there are some very real enemies to any marriage. To make a marriage work, we must recognize those enemies and make a determined effort to conquer them.

Since Eden, Satan has used man's own traits to destroy man. He used Eve's curiosity to get her to taste the forbidden fruit. He used man's deep attachment to his helpmate to draw him away from God. And Satan's devices have not changed. Thus, there are some obvious things he uses to divide a home. These are the tools of his trade. Wise ones will note them and not be deceived by them.

Jealousy. In the Bible's most poetic book, the writer says, "*Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame*" (Song of Solomon 8:6). God knew the nagging heartbreak of jealousy. Thus, in the Old Testament He set up an elaborate system of ceremonies to determine infidelity. We do not know how it worked, but we do know the purpose was to deliver an injured party from the "spirit of jealousy" (Numbers 5).

Jealousy is "cruel as the grave." Immature mates play on one another's jealousies, and in doing so they destroy a vital part of marriage—trust. If a marriage is to be real and rich, it must be one of trust.

Envy. Closely tied to jealousy is envy. The writer of Proverbs was right in saying, "*A sound heart is the life of the flesh: but envy the rottenness of the bones*" (Proverbs 14:30). In our prosperous lands we are always getting, but never being satisfied. We are always wanting, but still there is that nagging need that cannot be filled with things.

That new car never really fills our need. That new dress we thought would help, doesn't. That new house we just had to have becomes a burden. Envy is not only sin, it's stupidity.

Our world's culture tells us to get, grab, acquire, attain. Yet, when we have done all these things, there is still a hollow hole in our heart.

The simple reason is: relationships are far more important than things.

God's Word simply says, *"Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have"* (Hebrews 13:5). Envy has financially bound many couples to years of hard servitude; it has disrupted relationships that could have been good and warm. The Bible says, *"He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house"* (Proverbs 15:27).

Contention. It is very easy for any person to get into a habit of bickering. It is especially a temptation to the wife, because her work is her home and she sees all the things that need to be done. Most husbands cannot see broken screen doors and peeled paint. They are away at work and do not have to live with the irritation of the uncompleted house. The poor wives do. And in such frustration there is a great temptation to nag and be contentious.

God's Word speaks much about strife in the home. *"And the contentions of a wife are a continual dropping"* (Proverbs 19:13). Again, *"It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman in a wide house. It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman"* (Proverbs 21:9, 19).

Men can be contentious too. Often it is the man who is the nagger. This is a sin that is not just reserved for the fairer sex. Regardless of who is to blame, nagging destroys. Israel nagged and nagged. The Bible says, *"And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul"* (Psalm 106:15).

Usually this is exactly what happens in marriage. We can nag our mate until in frustration he finally does what we ask. Yet, it exacts a great price. There is a leanness that comes in the relationship that breeds bitterness and resentment.

We would be most wise to remember the power of the tongue. We can hurt or heal with it. The Bible warns about that power by saying of the tongue, *"Death and life are in the power of the tongue."* Then note what he hastened to add, *"And they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof"* (Proverbs 18:21). If we use the tongue to heal, we have life; if we use it to hurt, we kill our relationships and unleash

powers of destructiveness upon ourselves. We would be wise to read and carefully observe the Bible's words in James 3:1-18.

Slothfulness. It takes work to make a marriage. And there are no holidays from that work. God's Word says, *"By much slothfulness the building decayeth; and through idleness of the hands the house dropeth through"* (Ecclesiastes 10:18).

Too often we hear the old adage, "You don't chase a streetcar after you have caught it." Husbands use this foolish cliché to excuse their two-day-old beard, obnoxious behavior, and laziness. Women use it to excuse their out-of-shape bodies and spirits. But that's all they are: excuses.

The simple fact is that the house will fall unless kept in good repair. The law of our earth is decay, not evolution. Everything wears away, even relationships, unless they are brightened with interest and deepened with devotion. There is still the pull of gravity that brings all down.

Thus, we must keep our marriage bright, and work to make it new.

That does not mean there will not be periods of boredom. These will come, but we need not succumb to them. Another principle from God's Word should apply here: *"He also that is slothful in his work is brother to him that is a great waster"* (Proverbs 18:9). We waste the beauty of relationships, the hours we could deepen our relationships, because we do not give diligent attention to our marriage.

Divorce Always Hurts

It is a fact that divorce is the growing sickness of our age that threatens the very existence of the home.

At present, one in every three marriages ends in divorce, and the toll is rising. Commenting on the current attitude toward divorce, Lawyer Max Lichtenberg says, "Marriage is no longer viewed as something made in heaven. It's a legal contract, with the emotions terminating."

This "worldly" view toward marriage is tragic and totally unbiblical. Jesus clearly said, *"Wherefore they are no more twain, but one*

flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matthew 19:6). Clearly, Jesus tells us that marriage is a union, not a contract.

However, divorce does happen. And there are many causes, some of which are finances, obnoxious behavior, extramarital affairs, problems with in-laws and religious differences.

But after all the sophisticated studies about what causes marriage breakups, there is still one simple statement by Jesus that tells the whole story. He simply says, *"Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so"* (Matthew 19:8). The root reason for every divorce is simply "hardness of hearts."

God never intended divorce to come. Because He is merciful and loving, He forgives; but it is definitely not His will nor ever will be. The Bible says, *"For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away"* (Malachi 2:16).

Perhaps the most difficult verse in the Bible on the subject of divorce is, *"And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery"* (Matthew 19:9).

The words of our Lord are hard. This is especially true for the innocent party in a divorce action. But our Lord teaches us not to demand our rights but to turn the other cheek and go the second mile.

May we also clearly say that while remarriage involves the partners in the sin of adultery, that sin can be repented of and forgiven. Remarriage does not involve one in a life of evil that must be forsaken before forgiveness and restoration can take place. The Scripture speaks in no uncertain terms about the sin of remarriage after illegitimate divorce, but does not place those involved in such remarriage outside of forgiveness if repentance takes place.

Divorce always hurts. It hurts the innocent party. It hurts each mate for the future. It casts over each a sense of failure and frustration. It is the tragedy of our time.

There is no really deep secret to having a happy home. It is simply letting Jesus have first place in our hearts. And each day is a growing experience where we draw closer to Him and to one another.

How to Stay on Top When Trouble Comes into Your Home

- 1. Spill out your tears.** Tears wash away our human pretension. We see more clearly who God is, who we are, and where we are going. The Bible says, *“They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him”* (Psalm 126:5-6).
- 2. Look up.** In our trouble, we can either look out for someone to blame, or look up for Someone to help. There is absolutely nothing that can happen to you but what God can make something beautiful out of it.
- 3. Pray.** Prayer takes our minds away from problems—and focuses it on the possibilities. And prayer gives direction. The Bible says, *“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him”* (James 1:5).
- 4. Pursue.** The devil has robbed many parents of their children. He has put divisions between mates. But God wants us to pursue them with love, tenderness, prayer, and understanding.
- 5. Overtake.** We are not programmed for defeat, but victory. God has given His children stronger power than that of the enemy.
- 6. Recover.** Satan has victimized our homes too long. He has stolen our joy, peace, and happiness. It is time we stood up and insisted that we recover all. The victory is really already ours.

Pray This Prayer from Your Heart

Dear Lord, thank You for the family You have given me. I know my family is a gift from You, so I give it back to You and trust You for the answer to my family problems. I know, Lord, that You are my only hope and my only source of help to meet this need in my home.

Please forgive me for not caring enough and for not giving enough of myself to my family. Lord, please help me to give unselfishly to my family and to keep on giving until this need is met. I ask You, Lord, to bind Satan's power to divide my home, and I claim Your power to heal and protect my family. In the name of Jesus I pray. Amen.

Promises *from* God's Word

"And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." —Genesis 2:23-24

"Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons; specially the day that thou stoodest before the LORD thy God in Horeb, when the LORD said unto me, Gather me the people together, and I will make them hear my words, that they may learn to fear me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children." —Deuteronomy 4:9-10

"Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the LORD. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." —Joshua 24:14-15

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" —Psalm 133:1

"My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of his correction: for whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth." —Proverbs 3:11-12

"Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins." —Proverbs 10:12

*"A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger."
—Proverbs 15:1*

"Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." —Proverbs 22:6

"And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." —Ephesians 4:32

"Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it." —Ephesians 5:22, 25

"And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." —Ephesians 6:4

"Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also." —1 John 4:7-8, 21

6 Rising above Depression



"These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." —John 15:11

Sir Winston Churchill, the great leader of England during the Second World War, gave his famous speech following the disastrous British loss at Dunkirk: "We shall fight in the hills, we shall never surrender;" But did you know this brave man was known to sink into deep periods of depression? Many famous people such as Edgar Allen Poe and Stephen Foster also had bouts with depression. Depression, to one degree or another, attacks just about everyone at some point along life's pathway. Somehow, though, we don't ever really believe that biblical characters suffered from such a problem. We picture in our minds that they were always full of hope, joy, and power. Well, that's simply not so. In fact, many of the biblical heroes such as Elijah, David, Peter, and Paul had to deal with depression. One of Elijah's greatest miracles was when he challenged the prophets of Baal to a spiritual duel to see who was the true God. Both Elijah and the Baal priests built a sacrifice on the top of Mount Carmel. The fire to consume the sacrifices, however, was to fall from heaven. If Baal's god answered with fire, then their god would have been the true God.

The 450 prophets of Baal ranted and raved for their god to send down the fire, but nothing happened.

Then it was Elijah's turn. First he drenched the sacrifice with water three times so that all would know that Jehovah was the living God. He then called on God, and the *"fire of the Lord fell,"* consuming the offering.

It was a magnificent triumph, and Elijah should have been on top of the world. However, in 1 Kings 19 we find out that Elijah's life has been threatened by Jezebel. Mighty Elijah, the same Elijah who had whipped the Baal prophets and then outrun the chariot of King Ahab, now ran for his life. We see him cowering in the wilderness saying, "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers" (1 Kings 19:4).

Elijah was depressed.

David also knew what it was like to ride the roller coaster of depression. *"Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me. I am weary of my crying"* (Psalm 69:1-3).

"Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me?" (Psalm 42:11).

Even an apostle who walked and talked with Jesus for three years was given to battles of depression. In Luke 22, we see that Peter has denied Jesus for the third time. Immediately, the piercing face of Christ looks into the frightened eyes of Peter. *"And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly."*

Peter was depressed.

Paul was perhaps the greatest of all apostles. He endured all manner of trial and tribulation, writing some of his most famous books in the confines of a Roman jail. Yet even this tremendous man of God knew the depths of depression.

In his letter to the Corinthians, he says, *"For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life"* (2 Corinthians 1:8).

The preceding verses make it clear that Paul was talking about emotional despair as well as physical danger.

Causes of Depression

There are some estimates that as many as 8 million Americans, and many millions more around the world, suffer from depression annu-

ally. Hundreds of thousands often wind up in a hospital to undergo treatment. Millions more silently suffer on the job or at home, afraid to admit in this success-oriented society that they feel defeated.

As you can imagine, there are a great many causes of depression, both on the emotional and physical level.

Elijah was obviously physically tired when he asked the Lord to take his life. In a burst of supernatural strength, he had outrun Ahab's chariot from Mount Carmel to Jezreel. That was a distance of about 25 miles, which is almost equal to the distance of today's marathons. Now all I have to do is look at someone who has just run a marathon and I'm tired. It takes the body almost a week to recover from the bruising side effects of running a marathon. So Elijah, no doubt, was exhausted. In fact, in 1 Kings 19:5, it says that he *"lay and slept under a juniper tree."*

Today's frantic pace of life leaves almost all of us tired at some point. Working mothers not only have the wearisome duty of raising children and taking care of the house, but they also are sapped by the demands of a job. Husbands, finding their wages eaten away by inflation, work harder and harder to increase their income. Being physically tired greatly increases our susceptibility to depression, since dealing with any sort of difficulty is irritating and fatiguing.

Elijah was also emotionally drained. The confrontation with the prophets of Baal was an exhilarating moment in his life. It was a time of great expectation and wonderful fulfillment. But it is exactly after such an emotional high that many fall into the depths of despair. Once you get to the mountaintop, there isn't any other way but down.

How many of us have experienced similar episodes. We have just achieved a long-sought-after goal in our life, such as a new job, or beautiful home, and not long after, wonder why we feel so down. It is simply because we have been so anxious and tense in the achievement of our goal, that once we reach it, we are emotionally spent.

