DISCIPLESHIP COUNSELING

The Complete Guide to Helping Others Walk in Freedom and Grow in Christ



Dr. Neil T. Anderson

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Dr. Neil T. Anderson



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FOREWORD

In my 20-some years of ministry experience, I have led many people to faith in Christ or through some form of discipleship material. I have met with them for counseling and have referred them to the best professionals in the community. Yet in the midst of all these disciplines and advice, I would still see countless dedicated Christian men and women struggling to get free from the emotional problems that beset them. Most of the time they struggle in silence, afraid to tell anyone the truth about how they feel or their real discouragement about the Christian life. This results in an unhealthy church, full of diligent "doers" who have resigned themselves to believe that this is as good as it gets. The lack of genuine joy, love and freedom of spirit make evangelism and community building very difficult.

If the Holy Spirit is not flowing naturally through church members and is quenched and grieved by unresolved issues of anger, fear, pride and unforgiveness, the average church leader resorts to a "program" approach to ministry. People are invited to events, service projects, concerts and classes, with no real impact on their maturity in Christ. What is more, the preaching and teaching of God's Word—which is my primary ministry and joy—bears little fruit.

You can imagine my excitement in learning that Christians can live free and productive lives in Christ! It has been my great privilege and pleasure to have Neil and Joanne Anderson join our church, and I have seen the fruit of their ministry. I have witnessed the power of the truth set people free from bondage and bring closure to issues that have been festering under the surface for years! There is no question in my mind that God has given this hardworking farm boy from Minnesota an insight into the discipleship process that the Church sorely needs. I needed it!

As a pastor, so often I felt the gap between discipleship ministries in the church and the counseling needs of the body. We subtly send the message that spiritual disciplines and emotional problems are unrelated and that the Bible and prayer are great tools for equipping saints in witnessing, but emotional or relational difficulties are contracted out to the local psychologist. Consequently,

we have people filled with Bible knowledge but no resolution to the problems and sins that beset them. In pride and fear we cover the insecurity lodged in our hearts. The genius of Neil's book is to bring the care of whole persons back into the church—body, soul and spirit—and apply the great New Testament truths of our identity in Christ to the issues that plague us.

This book is not for the timid or passive. It is an intentional strategy to set Christians free from the chains that bind them, and it takes courage and faith to incorporate the reality of the spiritual world. Neil dares to suggest that the spiritual world impacts all we do, and he equips us to deal with these challenges. In a world that can analyze every problem to its smallest component, Neil dares to move us from analysis to closure, to give hope of seeing problems actually resolved. What is more, these principles are completely transferable, so any mature saint can learn the theology of discipleship counseling, be trained in the process and released to minister to one's local body.

This is not "new" truth. This is ancient, New Testament truth that the modern Church, infatuated with rationalism and secular psychology, has neglected to her own hurt. What pleasure it must bring the Savior to see His people rediscovering their identity and authority as His beloved children.

May this book serve to transform your congregation, as it is transforming mine!

Sandy Mason
Pastor, Desert View Bible Church
Phoenix, Arizona

INTRODUCTION

When I pastored a church, there were people in our congregation with problems that I did not have answers for, and that really bothered me. I believed that Christ was the answer for hurting people in this fallen world and I believed that biblical truth would set them free, but I was not seeing it happen in the lives of our people. When the Lord called me to teach at Talbot School of Theology, I requested permission to offer a master of theology elective to discover why we were not seeing more fruit from all our programs and ministries. Eighteen students enrolled the first year, and I felt like I was in the second grade, teaching first-grade students. The next year, 23 signed up; then 35; then 65; then 150 and finally 250 students signed up for a one-week summer elective. I was starting to see the lives of the students change as they discovered who they were in Christ and as they resolved personal and spiritual conflicts through genuine repentance.

My search led me through two huge paradigm shifts in my thinking. First, I realized that I had not fully understood the gospel, especially as it related to who believers are in Christ. Jesus did not come just to die on the cross for our sins, He also came to give us life in Christ. As a result, Christians are new creations in Christ, which means that they can be free from their past and are free to be all that God created them to be, as well as many other blessings. Indeed, it was for this freedom that Christ set us free (see Gal. 5:1). Second, my Western education had skewed my worldview, which left me with an inadequate understanding of the spiritual world. Jesus did not come just to forgive our sins and give us life; He came to undo the works of Satan (see 1 John 3:8).

As the Lord was renewing my mind, He began to direct hurting people to me. I wanted a biblical answer for these dear believers who desperately wanted to live liberated and productive lives in Christ. I also knew the message and method had to be academically credible and wholistic, or the Christian community as a whole would not accept it. Many wounded and anxious Christians waded through the process of learning with me. I had to tell some that I did not know how to solve their problems but Jesus did; and if they were willing to work with me, I would continue to pursue God for an answer. Over time and through much learning and experience, I began to see the Lord set captives free and bind up the

brokenhearted.

I also became aware that these hurting Christians had only one thing in common: None of them knew who they were in Christ, nor did they understand what being a child of God fully meant. If "the Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom. 8:16), why weren't they sensing it? The apostle Paul wrote, "God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' " (Gal. 4:6). The gospel message of "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27) was missing from their personal experience, and they were ignorant of their spiritual heritage.

In my educational experience, Western rationalism and naturalism had dominated my thinking. I was taught about the kingdom of God but nothing about the kingdom of darkness. Today I understand a little better the battle that is being waged between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness, between the Christ and the Antichrist, between the Spirit of truth and the father of lies, between the true prophets and the false prophets and between good and evil.

Jesus identified Satan as "the ruler of this world" (John 16:11), and John wrote that "the whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (1 John 5:19). Paul taught that "the god of this world [Satan] has blinded the minds of the unbelieving" (2 Cor. 4:4) and admonishes believers to put on the armor of God. "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12). Peter wrote, "Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). These are not optional passages that we can dismiss as though there is no such thing as a spiritual world or a kingdom of darkness. With perfect knowledge of that reality, Jesus prayed, "I do not ask Thee to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth" (John 17:15-17).

SPIRITUAL BATTLE FOR THE MIND

During those growing years, my ministry was confined to the campus of Biola University. Frankly, I did not want to take this ministry to churches until I was sure that my message and method were biblical, wholistic and transferable. I also wanted to learn more about what was happening in the lives of Christian

teenagers, because the majority of the adults I was counseling had problems that originated when they were young. So we surveyed over 1,700 Christian students and discovered that 71 percent of these professing-Christian young people were hearing voices or struggling with blasphemous or condemning thoughts.[1] This battle for their minds did not appear to be predominantly neurological or psychological. It seemed to be more consistent with 1 Timothy 4:1 (*NIV*): "The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons." Is that happening today? Yes, and it is happening all over the world!

In our survey we also discovered that 74 percent of the teenagers believed they were different from other kids: *Christianity works for others, but it doesn't work for me!* Is that true? Of course not! But if Christians believe they are different from others, it will affect the way they live. We have discovered that many adults believe the same lie, even though Scripture clearly teaches that Christ is all and in all (believers).

In the last 20 years, I have had the privilege of personally counseling hundreds of people who were struggling with their thoughts, experiencing difficulty reading their Bibles or actually hearing voices. In many cases the root issue turned out to be a spiritual battle for their minds. That was easily resolved when they submitted to God and resisted the devil. We have learned how to help these people find their identity and freedom in Christ through the discipleship counseling process taught in this book. In addition, thousands of people have found their identity and freedom in Christ during conferences at which we helped them resolve their personal and spiritual conflicts through genuine repentance. Most will leave our counseling sessions and conferences with the peace of God guarding their hearts and their minds, and this newfound mental peace is something many have never experienced before.

While I was conducting a Living Free in Christ conference in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Judy King, a licensed Christian counselor, decided to do some informal testing on those who were in need of personal counseling. The subjects in her study were those who attended the conference and requested a personal counseling session. They were given a questionnaire before their appointment and then again three months later. The counseling appointment was for one extended session conducted by a lay encourager.[2] The results showed a 52 percent improvement in depression, a 47 percent improvement in anxiety, a 57 percent improvement in tormenting thoughts, a 48 percent improvement in personal and spiritual conflicts and a 39 percent improvement in negative habits

or behavior.

This led to further studies. A conference in Tyler, Texas, had the following results:

Depression	57% improvement
Anxiety	54% improvement
Fear	49% improvement
Anger	55% improvement
Tormenting thoughts	50% improvement
Negative habits	53% improvement
Self-esteem	56% improvement

No attempt was made to determine what a counselee's individual problems were before the pretest was completed. In other words, some of the people who asked for appointments may not have been depressed or overly anxious, which makes the results even more impressive. It is important to note that I did not do the counseling. All the sessions were conducted by well-trained laypeople.

In January 2000, I taught a doctor of ministry class at Regent University. Dr. Fernando Garzon, who taught in the psychology department, requested permission to conduct research on the students that attended the class. The class was an intensive one-week class, meeting eight hours every day. The students were working on their master of divinity, doctor of psychology and doctor of ministry degrees. Dr. Garzon used Judy King's questionnaire, and the students took a pretest and posttest, using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory, the Beck Anxiety Inventory and the Symptom Checklist 90-R. Dr. Garzon's results were published in the *Journal of Psychology and Theology*. In summary, he wrote:

> Statistically significant reductions were found in … anxiety, depression, obsessive-compulsive, interpersonal sensitivity, hostility, somatization, paranoid ideation, and psychoticism. Anxiety was reduced … and statistically significant increases in self-esteem and spirituality were also found.[3]

I think you will agree that most students at that level of education do not primarily attend classes to have their lives changed—but that is what happened. Dr. Garzon and Judy King joined up to research the application of this message

and method in therapy. All those who were counseled by Judy had the same degree of recovery as the above test results. Several case studies are reviewed and their recovery in Christ is explained in the second edition of *Released from Bondage*, which I coauthored with Judy King and Dr. Garzon.[4]

How does one explain such significant results? I can assure you that the fruit, which our ministry is seeing routinely around the world, cannot be explained on the basis of my ministry skills or some special calling or giftedness that I possess. I have no power or ability apart from Christ to release a captive or bind up the brokenhearted. Only God can do that, and I will explain later in the book how we intentionally include the wonderful counselor in this discipleship counseling process. He is the third party who is always present and the only One who has the power to change anyone.

BROKENNESS

Having the right message and method is not enough. You have to have the right people who are dependent on God. At the peak of my learning curve, the Lord allowed me and my family to go through a period of brokenness. For 15 months I did not know whether my wife was going to live or die. We lost everything we had. When all you have is God and each other, you have the opportunity to discover that God is all you need. God brought me to the end of my resources so that I could more fully discover His. It was the best thing that ever happened to me. As long as we think we can help another person by our strength and resources, He will let us try. Freedom in Christ Ministries was born out of that brokenness. I also learned during that time that compassion is an essential prerequisite for ministry.

Engineering school had sharpened my mental cognitive abilities and taught me discipline. Although I attended church and was raised to believe I was a Christian, I did not personally find the Lord until after engineering school. As a new believer, I had the privilege of going through all the discipleship material created by Campus Crusade for Christ and the Navigators. It was good theology, and I am thankful that I was grounded in my faith by these good resources. Looking back, it was ideally suited for a young person like me: I did not have a lot of conflict in my life, I never drank or used drugs, and I was never sexually active.

In the last 40 years, the American culture has shifted dramatically, and most young people would not fit my description. Many of the people I have discipled

would struggle to get through the older discipleship material. Sex, drugs, alcohol, abuse and the disintegration of family have left many with unresolved conflicts. This change in our culture has given rise to the incredible growth of Christian counseling, which has a very different curriculum than the old graduate-level programs of evangelism and discipleship. To a great degree, we have lost the ministry of discipleship in the American Church. The material is dated and does not address the needs of those who desperately need to be established alive and free in Christ. Many of our graduate-level programs in psychology lack an adequate theology that includes repentance and faith in God. It is not their stated purpose to present every person complete in Christ (see Col. 1:28), which is a goal for discipleship.

I believe that the ministries of counseling and discipling are the same in the Bible, although too often they have become separate and unrelated disciplines in the Christian community. Discipleship is the process of building into one another the life of Christ. Discipleship counseling is an encounter with God. Biblically speaking, if you were a good discipler, you would be a good counselor, and vice versa.

INTEGRATION

Discipleship counseling is an attempt to meet people where they are and help them resolve their personal and spiritual conflicts so that they can be established alive and free in Christ. People need the Lord, and the path back to God must be simple enough so that the simplest of His creations can enter into it. Otherwise we reduce our walk with God to an intellectual exercise and make victorious Christian living available only to the intellectually gifted. However, we cannot be simplistic or one-dimensional about this freedom.

To have a wholistic answer, Christian leaders must learn to interface with Christian disciplines other than their own. I am not talking about integrating Christian beliefs with worldly philosophies. That is syncretism. I am talking about understanding how the body, soul and spirit function together and how we were intended to relate to God and to each other.

A complete answer requires an understanding and the integration of all reality. We have a whole God who relates to the whole person—body, soul and spirit—and we live in a natural world as well as a spiritual world. We should be thankful for medical doctors, nutritionists and physical therapists—especially those who know that a medical model is only part of the answer—that look after

our physical needs. Taking medication to heal our bodies is commendable, but taking a pill to heal our souls is deplorable. The book *The Biblical Guide to Alternative Medicine,* which I coauthored with Dr. Michael Jacobson, is an attempt to understand biblical health from an integrated and wholistic perspective.[5] In that book, Dr. Jacobson and I developed a biblical grid by which to evaluate medical practices, and then we used the grid to examine allopathic, osteopathic and chiropractic medicine, homeopathy, naturopathy, reflexology, iridology, traditional Chinese medicine and many others.

I have also had the privilege to coauthor two additional books with Christian therapists. *Christ-Centered Therapy* was coauthored with Terry and Julie Zuehlke.[6] Terry is a professional counselor who has established Christ-centered counseling centers around the state of Minnesota. Julie has a degree in psychiatric nursing. She also is on staff at Crystal Evangelical Church and oversees pastoral care. They use the model I would like to see every church and professional counseling center use, which is the professional counselor in the marketplace working together with the local church. *Finding Hope Again* is a book about overcoming depression, which I wrote with Dr. Hal Baumchen, a licensed psychologist. [7] We will need a wholistic answer if we are going to care for those who are depressed, because depression is a body, soul and spirit problem.

DISCIPLESHIP IN CHRIST

In this book I will begin by discussing the scope and limits of biblical integration and define mental health from a Christian perspective. Then I will look at the roles of the encourager (discipleship counselor), the counselee and, finally, the role that only God can fulfill. Next I will examine the theological basis for discipleship counseling in Christ. Finally, I will discuss the practical aspects of counseling in Christ and explain each Step in *The Steps to Freedom in Christ,* which is a tool now being used all over the world to help people resolve root issues that are critical between themselves and God. This is essentially a repentance process that helps the person submit to God and resist the devil (see Jas. 4:7). It is important to obtain a copy of *The Steps to Freedom in Christ* in order to further reference my explanation of the Steps in this book.[8]

I suppose every book should be able to stand alone, but you would profit greatly if you first read *Victory over the Darkness*[9] and *The Bondage Breaker*,[10]

in that order. Each has a study guide as well as a professionally taped videocassette and audiocassette series for group discussion, as does this book. Together, these three books comprise our basic training for churches and ministries around the world.

FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES

Five basic assumptions underscore everything that is in this book and Freedom in Christ Ministries. First, I believe that *Scripture is the only reliable source for faith and practice* (see 2 Tim. 3:16-17). God's Word is sufficient to establish a foundation of truth by which all other sources of knowledge can be evaluated. I will explain in chapter 1 why I believe that empirical research must be evaluated through the grid of Scripture.

Second, I believe that *the message and method of discipleship counseling must be based on the finished work of Christ* (see Col. 1:27-2:10). The fact that every Christian is eternally alive in Christ right now is the only basis for hope.

Third, *I rely totally on the present ministry of the Holy Spirit* (see John 16:7-15). If there were no Holy Spirit, there would be no Church and no power to live the Christian life. He "is the Spirit of truth" (John 14:17), and He will lead us into all truth (see 16:13), and that truth will set us free.

Fourth, *we are limited by the faith response of counselees.* We are not only saved by faith, but we are also sanctified by faith (see Gal. 3:1-5). We cannot believe for another person. Neither can we help those who do not want to be helped, and we cannot help those who will not assume their own responsibility to choose the truth. If they choose to believe a lie or live in sin, that is their choice. I respect their right to choose, but I care enough about them to let them know what the consequences of their choices will be.

Finally, I believe that *we all need the support of the Christian community and we all need to renew our faith and walk with God* (see Heb. 10:17-25). I do not believe God ever intended us to live our lives alone. We absolutely need God, and we necessarily need each other. The question, Who needs this kind of ministry? is best answered by my friend Dr. Wayne Grudem. In the foreword for my book *Praying by the Power of the Spirit*, he wrote:

> After living more than 50 years as a Christian, and after teaching more than 25 years as a professor of Bible and theology, I took about two hours to work carefully through Anderson's "Steps to Freedom in Christ," and

> apply each step to my own life, reading each suggested prayer aloud. God used that process to bring to mind a number of thoughts and attitudes that He wanted to correct, and then to impart to me a wonderfully refreshing sense of freedom, peace, joy and fellowship with Himself.[11]

There is no greater privilege than to be used by God to help others. When I was a young pastor, one of our dearest and oldest saints handed me a note on his way out of the church one Sunday morning. It read, “It is one of life’s greatest compensations that no person can sincerely help another without helping him or herself in the process.” May that be true for you as you seek to help others.

PART 1

DISCIPLESHIP COUNSELING IN THEORY



CHAPTER ONE

TOWARD A BIBLICAL BALANCE

After speaking at a church, a middle-aged lady said, “You’ve described me to a tee. I’ve struggled for years and can’t break free from my problems.” After many years of fruitless counseling, she had decided to admit herself to a treatment center.

I asked if I could see her first, because I knew the treatment center that had been recommended to her relied primarily on prescription medication. The night before her admission, she had an encounter with God as I helped her resolve her personal and spiritual conflicts. When we were finished, I said, “I really don’t believe that you need the hospitalization program, but if you do admit yourself, write me a letter in a week and let me know how things are going.” A few days later, I received this note:

> I’ll let you know how I’m doing in a week or so, but I just had to share my joy while it’s still fresh and new. After meeting with you Monday night, I was absolutely euphoric, and so was my husband. He was so glad to see me happy. But the best news is that I didn’t wake up with nightmares or screams. Instead, I woke up with my heart singing, and the very first thought that entered my mind was “even the stones will cry

out," followed by "Abba, Father." Neil, the Holy Spirit is alive in me. Praise the Lord.

I'm now in this treatment center. It's been a tremendous adjustment. There are so many truly hurting people here. I just wish I could bring you here to meet with all of them and set them free, too. There's one woman in particular who appears to be evil personified. She verbally attacked me the very first day.

Thank you, Neil, for having the courage to free God's people from the grip of the enemy. I can't begin to tell you how free I feel, but somehow I think you know.

I wish I could say that the doctors and counselors at the secular treatment center reinforced what the Lord had done in this dear lady, but they did not. Can a decision to be submissive and dependent on God be reversed by a program that encourages self-reliance and dependency on medication? Can three hours of biblical counsel be nullified by three weeks of godless counsel? In this case it did. This woman became dependent on prescription medications and the counsel of her secular doctors who advised her not to seek any other kind of treatment, and she did not—for fear of losing their support.

Is there no value in secular programs? Can the Christian learn anything from the world? Is truth restricted to biblical revelation only? Does empirical research (experimentation and observation) refute, undermine, contradict, subvert or destroy our confidence in Scripture? Are the natural sciences on a collision course with divine revelation, or are they potentially an important and necessary ally? Is secular psychology nothing more than worldly "wisdom," and potentially a tool of the enemy? Is there a biblical psychology that must be understood and embraced by all Christians? How do we know what is true, real, relevant and right?

Let us consider these questions as we examine how theology can, or cannot, be integrated with empirical research.

THE SCOPE AND LIMITS OF INTEGRATION

First, let us lay some groundwork by looking at how God reveals Himself and His will to us. Theologians have identified three means of divine revelation.

General Revelation

General revelation is what can be observed and studied in nature. Psalm 19:1 reads, “The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.” Romans 1:20 says, “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen.” Paul goes on to say that we will not be excused from knowing that there is a God, because the existence, work and nature of God can be understood by observing His created order. As we observe creation, the “natural” response should be to worship the creator.

However, the fallen inhabitants of this world did not honor God. “They exchanged the truth of God for a lie” (v. 25). Even though they suffered the negative consequences of believing a lie, they still would not honor Him. Consequently, “God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women [and men] exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural” (v. 26; see also v. 27). Finally “God gave them over to a depraved mind” (v. 28), which is a mind devoid of logic. If this truth could be applied to a nation, then our country is on the brink of that final judgment. Political correctness has replaced divine revelation, and we seem to have lost our moral compass. There is growing evidence that many can no longer distinguish between right and wrong (a depraved mind has no conscience).

The concept of general revelation has led many biblical ethicists to coin the term “natural law.” Proponents of natural law reason that God has built into the universe a sense of justice and morality. Because God created order in the universe, there is a natural way that humanity should live with one another. For instance, it is unnatural for a man to be with another man sexually. God created men to be with women sexually and live together in complementary relationships.

The evidence of natural law can be observed by studying pagan societies that have no biblical knowledge of God and His ways. They seem to collectively “know” or socially agree that acts such as killing, stealing and lying are wrong, and they cluster together in family units. Every society has agreed upon certain standards of right and wrong that are generally consistent with biblical morality, even though individuals fail to live up to their own standards.

In a pagan society like ours, natural law may be the only acceptable basis for discussing moral issues in the public settings and courts of law. Standing in front of an abortion clinic and proclaiming the truth from the Word of God concerning the sanctity of life will not be received by those who do not know the Lord. They would simply respond by saying, “I don’t believe in God or the Bible.” That is

the end of the argument, since they have a different standard by which they live and we cannot impose our standards on them.

The truth spoken in love may bring conviction leading to conversion, but it will not have an immediate effect upon the laws of our land. Why? Because the Bible is not accepted in our courts of law as the standard for morality. The Constitution of the United States is the basis by which the courts of our land mete out justice. But what argument does an unregenerate person have against an honest doctor or geneticist who can demonstrate on the basis of natural law that an unborn child is fully human at conception and is therefore guaranteed protection under the Constitution?

Natural law is never on a collision course with Scripture. It actually illustrates in creation what God has said in His Word.

Catholic ethicists have placed a greater emphasis on natural law than Protestants have. I personally think we need to incorporate the concept of natural law into more of our thinking. Natural law is never on a collision course with Scripture. It actually illustrates in creation what God has said in His Word. Science is an attempt to understand what God has created.

Special Revelation

Special revelation refers to the written Word of God. Protestants limit special revelation to the 66 canonical books divided into the Old Testament (39 books) and the New Testament (27 books). The Old Testament records the creation and fall of humanity, the relationship that God had with His people based on the promises of the Abrahamic covenant (see Gen. 12:1-3), and the law of the Mosaic covenant (see Exod. 24:8). The New Testament reveals God's answer for fallen humanity by recording the life, death, burial and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and how God now relates to His people under the New Covenant (see Jer. 31:31-34; Matt. 26:28; Heb. 10:16-17).

Ultimate Revelation

Jesus Christ is the ultimate revelation of God. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). Jesus alone

perfectly reveals who God is because He is God. “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth” (v. 14). The glory of God is a manifestation of His presence. Jesus said, “If you knew Me, you would know My Father also” (John 8:19). “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30). “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9).

THE KEY TO UNDERSTANDING

These three channels of revelation are the means by which God has revealed Himself and made His will known to us. None of these channels will be understood or effective in our lives apart from the present work of the Holy Spirit. He is first and foremost “the Spirit of truth” (John 14:17). The Holy Spirit will guide us into all truth (see 16:13), and that truth will set us free (see John 8:32). Fallen humanity cannot even know the liberating truth of God’s Word, because “a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised” (1 Cor. 2:14). “Even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving” (2 Cor. 4:3-4).

Fully understanding and appropriating the liberating truth of God’s Word cannot be divorced from the reality of the spiritual world. We need the liberating power of the Holy Spirit and a means to protect ourselves from the destructive strategies of Satan. The real battle on planet Earth is between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light. This battle between the father of lies and the Spirit of truth is fought primarily in the minds of all humanity. Nobody is excluded from the battle. Even believers must choose to take “every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5), and they must choose to think upon that which is true, honorable, right, pure and lovely (see Phil. 4:8).

The battle between the father of lies and the Spirit of truth is fought primarily in the minds of all humanity.

How do we determine the truth and the right course of action to take? Consider the integration of general revelation with special revelation depicted by

the diagram on page 26.

The left side of the diagram shows the rational process of verification accomplished by observation and experimentation. It represents the scientific method of investigation, which is what higher education in our Western world is based upon. Psychological and sociological research is conducted by scientists and those who are attempting to obtain degrees at the highest levels of learning.

The right side of the diagram is special revelation (the Bible), which is proclaimed, explained and defended by various seminaries and schools of theology. Interpretation is accomplished by practicing exegesis (reading out) on passages of Scripture and applying principles of hermeneutics (biblical interpretation) in order to understand what God has communicated to us. The temptation is to assume that each side of the diagram carries equal weight and that truth is determined by combining the two. But I, along with many other concerned Christians, believe that there are serious problems with that approach to integration. Let me offer three critical observations.

Diagram 1.1



THE PRIMACY OF SPECIAL REVELATION

First, special revelation (the Bible) is authoritative, whereas general revelation (nature) is illustrative. The heavens and Earth do declare and show forth the glory of God, but scientific observations cannot answer the philosophical question of *why?* How do we explain the origin of the species, much less their purpose for being here? Without special revelation to explain life and its

meaning, we have no recourse but to fall back on humanistic philosophical speculation or scientific rationalism.

Research is valuable because it helps us to know what is, and we will be more fruitful if we learn to adapt our ministries accordingly. That is the point that Paul makes in 1 Corinthians 9:19-22:

> For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some.

Good ministries stay relevant by being fully informed about the societies around them and understanding what people are doing, thinking and saying. I have conducted my own research, and it has proven to be invaluable in understanding people. Without this knowledge, we will likely answer a lot of questions that nobody is asking or attempt to meet needs that nobody has.

Without compromising our message or morals, we must stay current with our society and relevant to its needs. We cannot become all things to all people without having some understanding of who they are. Although we are not of this world, we are certainly in it for a purpose. The truth of God's Word never changes, but society does because people change what they think, believe and do.

When behavioral scientists research humanity, they are observing what the Bible calls the flesh in the vast majority of cases. They are describing the actions and attitudes of the fallen nature of humanity, which operates independently of God. Such research is descriptive and helpful if we understand its limitations. However, when research become *prescriptive*, implying what life and human behavior should be, it distorts the truth and becomes an enemy of the gospel.

Secular research assumes that we are an evolutionary product of our past environment and shaped by our individual choices. Such research makes no attempt to show the potential of new life in Christ or what a Spirit-filled life could be.

We are dependent on the creator of life to provide the explanation of why we

are here, how we should interpret what we observe and how to live meaningful lives with an expectant hope for the future. It was intended by God that special revelation interpret and explain natural revelation.

THE INADEQUACY OF SCIENCE

Second, the scientific method of investigation *by definition* leaves out the reality of the spiritual world. God does not submit to our methods of verification. We cannot *scientifically* prove the existence of God to the satisfaction of the skeptic. Metaphysics (the nature of being, or essential reality) is discussed in philosophy departments, not science departments. Even the Bible makes no attempt to prove the existence of God, much less the reality of the spiritual world. God just declares that He, angels and demons do exist and admonishes us to accept His perspective by faith and to live accordingly. “Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him” (Heb. 11:6). Rest assured that the god of this world is not going to cooperate with our research methods. He is the prince of darkness and the father of lies. He operates under the cloak of deception and will not voluntarily reveal himself for our benefit.

A leading Christian educator said he was interested in what Freedom in Christ Ministries was doing, but he would need to have scientific verification before he could include it in his curriculum. When he suggested that we do some research together, I said I had conducted my own research before and was open to work with him. But when I explained the limitations of what such a study could prove, he said he was no longer interested. Apparently he felt he needed research to validate revelation. Research may illustrate, but it does not validate special revelation. God’s Word is essential to interpret empirical research. Science has helped us understand natural law, alleviate some suffering and improve our standard of living, but it is simply inadequate to explain matters of faith.

When the Tail Wags the Dog

Why would not this educator incorporate the reality of the spiritual world into the curriculum of a graduate-level Christian counseling program? He was probably concerned for his credibility and reputation, and did not want any course listed that would threaten the school’s accreditation. It seems to me that the tail is wagging the dog. We have to be careful not to become more concerned about what others say than about what God says. Paul would certainly say, “See

to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ" (Col. 2:8).

In order to teach at the highest levels of learning in our secular campuses, one would be required to have or be in the process of obtaining a research doctorate. Such research would exclude the reality of the spiritual world and special revelation. Thus, empirical research and rationalism have formed the basis for a secular liberal arts education in the Western world. What is true, real and right has been determined by what is seen, heard and felt through the rational process of deduction. There is, however, a rise in paranormal research. Many secular schools have added parapsychology to their curriculum, but divine revelation is not the means by which they are evaluating their research. Humanism in secular schools is being replaced by New Age philosophies.

Research in the social sciences ascribes to the scientific method of investigation. Having been an aerospace engineer, I was familiar and comfortable with this scientific approach. This method originated in the natural sciences, which are, by and large, precise sciences. For example, there are over 100 elements listed in the periodic table of the elements. Some are man-made. If you combine some of these elements in a certain way under a specified atmospheric pressure and temperature, you can predict with great precision what the results will be anywhere in the world.

No Precision in Social Science

Since the natural sciences are relatively precise, why not apply the same scientific method to the social sciences? Because the social sciences do not have the same precision. Any time individual will and other external factors (which cannot be controlled) are part of the equation, the outcome cannot be predicted with any degree of accuracy.

Those who receive a doctorate in the social sciences, as I have, will be required to take classes on research methodology and statistics. There is no perfect research design in the social sciences because all contributing factors cannot be perfectly measured or controlled. Consequently, all results are given in *degrees of probability,* and correlations can only be shown to be or not to be *statistically significant.* There are no absolutes in sociological, psychological or anthropological studies.

However, secular societies often function as though the social sciences are precise and therefore authoritative. For instance, when a television news

program reports that a court-appointed psychiatrist or psychologist has determined that a person is mentally stable or competent to stand trial, the public should ask, “Which court-appointed psychiatrist or psychologist? On what basis is he or she making the evaluation?” Schools of psychology vary radically from one extreme to another, and a variety of theories that contradict one another abound in the behavioral sciences.

A Broad Spectrum

At one end of the psychological spectrum is behavioral modification, which is based on the belief that we are primarily products of our environment. Popularized by the research conducted on Pavlov’s dogs, operant conditioning has been demonstrated with rats and pigeons for years in many schools of psychology. Assuming that humanity is just a higher form of animal, the researchers (or counselors, teachers, parents, etc.) believe they can make a child be whatever they want the child to be just by applying the right stimulus. They do this by rewarding good behavior and punishing bad behavior.

At the other end of the behavioral-science spectrum are the personal-relevance theorists and practitioners. They take a more nondirective approach to counseling and disagree that people are just a product of external stimuli. They are more concerned about the internal values, attitudes, dignity and sense of worth that we all should have. Nondirective counselors are good listeners, and they help people get in touch with their feelings. Personal-relevance counselors are often taught not to force their convictions or values on their counselees. They employ counseling techniques such as empathy, congruence, transference, concreteness and genuineness. (By the way, these are simply good pastoral skills.) Personal-relevance counselors work on establishing trust and developing relational skills. They try to help their counselees self-disclose, so they can explain why the counselees are not functioning well and then give them the emotional support they need to cope with life.

Somewhere between these extremes are gestalt therapy, cognitive therapy, reality therapy and numerous other approaches. Which theory from this psychological smorgasbord is correct? Are they all wrong? If there were not some truth to what they are saying, nobody would be listening to them. If you try hard enough, you can find *some* biblical basis for any of them.

Consider behavioral modification, for instance. Doesn’t the Bible teach that there will be punishment for bad behavior and rewards for faithfulness? Spanking is a form of behavioral modification. Now consider another point on

the psychological spectrum: Shouldn't we be concerned about people and demonstrate concern by caring for them and showing empathy? Isn't the cognitive therapist right in stressing the need to think correctly? Certainly the reality therapist is not wrong in emphasizing the need for responsible behavior.

You will never achieve the balance or understanding you need if you embrace these theories and then look for biblical passages to support them. That is reading *into* Scripture, instead of exegesis, which is reading *from* Scripture.

THE PREVALENCE OF GRIDS

My third concern for elevating empirical research to the same level as Scripture has to do with worldview. The rational process of verification is always interpreted through the grids of culture, education and personal experience. We naturally interpret the world we observe from our own perspective. Wisdom, however, is seeing life from God's perspective.

We also have the tendency to perpetuate our own perspective, or that of the groups we are associated with, and Christians are no exception. To illustrate, suppose you sensed God's call to go into full-time Christian ministry. The church you are attending happens to be a conservative Presbyterian church, and the pastor is a Calvinist who teaches Reformed theology. Since this man was influential in your life, you would probably ask him to suggest a seminary that you could attend. He would probably recommend Calvinistic schools that teach Reformed theology, and you would probably attend one of them. There you would learn to interpret Scripture and understand the world from that perspective.