Actually, any sort of stress can carry you into depression. A system showing the causes of stress has been worked out by a leading professor of psychiatry at the University of Washington. The top ten causes of stress are:

1. Death of a spouse
2. Divorce
3. Marital separation
4. Jail term
5. Death of a close family member
6. Personal injury or illness
7. Marriage
8. Job firing
9. Marital reconciliation
10. Retirement

Of course there are many others such as health, financial responsibilities, readjustment to a new place of residence, etc. But one or a combination of them can produce emotional as well as physical problems that can easily carry you into depression.

A person in a depressed state finds himself withdrawn, wanting to be alone. He is often worried and anxious. His physical energy and appetite are lacking. He may weep a lot and generally feel downright blah. Even his personal appearance can be unkempt.

The Role of Self-Pity

Self-pity is almost a universal symptom of depression. They fit together like a hand in a glove. The sorrier one feels for himself, the worse his depression becomes.

It doesn't matter that his circumstances may not really be all that bad. In his eyes, he can't see how they could be any worse. Self-pity provides a breeding place for depression. It is fertile soil for the seeds of hopelessness.

It is also a very easy trap for us to fall into. When something goes wrong or someone hurts us, it is almost comforting to feel sorry for ourselves. After all, if we don't, who will?

But it doesn't have to be that way.

I will never forget the time I visited an elderly lady dying of cancer. Her daughter had called me to come and visit her. She had watched and listened to my program for many years.

The house was located at the end of a dirt road. When I entered

the house, the daughter pointed me toward a stairway. At the top was a special room which had been built for her mother.

As I opened the door, the smell of cancer almost overwhelmed me. I slowly walked up to the woman's bed. Her body was ravaged with the effects of the disease. Her voice was extremely weak and I could barely hear her. She gave no indication, however, of wanting sympathy.

"I want you to know how much I love your program," she cheerfully told me. "I listen to you on the radio three times a day." I stayed for about an hour before I had to leave. When I drove away, I was so moved that I cried.

I had been facing a lot of pressure in my ministry and was feeling rather down as I drove to visit that lady. But here was a woman confined in a small room, disfigured by cancer and only a few days away from death, yet she felt she had nothing to complain about. She didn't feel sorry for herself. I went away with a new attitude, convinced that if she could be optimistic in such circumstances, I certainly could also.

If we are to break out of the dungeon of depression, one of the first steps is to shatter the bars of self-pity. It is estimated that 80 percent of all illness stems from emotional problems. More than half of the hospital beds in the country are occupied with patients suffering from emotional disorders.

A Battle for the Mind

There is a tremendous battle raging within each and every one of us. It is a battle for the mind, pitting the forces of despair, discouragement, and disappointment against the staunch defenders of human health—joy, peace, and hope. Whether we realize it or not, it is a spiritual warfare commanded on one side by the devil and on the other side by God. Depression is a mighty warrior for the forces of Satan. You and I are the battleground. The apostle Paul makes that very clear in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5: *"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."*

When we are depressed, we often are filled with thoughts of inferiority, hopelessness, and other negative mental attitudes. Christ wants to take those thoughts and cast them from our lives. Christ must be Lord of our thoughts in order to be Lord of our lives.

Solomon said in Proverbs that as a man *"thinketh in his heart, so is he."* What that means is that our thoughts can control us.

If we constantly dwell on negative things, we will be depressed.

That is why Solomon also said in Proverbs 4:23, *"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life."* How, then, do we guard against depression? Well, for one thing, we realize that we have divine weapons.

Since the battle for the mind is not physical, we must use our spiritual weapons. Ephesians 6 describes the spiritual armor of the Christian warrior which includes such things as the *"girdle of truth,"* the *"breastplate of righteousness,"* the *"helmet of salvation,"* *"feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace,"* the *"shield of faith,"* and the *"sword of the Spirit."*

It is the last instrument that I think is the key. The *"sword of the Spirit"* is the Word of God. As we learn to use it against the dark forces of depression, we will gain victory.

Hebrews 4:12 says that the Word is a *"discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."* God's Word will enable you to see clearly what the problem is that has brought on the depression.

Psalms 119:130 also says that *"the entrance of thy words giveth light."* As you read God's Word, it will shed light on your problem. Depression is a spiritual darkness, and no darkness can stand before the light of God.

As you understand that depression is a battle for the control of your mind, then I think you will begin to see the need to escape its hold.

One of the worst things I think one can say to a person who is suffering from depression is, "Snap out of it." Nobody likes to be depressed, and condemning them isn't going to help.

When Elijah was down and out, God didn't say, "You sorry bum, get up from there." Rather, an angel came and gave him some food

and water. He ate, went back to sleep, and then ate again upon awakening the second time.

For most people, depression is something that happens over a period of time. Likewise, for most, its departure will occur gradually.

The Road to Recovery

Applying the following principles will help put the depressed person on the road to recovery.

Start praising God. This can be very difficult for a person who feels totally discouraged. But it is a command that God has given us. *“In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you”* (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

It is God’s will for you to praise Him no matter how you feel. Isaiah 61:3 says we should put on the *“garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.”* Begin praising God and the spirit of heaviness will gradually lift.

Paul and Silas were two disciples who keenly understood that praise and thanksgiving can bring liberty. They had just been arrested, beaten, and thrown into prison with their feet *“fast in the stocks.”* If that had been me, I probably would have been thinking how I could get back at the folks who had done this to me. But these two did something highly unusual.

“At midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God” (Acts 16:25). Immediately, an earthquake opened the prison doors, breaking their chains.

Likewise, praise can break the chains of despair and discouragement that depression brings. The doors of darkness can be thrust open and the radiant love of Jesus Christ made to shine in your heart.

Hope in God. David answered his own question in Psalm 42:11 when he said, *“Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.”* Turn your eyes away from your problems and start putting your hope, your confidence, and your faith in God.

When Paul said he despaired for his life, he too realized his answer was to hope in the Lord *“in whom we trust that he will yet deliver*

us" (2 Corinthians 1:10). Paul knew that God would not let him down. Mankind will always disappoint us, but God won't.

"And hope maketh not ashamed [does not disappoint]; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Romans 5:4). Hope in God, because He loves you and wants to help you.

Think positive. A depressed person is usually filled with negative thoughts. He needs to adopt a positive attitude. Learn to say with Paul, *"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me"* (Philippians 4:13).

God isn't asking you to do everything on your own. Rather, He is saying through His power, you can handle anything. It is the power of Jesus Christ, not self-effort, that will give you victory over depression.

Also, pay attention to Philippians 4:8, which tells us to focus our thoughts on things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, of any virtue, and of any praise. Stop dwelling on the shady side and start thinking on the sunny side. It will make a difference.

Ask for Jesus' joy. Jesus said in John 16:24, *"Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full."*

Ask Christ to put His joy in your life—not some kind of plastic, manufactured emotion, but real, 100 percent pure joy from the Lord. *"These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full"* (John 15:11).

One of the fruits of the Spirit is joy. Ask that its sweetness be released into your life.

Nehemiah said that the *"joy of the LORD is your strength."* God's joy can release newfound vitality and energy into your tired body.

Take on the yoke of Jesus. Many people are depressed because they try to tackle problems they can't handle. The load becomes too heavy, and they find themselves unable to get out from under the pressure and stress.

Jesus did not intend for life to be that way. *"Come unto me, all ye*

that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matthew 11:28-29).

In 1935, my dad and the Humbard family singers were holding a meeting in Keysville, Georgia, in an open-air tabernacle.

Each night a man would come to the meeting in a two-wheel oxcart. One of the oxen was very big and the other was small. They were hooked together with a yoke as they pulled the cart. I noticed that the big one always carried the load and the little one just seemed to be trotting along.

A yoke is a collar for two. Jesus wants to be in the yoke with us. And when He is, He carries the load for us. As the Scripture says, *"For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light"* (Matthew 11:30).

Are you carrying a heavy burden? Get yoked up with Christ and He will carry it for you.

Jesus will not allow you to endure more difficulty than you can bear. It is we who heap burdens upon ourselves. Learn to give your problems to Christ. He will solve them and provide the emotional and physical strength to deal with them until a solution is reached.

Get busy. One of the worst things a depressed person can do is to be inactive. Activity brings relief in many ways. A stagnant pond breeds disease. A flowing river does not.

After Elijah had eaten and drunk, the angel told him that he had a journey to go on. He also had to anoint a king of Syria. A few days later, he was to discover his successor, Elisha, and take him along. God gave Elijah plenty of things to do. Had he let him sit in despair, he would have rotted away.

Get out and get going. You may have to force yourself to do it, but spiritual growth can sometimes be painful. That is exactly what will happen out of your depression. You will see in a new way how God really cares for you and will observe His power to deliver you.

A time of depression can also be a time when you hear the voice of God anew. Elijah was still depressed when he journeyed on to Mount Horeb: *"I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."* Moments later, God spoke to Elijah with a "still, small voice."

You too can hear God, even if it's only a whisper. With God's help, you will be able to say with David: *"He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God"* (Psalm 40:2-3).

How to Rise above Depression

1. Start praising God.
2. Hope in God.
3. Think positive.
4. Ask for Jesus' joy.
5. Take on the yoke of Jesus.
6. Get busy.

Pray This Prayer from Your Heart

Dear Lord, I am discouraged, but I have a new hope that You can break this bondage of depression. So I'm going to look away from myself and all of my problems and I'm going to look to You as my source of joy. I want to thank You, Lord, that I have You to turn to in my time of need, and I want to praise You for all the blessings of life and for all that You have done for me. As I give myself to serve You, I pray that You will fill me with Your joy that is past my own understanding. And I thank You in advance, Lord, for Your freedom from depression. In Your precious name I ask it. Amen.

Promises *from* God's Word

"For his anger endureth but a moment; in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." —Psalm 30:5

"I will be glad and rejoice in thy mercy: for thou hast considered my trouble; thou hast known my soul in adversities." —Psalm 31:7

"The righteous cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles." —Psalm 34:17

"Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God." —Psalm 43:5

"They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." —Psalm 126:5-6

"Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop: but a good word maketh it glad." —Proverbs 12:25

"A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance: but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken." —Proverbs 15:13

"All the days of the afflicted are evil: but he that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast." —Proverbs 15:15

"A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones." —Proverbs 17:22

"Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid: for the Lord JEHOVAH is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation. Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation." —Isaiah 12:2-3

"Therefore the redeemed of the LORD shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away." —Isaiah 51:11

"Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted." —Isaiah 53:4

"A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh." —Ezekiel 36:26

"These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." —John 15:11

"Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God." —Romans 8:26-27

"Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." —2 Corinthians 1:3-4

"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." —2 Corinthians 4:17-18

"Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." —Philippians 1:6

"Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you." —1 Peter 5:7

7 How Does Healing Happen?



"Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth." —3 John 2

Disease plays no favorites. It strikes the rich and the poor, the young and the old, the sinner and the saint. Very early in my ministry, I learned that none of us is immune to the dangers of disease.

I was working as business manager for our family's evangelistic team. Maude Aimee and I were the young parents of a little boy, Rex Jr. It was 1949 and we had been conducting revival services at the 8,000-seat Cadle Tabernacle in Indianapolis. It was a successful meeting with an overflow crowd every night.

Our schedule was very hectic with meetings every night of the week. So by the time we traveled to Detroit, Michigan, to dedicate a new church, we were all very tired.

During that dedication service, Rex Jr. became violently ill. We rushed our son to the doctor to find that he had suffered from a collapsed lung. The doctor then demanded that I take Rex Jr. to a warmer climate. He said that we had no choice, because without warm, dry air our son would die. With that news, the bottom dropped out on me and my family. Here we were traveling all over the country, living out of suitcases, trying to help others. We were giving ourselves to the work of the kingdom. We had seen souls saved and the sick healed. And now my own son was sick, and there was no way I could continue to travel with my son in his condition.

When the Bottom Drops Out

The bottom dropped out and I needed help. So I turned to a friend to help me pray. He was a young preacher in Tulsa, Oklahoma, by

the name of Oral Roberts. We took a step of faith and went to Tulsa to have Oral pray for our son.

Seventeen days later, we gathered up the x-rays taken in Detroit and took our boy to the doctor. He took new x-rays and came out shaking his head in unbelief. "I can't explain it," he told us, "but your son's lungs are perfectly healthy. There is no damage—I can't even find a scar!"

In that experience, God taught me a very dear lesson.