If the pastor in your church were a dispensationalist, what kind of seminary do you think he would recommend? And what if your pastor were Arminian? Anglican? Catholic? Charismatic? Evangelical? Every seminary or church has a doctrinal statement, and every professor or pastor has a theological position that he or she believes is correct. So does every school of psychology and every psychologist.

I am more committeed to the truth than I ever have been, because I have seen it set people free.

Only God Is Right

None of us has a perfect perspective of reality. The only One who is perfectly right is God. We may think we are defending the truth, but what we are actually defending is our own theological position and worldview. We are not omniscient, and we all have a grid by which we interpret and evaluate life. Being aware of this potential problem, I can honestly say that I am less committed to my theology now than I was when I finished seminary, but I am more committed to the truth than I ever have been, because I have seen it set people free. Theology is our attempt to systematize truth. Frankly, my theology has changed as I have matured over the years; what has not changed is the truth.

We even interpret Scripture from our own perspective. Let me illustrate: An intellectually gifted and committed seminary professor gave a message in chapel one day. His text was 2 Timothy 2:24-25: "The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition."

After grammatically breaking down the text, he shared how we should relate to one another as brothers and sisters in church-staff relationships. I about came out of my chair. This man taught hermeneutics and was a fine biblical scholar. Why didn't he finish the text? "If perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will" (vv. 25-26).

That passage was not teaching how to relate to one another on a church staff. Paul was describing what kind of people God can work through to set captives free. I think the professor was blinded by his natural worldview, just as I had been in my early years of ministry.

The following testimony illustrates how our education and worldview form a grid by which we interpret data and evaluate experiences.

SILENCE

> When I sit and think, I think of many things—my life, what I want to do, what I think about issues and people. I have conversations with myself inside my mind. I talk to myself and answer myself. I am my own best friend. We get along great! Sometimes I talk to myself so much during the day that I am really tired at the end of the day. But I keep myself occupied, and it helps me to think things through.

Sometimes I think of myself as two people: the one who is me every day of the week and the one I want to change. The one who has a low self-esteem and is afraid to really be herself in front of everyone. And then there's the one inside of me—the confident me who I wish would come out but for some reason won't. I call that part of me "her." She is a "she," and I refer to her as such. She is very bold, and everybody loves her; at least that's what I think would happen if I would just let her out. If I could just be myself, life would be so much easier and happier.

But until then, I talk to her inside of me. We talk about what we will do today, where we will go to eat, what we will wear, who we will talk to. Sometimes she comes up with very good ideas, and I am impressed with myself that I am so smart and clever. *If only people knew the real me,* I think, *they would really love me.* And sometimes I hear her say things to me that don't make sense. *I shouldn't really do that,* I think. *That isn't very nice. That would hurt someone. That is a stupid thing to do.* And I don't listen to her that time. But I don't mind. I like talking to her, so I continue talking.

Before you hear the rest of her story, ask yourself some questions. *Is what this lady is describing "normal"? Is this self-talk? Does she have a split personality? Is she psychotic? Does she have multiple personalities? Is she listening to her "inner child of her past"?* Do you understand how your education, worldview and experience can affect your diagnosis? Now let's finish her story:

One day, things changed between her and me. My life was going okay, but I wanted a closer relationship with God. I wanted to be free from the past and to be healed in my heart from the pain that I have been carrying. Someone told me I should go through something called the Steps to Freedom in Christ, and I made an appointment with an encourager. I wasn't thinking about my friend inside of me; I was thinking about me.

In the counseling session, I was asked to read some prayers and Scripture out loud. While doing this, my mind became fuzzy, and I couldn't concentrate. Most of all, when I tried to speak to her in my mind, I became confused. I couldn't hear her clearly. I became scared; my heart raced; and I became enraged inside. I shook. Where was my friend inside of me? Why all of a sudden was she mad? What was going on? What was wrong with me?

Then I found out. She wasn't my friend. She wasn't really me. She didn't want me to be friends with Jesus, and she didn't want me to get my life right with God. It didn't make sense because these were things that I wanted to do. I thought she was on my side. But I was wrong. I had to tell her to leave—out loud. Out loud? It seemed weird when I was told that she couldn't read my thoughts. But it made sense: she wasn't God, and she wasn't omnipresent. So I told her out loud to leave, and she was gone.

And there was silence. There were no more conversations going on in my mind anymore. And I missed her. I knew I shouldn't, but I did. I knew that she wasn't good for me and that God wanted me to talk to Him and not her. I struggled with the thought of not talking to her. I couldn't stand the silence. I felt alone. She tried to come back, and when she did, it scared me. She was angry and hostile. I felt betrayed. But after time I got used to the silence. I used it to remind me to talk to God, and I did. He didn't answer like she did. I couldn't hear His voice like I could hers. But I began to love talking to Him, singing to Him. I really felt close to Him, like He cared. And after a while, I forgot about the silence.

After some time I found myself lonely again. I forgot about the silence and found myself in conversation without even realizing it. My life was in confusion, and I couldn't figure out why, until one day I had to pray. My friend who had been discipling me wanted to help me, and I wanted help. She talked to me about my rebellion and how I needed to stop living independently of Him. It was then that I heard a very loud voice inside of me say, "I AM INDEPENDENT OF GOD." It scared me. Was that me? Did I really feel that way? No, I didn't. *She* was back. Then I got angry because I had let her back. I wanted her gone, but I couldn't move and I couldn't say anything. My friend prayed with me, and I bowed my head. She told me to picture heaven with a light, the lampstands and the throne of God. I started to really see it and to feel calm again. But then the voice started yelling, "No! No! No!" So I opened my eyes and gave up. My heart became hard, and I didn't really want to give everything to God. I still wanted control. There were some things that I did not want to give up.

But inside I longed for the silence again. *How ironic,* I thought. *Something that I didn't like at first had become my freedom.* How I fought inside trying to struggle with praying to God or running away from Him. It is so easy to run, so easy to put off what I can do right now. But I didn't *feel* repentant. I didn't *feel* like letting go, even though I knew I needed to.

I wondered if I would ever feel like it again.

And that is when I saw the words from the Steps to Freedom in Christ jump out at me from the page. It read, “Faith is something you decide to do, not something you feel like doing.” So I did it.

And now I live in wonderful silence.

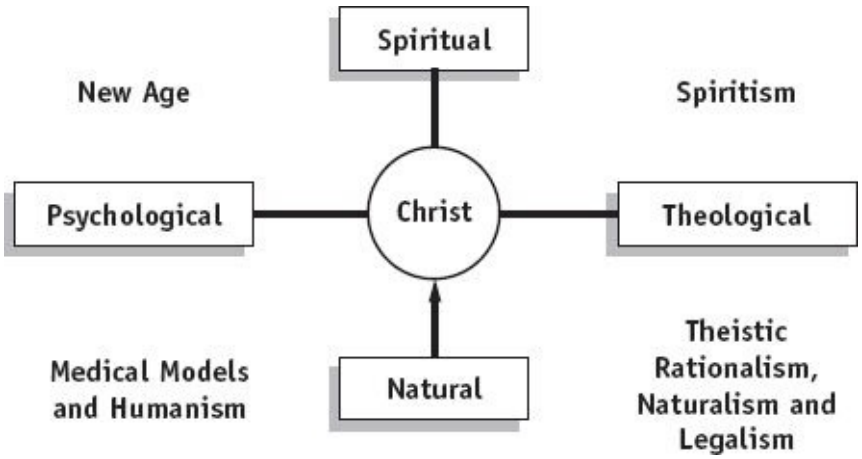
This lady’s problem was primarily spiritual. Could someone with her symptoms have a neurological or psychological problem? Yes, but in too many cases, those are the only possibilities considered.

A Call for Balance

Western rationalism and naturalism is out of balance with biblical reality. We have been taught by the secular world to believe that there is a natural explanation for everything, therefore, a natural answer for everything. Some churches will defend the miracles of the Bible but remain skeptical about the spiritual world. The Bible teaches that “our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers” (Eph. 6:12), but it is not perceived by many as a practical reality in their daily lives. We even hear someone say euphemistically, “The devil had a field day last night,” but when asked how the devil did it, they do not know. It is little more than a cliché for explaining difficulties or, worse, an attempt to blame something or someone else. “He is struggling with his own personal demons,” is another common cliché that may be more true than they realize.

As we search for biblical balance, consider diagram 1.2. Keep in mind that I am assuming a correct biblical understanding of God (theology), man (psychology), the natural world and the spiritual world. And I am not pitting one against the other. I want to show what can potentially happen if one is emphasized at the expense of the other.

Diagram 1.2



First, we need to realize that the Western world has been biased substantially toward the natural. But that has been changing dramatically with the recent growth of the New Age movement and the influence of Eastern religions.

Natural/Psychological Quadrant

The lower-left quadrant reflects the medical models, which have dominated the helping professions. Man and nature are the only players, with humanism the dominant philosophy. Christian counseling has been influenced by secular theories in this quadrant. Many have tried to integrate these models into Christianity. In many cases the result is nice Christian people doing secular counseling. Others are sincerely trying to embrace secular theories from a Christian perspective.

True integration will not occur unless two biblical perspectives are thoroughly embraced. First, have we fully embraced the gospel? Does it make any difference whether the person we are trying to help is a Christian or not? Are we just products of our past, or are we products of the work of Christ on the cross? Does 2 Corinthians 5:17—"Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come"—have any practical relevance to what we are trying to accomplish? Are we trying to fix our past, or be free from it? Does our hope lie in God, or does it lie in some technique, person or theory? I will have more to say about these questions in the next chapter.

Second, have we taken into account the reality of the spiritual world? In other words, do we have a biblical worldview? Are our struggles against flesh and blood? Are we trying to accomplish God's will without the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit? Is the person mentally ill, or is there a spiritual battle going

on for this individual's mind? Do we use the same message and methods with believers as we do with nonbelievers? Are we trying to help people establish their identities, find purpose and meaning in life, and seek to meet their needs without Christ? Isn't that what the devil is doing? Sobering!

Does our hope lie in God, or does it lie in some technique, person or theory?

I have a deep appreciation for medical doctors, and I thank God for what the medical profession has been able to accomplish in alleviating human suffering and sickness. I have no doubt that chemical imbalances and glandular problems plague some people, but any honest doctor will acknowledge that the medical model can take you only so far. Aren't medical professionals the ones informing us that most people are sick for psychosomatic reasons? The Church must make its contribution or people will never have a whole answer.

Psychological/Spiritual Quadrant

There is a dramatic shift in secular models as we move upward on the left side of the diagram. Tragically, the spiritual emphasis is not Christian but demonic. In the absence of an adequate theology, practitioners have no clue what they are getting involved in. They simply change the identity of demons by calling them spirit guides. Mediums are called channelers, and a gullible public accepts them. Humanism as a viable philosophy is waning as spiritism and New Age philosophies become the mainstream religion in America. New Age practitioners reason that mortals cannot save themselves, but if you were a god, you would have a better chance. So why not believe you are God or a god? The New Age message is appealing but horribly wrong. According to its teaching, you are not a sinner in need of salvation; you are a god who needs to be enlightened. This is much more attractive than the austere nature of Eastern religions, because you can have not only "enlightenment" but also spiritual power and materialism. Wow!

The rise of paganism as a religious philosophy among the elite and influential in England is an interesting offshoot of the New Age movement in America. Adherents dismiss the Church as a viable option because it lacks spiritual substance. The New Age, occult and ancient religions appear to offer more

spiritual reality. Power is what they want, and spiritism offers it. Since the Harry Potter books came out, the interest in the occult in England has significantly increased.[1] The lure of esoteric knowledge and power has trapped many a traveler in the web of the occult.

Spiritual/Theological Quadrant

The movement upward on the right side of the diagram has also been rapid in Christian circles. Among conservative Christians, the Holy Spirit came out of hiding in the ’60s and ’70s of the last century, and the devil came out in the ’80s and ’90s. Much of this new awareness has been sorely needed, but distortions are evident when it becomes unbalanced. Personal needs and responsibilities are often overlooked. People are said to have a “spirit of this” or a “spirit of that.” In other words, if they can just get rid of that false spirit, they will be okay. Such one-dimensional thinking has made a caricature of the Church and caused some to see the spiritual battle as bogus.

Theological/Natural Quadrant

The influence of the lower-right quadrant is diminishing in our culture, but a legalistic remnant is still very vocal. The further these people remove themselves from hurting humanity, the more controlling and judgmental they become. They are the “defenders of the faith” and resemble the Pharisees more than the disciples of Jesus. Their major personal flaw becomes evident when you try to get close and personal with them. They will not let you. They motivate through fear and guilt. If you were to try to help them understand how they got so hard and bitter, they would castigate you for psychoanalyzing them.

People in these legalistic churches are perceived as sinners in the hands of an angry God. But in truth, they are saints in the hands of a loving God. I have never been able to understand how that simple truth is so often distorted by those who claim most vehemently the authority of Scripture. I think the Lord would say to them, “Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire compassion not sacrifice,’ for the goal of our instruction is love” (see Matt. 9:13; 1 Tim. 1:5). Fundamentalism as a mainstream Christian movement is over in America, but the fundamentals of our faith will always be true for those who understand the grace of God.

Christ Is Central

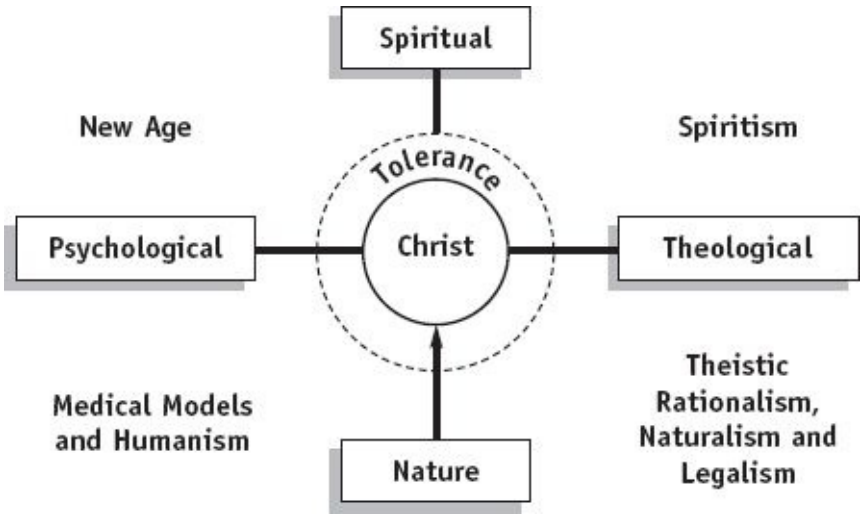
Christ, the God-man, is the center and the balance we need. We will see in

chapter 3 how everything radiates from Him. What I am saying is that doctrine should never be an end in itself. If our theology is right, it should cause us to fall in love with God and one another, which is the great commandment. There is a time to pray and a time to serve, a time to worship and a time to share. Prayer and worship come first. But if we say we love the Lord, then we need to care for and feed His lambs (see John 21:5-19). If we say we love the Lord, Scripture requires that we love our brothers and our sisters (see 1 John 4:19-21).

The explanation of the four different quadrants is a simple analysis of those who stray too far from the center. So who is perfectly in the center of the diagram? Only Christ! There are no perfectly balanced people, even though we would all like to be, so let me add two circles to the diagram (see p. 41).

The inner circle would constitute orthodox teaching by those who hold to the absolute authority of Scripture. If only God were interpreting His Word, the circle would be a dot. For us, it is a circle, because there will always be minor disagreements, even among the most intellectually gifted theologians. No one person will ever be able to achieve omniscience.

Diagram 1.3



Where you would fall on the inner circle is also affected by giftedness. Those with the gift of prophecy would probably be more oriented to the right, because they are calling for holiness; the administrators to the bottom, because they work in the world of facts and figures; those who have the gift of helps to the left because they are motivated to serve people, and so on.

The next circle indicates a need to exercise tolerance. People are in transition

and at various stages of growth. Those outside the circle of tolerance need to repent what they are doing and renounce the lies they are believing. It is not the goal of discipleship counseling to eliminate the negative consequences of what they have chosen to believe and do, nor should we make their lifestyle more comfortable for them so that they can continue living in sin. The goal is to help them repent, believe the truth and trust in God.



CHAPTER TWO

DEFINING MENTAL HEALTH

The father's problems began when his 26-year-old biker son returned home to live with him and his wife. Within six months, the mother was hospitalized for a nervous breakdown, and the father had gotten himself into a serious spiritual problem that he did not know how to resolve.

Shortly after his son moved into his house, the father started to experience seductive spiritual attacks at night. At first, he made the unfortunate mistake of participating in the attacks. Every encounter led him deeper into bondage. He even started to experience these attacks on his way to work.

Finally, he woke up to the reality of what was going on, but he did not know how to make it stop. By the time he came to see me, he was trying to sleep at night with pictures of Jesus on his body and a Bible between his legs to protect himself!

I helped him find his freedom in Christ, but I had to inform him that the bizarre things going on in his home would probably continue unless the son left the house or resolved his issues. The next meeting I had was with the whole family. The mature Christian in the family was the mother. After I heard the son's wild stories of excessive sex, drugs and demonic encounters, the mother was expecting me to support her opinion that he needed psychiatric help.

“He probably could use that kind of help for some issues in his life,” I said, “but most of what he has described today is spiritual and can only be resolved by submitting to God and resisting the devil.”

That was not what she wanted to hear. So I asked her, “Ma’am, do you believe in evolution?”

Startled, she said, “Of course not.”

I continued, “You mean to tell me that you don’t accept the scientific explanation for the origin of the species?” Again she assured me that she did not. Then I asked her, “Do you accept without question the psychiatric explanation of mental illness?”

“Yes, I do,” she answered.

This Christian woman wanted to believe that there was some natural explanation for her son’s problems, which could be resolved through the resources of the natural sciences. Although she did not buy into the scientific theory of evolution, she was willing to place her trust in secular psychiatry and psychology and dismiss the possibility that her son could have a spiritual problem.

Secular psychiatry can alleviate some suffering related to the natural realm, but without the aid of divine revelation, how can secular psychiatrists and psychologists give us an adequate understanding of who we are and why we are here, explain the nature of our problems and prescribe a wholistic answer? I am emphasizing secular because there are some very godly Christian psychologists and psychiatrists who are earnestly trying to integrate their Christian beliefs into their practices. Secular programs are like ships in the night that pass by people who are drowning in the middle of the ocean. They can throw out life vests to keep them from sinking for a while, but they do not have any means to save the people. Only God can do that.

MENTAL HEALTH ACCORDING TO THE WORLD

According to mental health experts, you are mentally healthy if you are in touch with reality and relatively free of anxiety. That is a fair assessment, but how do we define reality? Based on this definition of mental health, would not every spiritually deceived person fail on both counts?

In Touch with Reality

Suppose counselees tell their secular counselors that they are hearing voices or

seeing things. If the counselors do not hear or see what their counselees are describing, they would have no choice but to conclude that their counselees are out of touch with reality. Yet from God's perspective, the ones who are out of touch with reality are the secular counselors, since God is the ultimate reality. What the individual is experiencing is very real, although it is not seen or heard in the natural realm.

Lacking any biblical perspective on mental health, secular doctors and psychologists explain the battle for the mind as a neurological disorder or chemical imbalance. It is true that our body chemistry can get out of balance and hormonal problems can disrupt the normal functioning of our biochemical system. But other legitimate questions, such as How can a chemical imbalance produce a personal thought? and How can our neurotransmitters involuntarily and randomly create thoughts that we are opposed to thinking? also need to be asked. Is there a natural explanation for that? I'm open to receive instruction and will remain open to hear any legitimate natural explanations because I am searching for a wholistic answer for people. I too want to see their problems resolved, but I do not think that will happen unless we take into account all of reality—including the spiritual realm.

When people say they hear voices, what are they actually hearing? The only way we can physically hear is to have a physical sound source creating a sound wave. A sound wave is a rhythmic compression and rarefaction of air molecules. Sound is a physical movement through the medium of air that is picked up by our eardrums, which in turn send a signal to the brain. That is how we hear. But the voices that people hear are not coming from that kind of source, nor do they require the medium of air to be heard.

When people say they see things that others do not, what are they actually seeing? The only way we can see something through our eyes is to have a light source reflecting off a material object. There is no material essence to the spiritual world, so we cannot see a spiritual being with our physical eyes nor hear one with our ears. Remember, "Our struggle is not against flesh and blood" (Eph. 6:12). I have had many people in my office suddenly become fearful and claim to see things and hear voices that I could not see or hear. In fact, I do not even bother to look or listen, because I know that what they are experiencing cannot be seen or heard through physical channels of perception. The battle is in their minds and is not observable by someone else.

We cannot read each other's minds, so we have no awareness of a spiritual battle going on in other people's minds unless they have the courage to tell us.

Many fear they are going crazy, and most are reluctant to share this mental battle with others. Nobody wants to be diagnosed as mentally ill and given a label that comes with a prescription for medication. Without some biblical explanation, most people (including many Christians) accept the psychological diagnosis of psychosis, neurosis or schizophrenia. To illustrate, consider the following e-mail I received:

> For years, ever since I was a teenager (I am 36 now), I had those "voices" in my head. There were four in particular and sometimes what seemed like loud choruses of them. When the subject of schizophrenia would come up on television or in a magazine I would think to myself, *I know I am not schizophrenic, but what is this in my head?* I was tortured, mocked and jeered. Every single thought I had was second-guessed; consequently, I had zero self-esteem. I often used to wish the voices would be quiet, and I always wondered if other people had this as well and if it was common.
>
> When I started to learn from you about taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ and to read about people's experiences with these voices, I came to recognize them for what they were, and I was able to make them leave.
>
> That was an amazing and beautiful thing, to be fully quiet in my mind after so many years of torment. I do not need to explain further all the wonderful things that come with this freedom of the mind; it is a blessing you seem to know well.

We cannot tell a flesh pattern to leave or tell our body chemistry to stop causing us trouble. But we can resist the devil, and he will flee from us. If the voices leave by submitting to God and resisting the devil, then one can only conclude that the origin of the problem is spiritual, not natural.

The same reasoning occurs for dreams and nightmares. When we go to sleep at night, our organic brains continue to function, though nobody is typing on the keyboard. Our brains are allowed to randomly select data that is stored in our memories. Normal dreams are composed of people we know or have known and places we have been. The story line of some dreams can be rather creative, but the people and places are coming from stored information. If a child watches a horror movie and has a nightmare that evening, chances are the players in the dream will be the characters seen in the movie. But if the nightmares are terror attacks with images not previously stored, then the source is probably external.

In our experience, such night terrors are spiritual attacks, and they end when we have helped the victims resolve their personal and spiritual conflicts.

People will talk about their abuses and share what has happened to them, but they are reluctant to share what is going on inside. The lack of a balanced biblical perspective has left them with the conclusion that their problem is either psychological or neurological. Read this powerful testimony that a dear lady sent to me:

> It is by God's grace that I attended your conference. It was not easy getting here, as those voices in my head made me walk out halfway through the first night and halfway out of the parking lot before the second night even started. Now I know why.
>
> Thank you for putting all of my worst nightmares to rest—for presenting the truth about the voices in my mind. It is the first time someone has attempted to explain an aspect of mental illness without me having to cringe and throw up (that would have been embarrassing, since I was sitting in the front row)!
>
> This is truly the happiest day of my life. What a relief to know that I am sane. For 30 years I have begged God to save me from the pits of hell—mental illness. He answered my prayer at your conference. All my life I have lived with the fear that I would be crazy like the rest of my family, and I was only fooling myself that I was sane because I had been covering up by serving God all these years.
>
> I was too terrified to tell anyone about the voices, so I thought about suicide instead. I shuddered at the thought of living like my mother for the rest of my life. My marriage was being destroyed by those voices because I knew if I told my husband, he would have me locked up and committed. I would wear a onesize-fits-all white jacket for the rest of my life. I saw no way out. I had almost given in to those voices and given up on God completely.
>
> My mother is the victim of a split personality. She tried to kill me three times that I can vividly remember. She sexually abused all of her children. I lived in tremendous fear all my life. She told my siblings and me that we were born to a crazy family, and we all needed psychiatrists. If you can believe it, she was the head of a Bible school based in our church, and my father traveled as an evangelist for more than 30 years. Naturally, my view of God hasn't been too clear.

I am the only member of my family who hasn't suffered from a nervous breakdown. I simply refused to. And after hearing you, I know I never will. What a relief to know that others hear those same voices. I have not been alone. I don't have to be afraid anymore. I can be free! Really free! I feel like you should send me a bill. What is funnier is that I would be happy to pay it! Thank you! You can't imagine what it feels like to get out of this prison.

I was always waking up at exactly 3:00 A.M. For years and years, I have been terrified of 3:00 A.M. It is now 3:30 A.M. I woke up at exactly 3:00 A.M. and immediately checked the clock. This time there were no voices, and I started to cry. I knew it was God. I didn't have to be afraid anymore. Thank you! It's finally over!

I believe every church can and should be able to help someone like this. From God's perspective, the unseen world is just as real as the world we see with our eyes, "For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:18). God is a Spirit, and He is the ultimate reality—everything else is just His creation. Everything that we can see is temporal.

Using classifications of mental illness (paranoia, psychosis and so on) is convenient for categorizing symptoms. There is nothing wrong with using them for the purpose of communicating with one another, but they do not explain the cause or the cure. Establishing causation is not always easy, so if you do not ask the right questions or take into consideration the reality of the spiritual world, you will probably not get to the real cause in many cases.

We need to examine each thought according to the Word of God and choose the truth.

Most people will not identify with the problem of hearing voices, but everybody struggles with tempting, accusing and deceptive thoughts. Where these thoughts are coming from is less important than what we do with them. In one sense, it does not matter whether the thought originated from the television set, your memory bank, your imagination or from the pit, because the answer is the same: We need to take "every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). We need to examine each thought according to the Word of God and choose the truth. Paul says, "I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his

craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3). The way you overcome the father of lies is to choose the truth. This is certainly not a new phenomenon. Eve was deceived when she believed a lie.

If the diagnosis of mental illness is actually a battle for the mind, how can we know it? There must be some way to find out, and that is part of the purpose for this book. Should not our church leaders be equipped to provide some kind of spiritual diagnosis as our doctors are equipped to provide a physical diagnosis? When you go to your doctor, you expect to be checked out, don't you? If the blood and urine tests check out okay, you would not be upset, would you? If you are struggling with obsessive thoughts, chronic depression and anxiety attacks, wouldn't you want to know what the nature of your problem is? If churches follow the procedure outlined in this book, you will not be labeled, judged, rejected or charged. If your conflicts are not resolved, then go see your doctor. You would have nothing to lose and maybe something wonderful to gain.

The process I am describing in this book does far more than check for some evil presence, because that alone would not be an adequate solution. We need a biblical way to resolve personal and spiritual conflicts by the grace of God. Then the life of Christ will manifest itself in people's lives, and they will be set on the path of becoming the persons God created them to be.

The Church has to be careful not to think that there is a spiritual answer for everything, in the same way that the medical profession must not assume there is a physical answer for everything. The *two* explanations are needed because we are physical *and* spiritual beings, and we live in a world that is physical *and* spiritual—both of which God created.

Relatively Free of Anxiety

Being relatively free from anxiety is the other criteria for determining mental health. In the book *Freedom from Fear,* Rich Miller and I attempted to explain anxiety disorders and offer a biblical way to resolve irrational fears and anxieties.[1] Let me touch on some of the key points as they relate to our discussion.

Anxiety is a fear of the unknown or fear without an adequate cause. The primary word for "anxiety" in the New Testament, *merimna*, has both positive and negative connotations. Of the 25 uses in the New Testament, 5 indicate a sense of caring. For instance, if you have an important function tomorrow, then you should be a little anxious; and that should motivate you to responsible

behavior. That is why mental health is defined as relatively free from anxiety. The other 20 uses of the word refer to a debilitating sense of worry. When "merimna" is used as a verb, it appears to be a conjunction of two root words: *merizo,* which means "divide," and *nous,* which means "mind." That is why the translators of the *King James Version* of the Bible translated "do not be worried" as "take no thought" (Matt. 6:25) and "why are you worried" as "why take ye thought" (Matt. 6:28).

To be anxious in a negative sense is to be double-minded. James wrote that double-minded people are unstable in all their ways (see Jas. 1:8). This is clearly revealed in Matthew 6:24-25:

> No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth. For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life.

According to Matthew, the basis for anxiety is uncertainty and a lack of trust. We worry about what we treasure in our hearts (see Matt. 6:19-24), and we worry about tomorrow (see vv. 25-34) because we do not know what will happen. Scripture says, "Do not worry about tomorrow" (v. 34) because God will take care of you. A mind that is free and pure is single focused.

James writes that if we are experiencing trials in life, we should ask the Lord in faith for wisdom. If we are overcome by doubting thoughts, we will be overcome by trials and tribulations. "For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways" (Jas. 1:7-8). God is the antidote for anxiety; therefore, cast "all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you" (1 Pet. 5:7). We have to choose to trust Him and turn to Him in prayer:

> Be anxious for nothing [i.e., do not be double-minded about anything], but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God (Phil. 4:6).

Like anxiety, fear is a God-given emotion. Without being able to experience fear, we would not be able to protect ourselves. Fear is the natural emotion we feel when our physical or psychological safety is being threatened. Unlike anxiety, fear has an object. Fears are even categorized by their objects. For

instance, claustrophobia is a fear of enclosed places. Xenophobia is a fear of strangers or foreigners, and agoraphobia is a generalized fear of open spaces. In order for a fear object to be legitimate, it must have two attributes: (1) It must be perceived as potent (having some power); and (2) it must be imminent (present). For instance, I have a healthy fear of rattlesnakes. Yet as I am writing this, I sense no fear of rattlesnakes at all because there are none present.

To eliminate a fear object in your life, all you have to do is remove one of its attributes. For instance, physical death is no longer a legitimate fear object for us, because God has removed one of the attributes. Although death is still imminent, it is no longer potent because "death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor. 15:54). Therefore, Paul could write, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21). Physical life is not the ultimate value—spiritual life is. It will be heaven for believers when their souls separate from their bodies; it will be hell for nonbelievers when their souls are separated from God. Jesus said:

> Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell (Matt. 10:28).

Why is "the fear of the LORD … the beginning of wisdom" (Prov. 9:10)? Because it is the one fear that expels all other fears. "You are not to fear what they fear or be in dread of it. It is the LORD of hosts whom you should regard as holy. And He shall be your fear, and He shall be your dread. Then He shall become a sanctuary" (Isa. 8:12-14). A wise person does not fear people, death or Satan more than God.

What two attributes of God make Him the ultimate fear object? He is *omnipotent* and *omnipresent.* No matter where you go, God is there, and His power and authority exceed all others! Fear of anything other than God excludes faith in God:

> Even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence (1 Pet. 3:14-15).

When I have asked Christian audiences all over the world if they have had a

fearful encounter with some spiritual force, at least 50 percent have responded affirmatively. I have found it to be much higher among Christian leaders, which should not be surprising. At least 35 percent of the audiences I have queried said they have had the following terrifying experience at night when they seem to be half asleep: They are suddenly aware of some evil presence that terrifies them. They may have felt a pressure on their chests or something grabbing their throats. When they tried to say something, they could not. Why couldn't they? Because they needed to submit to God first, and then they would have been able to resist the devil. Since God knows the thoughts and intentions of our hearts, we can always turn to Him in our minds. As soon as we acknowledge Him and His authority, we will be able to call upon His name and be saved. All they would have to say is "Jesus," and it would be over. I am not a timid man, but I have felt the terror of spiritual attacks at night. In fact, it used to happen every night before I started a conference. In each case, I experienced immediate victory by turning to God.

If I shared my experience with secular doctors or counselors, they would call it an anxiety or panic attack. Why don't they call it fear, which is what it feels like? Because they cannot identify the fear object. Therefore, it would better fall under the definition of anxiety. Every child of God should know how to recognize a spiritual attack and know what to do about it.

A godly pastor used the Steps to Freedom in Christ to help the woman who wrote the following testimony:

> For the past 35 years, I have lived from one surge of adrenaline to the next. My entire life has been gripped by paralyzing fear, which seems to come from nowhere and everywhere. This fear made very little sense to me or anyone else. I invested four years of my life obtaining a degree in psychology, hoping it would enable me to understand and conquer those fears. Psychology only perpetuated my questions and insecurity. Six years of professional counseling offered little insight and no change in my level of anxiety.
>
> After two hospitalizations, numerous trips to the emergency room, repeated EKGs, a visit to a thoracic surgeon and a battery of other tests, my panic attacks only worsened. By the time I came to see you [the pastor], full-blown panic attacks had become a daily feature.
>
> It has now been three weeks since I've experienced a panic attack! I have gone to the malls, church services and even made it through Sunday

School with peace in my heart. I had no idea what freedom meant until now. When I came to see you, I had hoped that the truth would set me free, but now I know it has.

When you live in a constant state of anxiety, most of life passes you by because you are physically, emotionally and mentally unable to focus on the fear that is swallowing you. I could hardly read a verse of Scripture in one sitting. It was as though someone snatched it away from my mind as soon as it had entered. Scripture was such a fog to me. I could only read verses that spoke of death and punishment. I had actually become afraid of opening my Bible. These past weeks, I have spent hours a day in the Word, and it makes sense. The fog is gone. I am amazed at what I am able to hear, see, understand and retain.

Before reading *The Bondage Breaker,* I could not say "Jesus Christ" without my metabolism going berserk. I can now call upon the name of Jesus Christ with peace and confidence—and I do it regularly.