Reach Out

When we face these times of desperate need, God wants us to reach out to others to help us pray. James 5:16 says, *"Pray one for another, that ye may be healed."*

Now I could have said that my prayers were as good as anyone else's, and I don't need anyone to help me pray. And Rex Jr. might not be here today. But I turned to someone for help. I confessed my need, and together we prayed. And God performed a miracle. That's why I established the Prayer Key Family so many years ago. The Prayer Key Family was a body of believers who join their faith and their prayers in our time of need. I had to call upon members of the Prayer Key Family to help me through many difficult times. When we discovered that Suzanna, Rex Jr.'s daughter, had diabetes, what a comfort it was to know we had someone to turn to who would help us pray.

Sickness and disease touch every one of us. When sickness strikes you or a loved one, remember that you can activate your faith by sending your prayer requests to people you know to be prayer warriors and ask them to pray for you.

In addition to prayer, it is important for us to understand what the Bible has to say about the healing of our bodies. *"Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved: for thou art my praise"* (Jeremiah 17:14).

I saw the power of this truth demonstrated in a very sick man who came to my church one Sunday.

At the age of 42, Walden Berg was an old man. His body was wracked by a nervous condition, bad sinuses, ulcers, arthritis, and

bad eyes. Then one day he turned on the radio and our program was on. He became interested in the message of love and salvation that he heard, and he visited our church. He accepted Christ as his personal Saviour and Physician.

The seed had been planted. Walden's physical ailments began to disappear, one by one, as he lived for the Lord. He even stopped wearing eyeglasses, which he had needed for 10 years.

As I write this, Walden is 68 years old, a member of the Board of Trustees at the Cathedral of Tomorrow in Akron, and in good health! Walden Berg found that Christ not only saves our souls, but He heals our bodies and minds, too. *"Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases"* (Psalm 103:3).

God does care about every aspect of our lives: mental, spiritual, and physical. *"Beloved, I wish above all things,"* 3 John 2 states, *"that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth."*

How Does Healing Happen?

The Word of God is crystal clear in describing the miracle of healing. It is a work of Calvary which is received by faith as we pray one for another.

Healing happens as a work of Christ. *"He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed"* (Isaiah 53:5).

Through the eye of prophecy, Isaiah looked to Calvary and described the purpose of the Lord's death on the cross. This prophecy was fulfilled over and over during Christ's ministry on earth. *"When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses"* (Matthew 8:16-17).

The sufferings of Jesus were endured to wash away the transgressions and iniquities from our lives. In addition to washing away our sins, this verse also promises that the blood of Jesus provides for

our healing. Because our precious Lord suffered the pain of the cross, we can be healed! Isaiah 53:5 tells us the blood of Christ provides healing for our bodies in the very same way the Lord provides for the salvation of our souls.

Salvation provides cleansing. *“If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin”* (1 John 1:7). This is our promise: no matter how vile our lives have been, the blood of Jesus washes away every sin.

No matter how serious our bodies are infected with disease, Jesus has the power to cleanse that infection also. On one occasion, a man stricken with leprosy came to Jesus and said, *“If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.”* Jesus’ response to him was, *“I will; be thou clean.”* In Mark 1:42 the result of Jesus’ healing touch is described: *“And as soon as he had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed.”* Just as His blood cleanses our sin, Jesus also cleanses our bodies from disease.

Salvation provides spiritual healing. Luke 4:18 records Jesus’ description of why God sent Him to this earth. He said, *“He hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted.”* In sin, our emotions are torn apart. When we are born again, Jesus puts the pieces of our broken lives back together.

Just as He heals broken hearts, Jesus also heals broken bodies. *“And great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus’ feet; and he healed them”* (Matthew 15:30).

Salvation provides a new creation. *“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new”* (2 Corinthians 5:17). When Jesus cleanses us from a life of sin and heals our broken spirits, He makes us new creatures.

The Creator who made our bodies in the first place can also recreate any part of our body. The first seven verses of John 9 tell the beautiful story of Jesus meeting a man who was born blind. Just

as He made man from the dust of the earth, the Lord anointed this man's eyes with clay and gave him brand new eyes.

In Psalm 103:3 we find the glorious promise, *"Who healeth all thy diseases."* Jesus has made provision for whatever our healing demands. He cleanses infection; He mends our broken bodies; He restores and creates to make us whole.

Healing happens as an act of faith. God has ordained that man reach out in faith in order to receive healing. The little woman who touched the hem of Jesus' garment illustrated this truth. It was certainly the power of Christ that healed this woman. It was, however, because she reached out to Him that Jesus said, *"Thy faith hath made thee whole."*

And the kind of faith that this woman had was an active faith. Mark chapter 5 tells us that this little woman had gone to many physicians to find help. For twelve long years, she had searched for someone to help her. She was helpless, hopeless, and penniless. But she knew that if she could touch the hem of Jesus' garment, she could be made whole.

Who told her to touch the hem of Jesus' garment? It's not recorded anywhere in the Old Testament or the New Testament that we are to touch the hem of His garment in order to be healed. It was the Spirit of God that told her to reach out to Jesus.

She put her faith into action and she did something. And when she touched Him, Jesus knew that healing virtue had gone out of Him. And He said, "Who touched me?" The disciples were amazed that Jesus said this, for people were crowding in all around them. But Jesus knew that someone had reached out to Him in faith.

There are many today who are thronging Jesus. They gather at big churches and attend large crusades.

But until you reach out and touch Him in a personal way, you will never see your need met. But if you will reach out to the Lord, He will say to you what He said to that little woman, *"Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole."*

God will honor a faith that is active. Healing happens as a beautiful combination of Christ working with and in us.

What Hinders Healing?

Because we are so vitally involved in the healing process, there are several essentials that must be in our lives so we do not hinder the healing Christ has provided. The Word of God warns of hindrances.

Sin will hinder our healing. *"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the LORD will not hear me"* (Psalm 66:18). Those who reject the Lord for a life of sin also reject the healing He has provided.

Wrong relationships will hinder our healing. In 1 Peter 3:7 the Word instructs husbands to *"dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered."* Jesus also taught in Mark 11:25-26 that an unforgiving attitude toward others will break our relationship with Him.

Not asking will hinder healing. *"Ye have not, because ye ask not"* (James 4:2). How many suffer today simply because they have not asked Jesus to heal them?

Asking amiss will hinder healing. Many Christians fall into a trap of complaining for not being healed instead of reaching out to Christ in faith. *"Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss"* (James 4:3). Those who want to be healed to draw attention to themselves will cut off the flow of God's power.

Healing happens as we pray for one another. God knew there would be times in our Christian lives when our faith would waver. Just like the man who said, *"I believe, help thou mine unbelief,"* every one of us faces circumstances that weaken our faith. During these times, God has provided for the support of the body of believers to pray for those who are sick. *"Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick"* (James 5:14-15).

Prayer of Faith

God does not give one individual the ability to heal those who are sick. It is the “prayer of faith” that saves the sick. Here, then, is a practical illustration of how the Lord ministers the gift of healing through one believer to the sick.

In other members of the body of Christ, we can find the support and faith we need to be healed. *“Confess your faults [needs] one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much”* (James 5:16). Every week, people would confess their needs by writing their prayer requests to me. The Prayer Key Family then joined me in prayer, which was obedience to God’s Word. As you ask others to pray for you and then reach out to the Lord Jesus Christ in faith, healing can happen to you!

Matthew 18:19-20 tells us, *“Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”*

Why isn’t everyone healed? I wish I could give you the answer to that question, but nobody can know the real answer in this life.

I do know that God wants His children to be in perfect health—just as you want your own children to be. But God sees beyond today, and He alone knows what is best for us in the light of eternity.

And when we get to heaven, we will all have perfect bodies. Revelation describes what it will be like: *“And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away”* (Revelation 22:1-2; 21:4).

How to Receive Healing

1. **Take your eyes off your sickness and look at your Healer.**
2. **Realize that God loves you and wants His best for you.**
3. **Remember the rules:**
 - a. Prayer only works for those whose hearts are pure.
 - b. Prayer only works when it's focused on God.
 - c. Prayer only works when you believe it will work
4. **Pray for others.** James 5:16 tells you the secret to receiving healing for yourself: pray for someone else!
5. **Ask others to pray for you.**
6. **Praise God.** Praise is not optional; the Bible clearly tells us we are to praise God. And praise has the added benefit of focusing our attention on the healing instead of the sickness. As we lift our hearts in praise to God, our healing should begin, for *"a merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones"* (Proverbs 17:22). Praise to God shows we really believe we shall receive. It is faith in action.

Pray This Prayer from Your Heart

Dear Lord, I bring my sick body to You. And in the name of Jesus I ask You to heal me. I confess all my faults to You and ask for Your complete forgiveness. I pray, Lord, that Your will shall be done in my life and I trust You for the very best for me. I know, Lord, that You created me in Your own image and that You have the power to heal my body. So I want to praise You for who You are and for loving me. You are my heavenly Father, and I know You will take care of me. Thank You, Jesus. I love You. Amen.

Promises *from* God's Word

"If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee." —Exodus 15:26

"Ye shall serve the LORD your God, and he shall bless thy bread, and thy water; and I will take sickness away from the midst of thee." —Exodus 23:25

"The LORD will take away from thee all sickness, and will put none of the evil diseases of Egypt, which thou knowest, upon thee; but will lay them upon all them hate thee." —Deuteronomy 7:15

*"God is my strength and power; and he maketh my way perfect."
—2 Samuel 22:33*

"O LORD my God, I cried unto thee, and thou hast healed me." —Psalm 30:2

*"Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases."
—Psalm 103:3*

"He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions." —Psalm 107:20

*"This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me."
—Psalm 119:50*

"My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments; for length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee." —Proverbs 3:1-2

"My son, attend to my words; incline thine ear unto my saying. Let them not depart from thine eyes; keep them in the midst of thine heart. For they are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh." —Proverbs 4:20-22

"He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that 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." —Isaiah 40:29-31

"He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." —Isaiah 53:5

"Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved: for thou art my praise." —Jeremiah 17:14

"I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the LORD; because they called thee an Outcast, saying, This is Zion, whom no man seeketh after." —Jeremiah 30:17

"Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people." —Matthew 9:35

"The whole multitude sought to touch him: for there went virtue out of him, and healed them all." —Luke 6:19

"The people, when they knew it, followed him: and he received them, and spake unto them of the kingdom of God, and healed them that had need of healing." —Luke 9:11

"There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one." —Acts 5:16

"Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." —James 5:14-16

"Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we,

being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.” —1 Peter 2:24

“Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.” —3 John 2

8 Alone but Not Lonely



"I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

—Hebrews 13:5

During World War II, a young bride from the East followed her husband to an army camp on the edge of the California desert. Living conditions were primitive at best, and he had advised against it, but she wanted to be with him. The only housing they could find was a run-down shack near an Indian village. The day-time heat was unbearable—115 degrees in the shade. The wind blew constantly, spreading dust and sand all over everything. The days were long and boring. Her only neighbors were the Indians, none of whom spoke English.

When her husband was ordered farther into the desert for two weeks of maneuvers, loneliness and the wretched living conditions got the best of her. She wrote to her mother that she was coming home—she just couldn't take any more. In a short time, she received a reply which included these two lines:

Two men looked out from prison bars,
One saw mud, the other saw stars.

She read the lines over and over and began to feel ashamed of herself. And she didn't really want to leave her husband. All right, she'd look for the stars.

In the following days, she set out to make friends with the Indians. She asked them to teach her weaving and pottery. At first they were distant, but when they saw her interest was genuine, they returned her friendship. She became fascinated with their culture, history—everything about them.

She began to study the desert as well, and soon it, too, changed from a desolate, forbidding place to a marvelous thing of beauty. She had her mother send some books. She studied the forms of the cacti, the yuccas, and the Joshua trees. She collected seashells that had been left there when the sands had been an ocean floor. Later, she became such an expert on the area that she wrote a book about it.

Loneliness

Like this young bride, many of us have experienced the despair and discouragement that loneliness brings. It can be a physical loneliness when we are geographically away from family or friends. But more often than not, it is an emotional kind of loneliness—the feeling of isolation even in the midst of teeming crowds and masses.

Our society has done much to alleviate the first kind. Jet planes can whisk us from the Pacific to the Atlantic in a matter of a few hours. Within seconds, a simple dial of the telephone can put us in touch with a friend anywhere in the world. Television sets and radios inhabit the dens and living rooms of just about everybody, keeping even the infirmed and elderly company.

Just the sheer number of people makes it hard for us to be physically isolated. It took 5,830 years for the earth to reach 1 billion population, 100 more years to reach 2 billion, 32 more to reach 3 billion, and only 10 more to reach 4 billion.

Yet in this age of instant companionship and hordes of people, there are probably more people suffering from loneliness than ever before. I have walked down the streets of some of our nation's largest cities, packed with the masses of humanity, and seen hundreds of desperately lonely looking people.

Loneliness afflicts us all—young and old, men and women. Sometimes we think it is only the elderly or the destitute who suffer, but the executive on the corporate rise and the millionaire in the accumulation of his riches are also victims.

I believe there are millions who are captives of loneliness, imprisoned by the bars of uselessness, rejection, and inferiority. Hope, joy, and love are bound up in that prison, unable to escape and bring relief.

Uselessness

One factor that causes so many to sink into loneliness is the feeling of uselessness. We live in a world where computers not only do things for us but also think for us, making the skilled use of human hands and minds expendable. The world seems to move along quite well with or without us. Many of us no longer feel as if we significantly contribute to the good of society.

In addition, if we are housewives or common laborers, we often fail to see such occupations as useful to anyone.

A lady called me one day in my office and said that she just didn't have the money to support the ministry anymore. She said she watched the program faithfully, but was getting too old and feeble and too low on finances to be of any help anymore. She felt useless.

I asked her if she could still pray. "Why, yes, I can still do that," she responded.

"Well then," I told her, "there is something you can do. I want you to pray for me every day. I want you to ask God to direct me and guide me in all my ways. Will you do that?"

"Yes, I will."

It is strange that we do not think of praying as being very useful.

Yet prayer is the foundation of all Christian work and it is the prayer warrior who is the mightiest member of God's army on earth. This spiritual work has been all but lost in the world's preoccupation with material or professional gains.

Peter was one of the most courageous of the disciples. He was big, rough, and burly. He was a fisherman. When Jesus asked Peter to follow Him, Peter fell down before the Lord and said, "*Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O, Lord.*"

I imagine that Peter felt useless to such a man as Jesus. After all, here was a man who had just told Peter where to put his nets and, lo and behold, he hauled in such a catch that the nets began to break. How could a simple-minded, very unprofessional man like Peter ever help such a man?

Peter wasn't alone. The first four apostles Jesus called were local fishermen. No doubt, they felt useless to accomplish such a mighty work with their limited background and training.

But Jesus called them, and they obeyed.

Jesus has called us to tell the world about His salvation: *“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations”* (Matthew 28:19). He has chosen us to carry out His will on the earth: *“Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit”* (John 15:16).

Never feel useless in the kingdom of God. You may not be a pastor, or evangelist, or teacher, or leader, but God has called you to do something for Him. The world may not appreciate you, but your heavenly Father does. Like that lady who called me, maybe all you can do is pray. If you do that, you are priceless in God’s eyes.

Rejection

Nearly everyone has felt rejected at some point in their life. Maybe a friend or a neighbor or family member or business associate has turned their back on you. Such rejection is a major cause of loneliness because many of us simply withdraw when we are faced with a negative situation or relationship.

There are always going to be some negative elements in life. Everything isn’t always going to be cheery. There are going to be some people who like you no matter what you do, and some people who don’t like you no matter what you do.

I remember feeling rejected years ago when I was traveling with my father and mother, setting up crusades and handling advance promotion. I was in Birmingham, Alabama, attempting to line up a place and date for a rally. Everywhere I went, I was turned down. Station managers and newspapers didn’t want to talk about helping promote the crusade.

I went back to my hotel room at night and looked out at the lights of the city. “Nobody wants to hear anything about God or the Bible or Christianity,” I thought sadly to myself. “They’re not interested in anything I have to say.” I felt alone and rejected. But I persisted, and in the end, we had a great crusade.

Joseph must have felt rejected, too. His brothers didn’t like him a bit because they thought their father favored him too much. They first thought they might kill him, but were persuaded to put him in a pit. A caravan of wandering Ishmaelites came by and they decided

to sell Joseph to them. Don't you think Joseph felt absolutely rejected as he rode a camel to a foreign land?

Jesus himself was rejected. The very crowd that laid palm branches in his path upon His arrival to Jerusalem shouted "Crucify Him" only a few days later. Isaiah said Jesus was "*despised and rejected of men*" (Isaiah 53:3).

The answer to rejection, however, is not to withdraw. Rather, it is to persevere and move ahead. I kept at it in Birmingham. Joseph kept his head up and went on to become a ruler of Egypt, entrusted with its vast riches. Jesus, although totally spurned by those He came to save, "*endured the cross*" (Hebrews 12:2).

Do not let rejection make you the captive of loneliness. Get up and move on.

Inferiority

Someone once told me he had an inferiority complex until he found out that he really was inferior!

Seriously, though, inferiority is no laughing matter. Millions suffer the agony of feeling like second-rate human beings.

They drop out of many activities because they feel they're not good enough. The businessman, because he is not as bright as his associates, never feels like he is a part of his job. The child, because he isn't as good a ballplayer as the neighbor, plays in his yard alone. The housewife, because she doesn't have pretty dresses to wear, makes sure she has an excuse for not attending any social gatherings, and instead sits alone in her living room. We isolate ourselves, because we don't feel good enough that others would want to be with us.

Did you know that the prophet Jeremiah had an inferiority complex? God told him that he was appointed as a prophet. Ordinarily, this should have excited Jeremiah as never before. He should have been on cloud nine. But look at his response:

"Ah, LORD God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child" (Jeremiah 1:6). Poor Jeremiah. He just wasn't good enough for God. "God, I'm just a little kid, don't ask me to do a man's job. Go get somebody else."

You know what God told Jeremiah? *"Say not, I am a child: for*

thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak." In other words, Jeremiah, quit whining. Quit feeling inferior. Don't tell me you can't, because I say you can. You just do what I tell you.

That's a good prescription for you, too. Don't isolate yourself from the rest of the world because you don't think you measure up to them.

Inferiority comes mainly because we compare ourselves with others. When Jeremiah said he couldn't speak, he wasn't implying he had laryngitis. What he meant was that surely God could find a better public speaker than he. Jeremiah was comparing himself with others.

In Jeremiah 1:5 God told Jeremiah, *"Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations."*

God made you, and God doesn't make junk. That in itself ought to cause you to stop feeling inferior. You can't compare yourself to anybody, because you're unique. God has a special plan for you that nobody else can accomplish.

Don't be like Jeremiah and say you can't. Be like Isaiah and say, *"Here am I; send me"* (Isaiah 6:8).

While we are not to spend our lives wasting away with loneliness, there are times when, due to circumstances, we find ourselves alone. Perhaps we are confined to a bed during an illness, or maybe we've moved ahead of our family into a new job and town.

Fighting Loneliness

Rather than wallow in the despair that loneliness can bring, learn to invest that time.

Plant the seeds of prayer, meditation, Bible study, and devotion.

Respond positively to the circumstances that have put you in this isolated condition.

The apostle John had great insight into the kingdom of God. Revelation, perhaps his greatest book, was written under austere conditions.

As an old man, he was banished to the Isle of Patmos because

of his testimony to the lordship of Christ. Patmos was a barren, rocky isle, and John probably lived in solitude within the confines of a dark, damp cave.

It was a perfect setting in which loneliness could breed. Not only was he physically alone, but the work he had devoted his life to now seemed over. It would have been easy for John to sit and mope over his fate. But that wasn't the case. The Isle of Patmos is where John saw into the heavens and received the visions for the book of Revelation. It is a glorious book, full of the majesty of God as well as His terrible judgments upon mankind. John used his loneliness productively for the kingdom of God.

Paul is one of the greatest Bible heroes of all. His missionary journeys and witness for the gospel of Christ were filled with danger and excitement. He endured a tremendous amount of affliction, yet still bulldozed on with the good news of Jesus Christ.

His last recorded words are found in 2 Timothy. There is the obvious tone of loneliness. He is in jail, his friends have deserted him, and he is probably awaiting execution.

It is a sad and lonely time in the life of this great apostle: *"At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear"* (2 Timothy 4:16-17).

Yet Paul invested his time in writing this letter to Timothy, a letter that of course is part of our Bible today and a very important one at that. Had Paul brooded to the point of inaction, we would be without this great book today.

Be productive. Both Paul and John used their times of loneliness in a productive manner.

Here is yet another opportunity to activate your faith. You must do likewise. If you let loneliness get the best of you, then you thwart the purposes God has in store for you.

Joshua was the man God called to lead the children of Israel into the promised land. As Moses' understudy, he had journeyed with the Israelites for more than 40 years in the wilderness. But

now, he was chosen by God to accomplish something that even mighty Moses couldn't do. It is estimated that there were several million people that actually were with Joshua. That's quite a throng to guide.

I imagine that Joshua felt awfully alone. The task he had been assigned was a staggering one. He must have thought to himself, "How can I, one man, ever lead such a vast number of people?"

To encourage Joshua and let him know that he wasn't alone, God spoke the following words in Joshua 1:9: *"Be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest."*

God speaks the same words to us today.

God is with us no matter where we go, what we do, or whatever our circumstances may be. So long as we know and understand that, we will never be truly alone. God is always at our side.

He also told Joshua, *"As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee"* (Joshua 1:5). That is also God's promise to us today. He will not fail or leave us. He will stand with us through the good times and the bad times. *"For I am the LORD, I change not"* (Malachi 3:6).

Actually, there's no way we can escape from God. It's impossible. *"Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or wither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there"* (Psalm 139:7-8).

There is no dark corner on earth that God does not already inhabit.

Acknowledge God's presence in your life. Turn to Him for comfort. He is constantly with you, 24 hours a day. *"I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee,"* Hebrews 13:5 tells us.

God's Word is your greatest source of comfort in your time of loneliness. As you read your Bible, you will experience the presence of God. For in no other way can you communicate with God as directly as you can through His Word.

At the end of this chapter, I've included some special promises for you when you feel alone. These are promises that God placed in

His Word, so that in those times that you are alone, you don't have to be lonely. You can hear the voice of God through His precious Word.

In addition to these promises, you can enjoy fellowship with the Lord by reading other portions of Scripture. As you read the Gospels, the Holy Spirit will bring the life of Christ real to your heart. I have often experienced what it would be like living during Jesus' day simply by reading from Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

As you read the remainder of the New Testament, you will see how the Lord Jesus Christ became personally involved in the affairs of men.

He sent His Holy Spirit to be our Comforter and to stand beside us. He is not a God who lived on this earth and went away never to return. As you will read in the Word of God, *"And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever"* (John 14:16). And as you read all of the New Testament promises, you will experience the power of the Holy Spirit comforting you.

The Old Testament, too, can bring you great comfort. Beginning with the story of Creation, you can read how Adam and Eve had such a close relationship with God. As you read through the history of Israel, you will see again that even in times of great loneliness, men and women of God could communicate with Him.

And then, of course, there is that great book of Psalms. I don't believe there is any other book in the Bible that will help you when you feel lonely more than the book of Psalms. Psalms is alive with the love of God, and you will experience that love as you worship Him through reading these precious passages.

Remember, God has given you the Bible as His Word. It is a love letter from the Lord to you. The whole sum of the Bible can be wrapped up by saying, "God loves you." He has preserved His Word down through the years so that you never have to be lonely again. The Holy Spirit will comfort you through His Word.

Jesus is our Friend. If I were to ask who Jesus is, I would probably get the following answers. "He is my Saviour." "He is my Lord." "He is my Master." "He is my King." Those are all true, but Jesus is also someone else. He is our Friend: *"Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command*

you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends” (John 15:14-15).

What are some characteristics of a friend? Well, he is there when you need him, he is kind, he doesn’t condemn or criticize you, he is loving and caring. Think of Jesus in the same manner. See Him as your best Friend.

Learn to talk to Jesus as a friend. You don’t have to be high and mighty in your praying. You can be reverent, but casual. He will always be there to listen.

Whatever the reason for your loneliness, your friend Jesus wants to help and assist you. As you would with any other friend, invite Him into your life. He will bring sunshine, hope, and promise.

How to Stay on Top When You Feel Lonely

1. Have the right relationship with Jesus.
2. See yourself as useful to God.
3. Know that God has a plan for your life.
4. Make your loneliness profitable.
5. Know that God is always with you.
6. Make Jesus your best Friend.

Pray This Prayer from Your Heart

Dear Jesus, I know that You are with me, and I want to thank You for being my Friend. Because of You, Lord, I am never alone. I know that You will never leave me nor forsake me. Lord, I want to grow closer to You than I have ever been before. Make Yourself known to me as I read Your Word. Draw closer to me as I draw closer to You through prayer. And help me, Lord, to grow into Your very image. In Your precious name I pray. Amen.