There is a major difference between fears that are developed over time (i.e., learned) and those that are essentially spiritual attacks. The latter has to be dealt with at the time of attack. Sometimes spiritual attacks come through human agents. For instance, an abusive husband was going to harm his wife when she was taking a shower. She spoke a paraphrase of 1 John 5:18, "I am a child of God. The evil one cannot touch me." Her husband suddenly became disoriented and ran out of the house. A doctoral student who watched our videocassette series was confronted by three thugs at a train stop. When they demanded his money, he said, "I am a child of God. The evil one cannot touch me." They said, "Oh," and walked away. This type of response requires some discernment because those attacks may not have originated directly from the enemy.

There are people, animals and events in this world that will evoke healthy fear responses for our survival. If this is the case, then call the police or take appropriate action, but it does not cost anything to first call upon the chief of all police—and we are biblically encouraged to do so.

Irrational fears learned over time must be unlearned, which usually requires the person to discover the lies behind irrational fears. To overcome irrational fears, we have to first separate legitimate fears, which are necessary for survival, from irrational fears (phobias). Phobias either compel us to do something that is irresponsible or prevent us from doing that which is responsible. We need to make a commitment not to allow that fear to have any control over us and to

work out a plan of responsible behavior. Somebody once said, “Do the thing you fear the most, and the death of fear is certain.”

Fear is a powerful motivator. Paul said, “Knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men” (2 Cor. 5:11). The fear of the Lord is not a negative concept, because God is not out to punish us. Rather, He wants to restore us and protect us. “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love” (1 John 4:18). The punishment that I deserved was taken out on Christ. I fear the Lord because I will stand before Him someday and give an account for my life. This judgment is for the purpose of rewards; however, I will be personally accountable for all I have done. I want my Lord to say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” That is a powerful motivation that has far-reaching ramifications for how I live. The fear of God is the answer to spiritually based panic attacks, and the Word of God is the answer to irrational fears that we have learned from living in a fallen world.

MENTAL HEALTH ACCORDING TO THE BIBLE

Biblical mental health begins with a true knowledge of God and the knowledge of who we are as His children. You would be mentally healthy if you repented and knew the following:

- God loves you (see John 3:16).
- He is able and willing to meet all of your needs (see Phil. 4:19).
- You can do all things through Christ who strengthens you (see Phil. 4:13).
- He will never leave you nor forsake you (see Josh. 1:5; Heb. 13:5).
- He’s gone before you to prepare a place for you in heaven (see John 14:2).
- There is no legitimate reason to fear death (see John 8:51; 1 Cor. 15:54-57).
- The guilt of your sins has been forgiven (see John 1:29).
- There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (see Rom. 8:1).
- You are a child of God (see Matt. 19:14; John 1:12; Rom. 8:16; 1 John 3:1-3).

If all the above are true and the fruit of the Spirit is evident in your life, would you be a mentally healthy and balanced person? Of course you would.

Let me quickly add that the greatest cause of so-called mental illness is a distorted concept of God and ourselves. Visit a hospital psychiatric ward and you'll see some of the most religious people you have ever met. Upon examination, however, you will quickly understand that they have a very distorted concept of God and themselves. That is why some secular counselors have a negative view of the Church. Many of their counselees are religious, and some will bring their Bibles with them to the hospital. The counselors wonder where they are getting all this religious junk. It is easy to see why they want to de-emphasize religion and get their counselees back into "reality."

The greatest cause of so-called mental illness is a distorted concept of God and ourselves.

The Bases for Christian Living

There are two critical beliefs that are essential for our mental health. The first is based in the true nature of God. Paul emphasized this foundational belief when he wrote, "I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phil. 3:8). The second critical belief is based on a true knowledge of who we are as children of God and the nature of our relationship with Him. These two gospel beliefs—the nature of God and who you are as a child of God—form the basis for Christian living. Satan can undermine your mental and emotional health simply by distorting either one.

Let me illustrate: In Psalm 13:1-2, David said, "How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart all the day?" To whom is David talking? To himself! In verse two he continues: "How long will my enemy be exalted over me?" David is depressed and overcome by the circumstances of life. Much of his depression is based on a misconception of God and his relationship with Him. Could God forget him at all, much less forever? No, God could not forget him even if He wanted to, because God is omniscient. However, if you believe that He can or will forget you, there goes your hope.

The writer of Psalm 42:5 says, "Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him for the help of His presence." Our hope lies in God, and all depression that

is not physical in origin is from hopelessness. The same instruction is illustrated in Lamentations. Chapter 3 begins with a distorted concept of God and the author's relationship with Him. Consequently, he writes, "My soul has been rejected from peace; I have forgotten happiness. So I say, 'My strength has perished, and so has my hope from the LORD' " (vv. 17-18).

Out of this despair, something incredible happens: "Surely my soul remembers and is bowed down within me. This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. The LORD'S lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness" (Lam. 3:20-23). The writer's circumstances did not change; however, what changed was his understanding of God. The battle was all in his mind.

When we worship God, we are ascribing to Him His divine attributes. We do not worship God because He is an egomaniac who needs His ego stroked every Sunday morning. That is paganism. God does not need us to tell Him who He is. He is fully secure within Himself. We worship God because He truly is worthy and because we must keep the divine attributes of God constantly before us. Then we will live mentally and emotionally healthy lives by faith and live humbly dependent on Him.

PSYCHOLOGICAL VERSUS SPIRITUAL HEALTH

When is a problem psychological and when is it spiritual? This commonly asked question presupposes a distinction between the psychological and the spiritual natures of humanity. I believe that the question is indicative of a false dichotomy. Our present condition always has some psychological basis. There is no time when our minds, emotions, wills, personalities and relationships are not contributing factors. Likewise, our present condition always has some spiritual basis. There is no time when God is not here. Hebrews 1:3 says God "upholds all things by the word of His power." He is not a deistic God who created the world and now sits idly by as we struggle in our own human dilemma. We are created in the image of God. "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24).

Because we are spiritual people who live in a spiritual world, the Bible gives no indication that it is ever safe to take off the armor of God. On the contrary, it says, "Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm" (Eph. 6:13). Yet our tendency is to polarize into a psychotherapeutic ministry—which ignores the

reality of the spiritual world—or some kind of deliverance ministry that ignores the total person and individual responsibility. I do not believe either paradigm is sufficient to deal with the whole person.

We are whole people who have a whole God who has a whole answer.

We cannot emphasize either the body, the soul or the spirit at the expense of any other part and still have an adequate or balanced answer. We are whole people who have a whole God who has a whole answer. In our failure to address the interconnection between body, soul and spirit, we have allowed New Age philosophers, instead of the Church, to be the primary proponents of wholistic health.

IDENTIFYING CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP COUNSELING

I think there are two primary bases by which Christian discipleship, counseling and recovery ministries can be evaluated.

Centrality of the Gospel

First is the centrality of the gospel in our message and ministry. Some questions we should ask ourselves:

- *Are the people we are trying to help just products of their past, or are they primarily products of the work of Christ?*
- *Is it our goal to understand our past and attempt to live with it, or does the gospel provide us the means to be free from our past?*
- *Are we partly in Adam and partly in Christ, or is the old self dead and the new self alive?*
- *Do we really believe that "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come" (2 Cor. 5:17) or is this pie-in-the-sky theology instead of the basis for Christian living?*

The failure to understand the truth of "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27) will result in a law-obedience response to God instead of a life-faith

response. This is the classic struggle between law and grace. Law-based encouragers try to shape behavior according to God's laws. They explain from Scripture how their counselees' behavior is not consistent with what the Bible teaches, and they encourage them to confess and to seek God's forgiveness. Next they show the counselees how they should live their lives according to the Word of God, and they admonish them to commit to doing the very best they can. Lesser forms of this behavioral approach would not even include the Bible. The encouragers would use common sense or secular theory to root out the irresponsible behavior and encourage the individuals to start living responsible lives.

Those who understand the gospel know that Christ came to give us life and that our response is to walk by faith according to what God said is true in the power of the Holy Spirit. They also know that the wonderful counselor is God Himself and that the people they are trying to help must abide in Christ in order to glorify God and bear fruit (see John 15:7-8). Their method is to help people resolve the critical issues between themselves and God through faith and repentance. Once that is accomplished, the life of Christ is manifested in the counselees, who are then able to be the people God created them to be. The counselees are transformed by the renewing of their minds, and they begin to rely on God's strength and resources rather than on their own, as Paul taught in 2 Corinthians 3:5-6:

> Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

A professional counselor told me that his counselees are not ready for God. He has to help them first; then they will be able to go to church and worship God. In other words, God is only there to be worshiped, and we are the ones who are really going to help people. That is heresy. People do not need us! They need the Lord! They may have to lean on us initially, but the goal is to help them live their lives dependent on God, not on us. To do any less is to take upon ourselves a god status—we are incapable of giving anyone life or meeting their critical needs. Only God can do that.

Biblical Worldview

Having a biblical worldview is the second criterion for determining whether our ministry is truly Christian and wholistic. Let us ask ourselves:

- *Does the Bible teach that there is a kingdom of darkness and a kingdom of light?*
- *Is there a god of this world who also is the prince of power of the air?*
- *Do we have a practical understanding and acceptance of the fact that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12)?*

Without this knowledge, we are like blindfolded warriors who do not know who our enemy is, so we strike out at ourselves and at each other.

In order to recognize the positive side of having a biblical worldview and accept the reality of the spiritual world, let us ask ourselves:

- *Do we understand the role of the comforter, the Paraclete, the One who comes alongside?*
- *Do we know that He "is the Spirit of truth" (John 14:17), that He will lead us into all truth (see 16:13) and that truth will set us free (see 8:32)?*
- *Do we try to convict people of their sins, or do we let God fulfill that role?*
- *Do we know how to live by the Spirit so that we "will not carry out the desire of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16)?*
- *Do we understand the need for spiritual discernment, which can only comes from a righteous relationship with God?*

THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

Without a theology of resolution, we can easily succumb to the paralysis of analysis. It is not enough to correctly read the symptoms and assign the right label. Nor is it enough to explain with great precision why people are not functioning well. Neither one resolves the problem. If you were hopelessly lost in a maze, would you want a "mazeologist" to explain to you all the intricacies of your own private maze and give you coping skills to stay there? Would you want a legalistic preacher telling you what a jerk you were for getting into the

maze in the first place? No, you would want to know the way, the truth and the life (see John 14:6), so you could get out of there.

The path back to God is not that difficult, but to walk it you must believe that He is the answer. There are a million ways into sin, but the way out is always the same. You can be abused a thousand different ways, but in each case, forgiveness is the means by which you can be free from your past.

Ephesians 2:22 says that every believer is a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. Unresolved personal and spiritual conflicts are like garbage that we have failed to take out of the temple or spills that we have not cleaned up. The mess attracts flies. Some have suggested that we should study the flight patterns of the flies and determine their order and rank. Although that may have some value, that alone will not resolve the problem. We have to get rid of the garbage.

Repentance and faith in God has always been the answer, so that means we have to take personal responsibility for our own attitudes and actions. Many people have been victimized, but whether or not they remain victims is up to them. We must help them get rid of the garbage—that is what this book is all about.



CHAPTER THREE

INTEGRATING THEOLOGY AND PSYCHOLOGY

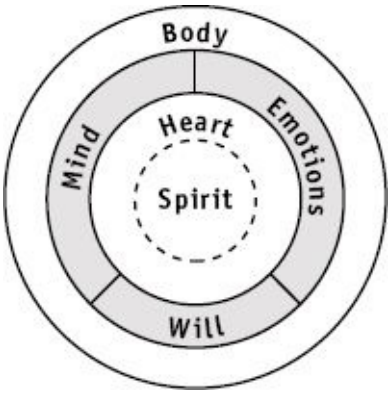
The influence of secular psychology in the Christian community has caused many conservatives to question the contribution that psychology has and can make. Some are even antipsychology, which I believe is unfortunate and polarizing. By definition, psychology is the study of the soul; theology is the study of God; bibliology is the study of the Bible; pneumatology is the study of the Spirit and so on. Generally speaking, systematic theology is a study of all the essential doctrines of our faith, which would include the study of our souls (psychology). I am not in agreement with secular psychology, but neither am I in agreement with liberal theology. I believe the Bible has the only authoritative explanation of the soul, and it is imperative that we understand how the body, soul and spirit function together and how God intended us to relate to Him.

THE THREE-PRONGED PERSON

According to the creation account, "The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being" (Gen. 2:7, *NIV*). This combination of dust (natural) and divine breath (spiritual) is what constituted the nature of Adam, who was created

in the image of God. The original creation of Adam could be depicted as follows:

Diagram 3.1



Conservative theologians have never come to perfect agreement over the basic nature of mankind. Those who believe we are composed of body, soul and spirit are said to be trichotomous—the soul includes the mind, will and emotion. Others are dichotomous and understand the soul and the spirit of humanity to be essentially the same. They understand humanity to be made up of the material and the immaterial, possessing an inner person and an outer person. However, it is not necessary to enter into that debate for the purpose of this book. Diagram 3.1 is functional and will be used to explain how the various aspects of our being work together.

The heart is even more difficult to define, although there is general consensus that the heart is the core of our inner being. “As water reflects a face, so a man’s heart reflects the man” (Prov. 27:19, *NIV*). Robert Jewett wrote:

> A characteristic of the heart as the center of man is its inherent openness to outside impulses, its directionality, its propensity to give itself to a master and to live towards some desired goal.[1]

This is true because we are not the source of our own life. We are dependent creatures who by nature look outside ourselves for life. What the heart takes in also becomes its master, stamping the heart with its character. In the original creation, God was at the center of Adam and Eve’s life, and they naturally took on His character. The heart and soul of mankind was never designed by God to function as master.

Physical Versus Spiritual Life

Adam was created to be both physically and spiritually alive. To be physically alive means that our soul/spirit is in union with our bodies. In the Bible, the idea of being alive means to be in union with, and to die means to be separated from. We will remain physically alive as long as our souls are in union with our bodies. When Christians die physically, they will be absent from their bodies and present with the Lord (see 2 Cor. 5:6). We are spiritually alive when our soul/spirit is in union with God, and we are spiritually dead when we are separated from Him.

In the presence of God, Adam and Eve's needs were provided for. They did not have to search for significance. Their divine purpose was to rule over the birds of the sky, the beasts of the field and the fish of the sea. They had a sense of belonging, not only to God, but also to each other. They were safe and secure in the presence of God and could have lived forever had they not chosen to live independently of Him. God said they would surely die on the very day they chose to act independently of Him. Eve was deceived by the devil; Adam sinned; and they both died. They died spiritually and their souls were instantly separated from God. Physical death also would be a consequence for sin, but for Adam that happened over 900 years later.

Before the Fall they were naked and unashamed. God had created them to be sexual beings. There was nothing sinful about having a sexual relationship with each other, and their bodies had no "dirty" parts. After they died spiritually, their insecurity was immediately evident. They wanted to hide and cover up, frightened to death that someone might find out what was going on inside. Additionally, the Fall had an immediate emotional impact on Adam and his descendants. Adam said, "I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself" (Gen. 3:10). Fear was the first emotion expressed by Adam. Not surprisingly, anxiety disorders are the number one mental health problem in the world today. Cain, Adam's son, became angry and depressed. Thus, depression is the common cold of mental illness and the second-most-common mental health problem (see Gen. 4:6). The modern world is experiencing a blues epidemic in an age of anxiety, and explosive anger is pandemic.

Something also happened to the mind of Adam. His knowledge and ability to understand were impaired. Adam thought he could hide from an omnipresent and omniscient God. Rebellion against God resulted in Adam becoming a natural man who could not discern the things of God (see 1 Cor. 2:14). Paul explained the nature of every unregenerate person:

> They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts (Eph. 4:18, *NIV*).

The unregenerate mind cannot function properly without the life of Christ. “The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14, *NIV*). The mental and emotional consequences that Adam experienced after the Fall can be attributed to only one factor: Adam died spiritually because of sin.

Since the Fall, every descendant of Adam has been born dead (spiritually) in their trespasses and sin (see Eph. 2:1). We all were born physically alive but spiritually dead and separated from God. In such a state, we are not children of God; we are children of wrath (see Eph. 2:3), and we cannot fulfill the original purpose for which we were created. Therefore, the natural person will establish his or her own identity and discover the purpose for living in the natural order of this fallen world. As a result of the Fall, our hearts became deceitful and desperately sick (see Jer. 17:9)—we are now being influenced by the nature of this fallen world rather than by God. Satan became the rebel holder of authority —the god of this world—after Adam and Eve forfeited their spiritual position and calling by sinning.

THE GOSPEL

God had an immediate plan for redemption, which was revealed when He cursed the devil: “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel” (Gen. 3:15, *NIV*). God said there would be a struggle between satanic forces and mankind. The offspring of the woman would begin with Cain and his natural descendants. Out of this offspring would come the Christ. Satan would cripple mankind (strike his heel), but Christ would deliver the fatal blow (crush your head). The offspring of the serpent would include his demons and anyone who serves in the kingdom of darkness—those whose spiritual “father” is the devil (see John 8:44).