Promises *from* God’s Word

“Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.” —Deuteronomy 31:6

"The LORD also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble. And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee: for thou, LORD, hast not forsaken them that seek thee." —Psalm 9:9-10

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." —Psalm 46:1

"I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts." —Psalm 119:63

"And there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother." —Proverbs 18:24

"Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." —Isaiah 41:10

"Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me." —Isaiah 49:15-16

"The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him." —Nahum 1:7

"Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen." —Matthew 28:20

"I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you." —John 14:18

"This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth; but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard

of my Father I have made known unto you. Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain; that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.” —John 15:12-16

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” —Romans 8:35, 38-39

“God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.” —1 Corinthians 1:9

“Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” —Hebrews 13:5

“Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.” —1 Peter 5:7

9 Thinking Right



*"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace,
whose mind is stayed on thee." —Isaiah 26:3*

Termites work in the dark. They cannot stand the light. They work quietly and constantly, burying themselves deeper and deeper in the wood of your walls and floors. If you occasionally check around your home, you will find the tell-tale signs that termites are at work, and you can stop them. If you don't, one day soon the floor may fall out from under you. You can have termites of your mind, too! They work quietly and constantly in the dark recesses of your heart. They may be so well hidden that you and you alone know at first that they are there, but sooner or later, they will eat away at your very foundation. The bottom will fall out, and then everyone will know they are there. I am talking about your thoughts, the termites of your mind.

There is an old legend that the devil was thrown into bankruptcy and had to hold a sale to help satisfy his debts. Out of all his tools, his creditors told him he could keep only one. The one tool he selected was the wedge of negative thinking. His creditors asked him why he liked that tool better than all the rest, and the devil explained, "That is because this is the one tool I can use when all others fail. Let me get that little wedge into a man's consciousness, and it opens everything else. That wedge has opened more doors for me than all other weapons combined."

Someone has said, "Thought is action in rehearsal." Since that is true, you must quickly realize that an evil thought entertained becomes an evil deed; an evil deed becomes a sin; and sin separates a man from his God.

Controlling Thoughts

On the other hand, a right thought entertained becomes a right deed; and a right deed then helps bring a man to his God. In writing about the deeds of wicked men, Solomon said in Proverbs 23:7, *"For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he."* Jesus also warned about the importance of our thoughts when He said in Matthew 12:34, *"For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh."* That abundance can be good or it can be bad, depending entirely on you.

Several years ago, Lucien and Sam were boyhood chums in Kentucky. They grew up, and each went his separate way. Lucien did well and served the State of Kentucky "beyond the call of duty," so much so that he was promised that if there was ever anything the State could do for him, all he had to do was ask.

One day Lucien heard that his friend Sam was in the penitentiary and had eight more years to serve. Lucien went to the warden and asked permission to talk to Sam. The warden agreed to let them visit alone in his office. They talked for nearly two hours. By the time the visit was over, the men were laughing about the experiences they shared in their youth. A month later, Lucien went to see the governor of the state. He told the governor, "I have not been able to sleep. Sam, my boyhood buddy, is in prison. He was a good boy, Governor, and since you told me that if there was anything the State of Kentucky could do for me just to name it, I have come to ask you to pardon Sam. I'll take him into my business with me and into my home because he has no family and I have a big house."

The governor promised to look into the matter. A week later he sent for Lucien. When Lucien arrived at the governor's office, the governor said, "Here is the pardon you requested for Sam, but it is yours under one condition. That condition is that you sit down in the warden's office and talk with Sam for two more hours. Then if you think you should give it to him, take Sam home with you. I'll parole him to you."

Lucien hurried to the penitentiary and told the warden what had happened. The warden had Sam brought to his office, and Sam and Lucien began to visit. "Sam," Lucien began, "when you get out of here, will you go into business with me? If you will, I might even get you out of here sooner than you expect."

Sam got up and walked around the office awhile, looked out the window, then finally said, "I don't believe I could accept that invitation. I've got something to do when I get out of here, something very important, and I'm going to do it just as soon as I get out of this place."

"What is it, Sam?" Lucien anxiously asked. Sam turned around and faced Lucien. Fire glinted in his eyes, hatred filled his whole face and being as he said, "I'm going to get two men together—the judge who sent me here and one witness—and I'm going to kill both of them with my bare hands."

Within moments, Lucien ended the visit and left the warden's office. As he walked away, he tore up the pardon.

You can be held captive or you can be set free by your thoughts!

That is a truth Job learned way back in the Old Testament when he wrote in Job 3:25, "*For the thing which I greatly feared is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me.*" Job's thoughts were not evil thoughts. They were negative thoughts, and he let himself feed on them until he began to expect the thing he feared to happen to him. And the very thing he feared did happen.

Fear is believing in reverse. It believes that only bad things will happen.

Sometimes we unconsciously train ourselves to think from the negative side of things instead of thinking from the positive side.

We speak of a drinking glass as being *half empty* when we could just as easily think of it as being *half full*. We think of a day as being *partly cloudy* when we could just as easily think of it as *partly sunny*. We call it a *stop light* when we could just as easily call it a *go light*, or, plainly, a *traffic light*.

Our world is full of things which are sordid, shabby, and soiled. But there are still a great many things of beauty and things of hope in our world. We can let our minds get into such a state that it soils everything we think about and everything we touch. Like Lucien's friend Sam, we get so intent upon carrying out a grudge and so eaten up by hatred that we would rather be kept in prison than be set free. Remember, hatred is like acid. It does more harm to the one in whom it is stored than to the one on whom it is poured.

What you see in your mind and what you let your mind feed on is what you can expect. Or as someone has said, “You can’t hit a star if you are shooting down a well.” It is when you put self-discipline to work on your thoughts that you can expect to keep on top when the bottom falls out of your life.

The apostle Paul put it this way in Philippians 4:8, *“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.”*

One of the best ways to discipline your thoughts and do the very thing Paul was talking about is to fill your heart and mind with God’s Word. It is like David wrote in Psalm 119:11, *“Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.”*

Today’s “possibility thinking” begins not with just good, positive thoughts; it comes with clear thoughts based on God’s Word. Jesus Christ is the Way. He is the Truth. He is the Light; and He is also the Life. Many so-called successful people in today’s world are successful failures because they have left God out of their thought life and their personal life. Materially, they are great successes; spiritually they are failures.

Spiritual Visions

When you give your life to Jesus Christ and discipline your thinking, it is then you can expect God to illumine your thoughts with the “impossible dreams” that others talk about. It is during such times that God can give you a mental concept, or maybe I should call it a spiritual vision, like He first gave me for this worldwide ministry.

That is what began taking place when I watched that television set in the display window of O’Neil’s department store in downtown Akron back in 1952. The Lord spoke to me and said, “That’s a powerful tool and it ought to be used to spread the gospel.” It was then that I decided to stay in Akron, build a large church, go on television, and spread the gospel by television around the world.

As I stood there watching a baseball game on that television set, I could have merely seen a game, but in my mind I saw a worldwide min-

istry. I saw a round building with a big dome on it representing the whole world. I saw that dome being supported by 48 posts representing the 48 states we had then in the United States. I saw Sunday school rooms all around that building. I saw in my mind and knew in my heart that God wanted me to build that church. He wanted me to go on television across the United States and Canada, and then around the world to spread the good news of God's love.

Call it positive thinking or call it a vision. It started as a thought within my mind. Of course, everyone else did not share that thought or that vision at first. Getting from that vision to the reality of what became the Cathedral of Tomorrow and the Rex Humbard worldwide television ministry was not easy.

Many predicted the church would never be built. Many tried to keep it from being built. There were even those who tried to destroy it after it was built.

But when God plants a positive thought in your heart and turns that thought into a burning vision for His glory, it will eat at you until you see it come to pass. That's what happened during one of the French revolutions. A group of French Republicans set up a barricade to defend themselves against the rebels. Night was falling when a young girl bearing a torch leaped over the barrier crying, "Forward!" The rebel soldiers opened fire, and the girl fell dead.

A young man, Frederic Auguste Bartholdi, saw the girl and was dumbfounded. From that day on, he saw that young girl with the torch, even though he never knew her name, as the symbol of liberty. Bartholdi became a great artist in the late 19th century. He was fascinated by the great structures of the pyramids in Egypt and in other places.

In 1865, Bartholdi met a man who was an ardent admirer of the United States and its model democracy. The man wanted France to give the United States some spectacular tribute to honor its first century of independence in 1876.

It was then that Bartholdi realized that the image he saw within his mind of the girl with the torch could become a reality, and he worked from that day forward until it was finished. His vision became a reality, and it still stands today, recognized all over the world as the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor.

Looking Forward

What do your thoughts have to do with your future? Everything! But let me emphasize that what you think must agree with what God says in His Holy Word, the Bible. When God says, "Thou shalt..." we better do it. When God says, "Thou shalt not..." we better not do it.

I have heard of people saying they did some rather amazing things because "a voice" told them to do it. Let me assure you, God will never, ever tell you to do anything which contradicts or disagrees with what He has said in His Word.

We have all read in our newspapers where someone has been killed, and the murderer claims that God told him to do it. But God didn't tell him, because murder is contrary to the Bible.

There are two spirits: God's Spirit and the devil's spirit. And when your mind is trying to tell you something that's contrary to the Word, then it's the devil.

If you ever hear a voice, see a vision, have a dream, or receive a revelation of any kind that does not agree 100 percent with the Bible, you can be absolutely positive it is *not* from God and you need to immediately reject it and put it out of your mind.

God is never the author of confusion (see 1 Corinthians 14:33). God is always the giver of peace. One of the most wonderful promises of the Bible is Isaiah 26:3, "*Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.*" When you trust in God and commit your thoughts to Him, He has promised to keep you in perfect peace.

You do not have to live in constant turmoil. Even in the midst of strife, or in the depths of darkness, you can have a peace that passes all understanding (see Philippians 4:7).

Which way are you looking: backward or forward? What outlook do you have? Robert Louis Stevenson, author of *Treasure Island* and other famous books, was very sick most of his life. A nurse constantly cared for him. One evening when he was quite young, the nurse entered his sick-room and found him staring out a window into the gathering darkness.

"Why are you staring out the window like this?" she scolded him. "There's nothing for you to see out there in the darkness."

"Oh, but you're wrong," he confidently responded. "There's

something wonderful out there. I see a man coming down the street punching holes in the darkness.”

Quickly the nurse looked out the window to see what strange thing the child had seen. There she saw the old lamplighter coming down the street, lighting the gas street lights. Each time he lighted one, sure enough, he punched another hole in the darkness.

You can punch holes in the darkness of your thoughts by turning your negative thoughts into positive, uplifting ones.

The psalmist David wrote in Psalm 139:1,2: *“O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my down sitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off.”*

God knows every thought, intent, and motive of your mind. It never has and never can be hidden from Him. Ask Him to help you think right.

How to Think Right

- 1. Be sure your heart is right with God.** He has offered full forgiveness and cleansing, just for the asking.
- 2. Be sure you are at peace with yourself, your family, and your fellow man.** If you feed on self-pity, real or imagined slights from others, old, painful memories, bitter grudges, and ill will of any kind, they will end up doing more damage to you than to anyone else. Get your heart right and be at peace with everyone else.
- 3. Be sure your thought life is under control.** Discipline what you let yourself think, what you let yourself listen to, what you let yourself watch, and what you let yourself read. Someone has said, “You can’t keep the birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from nesting in your hair.” You may not be able to keep negative thoughts from coming up, but you do not have to entertain them and let them remain.
- 4. Be sure all hatred and malice is removed from your life and cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ.** Harboring hatred in your heart is like ignoring the termites in your woodwork. The only

safe cure is to expose that hatred to the exterminator and let God handle it once and for all.

5. Be sure you are looking on the positive side of life. Remember the “whatsoevers” of Philippians 4:8, and think on those things.

Pray This Prayer from Your Heart

Dear Lord Jesus, since You know what I have been thinking down deep within my heart, and since You know the motives behind those thoughts, I can only ask You to forgive me for my wrong thinking. Cleanse my thoughts, take away all trace of hatred, remove any misgivings and grudges, take away my worry, and give me perfect peace within my heart. I accept Your cleansing of my mind and I also accept the peace You give me from this moment on. Please fill my heart and my mind with Your goodness and Your love. Thank You, Lord Jesus, for giving me Your Word to think about and to guide my thoughts every day. Amen.

Promises *from* God's Word

“Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil.” —Psalm 37:8

“Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” —Psalm 139:23-24

“For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he: Eat and drink, saith he to thee; but his heart is not with thee.” —Proverbs 23:7

“Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools.” —Ecclesiastes 7:9

“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.” —Isaiah 26:3

"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." —Isaiah 55:7

"O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." —Matthew 12:34

"Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." —2 Corinthians 10:5

"And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." —Ephesians 4:23-24

"Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." —Ephesians 4:31-32

"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." —Philippians 4:8

"Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." —1 Peter 2:1-2

"Herein is our hue made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love." —1 John 4:17-18

10 Knowing God's Will



"In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." —Proverbs 3:6

If there's one question that I have heard more than any other during my nearly 30 years with this ministry, it's, "How can I know God's will for my life?"

The housewife wants to know if it's God's will for her to go back to work.

The husband wants to know if it's God's will for him to change careers at such a late age.

The teenager wants to know if God really cares about who she is dating or if God is interested in her choice of college.

Most of us say, "If we could only hear from God on this matter, we would do just as He says." Matters seem to get so complex and complicated that we long to hear a simple audible voice from God directing us to the correct course of action. Yet, since that is not always the way God communicates with us, many grope along blindly, like playing the pin the tail on the donkey game.

But God definitely wants you not only to be aware, but sure of His guidance in your life. Colossians 1:9 tells us to be *"filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding."* Romans 12:2 says, *"Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."*

And Proverbs 3:5-6 instructs us to *"trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."*

One of the hallmarks of the early Christians was that they received guidance from God. They experienced it on a daily basis.

Discerning God's Will

I believe that discerning God's will should also be a distinguishing characteristic of today's Christian. I am convinced that it should not be something that we receive once in a while, but recognize and obey on a consistent basis.

God is our Guide. I'm not much of an outdoorsman, but I have had occasion to do some hunting. I vividly remember one particular time when my sons and I were invited to go to Montana to hunt elk.

The first morning we arrived, we met the man who would be our guide. He had lived in this rugged part of the country for his entire life. There was hardly a stream or a field or mountain that he didn't know.

"This is the man you stick with," our host told us. "He will lead you to the best places to find elk. Where he tells you to go, you go. He knows this country like the back of his hand." The next morning we began.

A few miles out from the lodge, he pointed up to a towering mountain ahead of us. "That's where we find elk," he said. We started the climb, and after an hour or so I was plenty tired. The thought entered my head to sit down and rest a bit while the others went on. Then I remembered what my host had said.

"There's been a lot of folks who have gone out on their own and never came back," he had related. "They think they know their way around. Unfortunately, they don't. In winter, we find some of them frozen stiff, miles from any cabin or town. Those who do make it back swear they'll never go out without a guide again."

I didn't have to think too long. I stayed close the entire trip. Even though the trail was strewn with rocks and fallen trees, I didn't dare strike out on my own. I put my confidence in our guide, since he was most familiar with the territory.

On our way back down the mountain, we came to a fork in the trail. The guide started down the right-hand path, but I was sure we had come up on the left fork. "Hey," I called out, "we're going the wrong way."

"Nope," the guide shot back. "This is the way we came." Needless to say, I took his word for it. Within a few hours, we were safely back in camp.

It is much the same in trying to distinguish God's will. Many, confident in their judgment, blaze their own trails. Often, like those solitary hunters, they wind up lost and confused.

We must recognize that this is God's territory. *"The earth is the LORD's,"* Psalm 24:1 tells us.

Once we are born again, we enter into a new realm, a new dimension for living. It is virgin land for us. We are strangers to it, and using only our physical faculties such as logic and reasoning will certainly get us lost.

Jesus Christ, however, has already chartered our course. *"The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD"* (Psalm 37:23). He is the only one who can direct us in the right path. *"For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death"* (Psalm 48:14).

Jesus is our infallible Guide in the Christian life. He knows which decisions will be for our benefit and which will be to our detriment. He knows which paths will lead us into a life of fulfillment and which paths will lead to frustration and despair.

If God can guide the birds, how much more does He care about us and give us direction in our lives. The Canadian goose somehow has the knowledge that it's going to get cold and the snow is going to come. He has a built-in compass so that he knows where south is, he knows the time to go, and he knows where to go. He doesn't go north, east, or west—he goes south. And God gave that instinct to that bird.

That same God tells us to acknowledge Him in all our ways and He will direct our path. He's not going to direct us north when it's getting cold; He's going to direct us south. We're going to know when to go. We're going to know where to go.

How to Know God's Will

Like I depended on that Montana hunting guide, so must we depend on the Saviour to steer us straight on this spiritual pilgrimage. As we learn to rightly discern His will in every situation, we will avoid many unnecessary detours that most of us take. But how do we receive His direction?

Be sensitive to His voice. One of the most important principles in learning to know God's will is becoming sensitive to His voice. When my dad was a boy, there wasn't any such thing as an automobile. He traveled some by buggy, but primarily by horseback. In fact, a good horse was a very important asset back in those days.

Some of the horses were difficult to manage. They seemed to have a mind of their own, always straining at the bit, seeking to go their own way. A good horse, though, obeyed at the mere touch of the reins, turning either left or right according to the side the reins were placed on.

Similarly, we are to be sensitive to the voice of God in our lives. Like the psalmist, we are to proclaim, *"I will hear what God the LORD will speak"* (Psalm 85:8). We need to be so sensitive, in fact, that we can declare, *"And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left"* (Isaiah 30:21).

When Jesus walked the earth, He said, *"The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works."*

Jesus received His guidance from within.

Discern God's will from the impressions of an indwelling Spirit, since we are now the temple of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 8:29 we read, *"Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot."* I don't believe that Philip heard an audible voice from God. I do believe that he heard the Holy Spirit within telling him what he should do.

Haven't we all experienced an inward voice gently trying to tell us something? "I want you to go and visit with the sick lady down the street," the Spirit may say. "On the way home today, why don't you stop and buy your wife a rose. She's had a tough day and she needs some encouragement," He may suggest.

Unfortunately, those times seem few and far between. Most of us have a knack of ignoring that indwelling voice. We say, "Oh well, I'll see that lady next week," or, "There's not a flower store on the way to the house and I don't have time to look for one."

But in doing so, we effectively quench the Holy Spirit's desire to guide our lives. Continued disobedience hardens us to God's voice and makes guidance increasingly difficult.

Be still. If you throw a rock in a pond, it is hard to see your reflection. But if that pond is still, then you can see yourself in it.

As long as our lives are rippling with chaos and confusion, it is hard to distinguish God's will. But when we quiet ourselves before the Almighty, we can more easily see His design for our lives.

"Be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10). That's a tough thing to do in a world where clamor and noise are a very real part of our daily existence. Cars zoom, trucks rumble, people yell, music vibrates, televisions blare, and jackhammers thunder.

Yet God tells us that in the midst of this hustle and bustle we must get inwardly still to hear Him.

It is essential in determining God's will that we become silent and listen. Why? Because when God speaks, He does not scream to be heard above the din and racket. Rather, He speaks gently and quietly.

The Old Testament prophet Elijah had been told by God to go up on a mountain and listen for Him. First came a strong wind which *"rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks."* Then came an earthquake, but the *"LORD was not in the earthquake."* After the earthquake, Elijah saw a roaring fire but the *"LORD was not in the fire"* either.

Finally, there came a *"still small voice"* (1 Kings 19:12). That was the voice of God. He does not thunder or bellow His directions for our lives. We cannot know His will as long as we are frantic on the inside. We must become silent so that we are able to hear Him whisper His plans for our lives.

Peter Marshall, the late chaplain for the U.S. Senate, felt called to preach the gospel while still a young man in Scotland. At first he thought he was to go to China. However, a cousin suggested he go to the United States to enter the ministry.

In her book *The Helper*, his wife, Catherine Marshall, related how he came to an answer: "Three weeks later, Peter still had no answer.

Then one Sunday afternoon, as he was walking through a rhododendron-lined lane in the Sholto Douglas Estate, the Chief (as he liked to call God the Father) gave him his marching order. 'I was walking along that lane...when all at once I knew. The answer was a clear-cut strong inner conviction, quite unmistakable, that God wanted me in the United States of America.'"

Peter Marshall withdrew himself from the hectic pace of the world. He walked along a peaceful, flower-lined path, and God spoke from within. He knew God's will for his life. It was a decision that was to affect the lives of thousands of Americans, especially the lives of our congressmen where he so marvelously ministered the Word of God. I don't mean to imply that we all have to withdraw from the world to find God's will. For some, that's almost impossible.

But we do need to get quiet before God so that we can truly hear His voice. Many years ago, I conducted a revival in a small Georgia town. Many people from the surrounding rural areas attended. As I stood outside to greet the crowd before the service, I noticed a man coming up to the church in an ox cart.

As he got closer, I could see that there were two oxen, one of them much larger than the other. The little one pulled all right, but it was the big one that did most of the work.

Be yoked with Jesus to understand what God's will is for our lives: *"Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me"* (Matthew 11:29). A yoke is a collar for two. In the spiritual realm, that means Jesus and you.

Just like the larger ox led the smaller, we have to allow Jesus to guide us and direct us. Where He goes, we must obediently follow, rejecting our human nature to go our own way.

We are followers, not leaders. *"If any man will come after me, let him...follow me"* (Luke 9:23). In order to follow Jesus, we must enter into a yoke of fellowship with Him.

Jesus told His disciples that when they prayed they should say, *"Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven"* (Matthew 6:10). When we become yoked with Jesus, we are submitting our will to Him so that His will might be accomplished in our lives.

Three Ways God Speaks to Us

I believe there are several means by which the indwelling God speaks to us.

1. Through His Word. Most importantly, He speaks His will through His Word.

David said in Psalm 119:105, *"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."* In the Roman days, soldiers often walked with a small light on their feet. They could not see very far in front of them, but far enough to proceed ahead.

As we study God's Word, it becomes a definite instrument of guidance. It illumines our path. Perhaps it is only one step at a time, but there is enough light shed to move onward.

In many instances, we need to look no further than God's written Word to find out His will.

If we want to know whether it is God's will for us to visit the widow next door whom we have never met, we need only to read James 1:27: *"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction."*

If an employee wants to know whether he should take any gruff from his boss at work, all he needs to do is turn to 1 Peter 2:18: *"Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the forward [unreasonable]."*

God's will is revealed for many such instances directly through the written Word. He has commanded us to love our enemies, give thanks in all things, honor our parents, pray for rulers, etc. To ask God to make His will known for such situations as these is foolish.

2. Through Prayer. We come to know God's will through prayer. Prayer is the direct communication between our spirit and God's Spirit, and thus it is a vital link in obtaining direction.

When we pray, we are asking God for His mind. James 4:2 says, *"Ye have not, because ye ask not."* Many of us fail to grasp God's will simply because we don't bother to specifically ask.

David was constantly asking for God's guidance in his life. *"Teach me thy way, O LORD, and lead me in a plain path"* (Psalm 27:11). *"Teach me to do thy will"* (Psalm 143:10).

Asking for God's direction was a vital part of David's life. When the Philistines invaded the valley he was living in, David asked God what to do. God told him to turn away and *"come upon them over against the mulberry trees"* (1 Chronicles 14:14). Earlier, against the same Philistines, God told David to go up and attack.

Had David not bothered to ask God for His direction the second time, he probably would have been defeated. He could have said, "Oh well, God told me to go up and attack them head-on a few days ago. I'll just use the same strategy this time." But he didn't. He asked God for His direction on both occasions.

In Acts 13:2, the Holy Spirit called out Paul and Barnabas *"for the work whereunto I have called them."* It was a particular decision that both faced, and it was a particular answer that came from God.

Notice in verse 3, however, that it was in an attitude of fasting and prayer that they were called. They were busy asking God what His will for their lives was. Before long, the answers came.

3. Through the advice of others. A third means by which I think God speaks to us today is through the advice of others. *"Without counsel purposes are disappointed; but in the multitude of counselors they are established"* (Proverbs 15:22). *"Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counselors there is safety"* (Proverbs 11:14).

If every godly man or woman you approach for advice strongly disagrees with you, then you had better take a good, hard look and see if the decision you made is really God's will. Due to our complete attention to the problem at hand, others can see areas of difficulty or trouble that we are simply blind to.