The Covenant

In preparation for the coming of Christ, God established a conditional covenant

(see Exod. 19), which served as the basis for the Mosaic Law. The Law was moral, ceremonial and civil, and provided a temporal means by which the fallen inhabitants of this world could relate to God and each other. However, the Law was powerless to give life and, therefore, righteousness could not be based on the Law (see Gal. 3:21). The Law was actually a tutor that would eventually lead us to Christ, who is the only name given under heaven by which we can be saved (see Gal. 3:24; Acts 4:12). Ezekiel prophesied what God was going to do in order to save his fallen people:

> I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God (11:19-20, *NIV*).

The Savior

The gospel covers far more than the forgiveness of sins. Paul wrote, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23, *NIV*). Jesus had to die on the cross in order for us to be forgiven, because "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Heb. 9:22, *NIV*). However, the cross represents only half the gospel. Because of Jesus' resurrection, we have new life in Christ. Jesus came to give us life and put a new heart and a new spirit within us. When we are born again spiritually, our soul/spirit is in union with God as it was for Adam in the original creation. This wonderful truth is most often conveyed in Scripture with the prepositional phrase, "in Christ," or "in Him." After commissioning Timothy to go, Paul wrote:

> He will remind you of my ways which are *in Christ [Jesus]*, just as I teach everywhere in every church (1 Cor. 4:17, emphasis added).

What Adam and Eve lost in the Fall was life (spiritual life). What Jesus came to give us was life (see John 10:10). Eternal life is not something we get when we physically die. John writes, "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life" (1 John 5:12, *NIV*). If you do not have eternal (spiritual) life before you physically die, all you have to look forward to is hell. Jesus said:

> I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die (John 11:25-26, *NIV*).

In other words, every born-again believer is spiritually alive and will continue to be so after dying physically. Jesus is the "bread of *life*" (John 6:35, emphasis added), "the way, and the truth, and the *life*" (14:6, emphasis added), and every Christian's name is written in the "book of *life* of the Lamb" (Rev. 13:8, emphasis added).

A New Identity

The gospel also answers the question of who we are: "To those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God" (John 1:12, *NIV*). Before Christ, we had no option but to make a name for ourselves or assume some identity from our culture or work. But as new believers we

> have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all (Col. 3:10-11, *NIV*).

Every defeated Christian has one thing in common:
None of them knows who they are in Christ nor
understands what it means to be a child of God.

John writes, "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" (1 John 3:1, *NIV*).

Recognizing Our New Roles in Christ

Understanding what it means to be a child of God is a core belief for every Christian. Freedom in Christ Ministries has had the privilege of helping people all over the world resolve their personal and spiritual conflicts and find their

freedom in Christ. Every defeated Christian has one thing in common: None of them knows who they are in Christ nor understands what it means to be a child of God. If the "[Holy] Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children" (Rom. 8:16, *NIV*), why are not all Christians sensing that? Paul wrote, "Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, '*Abba,* Father' " (Gal. 4:6, *NIV*, emphasis added). The believers we helped did experience the presence of their heavenly Father after resolving their personal and spiritual conflicts through genuine repentance. In part 2 of this book, I will explain how the discipleship encourager can help others in this way.

Being a new creation in Christ has profound implications for discipleship for at least six reasons:

1. We can positively affirm the believers we are helping.
2. We have the assurance of victory since the life of Christ is within them.
3. We are not trying to build our lives into other people; we are helping to establish the life of Christ within them.
4. We have the internal presence of the wonderful counselor and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, both in ourselves and the Christians we are helping.
5. Nothing can keep any of us from being the people God created us to be.
6. Who we are is not determined by what we do. What we can potentially do is determined by who we are in Christ and by the beliefs we have in God.

We will all have slightly different roles to play in life, but we carry out those roles as children of God. Notice how this applies to marriage:

> Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers (1 Pet. 3:7, *NIV*).

In a Christian marriage, both husband and wife are children of God and should be respected as such and treated accordingly. When Paul led the runaway slave to Christ and sent him back to his earthly master, he was to be received "as a brother in the Lord" (Philem. 1:16, *NIV*). We live out the roles of husband, wife,

master and slave (today, manager and employee) as children of God. The role does not determine who we are.

Recognizing Our New Position in Christ

Whether we consider ourselves saints or sinners is another important biblical truth related to identity. In the *King James* translation of the Bible, believers are called saints, holy ones or righteous ones approximately 240 times. We are called saints because of our position in Christ, not because of our maturity and behavior. In contrast, nonbelievers are called sinners approximately 340 times. Clearly, the term "saint" is used in Scripture to refer to the believer and the term "sinner" is used in reference to the nonbeliever.[2] At the core of every believer is a righteous seed that God has sown. It is counterproductive to identify Christians as sinners and then expect them to act as saints. If you are just a sinner, then what do sinners do? No person can consistently behave in a way that is inconsistent with what they believe about themselves. As Christians we are not trying to become children of God (i.e., saints)—we are children of God who are becoming like Christ! We are not working for our salvation—we are working it out (see Phil. 2:12). That is why it is so important to understand positional sanctification (what God already has accomplished for us and who we already are in Christ) and progressive sanctification (making real in our experience what is already true about us).

Our position and identity in Christ are the bases for living and growing in Christ. Theologian Sinclair Ferguson defines sanctification as "the consistent practical outworking of what it means to belong to the new creation in Christ."[3] John Stott wrote:

> So, in practice we should constantly be reminding ourselves who we are. We need to learn to talk to ourselves, and ask ourselves questions: "Don't you know? Don't you know the meaning of conversion and baptism? Don't you know that you have been united to Christ in His death and resurrection? Don't you know that you have been enslaved to God and have committed yourself to His obedience? Don't you know these things? Don't you know who you are?" We must go on pressing ourselves with such questions, until we reply to ourselves: "Yes, I do know who I am, a new person in Christ, and by the grace of God I shall live accordingly."[4]

Knowing who we are in Christ and understanding what it means to be a child

of God make an incredible difference when helping struggling Christians. For instance, many Christians have abused alcohol and drugs to the point of being addicted. But their addiction does not define who they are. Sitting in groups and repeating a failure identity are counterproductive to their recovery. It is correct and necessary to say, "I am a child of God who struggles with alcohol or drugs." Recovery in Christ requires them to walk in the light (see 1 John 1:7) and speak the truth in love (see Eph. 4:25). The only thing a Christian must admit to is the truth, and that is the first step in recovery:

> If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us (1 John 1:8).

Recognizing Our Freedom in Christ

It is important to understand that *having* sin and *being* sin are two totally different concepts. God had to change who we are at the very core of our being. We have to assume our responsibility to live out that salvation as children of God:

> For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (Eph. 5:8, *NIV*).

There is a major difference between saying, "I have a problem child," and saying, "My child has a problem." If you have a problem child, the only way to get rid of the problem is to get rid of the child. But if your child has a problem, hopefully you can help to solve the problem without calling into question the child's identity. The same reasoning follows for our growth in Christ. Immature behavior is a reflection of our growth, not who we are in Christ.

The need to reinforce our identity and position in Christ is especially true for those who struggle with addictive behaviors. These Christians are not alcoholics or addicts; they are children of God. Believing the truth that they are new creations in Christ is their ticket out of bondage. To overcome their addictive behaviors, they must continuously choose to believe they are "dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6:11, *NIV*). The secular world has taught them to believe that alcoholism is a disease that they will have all their lives. The recovery process begins when we help them resolve their personal and spiritual conflicts, so they can find their identity, position and freedom in Christ. Then we need to show them how their needs are met in Christ and how to live their lives

by faith in the power of the Holy Spirit so that they will not carry out the desire of their flesh (see Gal. 5:16).[5]

Christians who struggle with addictive behaviors are not alcoholics or addicts; they are children of God.

The same reasoning holds for homosexuality. There is no such thing as a homosexual person. God created us male and female. There are homosexual behaviors, feelings and tendencies, but that is not *who* a person is. Establishing a true identity is the first step in overcoming homosexuality. "Once a sinner, always a sinner" is not true if you understand and believe the gospel, nor is "once an alcoholic, always an alcoholic" or "once a homosexual, always a homosexual." The world teaches that because it has no gospel. Without the gospel we will continue to apply such labels and allow people to remain products of their past. Nobody can fix our past. God does not even do that. Yet He sets us free from it by making us new creations in Christ. Believers get their identity from their spiritual heritage, not their physical heritage. That is why Paul prays in Ephesians 1:18:

> I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.

Without the gospel, the best we can do is help those with mental health problems learn to cope, live more responsibly and try by human effort to abstain from negative thinking and behavior. Secular programs admonish their counselees to "work the program, the program works." But the best programs in the world, including Christian ones, cannot set anyone free, and good works cannot either. Only Christ can set us free. The goal in recovery has to be more than abstinence. If that were the goal, then Ephesians 5:18 would read, "Be not drunk with wine, therefore stop drinking." The answer is to be filled with the Spirit, because where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (see 2 Cor. 3:17).

Recognizing Our Need to Believe the Truth

We are not saved by how we behave. We are saved and sanctified by what we

believe. Changing a counselee's behavior without changing what the person believes only leads to legalism and drivenness or rebellion. Rules without relationship lead to rebellion. Any message or program that advocates only a change in behavior with external accountability will fall way short in the end. It may allow people to cope better in society, but it cannot liberate them.

Just abstaining from aberrant behavior is not enough. People without Christ choose sinful behaviors in order to deal with their pain, get rid of their inhibitions and satisfy the lusts of their flesh. Take the alcohol away from the alcoholic and all you have is a dry drunk. These people have legitimate needs, but they are attempting to meet them in all the wrong ways. Satan takes advantage of those who do not have their needs met in Christ. He takes advantage of their legitimate needs by working through the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life. The purpose of every temptation is an attempt to get us to live our lives independently of God. For every temptation God has provided a way of escape (see 1 Cor. 10:13). It is a lot easier to find the way of escape if you know who you are in Christ and understand how He will meet all your needs according to His riches in glory *in Christ Jesus* (see Phil. 4:19). The most critical needs are the "being" needs: life, identity, acceptance, security and significance. The following list is from my book *Who I Am in Christ*, which I wrote to help struggling Christians know who they are and how those "being" needs are met "in Christ."[6]

THE "BEING" NEEDS

I Am Accepted in Christ

John 1:12	I am God's child
John 15:15	I am Christ's friend
Romans 5:1	I have been justified
1 Corinthians 6:17	I am united with the Lord and one with Him in spirit
1 Corinthians 6:20	I have been bought with a price; I belong to God
1 Corinthians 12:27	I am a member of Christ's Body
Ephesians 1:1	I am a saint
Ephesians 1:5	I have been adopted as God's child
Ephesians 2:18	I have direct access to God through the Holy Spirit
Colossians 1:14	I have been redeemed and forgiven of all my sins

Colossians 2:10	I am complete in Christ

I Am Secure in Christ

Romans 8:1-2	I am free from condemnation
Romans 8:28	I am assured that all things work together for good
Romans 8:33-34	I am free from any condemning charges against me
Romans 8:35	I cannot be separated from the love of God
2 Corinthians 1:21	I have been established, anointed and sealed by God
Colossians 3:3	I am hidden with Christ in God
Philippians 1:6	I am confident that the good work that God has begun in me will be perfected
Philippians 3:20	I am a citizen of heaven
2 Timothy 1:7	I have not been given a spirit of fear, but of power, love and a sound mind
Hebrews 4:16	I can find grace and mercy in time of need
1 John 5:18	I am born of God and the evil one cannot touch me

I Am Significant in Christ

Matthew 5:13-14	I am the salt and light of the earth
John 15:1,5	I am a branch of the true vine, a channel of His life
John 15:16	I have been chosen and appointed to bear fruit
Acts 1:8	I am a personal witness of Christ
1 Corinthians 3:16	I am God's temple
2 Corinthians 5:17-20	I am a minister of reconciliation
2 Corinthians 6:1	I am God's coworker
Ephesians 2:6	I am seated with Christ in the heavenly realm
Ephesians 2:10	I am God's workmanship
Ephesians 3:12	I may approach God with freedom and confidence
Philippians 4:13	I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me

THE RIGHT CAUSE

Why do people do what they do, and why do they feel the way they feel?

Establishing causation may be the most difficult task for the encourager and one that requires the greatest need for the integration of theology and psychology. For example, the following statement is commonly given to explain why Christians continue to struggle: "Of course we are going to sin because we are all sinners, and after all, our hearts are deceitful and desperately sick." However, this is not true for believers, and saying it would make the possibility of living a righteous life even more hopeless.

I realize that this teaching may be new to many readers, and I am aware that you may need more explanation to be theologically satisfied. Therefore let me suggest *God's Power at Work in You,* which I coauthored with Dr. Robert Saucy.[7] This is an exhaustive book on sanctification. Sanctification is God's will for our lives (see 1 Thess. 4:3). Everything we are attempting to do in our churches, discipleship ministries and counseling programs must be consistent with the doctrine of sanctification or we are not in step with God.

In giving us a new heart, God has changed the very core of who we are in the inner man. We are no longer in Adam or in the flesh; we are *in Christ.*

> You are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him (Rom. 8:9).

> Therefore, if anyone is *in Christ,* he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (2 Cor. 5:17, *NIV*, emphasis added).

> For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (Col. 1:13-14, *NIV*).

If this is all true (and it is), then why do we still struggle with the same old thoughts, feelings and behaviors?

Since we were all born dead in our trespasses and sins, we had neither the presence of God in our lives nor the knowledge of His ways. Therefore we all learned to live our lives independently of God. From the earliest days our minds were programmed by the external world. That is why the heart of an unregenerate person is deceitful and desperately sick (see Jer. 17:9). Then one day we came to Christ and everything we have explained so far concerning our identity and position in Christ became instantly true. We became children of God

who are alive and free in Christ; however, nobody pushed the “clear” button in our memory bank. In fact, there is no “clear” button on the computer operation going on between our ears. Everything that we previously learned and experienced before salvation is still recorded in our minds. That is why Paul wrote in Romans 12:2 (*NIV*):

Traumatic experiences are deeply etched in people’s minds. They shape their beliefs about God, themselves and the world in which they live.

> Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

OUR WORLDVIEW

Before we came to Christ, we were all conformed to this world, and we will continue to be so if we allow ourselves to be influenced by it. Messages from this world are still being received by our brains and interpreted by our minds. Prior to birth, the only world an infant has seen is the inside of a mother’s womb. Newborn children have just enough pre-programming to sustain life. Other than that, their minds are blank slates. They have no vocabulary and no understanding of the world around them. Their worldview is shaped by the environment in which they are raised. Values and attitudes about life are formed in their minds in two primary ways. The first is through prevailing experiences, such as the home in which they are raised, the neighborhood in which they play, the friends they have and the churches they attend or do not attend. Values and attitudes are more caught than taught. Formal education is another prevailing experience that shapes their worldview. It is important to understand that all children will interpret the data they receive differently. That is one reason why two children raised in the same home can respond so differently. The second primary contributor to attitude formation is traumatic experiences, such as the death of a family member, the divorce of parents and emotional, sexual or physical abuse. Traumatic experiences are deeply etched in people’s minds. They shape their beliefs about God, themselves and the world in which they live. It is these deeply rooted beliefs that keep people in bondage to their past, not the traumatic

experience itself. Suppose a father abandoned his family. The wife and children would each process this loss differently. The wife might think: *Where was God? What's wrong with me? All men are sick and untrustworthy. I will never get married (or married again).* The children might think: *How come he didn't love us? Is there something wrong with me? From now on I am going to …*

These lasting impressions are burned into our minds over time through repetition (prevailing experiences) or by the intensity of powerful experiences both good and bad (traumatic experiences). We live according to what we have chosen to believe about ourselves and the world around us, and we are not always aware that we are continuously gathering information that forms, alters and intensifies our beliefs. Many people cruise through life with a carefree attitude, unaware of how they are being influenced by the world in which they live.

The external sources of information vary greatly from one culture to another, and there is no value-neutral culture. We all have some safe and healthy inputs from our surroundings, but we also have some contaminated and unhealthy external stimuli affecting our worldview and our belief about ourselves and God. Thus, our belief system is always changing as we process positive and negative information and experiences. Unfortunately, not every piece of information we receive comes clearly marked as productive or unproductive, good or evil, true or false!

DEFENSE MECHANISMS, STRONGHOLDS OR FLESH PATTERNS?

During those early informative years of our lives, we learned how to cope, succeed or just plain survive independently of God. Psychologists call these strategies defense mechanisms. There potentially are an infinite variety of ways and combinations that people choose to defend themselves. Some of the more common defense mechanisms are lying, denial, projection, fantasy, emotional insulation, regression, displacement and rationalization. For example, if children feel threatened if they tell the truth, they might lie to protect themselves or blame somebody else. If they repeat this behavior for several weeks, it will become a habit; and if it persists, it will become an established part of their temperament.

Defense mechanisms are similar in concept to what the Bible calls strongholds, which Paul talks about tearing down in 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 (*NIV*):

> The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the

> contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

Strongholds are habitual mental thought patterns. They are memory traces burned into our minds over time or by the trauma of certain experiences. Some Christian groups call them flesh patterns. They represent the old nature—how I learned to live my life independently of God. A mental stronghold is like the grooves worn in a dirt road over time. If one drives that way long enough, it becomes unnecessary to steer the car. It naturally follows those grooves, and any attempt to steer out of them would be met with great resistance.