Oftentimes, God speaks to us through others. I've experienced many occasions when God would confirm His will in my life through something a brother or sister in Christ said to me. We are also to seek out the counsel of godly men and women who walk in the Spirit, who know the Lord, and who are living a godly life. In seeking their counsel and direction, God will confirm the direction we are taking.

However, you must be very careful here, for our primary source of direction is God, God's Word, and God's Spirit. Even though some people disagree, we still must follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit in His Word.

When I made the decision to stay in Akron and build a church, all of my family did not agree with me. My dad wanted me to continue to travel with him. Many people mocked us and said it would never work. Many disagreed with my decision. But God had given me a call. He had placed a vision in my heart, and I knew what He wanted me to do.

God can also speak through circumstances. Though this is not the major area of guidance, many of us make it the most important. But if you lose your job because the company you work with has folded, then that's pretty plain circumstantial evidence that God's will involves finding a new job.

God will use these vehicles of His Word, prayer, counsel of others, and circumstances to make His will known. When, like a row of telephone poles, they all line up as to suggest a certain course of action, then we probably have a good indication that this is God's will.

There are several factors which can prevent us from knowing God's will. Pride is one of these factors. As long as we come to God with a haughty frame of mind, we will have a very difficult time in discovering His will: *"The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way"* (Psalm 25:9). That's a pretty frank statement. Only those who humble themselves, who rightly revere and honor God, will He instruct in His ways.

Any sort of sin held secretly within you will be an obstacle. *"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the LORD will not hear me"* (Psalm 66:18). Sin creates a chasm between you and God over which His will cannot bridge.

Unbelief will also be a stumbling block. *"But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven*

with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord” (James 1:6-7). If you don’t expect to receive an answer from God, then you probably won’t.

One overriding theme in knowing God’s will for your life is the peace of God. Colossians 3:15 says, *“Let the peace of God rule in your hearts.”* That means let God’s peace be the referee. If you don’t have peace about a certain decision, think it through again.

A bold Christian warrior, Norman Grubb, summed it up: “Then the conviction [about God’s will] comes. It doesn’t matter how it comes so long as it comes. Often circumstances arrange themselves so as to make a certain course obvious—this is a very usual method. Sometimes a verse of Scripture or a strong inner assurance is the way...He communicates with our spirits...a solid certainty that thus and thus is God’s way. That is the peace of God sitting as referee and declaring God’s verdict on this situation. When we know that, then we can act, declare, and believe in full assurance of faith; for we go out, not to gain a victory already won, but to gather the spoils of a victory already won, or to reach a goal with the map of directions already in our hands.”

Discovering God’s will is an exciting adventure. Begin now.

How to Know God’s Will

1. Have the right relationship with God.
2. Understand that Jesus is our Guide.
3. Listen to God.
4. Be yoked with Christ.
5. Seek direction from God’s Word.
6. Seek direction in prayer.
7. Seek the counsel of others.
8. Remove pride, sin, and unbelief from your heart.
9. Let God’s peace be the referee.

Pray This Prayer from Your Heart

Dear Lord, I ask You to remove all the pride in my life. Please take away all selfishness that causes me to want my own way, and

cleanse me, Lord, from everything that is not pleasing to You. I want my life to count for You and for Your kingdom, so I give You my life and I will do whatever You want me to do. Please, Lord, reveal Your will to me. I will search the Scriptures, I will seek Your will through prayer, and I will wait for Your direction to be revealed in my heart. As I take a step of faith, I ask You, Lord, to confirm in my heart that I am following Your will. Thank You, Lord, for being my Friend and for revealing Your will to me. Amen.

Promises *from* God's Word

"Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed: thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation."
—Exodus 15:13

"For thou art my rock and my fortress; therefore for thy name's sake lead me, and guide me." —Psalm 31:3

"I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye." —Psalm 32:8

"The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way." —Psalm 37:23

"For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death." —Psalm 48:14

"Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory." —Psalm 73:24

"Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." —Proverbs 3:5-6

"I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment." —Proverbs 8:20

"Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left." —Isaiah 30:21

"Thus saith the LORD, thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; I am the LORD thy God which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go." —Isaiah 48:17

"For the LORD God will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed." —Isaiah 50:7

"The LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not." —Isaiah 58:11

"Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." —Matthew 6:33

"When he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice." —John 10:4

"God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints." —1 Corinthians 14:33

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." —James 1:5

11 Shepherd for Life, Death, and Eternity



"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil." —Psalm 23:4

Strauss, composer of immortal melodies, didn't like to admit the facts of old age, illness, and death. He forbade such matters to be discussed by associates in his presence. To the end of his life, Strauss pretended never to think of illness or death. At his last public appearance, he conducted a benefit matinee of *Die Fledermaus*. That evening, he collapsed with chills and fever, ending in pneumonia. Within a few days, he died without admitting he was under medical treatment. Unlike Strauss, those who know Christ do not have to hide their heads in the sand of ignorance, pretending there is no death. Our Bible tells us it is appointed unto men once to die a natural, physical death. It also tells us, however, that the natural death for the child of God is a mere stepping-stone into His presence: *"We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord"* (2 Corinthians 5:8).

Although it is appointed unto all men to die a death in the natural sense, it is also promised to the child of God that eternal life awaits him in God's presence.

We often quote Psalm 23:4 in our time of grief: *"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."*

But the entire Psalm 23 is a song of hope and comfort to the believer. In its lines we find that Christ is our Shepherd for life, for death, and for eternity.

Shepherd for Life

The Lord is the Lord who made all that was made, and then He breathed into man the breath of life. Man became a living soul. Because that breath of life is a part of the Spirit of God, it will never cease to be. God means perfection, and if that part were to be destroyed, God would no longer be perfect. Our souls must be preserved forever as an obedient spirit or disobedient spirit.

Over 2,800 years ago, a little shepherd boy named David watched over his sheep. He took them to the green pastures when they were hungry, to the still waters when they were thirsty, and went out in search of the little lamb or sheep that would stray from the fold and bring it back. David was the shepherd to care for the sheep.

David looked up into the heavens and began to think, "The Lord is my Shepherd." He realized how many times he was hungry and thirsty, how many times he needed protection, and how often he had strayed from the fold. But it was the love of the Good Shepherd that fed him, quenched his thirst, searched for him, and brought him back to the fellowship of the Father. He said confidently, *"The Lord is my Shepherd."*

Along life's pathway, the Lord is our Shepherd to meet our every need, and we do not have to want.

Shepherd for Death

There will come that day when each of us reaches the end of the journey. The doctors and the nurses have done all that they can for us. The minister has prayed but must bow his head to the will of God. Our closest friends cannot go with us. Yet, we are not alone. David said, *"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me."*

Jesus said, *"I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."* At our home-going, we are not alone. The Lord is our Shepherd and we shall not want. Jesus also said, *"In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also"* (John 14:2-3).

Heaven is a prepared place for prepared people. How do we prepare for heaven? We prepare by receiving God's plan of salvation. The Bible says, *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life"* (John 3:16). Christ so loved you and me that He carried a cross to Calvary and there He took our sins in His own body on the tree.

We come by faith and receive God's plan of salvation, Jesus Christ, the atonement of Calvary. Thus, we prepare for eternity. By our spiritual birth, we are born into the family of God. Through faith in Jesus Christ, God's Son, we are saved. We prepare for eternity by reading the Bible, that is God talking to us; by prayer, that is us talking to God; and by Christian service, or keeping the commandments of the Lord.

Shepherd for Eternity

"I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever." Those that prepare will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. What is heaven like? Heaven has gates of pearl and streets of gold. But if I went to a city that had gates of pearl and streets of gold and there was heartache, sorrow, and tears, wars, and twisted limbs, hospitals, funeral processions, that would not be heaven. The beauty of heaven is recorded in Revelation. The Bible says, *"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away"* (Revelation 21:4).

That is the beauty of heaven. There shall be no more sorrow, no more death, no more crying. There will be no more pain. All the former agonies are passed away.

Knowing the Lord is our Shepherd in life, that He will be with us at our home-going, and that we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever is glorious. I have to say in the hour of sorrow as I stand in memory of my loved ones and friends, *"The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD"* (Job 1:21).

When I come to the end of the journey, I hope my friends can look at my favorite psalm, the 23rd Psalm, and say, "The Lord was Rex's Shepherd in life, death, and for eternity. The Lord has given

Rex unto us, and the Lord has taken him away, blessed be the name of the Lord.”

We need to have a personal relationship with the Shepherd.

There is an old story of a great orator traveling through America quoting various pieces of famous literature. With brilliant inflection and polished voice he quoted Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Lord Byron, and other great authors. At the end of each program, he would ask if anyone had any particular poem or portion of Scripture they would like quoted.

One night a lady asked him to quote the 23rd Psalm. The great orator eloquently began: *“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.”* When he had finished, the audience clapped madly and demanded an encore. Again in swelling tones the orator spoke out the words of the dynamic psalm.

Once more the audience clapped madly. This time, however, the orator said, “Tonight my pastor is with me and, although he has been retired for many years, I wish him to come and quote the 23rd Psalm.” In the back, an aged man rose heavily and walked down the aisle, leaning over his cane. His hair was white and his face creased with the cares of many years. Helped to the platform, he stood behind the podium and in a cracked voice began, *“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.”* When he had finished, the people did not applaud. Rather, there was a reverent hush in the auditorium. Women wept unashamed and men were noticeably moved by the majestic words of the great psalm.

After an embarrassed silence, the great orator rose and said, “Ladies and Gentlemen, do you know why it was that when I quoted the 23rd Psalm you applauded, but when he quoted the same psalm you prayed? The reason is, I know the psalm, but he knows the Shepherd.”

Preparing for Death

The man we call Saint Francis of Assisi lived many centuries ago. The story is told that while he was working in his garden one day someone asked him what he would do if he would suddenly

learn that he would die at sunset. "I'd keep hoeing my garden," Francis answered.

That's a question each of us should ask ourselves, because for one out of every four families, the bottom will fall out of our lives during the next year because of death. For many, it will come because of the death of a loved one or someone very close to us. For others, it will come because they will learn they have some fatal illness.

When that time comes to you, will there be any special preparations you should have to make, or will you be able to just "keep hoeing"? Down deep inside, whether or not you admit it, you know that sooner or later it will come. Yet, too many people refuse to admit it is coming or prepare for it in any way. They seem to think that if they ignore it, it will go away and leave them alone.

Then, when it does come, and come it will, they are not ready for it. They can't handle it. They begin to blame everyone they can think of, and they often grow bitter and blame God. But God isn't the author of death, but of life: *"The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly"* (John 10:10).

Few of us actually know when our time will come. Yet none of us can say we have not been warned. If you have watched my television programs, or been in any of my rallies or church services, you have heard me ask, "How many of you can hold up your hand and say that if your heart were to quit beating right now there is not a doubt, not a fear, not a sin, not a habit between you and God?" Then you have heard me offer to pray for anyone who could not raise their hand and say that.

Accepting Jesus Christ and the forgiveness He gives when we confess our sin and guilt to Him is the first thing, and the most important thing, we must do to prepare to face death.

One of the most wonderful and most powerful things about believing in Jesus Christ and in accepting His full forgiveness is the release from the overwhelming fear of death. And the more you grow in Christ Jesus, the more you will see death as a doorway to a higher and happier way of life, rather than the end of your existence on this earth.

God does not want us to fear death when we know Him. That is why the apostle Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 4:13, *"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope."*

Ours was always a very close family. There were six of us children, and we grew up under the ministry of Mom and Dad. Dad began preaching before I was born. He went into places few other preachers would go, and God would bless him and give him souls. But others would torment him and mock him. Some of them actually whipped him and tried to run him out of town. But his faith in God was so strong that he let God fight his battles for him, and over and over God would deal with his tormentors in some startling and miraculous ways.

After more than 50 years in the ministry, Dad walked in the kitchen where Mom was one day. Without any warning, he looked up and said, "Beautiful! Wonderful!" He then lapsed into a coma and never regained consciousness. Before long, he had gone home to be with the Lord. We do not know what he saw that day, but we do know it thrilled him, and we also know he was ready to meet God.

With faith like my dad had, he could say what Paul had said when he was in prison facing certain death, *"O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"* (1 Corinthians 15:55). Paul seemed to look forward to the opportunity to pass on into the presence of Jesus like the old saint John Jasper did.

John Jasper was a slave who was set free after the American Civil War. After the war, he pastored a Baptist church in Richmond, Virginia.