For instance, an inferiority complex is a stronghold. We were not born inferior to one another, but many people began to believe that way because of the world system in which they were raised. Somebody always scored better on exams, ran faster, looked prettier, played better, had more money, got a better job, bought a bigger house, achieved more education, and on and on. How could one not develop some sense of inferiority in our culture or struggle with personal identity and sense of worth?

The world has recognized that most people do not have a healthy sense of who they are and many struggle with a poor sense of worth. Some people respond by trying to be prettier, stronger, wealthier or more popular than anyone else. They are going to beat the system. Other people employ more humane approaches and try to build up the self-esteem of those who are beaten down by the system. Stroking one another's egos and picking ourselves up by our own bootstraps will not work. Others rebel against the system and become part of the counterculture. In the end, everyone loses in the kingdom of self-sufficiency.

Adult children of alcoholics have developed mental strongholds or defense mechanisms in order to survive. Suppose a father of three boys is an alcoholic. All three boys choose to respond to their father in different ways. The older boy stands up to his father and physically defends himself if he has to. The middle son chooses to accommodate his father, and the younger son runs and hides whenever his father comes home drunk. Thirty years later, the father is long gone and the three boys are now adult men. When confronted with a hostile situation, how will they respond? Chances are the older one will fight, the middle son will accommodate and the younger son will run and hide.

Do we have to live that way the rest of our lives? Can these mental strongholds be torn down in Christ? Can our temperaments be transformed by

the renewing of our minds? If we have been trained wrongly, can we be retrained? If we have been taught wrongly, can we be taught the truth that will set us free? If we have believed a lie, can we renounce that lie and choose the truth? The answer is an emphatic *yes*, and that is the purpose for discipling, preaching and teaching in our churches.

THE BODY, SOUL AND SPIRIT

Since we are working toward a whole answer, we need to see what part our physical bodies play in the process. God created us to have an outer (material) person and an inner (immaterial) person. Since we are "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Ps. 139:14), it would only make sense that God would create the outer person to correlate with the inner person. Please refer to the following diagram:

Diagram 3.2

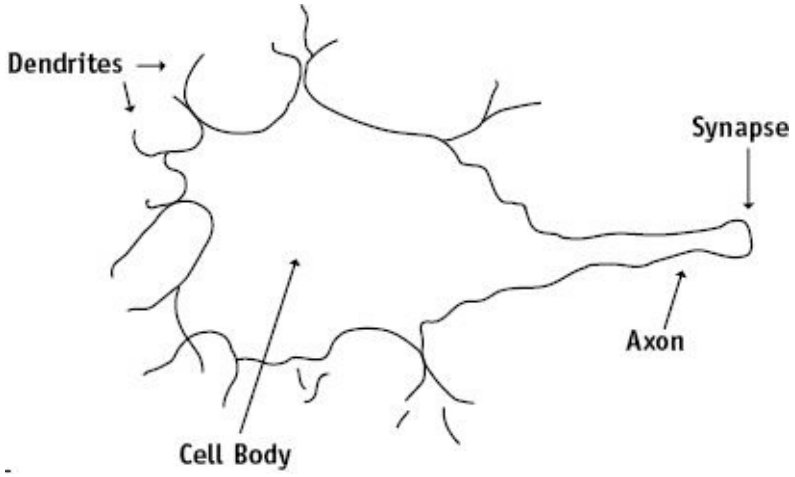


The correlation between the mind and the brain is obvious, but there is a fundamental difference between the two. The brain came from the dust of this earth and will return to dust when we physically die. At the moment of death, we will be absent from our bodies and present with the Lord, but we will not be mindless. The brain-mind combination is similar to that of a computer. Every computer system is comprised of two distinct components: the hardware and the software. The hardware (the physical computer) is the brain in this analogy.

The brain functions much like a digital computer that has billions of switching transistors. All the information is coded in a binary numbering system of 0s and 1s. However, a personal computer is mechanical whereas our brains are living organisms composed of approximately 100 billion neurons. Each

neuron is a living organism that in and of itself is a microcomputer. Additionally, every neuron is composed of a brain cell, an axon and many dendrites (inputs to the brain cell) as follows:

Diagram 3.3



Each brain cell has many inputs (dendrites) and only one output through the axon, which channels neurotransmitters to other dendrites. The axon is covered by a myelin sheath for insulation, because the cell sends electrochemical messages along the axon. Every neuron is connected to tens of thousands of other neurons. Given that there are 100 billion neurons, the potential number of combinations is mind-boggling. There is a junction between the axon of one neuron and the dendrites of another called a synapse. Every brain cell receives information through its dendrites, which it processes, integrates and sends on to other neurons.

In the axon exist mitochondria, which produce neurotransmitters. When a signal from the cell reaches the axon, it releases neurotransmitters that cross the synapse to other dendrites. There are numerous types of neurotransmitters of which norepinephrine, dopamine, serotonin and acetylcholine are the best known and the most important for our discussion. These neurotransmitters carry signals throughout our bodies. Only five percent of the serotonin in our bodies is found in the brain.

The brain and the spinal cord make up the central nervous system, which splits off into a peripheral nervous system. The peripheral nervous system has two channels: the autonomic and the somatic (skeletal, or body) nervous system. The somatic nervous system regulates our muscular and skeletal movements

such as speech, gestures and so on. It correlates to our will. In other words, we do not do anything without first thinking it. The thought-action response is so rapid that one is hardly aware of the sequence, but it is always there. Involuntary muscular movements can occur when the system breaks down, as is the case with Parkinson's disease (shaking palsy), which is a progressive degeneration of nerve cells in the part of the brain that controls muscle movements.

Our autonomic nervous system regulates our internal organs. We do not have direct volitional control over our glands. We do not consciously regulate the beat of our heart or the functioning of our endocrine system. They function automatically. In a general sense, we do not have volitional control over our emotions either. You cannot will yourself to feel good or like somebody you hate. We do, however, have control of what we think, and we can decide to believe what God says is true. Just as our glands are regulated by our central nervous system, our emotions are primarily a product of our thoughts. It is not the circumstances of life that determine how we feel. How we feel is primarily determined by how we interpret the events of life (i.e., what we choose to think and believe) and secondarily by how we choose to behave. Between the external stimulus and the emotional response are the brain (receiver) and the mind (interpreter).

When Stress Becomes Distress

Let's apply this to the problem of stress. When external pressures put demands on our physical system, our adrenal glands respond by secreting cortisone-like hormones (adrenaline) into our physical bodies. Our bodies automatically respond to external pressures. This adrenaline rush is the natural fight-or-flight response to the pressures of life. If the pressures persist too long, our adrenal glands cannot keep up, and stress becomes distress. The result can be physical illness, or we may become irritated with things that would not bother us physically or emotionally in less stressful times.

Why then do two people respond differently to the same stressful situation? Some actually seize the opportunity and thrive under the pressure while others fall apart. Does one have superior adrenal glands? Although we may differ considerably in our physical stature, the major difference is the way in which we interpret the data our brain receives, and this is related to what we have chosen to believe. It is not just the external factors that determine the degree of stress. We all face the pressures of deadlines, schedules, trauma and temptations. The major difference is how we mentally interpret the external world and how we

process the data our brain is receiving.

It is important to understand that the adrenal glands do not initiate the release of adrenaline. They are the responders, not the initiators. The hormone is released into the bloodstream after the brain has recorded the external inputs and the mind has interpreted them. The brain itself can only function according to how it has been programmed.

There is also a natural or normal production of neurotransmitters that allows the brain to function, or no physical life could be sustained in infancy. In other words, we are preprogrammed from birth to physically exist. There is a natural will to live and to seek food, clothing, shelter and safety. Could the programming of our minds or how we choose to think affect how the brain operates? If the secretion of adrenaline from our adrenal glands is triggered by how we think or perceive reality, could serotonin or other neurotransmitters be affected by how we think and choose to believe? Researchers such as Martin Seligman are beginning to reveal that learned helplessness and hopelessness can change our neurological system.[8]

When God Reigns in Our Bodies

How does the presence of the wonderful counselor, the God of all hope, transform our lives? Does His presence transform the outer self or the inner self? In other words, what physically changed in our lives the moment we were born again? Nothing that was observable changed physically. The body stayed the same. In a similar fashion, what physical changes could you observe in your computer when you slipped in a new program? Even though the same number of hardware components existed in the computer, the screen began to show a different output. The electronic flow *through* the computer changed. Would we begin to live differently if a new program was loaded into our "computer"? We should start to live differently, and potentially we can, because we have had our eyes opened to the truth and the power of the Holy Spirit, who enables us to live by faith. In the physical body, the flow of neurotransmitters would certainly change even though the number of brain cells would remain the same.

This brings up a critical question: *What is the primary cause for our mental and emotional problems?* Is it the hardware or the software? Is the cause neurological or spiritual? From a biblical perspective, you would have to conclude it is primarily the software. Of course, we can have neurological and biochemical problems, such as organic brain syndrome, Alzheimer's disease and strokes, but the major emphasis in Scripture is to renew our minds and to live by

faith. The Church should work in harmony with the medical profession, which has the right to prescribe medication. However, to believe that all our mental and emotional problems can be dealt with solely by medication is simply wrong and anything but wholistic.

BIBLICAL FAITH LEADS TO WHOLENESS

The presence of God in our lives will affect even our physical being. According to the words of Paul:

> He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you (Rom. 8:11).

This is evident when we walk by the Spirit. "The fruit of the Spirit is love [the character of God], joy [the antithesis of depression], peace [the antithesis of anxiety], patience [the antithesis of anger], kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law" (Gal. 5:22-23). Essentially, the connection between the initiating cause, who is the Spirit of truth working in our lives, and the end result, which is self-control, is the mind, which directs the brain, which in turn regulates all our glands and muscular movements.

Jesus asked the blind men, "'Do you believe that I am able to do this?' 'Yes, Lord,' they replied. Then he touched their eyes and said, 'According to your faith will it be done to you'" (Matt. 9:28-29, *NIV*). In this biblical example, the external power of Jesus was made effective by the blind men's choice to believe. In other words, the Lord chose to bring about a physical healing through the channel of their mind, which chose to believe. Is this not true in every other aspect of life? We are saved by faith (see Eph. 2:8), sanctified by faith (see Gal. 3:3-5), and we walk or live by faith (see 2 Cor. 5:7). God never bypasses our mind. He works through our minds, and we are transformed by the renewing of our minds. The Lord makes possible the renewing of our minds by His very presence in our lives. We respond in faith by choosing to believe the truth and living by the power of the Holy Spirit. When we live by faith, we will not carry out the desires of the flesh (see Gal. 5:16). Jesus is "the way [how we ought to live], and the truth [what we ought to believe], and the life [our spiritual union with God where the power to live comes from]" (John 14:6). The proper operation of spiritual gifts also incorporates the use of our minds. Paul wrote:

God never bypasses our mind. He works through our minds, and we are transformed by the renewing of our minds.

> I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also (1 Cor. 14:15).

COGNITIVE THERAPY

I mentioned earlier that we have very little direct control of our emotions, but we can change how we think and choose what we believe. Many secular psychologists such as Albert Ellis and Aaron Beck have taught that our emotions are essentially a product of our thoughts. Several Christian counselors, such as William Backus, who wrote *Telling Yourself the Truth*; David Stoop, who wrote *Self Talk*; and Chris Thurman, who wrote *The Lies We Believe*, are saying essentially the same thing.

Such cognitive therapists believe that certain precipitating events are not what caused the emotional response. The emotional response was determined by how the mind interpreted the events. Recall that our brains receive the external data through our five senses; our minds interpret that data, which determines our volitional and emotional responses. For instance, two people can hear a door slam in their house at night and one becomes afraid while the other ignores it. The first person thought the two were alone and quickly concluded that someone had broken in. The other person had previously permitted a relative to enter the house and failed to tell the housemate.

If what a person believes or thinks does not conform to the truth, then what the person feels will not conform to reality. Let me illustrate. Suppose a faithful employee receives a note from his boss on Monday morning that his boss wants to see him on Friday at 10:30 A.M. The company has been downsizing the past few months. Suppose the employee believes that he is going to be laid off. At first he gets mad: *This isn't fair. I have been a good employee. How can they do this to me?* Then again, he may not get laid off, so he goes through a period of feeling anxious because he is double-minded. By Thursday he is depressed because the situation looks hopeless. Come Friday morning, the poor man is an emotional basket case until he finds out at the meeting that he is being promoted. All of the emotional reactions he went through were not based on the truth and,

therefore, were not consistent with reality.

Cognitive therapy is probably the fastest-growing and the most widely accepted approach to counseling at the present time—both secular and sacred. Albert Ellis calls this process the replacement of irrational beliefs with "a number of realistic, flexible, effective new philosophies."[9] According to this counseling technique, the process of helping others or yourself would sequence as follows:

1. The counselee is helped to see the connection between negative thoughts, the emotions they create and the subsequent behaviors that follow.
2. The counselee is taught to recognize and monitor his or her negative thoughts or distortions of reality. His or her thoughts or beliefs are identified as ineffective or dysfunctional, leading to negative feelings and improper responses to life.
3. The counselee examines the evidence for and against such distorted thinking or perceptions of reality. What does the evidence show? Is the thinking rational or irrational, true or false, biblical or unbiblical? Is the counselee going to continue thinking what he or she is thinking, believing what is being thought and acting accordingly, or is the counselee going to change? This is decision time.
4. If the counselee concludes that what has been believed is not true and that his or her perception of reality wasn't right, then he or she must reject old ways of thinking and respond with new ways.
5. The counselee is helped to identify and change the inappropriate assumptions that predisposed him or her to distort the experiences in the first place.

This approach is very close to the concept of repentance. Biblical repentance, however, has an eternal standard, and sin is the result of deviating from the standard. If you have distorted, false and negative beliefs about God, yourself and the world, then you disagree with what God has said about Himself, yourself and the world in which you live. This disagreement is missing the mark and to do so is sinful because, "whatever is not from faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23). Christians repent when they agree with God that what they have believed is not true and what they have done is not right. It is at this time of repentance that they turn from those false beliefs and destructive behaviors. Confession is agreeing

with God and it is the first step toward repentance. The word “repentance” in the original Greek language literally means “a change of mind,” which must happen for all of us if we are going to live a liberated Christian life.

THE RENEWAL OF THE MIND

I generally agree with the cognitive approach to therapy since we are called to repent and be transformed by the renewing of our minds. We are saved and sanctified by faith; therefore, we must learn to know and choose to believe the truth. In our Western world, however, there are two other critical issues that are often overlooked, causing us to stop short of a complete answer and total recovery. The first need is to understand the spiritual battle for our minds, and the second is to abide in Christ.

Take Every Thought Captive

Computer programmers coined the term “GIGO,” which means “garbage in, garbage out.” Jesus said:

> The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart (Luke 6:45).

We have to be very careful about what we put into our minds, which is why Paul admonished us to “take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5, *NIV*). It does not make any difference whether the thought originated from the television set, the radio, a book, a speaker, from our own memory bank or from the father of lies. We must take “every thought” captive to the obedience of Christ.

If what we are thinking is not true according to God’s Word, then we should not pay attention to it. Instead, we should do what the apostle Paul admonished us to do:

> Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things (Phil. 4:8).

You do not get rid of negative thoughts by trying not to think of them. You overcome them by choosing the truth and continuing to choose the truth until the negative thoughts are drowned out or completely replaced by the truth. You let the peace of Christ rule in your heart by letting the words of Christ richly dwell within you. If you want to experience the freedom that Christ purchased for you and have a peace of mind that surpasses all understanding, then choose to think only those thoughts that agree with the Word of God.

Abide in Christ

Every computer owner has been warned about the potential for a computer contracting a virus. A virus can cause severe damage to existing programs already loaded in the computer. Computer viruses are often not accidental; they are intentional. They may come from store-wrapped software that gets contaminated by disgruntled employees. In addition, some devious people have purposefully created programs that are designed to introduce a killer virus into any system that accesses it. Therefore, most computer systems have programs that scan for viruses. So should we!

If you want to experience the freedom that Christ purchased for you and have a peace of mind that surpasses all understanding, then choose to think only those thoughts that agree with the Word of God.

It is not always easy to detect a virus in our own belief system because the major strategy of the enemy is deception. Every Christian is subject to tempting, accusing and deceiving thoughts. That is why we are to put on the armor of God and, more specifically, the shield of faith, which deflects Satan’s fiery darts aimed at our minds. The most devious of his schemes is deception, because if you were tempted you would know it and if you were accused you would know it; but if you were deceived you would not know it. This strategy has been used from the very beginning when Eve was deceived and believed a lie. That is why Jesus prays for those who follow Him:

I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the

evil one. Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth (John 17:15,17).