One day he was preaching on the joys that await the believer on the other side in heaven. He tried to describe the beauties and blessings he knew would be there. His vivid imagination and his emotions overcame him until, when he opened his mouth to speak, he could not say a word. He tried several times, and the great crowd waited in silence.

Tears ran down his cheeks, but no words came. Finally, he shook his head and waved for the crowd to leave, but the people sat enthralled. After he tried to get everyone to leave, he started to leave himself, but when he saw the crowd just would not go, he composed himself and spoke to his people something like this:

"Brothers and Sisters, when I think of the glory which shall be revealed in us, I can visualize that day when old John Jasper's last battle has been fought, and the last burden has been carried. I can see that day when this tired servant of God shall lay down his burdens and walk up to the battlements of the City of God. Then as I stand outside the beautiful gate, I can almost hear the Mighty Angel on guard say, 'John Jasper, you want your shoes?'

"I'm gonna say, 'Of course I want my shoes, my golden slippers to walk the gold-paved streets of the City of God, but not now!'

"Then I can hear the Mighty Angel say, 'John Jasper, don't you want your robe?' I'm gonna say, 'Of course, Mighty Angel, I want my robe, that robe of pure linen, clean and white, which is the righteousness of the saints, but not now!'

"Then the Angel would say, 'John Jasper, you want your crown?' and I shall say, 'Of course, Mighty Angel, I want all the rewards that are coming to me, this poor servant of the Lamb, but not now!'

"Then the Angel would say, 'John Jasper, wouldn't you like to see Elijah, the great prophet who called fire down from heaven? Wouldn't you like to shake hands with John the beloved disciple who leaned on the Master's breast at the Last Supper? Wouldn't you like to shake hands with Paul, the great apostle to the Gentiles, the greatest church establisher and soul-winner of all time?'

"I'll say, 'Of course, Mighty Angel. I want to shake hands and know and commune with all those saints of God who have won the incorruptible crown. Yes, I have some loved ones over here I want to see, too, but not now. First, I want to see Master Jesus. I want to see Him first of all!'"

Knowing Jesus Christ as your Saviour like old John Jasper did, and like my dad did, can make all the difference in the world in facing death.

Five Emotional Stages a Very Ill Person Goes Through

Death is a reality we all must face. It may be sudden, or it may be through a terminal illness. If you or a loved one faces an incurable

illness, it seems as though the bottom has fallen out of your life. But there are things we can know and do to help that person.

According to those who have specialized in studies of death and dying, there are five emotional stages which a very ill person goes through. They are *denial*, *anger*, *bargaining*, *depression*, and *acceptance*. By knowing these stages, you can help your loved ones deal with them as they pass through each one.

1. Denial. Here the person is unwilling to accept his fate and the nature of his illness. After the initial shock of being told his death is near, most patients deny or strongly question the diagnosis. "Oh, no, not me," they insist. "Surely there must be a mistake."

Denial works as a buffer after the shock of the first announcement. It lets the patient have time to get himself together, to rationalize, to lower his defenses against the truth. Denial usually comes in the first stages of the factors of dying. Also during this time, he may withdraw to some extent into isolation.

2. Anger. When the physical symptoms become so obvious that denial is no longer possible, the dying patient then enters an emotional state of anger. He becomes angry at doctors, nurses, his family, and his friends for no apparent reason. It is a most difficult time since his question now is, "Why me? What have I done to deserve this?" Often the patient will blame God as bitterness rises to the surface in his life. Such anger is irrational and comes from a sense of loneliness.

3. Bargaining. Next comes a time of bargaining. The patient tries to delay the inevitable by promising to live for God, go to church, give his body to medical science, donate all his resources to some worthy cause, or something else. He makes promises, bribes, sets goals, and even deadlines. At this stage, loved ones feel helpless and really do not know how to reach out to the one going through the crisis.

4. Depression. This is the most difficult time for the loved ones who are near the patient. The patient finally realizes what is happening and he enters a time when he is actually grieving for his own

death. It is a trying time for both the patient and his loved ones. There is nothing anyone can say that seems to help. Probably the worst thing one can say to the patient during this time is, "Cheer up," or, "You shouldn't feel that way." The patient has a right and a need to go through this grieving process.

Memories of past losses or impending separation lower vitality during this period. The dying one needs the luxury of dwelling in the finality of death and the interrupting of human relationships. To pretend that things are fine and getting better is only a game he cannot afford to play. Death-denying is futile and destructive. The dying one cannot come to the stage of acceptance until he has dealt successfully with the agonies of this anxiety. During this time, the dying one merely needs a loved one's presence and understanding. He does not need to be "preached at" or condemned. He needs support, love, and the beautiful assurance that life does not end in the cemetery, but really only begins at death's door.

5. Acceptance. After the patient has completed the first four cycles, he comes to the place of acceptance. Although he might still retain a glimmer of hope, he is ready. The struggle is over. The bargaining is past. It is as though the person were resting in preparation for the long journey ahead. Happiness at this stage will be in direct proportion to the quality of life he has lived and the faith he has for the future.

Many experts who study death and dying say that if the patient is interrupted in any phase of the cycle of suffering, the interruption merely prolongs his agony and final acceptance. Therefore, you should understand these cycles and rather than trying to "cheer up" the dying one, try to minister to the patient at his point of need. Your understanding presence is probably the greatest thing to help him through the crisis.

Long before people began studying and analyzing the death process, Jesus simply said, *"Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted"* (Matthew 5:4). In other words, He simply said,

"Blessed are they who go through the full cycle of suffering; for they will come to complete comfort."

While we would all like to live in perfect health and happiness, God at times takes us through the valley experiences, as David did when he wrote in Psalm 23:4, *"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."*

If we are called upon to travel this valley ourselves, or accompany a loved one or friend, it will help to realize Jesus will bring us through safely. Just keep these verses in our minds, *"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose"* (Romans 8:28), and, *"When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee"* (Isaiah 43:2).

When Death Comes

"When I'm dead, just stick me in the ground or place me on the trash heap. I don't want people making a fuss over me." That comment is frequently heard whenever the matter of death or funerals is expressed. However, those making such statements are really avoiding the realities of death and, most important, do not understand the purpose of a funeral ceremony. The funeral is a therapeutic and healing process necessary in our coping with death.

One prominent preacher gave perhaps the most clear definition for the need of a funeral. Dr. Edgar Jackson notes, "The funeral provides a time when the loved ones can withdraw love and affection from that one God has taken away, and reinvest that love and affection in the lives of those about them."

If we merely withdraw love from the one who has gone and fail to reinvest it in the lives of others, we become bitter and angry. Often we ask, "Why?" and can even blame God for the tragedy we encounter. However, if we reinvest that love and affection, the memories of the deceased remain warm and strong and our lives are better for having gone through the experience. In times of test-

ing, it is important to remember that how we respond to grief is up to us. We can become better or bitter.

The 10 Stages of Grief

There are 10 stages of grief through which we pass when we lose someone close to us. Understanding them now will help to prepare us when we face that loss.

- 1. Shock and surprise.** We really never are ready for anyone's death, especially our loved ones', even if their illness is prolonged. It is still a shock when the final moment comes. We lose our balance at least momentarily and we may show this in an explosion of tears or silent withdrawal.
- 2. Emotional release.** The opportunity to express grief at a memorial service with family and friends gives us the opportunity to spill the grief out of our souls. There must be an outpouring of grief for inner healing to come to us.
- 3. Loneliness.** A void exists after a funeral. Often friends think they have done all they can by going with us through the funeral process, not knowing that when loneliness sets in we need them more than ever. Loneliness, isolation, and depression naturally follow and must be dealt with.
- 4. Physical distress with anxiety.** This loneliness can cause an awareness to where the loved one who is left behind may develop the same physical symptoms of the deceased. Depression and grief basically have a reference in the past, while anxiety has a reference in the future. Often the left loved one is too embarrassed to talk with others about this phase, and lonely, difficult nights are spent in deep distress. If friends understand and give the gift of their presence, the loved one can make it through easier.
- 5. Panic.** Often the remaining loved one does not make it

through his anxiety comfortably and becomes convinced something is really wrong with him. He can concentrate on nothing but the loss. A strong faith in Christ is particularly helpful at this time.

6. Guilt. The real or imagined stage of guilt is caused by recalling things the surviving person could have done but did not do before or during the deceased person's illness or prior to death. This kind of guilt almost always comes. Partial or complete interruption of the mourning process often happens at this stage.

7. Hostility and projection. This is a very difficult stage, since the person changes from his own guilty feelings to feeling hostile toward those whom he thinks could have prevented the death. It is an irrational projection as an attempt to avoid his own guilty feelings, but the person must ventilate his hostility to a compassionate listener.

8. Weariness. A feeling of weariness develops as the last of the depressing and frustrating stages of grief. The person begins to suffer in silence, doesn't want to get involved. Other people cannot understand his withdrawal attitude. This type of suffering comes several weeks after the death and is probably the time when most suicides take place. The survivor gets the idea he may wish to join the deceased. At this stage, the pastor or other friend should make regular calls on the bereaved so as to draw out these depressing and deep lonely feelings.

9. Gradual overcoming of grief. This is the stage of readjustment in working through the grief process. This stage may begin as early as four weeks, or it may take 12 weeks. The person begins to enter into activities, his mood brightens, and life begins to look realistic.

10. Readjustment to reality. The acuteness of the death is now over. A readjustment continues up to 24 months. By understand-

ing these stages of grief ourselves, we cannot only help ourselves, but we can better reach out in love and understanding to others facing separation through death. It is also wise to personally prepare for death with our family and friends. The better plans they have made before the tension of death strikes the family, the easier it is for the surviving members of the family.

Spiritual Preparation

Spiritual preparation is the most important thing we can do to face death. Realizing that everyone is going to die, we need to make sure we are right with God and ready for death if it should strike at any time. We must admit to ourselves the surety of death.

We must also face the fact that an account for the way we have lived this life must be given in the next life. Then death can be anticipated without anguish and dread. It is not only wholesome to prepare for death, it is essential: *"So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God"* (Romans 14:12).

Recognizing that all have sinned (Romans 3:23) and that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), it is very important to turn to Christ who gave His life to settle the sin question for all mankind. This is done through confession of sin and accepting Christ as Lord and Saviour: *"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation"* (Romans 10:9-10).

With this confession of faith in Christ, the Son of God, comes forgiveness of sin and an awareness of our security in His divine love. When we have done this, we can then say there is not a doubt, not a fear, not a sin, not a habit that stands between us and our God.

Many years ago, a lamplighter who had wasted his youth on evil found Christ as his Saviour. An old drinking buddy of his began mocking him for "turning pious."

After about a week of this, the new convert squarely faced his foe and said, "I'll tell you what. You know I work as a lamplighter. When I go around turning out the lights, I sometimes look back, and

all the road over which I have been walking is all darkness, and that is what my past is like.”

Then he continued, “I look out in front of me, and there is a long row of twinkling lights to guide me, and that is what the future is since I found my Jesus.”

“Yes,” said the foe who thought he had trapped him, “but by-and-by you get to the last lamp and turn it out, and then where are you?”

“Then,” responded the lamplighter, smiling a confident smile, “when the last lamp goes out it is dawn, and there ain’t no need for lamps when the morning comes.”

When Jesus Christ comes into your life, there is no need to ever fear the darkness of death again.

How to Prepare for Death

1. Admit to ourselves the surety of death.
2. Face the fact that an account for the way we have lived this life must be given in the next life.
3. Prepare for death by receiving God’s plan of salvation.
4. Realize that for the believer, death is just a steppingstone into the presence of Jesus.
5. Live each day as though it could be the last one.
6. Realize that Jesus will go with us through the valley of the shadow of death.

Pray This Prayer from Your Heart

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever. —Psalm 23

Promises *from* God's Word

"O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!" —Deuteronomy 32:29

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." —Psalm 23:4

"So reach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." —Psalm 90:12

"Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints." —Psalm 116:15

*"He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds."
—Psalm 147:3*

"For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten." —Ecclesiastes 9:5

"He will swallow up death in victory; and the LORD God will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it." —Isaiah 25:8

"Therefore the redeemed of the LORD shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away." —Isaiah 51:11

"Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection." —Luke 20:36

"Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." —John 11:25

"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." —John 14:1-3

"I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you." —John 14:18

"For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." —Romans 8:38-39

"O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." —1 Corinthians 15:55-57

"We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." —2 Corinthians 5:8

"I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." —1 Thessalonians 4:13-14

"For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him." —1 Thessalonians 5:9-10

"I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them." —Revelation 14:13