Paul writes, “But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ” (2 Cor. 11:3). Commenting about the later days of the Church age, Paul also writes, “But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons” (1 Tim. 4:1).

We have seen evidence of this all over the world—people struggling with their thoughts, having difficulty concentrating and hearing voices. These voices, or negative thoughts, are usually self-condemning, suicidal, delusional and phobic, which result in feelings of guilt, fear, hopelessness, sadness and despair. These symptoms are what therapists typically associate with depression, anxiety disorders or psychosis. Why is it difficult for a committed Christian to believe that those negative thoughts are patterns of the flesh learned from living in a fallen world or that they are fiery darts from Satan about which Scripture has clearly warned us? A therapist with a secular worldview would not even consider such possibilities!

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

Not only have secular psychologists and therapists overlooked the kingdom of darkness and the possibility of spiritual warfare being a part of the counseling process, they have never integrated into their practice the presence of Christ. While researching for the book on anxiety disorders, *Freedom from Fear,* I came across the testimony of Dr. Edmund Bourne.[10] He is one of the more credible secular practitioners seeking to help those struggling with anxiety disorders. Dr. Bourne is the author of *The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook,* which won the Benjamin Franklin Book Award for Excellence in Psychology.[11] Dr. Bourne entered this field of study because he struggled himself with anxiety disorders. Five years after the publication of the first edition in 1990, his own anxiety disorder took a turn for the worse. This caused him to reevaluate his own life as well as his approach to treatment. In 1998, he published a new book entitled *Healing Fear.* In the foreword he said:

> The guiding metaphor for this book is “healing” as an approach to overcoming anxiety, in contrast to “applied technology.” I feel it’s

> important to introduce this perspective into the field of anxiety treatment since the vast majority of self-help books available (including my first book) utilize the applied technology approach. These books present—in a variety of ways—the mainstream cognitive behavioral methodology for treating anxiety disorders. Cognitive behavioral therapy reflects the dominant zeitgeist [spirit of the age] of Western society—a worldview that has primary faith in scientifically validated technologies that give humans knowledge and power to overcome obstacles to successful adaptation…. I don't want to diminish the importance of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and the applied technology approach. Such an approach produces effective results in many cases, and I use it in my professional practice every day. In the past few years, though, I feel that the cognitive behavior strategy has reached its limits. CBT and medication can produce results quickly and are very compatible with the brief therapy, managed-care environment in the mental health profession at present. When follow-up is done over one- to three-year intervals, however, some of the gains are lost. Relapses occur rather often, and people seem to get themselves back into the same difficulties that precipitated the original anxiety disorder.[12]

In other words, "They have healed the brokenness of My people superficially, saying, 'Peace, peace,' but there is no peace" (Jer. 6:14). Bourne's words read like a modern-day commentary of Colossians 2:8:

> See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.

Dr. Bourne believes that "anxiety arises from a state of disconnection."[13] I agree, and the primary disconnection is from God.

From a Christian perspective, cognitive behavior therapy is part of the repentance process when biblically based. Repentance begins by admitting: "I am wrong, and what I have believed is not true. I choose not to believe that anymore, and I choose to believe the truth according to the Word of God."

Renewing our minds is essential for sanctification, and the truth will set us free; but the Christian life is not only an intellectual exercise. Freedom cannot be fully realized without the presence of God in our lives. When asked by the

Pharisees what the greatest commandment is, Jesus said

> "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:37-39).

God is the one who grants repentance, and the Holy Spirit leads the counselee into all truth. The words of Christ are not enough. We need the life of Christ, which enables us to live what we have chosen to believe.

I do not know whether Dr. Bourne has a saving knowledge of our Lord, Jesus Christ, but in his own search for answers he came to the following conclusion:

> In my own experience, spirituality has been important, and I believe it will come to play an increasingly important role in the psychology of the future. Holistic medicine, with its interest in meditation, prayer, and the role of spiritual healing in recovery from serious illness, has become a mainstream movement in the nineties. I believe there will be a "holistic psychology" in the not too distant future, like holistic medicine, [that] integrates scientifically based treatment approaches with alternative, more spiritually based modalities.[14]



CHAPTER FOUR

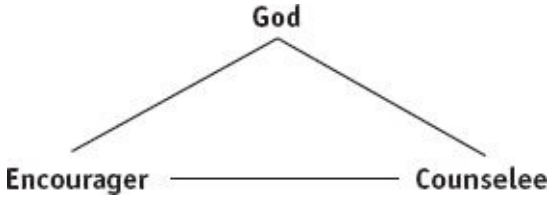
WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT?

Integrating God into the counseling process sets discipleship counseling apart from secular counseling. Christians know that apart from Christ they can do nothing that will last for eternity (see John 15:5). We may be able to temporarily help a person cope for a season, but all we have done is postpone the inevitable. Discipleship counselors (encouragers) are alive and free in Christ and will resist the temptation to minister independently of God. They are led by the Spirit of God and understand why they are not the answer for those they are trying to help. When they attempt to help another person, they do so knowing that God is always present and that He is the wonderful counselor. Therefore, the encourager does not try to play the role of the Holy Spirit in other people's lives. Encouragers are dependent on God for direction and wisdom and also to bring lasting change to the counselee if they are willing to repent and believe the truth.

Roles and Responsibilities

A lot of psychological literature discusses the role relationship between the encourager and counselee. Most professional counselors have been trained not to be rescuers or enablers; they have learned how to set boundaries in the counselor-counselee relationship. Many, however, have not been trained to

include God and the role that only He can play in the counseling process. We do not have to invoke God's presence, because He is omnipresent; but we do need to be consciously aware of His presence. Every counseling session has three participants as illustrated below:



Hopefully, there is an intimate relationship between the encourager and God. What remains to be established is a right relationship between the encourager and the counselee as well as a right relationship between the counselee and God. All three elements have an important role to play that cannot be played by either of the other two without hindering the process.

GOD'S ROLE

The sovereign role of God is something we, as encouragers, often explain to those we are trying to help. In the course of living, there is a very precise line between God's sovereignty and mankind's responsibility, as shown:

God's Sovereignty	**Our Responsibility**

We may draw the line further to the left or right according to our theology, but we all agree that God's sovereignty and mankind's responsibility are both taught in Scripture. Everything on the left side of the line is God's responsibility. If we try to do what only God can do, we will be frustrated and fail in our efforts. We are not the creator; we cannot save ourselves; we should not try to be someone else's conscience; and we cannot change another person. Nothing will interfere more with therapy than trying to play the role of God in someone else's life. God will always be faithful to His Word and His covenant relationship with us.

The key to successful ministry is to know God and understand His ways:

Nothing will interfere more with therapy than trying to play the role of God in someone else's life.

> This is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight" (Jer. 9:23-24, *NIV*).

Jesus is "the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). There is *no* other way and there is *no* other truth, and *no one else* can give us eternal life.

The creator designed us to live a certain way. When we rebel against God and live another way, it ends in defeat for Christians and death for non-Christians. "There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Prov. 14:12). To proclaim only one way invites scorn from non-Christians and pricks the pride of the self-sufficient. Perhaps an analogy will illustrate why there can be only one way and why the concept is not just related to Christianity. Suppose you just purchased a new computer, which is formatted differently from your old one. You want so badly to use this new computer in the same way you used your old one, but you cannot. You are going to have to learn a whole new way. The company designed that computer to work one way. If you ignore the instruction book, you will be able to do very little with your computer; but if you master the manufacturer's handbook, you will be able to do incredible things with your computer. For the believer, God is the manufacturer and the Bible is the manufacturer's handbook; and if we study it, we can do incredible things.

HUMANITY'S RESPONSIBILITY

On the other side of the line is our responsibility, which has been revealed in Scripture. God will not do for us what He has instructed us to do. In fact, He cannot. God can only do that which is consistent with His nature and His Word. For example, God cannot lie, and He will not deviate from His Word or His ways. "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever" (Isa. 40:8). The truth that God is immutable—unchanging—is what gives us consistency in life. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb. 13:8). It would do no good to pray and ask God to think for us when He instructed us to think (see 1 Cor. 14:20; Phil. 4:8). He will not believe for us, repent for us, forgive others for us, and so on; but He will enable us to do all that He has commanded us to do.

The devil has a field day when we do not understand this simple truth. We

expect God to act a certain way and when He does not we are disappointed with Him. Chances are good that James 4:3 (*NIV*) analyzes our situation:

> When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives.

Not knowing what we ourselves are responsible for is even more devastating when it comes to spiritual conflicts. Suppose a boy suddenly becomes aware of some spiritual presence in his room, so he pulls the covers over his head and cries out, "God, do something!" God does not seem to do anything. He wonders, *Why don't You do something, God? You are all-powerful. You can make it go away. Maybe You don't care, or maybe I'm not a Christian. Maybe that is why You won't help me!*

By the time Christians seek help for these kinds of struggles, they are questioning God and their salvation.

Why didn't God do anything? He did. He defeated the devil and positioned the Church with His authority over the kingdom of darkness.

Whose responsibility is it to resist the devil, put on the armor of God and take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ? What if you do not do those things? Will God do them for you?

I have counseled many defeated Christians who have asked God to assume their own responsibilities in many subtle ways. Some have even hoped God would change or alter His ways just this one time in order to accommodate them. If He did, He would no longer be God. God will always stay true to His character and will always keep His Word. Therefore, we can claim His promises and rest in the finished work of Christ.

THE COUNSELEES' RESPONSIBILITY

To my knowledge there is only one place in Scripture that explains what the sick or suffering are supposed to do. James 5:13-16 reads:

> Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises. Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. Therefore, confess your sins to one

> another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

The focus of this passage is commonly placed on the role of the elders. What is most often overlooked is the role and responsibility of the suffering and the sick. Our prayers for others will not be very effective if the following three principles are overlooked.

They Need to Pray for Themselves

Initially the one who is suffering is the one who should be praying. I believe in intercessory prayer, but not for the purpose of replacing another person's responsibility to pray. The point is, I cannot do *your* praying for you. "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5, *NIV*). We should never try to play the role of a mediator or a medium in another person's life. Every child of God has the same access to their heavenly Father, and no encourager or pastor is called to be a medium between God and His children. If one of two children were to come to their father and say, "Johnny wants to know if he can go to the movie," a wise parent would say, "Go back and tell Johnny that he needs to ask me himself." The relationship between father and son is far more important than the movie.

A pastor brought to my office a young man who was hearing voices. Three hours later the young man left with a clear mind, and the pastor was amazed—not with the results, because he trusted me and what I was doing. He was amazed at the process that was unfamiliar to him. "What a trap I have gotten myself into," proclaimed the pastor. "People come to me all the time and ask me to pray for them. Of course I do, but never once have I shown them how to pray for themselves, and I have seen little if no results of doing their praying for them." Nor has any other pastor or encourager.

The only effective prayer at this stage is the prayer of a repentant heart. Chances are the sufferer's own prayer has not been effective, and the psalmist explains why:

> If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Ps. 66:18, *KJV*).

The answer: Deal with the iniquity. Do not ask someone else to do your praying for you. We cannot have a secondhand relationship with God. Expecting the

encourager or pastor to petition God for us is abdicating our responsibility, and it will not work.

After I spoke at a Christian recovery conference, a licensed therapist asked me for help. Three hours later she was experiencing her freedom in Christ. At the door she paused and said, “I always thought someone else had to pray for me.” That belief is commonly held by many encouragers, as well as those they are trying to help. We have learned to put that responsibility back where it belongs—on the counselee. Conviction of sin and divine guidance come directly from God to all His children. I do not pray and ask God to show me what a counselee’s problems are so that I can relay what God says. In the discipleship counseling process, the counselee prays and God responds directly, personally.

This also is true for testing the spirits. John wrote:

> Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God (1 John 4:1, *NIV*).

The passage does not say, “Have your pastor or somebody more spiritual than you test the spirits for you!” One young man said, “This voice in my head says it wants to go to heaven with me.” I instructed him to pray and ask God to show him the true nature of the voice. The young man did, and he immediately knew that it was an evil spirit. He told it to leave in the name of Jesus. It left. It was his responsibility to test the spirit and resist the devil.

They Need to Assume Responsibility for Their Own Spiritual Well-Being

The second principle we can draw from the James passage is related to individual responsibility: Who does God hold responsible for taking the initiative to call the elders of the Church? Christians will never experience wholeness or victory or mental, emotional and spiritual health until they assume their own responsibility. No one can be healthy for someone else. Good health is not contagious, only sickness is. Nobody can eat right, get enough rest or exercise for another person.

The same truth holds for spiritual maturity and victory in Christ. No one can practice Christian disciplines for another person. Some people ask for help with their attitude, begging, “Fix me!” If you loved them, you would help them understand that you cannot. Only God can change who they are. If any lasting change is going to take place in their lives, it will be directly related to what they have chosen to believe and do.

When I conducted a conference at a local church, I was greeted by the pastor who said, “I have 50 lay prayer encouragers to help you.” They were wonderful intercessors who were taught to pray for others. People were invited to come forward for prayer at every service and they did, with all kinds of requests. The prayer encouragers would anoint them with oil and intercede on their behalf. The church also had a professional counseling center located in the church, and they were the ones who had invited me to come. When I met with the professional counselors, I asked, “Given what you do in the church service, does that create problems for you in counseling?” They all agreed that people from their own church were the hardest to counsel. Why?

What was wrong with what they were doing in the church service? There was nothing wrong with praying for people’s needs, and what they were doing revealed that they were a caring church. They were willing to commit time in the worship service for people’s individual needs to be addressed. That is commendable. Most churches make no provision for such an opportunity. However, the problem was the subtle message being conveyed to the congregation. If their problems were going to be solved, God would have to do something in response to their prayers.

When members of that congregation came in for personal counseling, they were expecting the encourager to anoint them with oil and pray over them. What was being overlooked was their responsibility. What more does God need to do in order for us to live a victorious life in Christ? He defeated the devil, forgave our sins, set us free from our past, made us new creations in Christ, empowered us with His Holy Spirit and gave us the rule book for life—telling us to repent and walk by faith according to what He says is true. The missing ingredient is our response to Him in repentance and faith.

They Need to Confess the Truth

The third principle has to do with the sequence of Scripture:

> Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective (Jas. 5:16, *NIV*).

Confession is honest and open agreement with God, and that has to come before healing. If there is any one principle that is uniformly believed in the field of recovery (secular or Christian), it is the need to get out of denial and start facing

the truth. Confession comes before healing.

Suppose you have a very rebellious son who has a strained relationship with you. You told him to mow the lawn, but he did not. Then he comes to you with a request, “Dad, I have a hot date tonight, I need the keys to the car and 20 dollars.” Would you give it to him? Would God? I do not think so. I think a righteous heavenly Father would say, “Son, you have many unresolved issues in your life that are seriously affecting your relationship with Me. Why don’t you seek reconciliation with Me, and then we will see if the money and car are really what is best for you.”

Elders are being called to pray for sick people only to discover later that these people were living in bondage to sin, bitterness, pride and rebellion. Most of these people are probably sick for psychosomatic reasons. If you loved them, you would help them resolve their personal and spiritual conflicts first. If the sick and the suffering are truly repentant, then the prayers of a righteous man will be very effective. Since healing follows confession in the James passage, one could conclude that James is addressing those people who are sick because they are living outside of God’s will.

THE TRUTH ENCOUNTER

In many cases it is not enough to submit to God. James says that we must also resist the devil (see Jas. 4:7). We have learned that the sequence of Scripture is critical. If you try to resist the devil without first submitting to God, you may end up with a very unpleasant experience. On the other hand, you can submit to God but not resist the devil and stay in bondage. The tragedy is that most recovery ministries and Christian encouragers are not doing either one.

In preparation for Pentecost, which ushered in the church age, Jesus trained His 12 disciples by sending them out to minister:

> When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons (Luke 9:1, *NIV*).

When He trained the 72, they “returned with joy and said, ‘Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name’ ” (Luke 10:17, *NIV*). Notice how the Lord responded to their joyful report:

> He replied, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you

> authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven" (vv. 18-22, *NIV*).

Several intervention principles need to be noted.

The Church Has the Authority and the Power over the Kingdom of Darkness

Authority is the right to rule. Power is the ability to rule. As members of the Body of Christ, Christian encouragers have this delegated *authority because of their position in Christ,* and they have the *power when they are filled with the Spirit.* Therefore, "be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power" (Eph. 6:10, *NIV*). In the Great Commission, Jesus said:

> All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:18-19, *NIV*).

No one can delegate responsibility without authority. We minister by virtue of Christ's authority and His power. We cannot use either at our own discretion. The moment we do, we are operating according to the flesh instead of the Spirit. We have the authority to do God's will, nothing more and nothing less.

Authority Is What the Church and the Encourager Has over the Kingdom of Darkness

In the spiritual realm, snakes and scorpions refer to the devil and his demons; but physical snakes and bugs are not our enemy. The Bible also refers to governing authorities, and that regulates how we are to function together in society (home, school, work and state).

We Are Not to Let the Devil Set the Agenda

Do not get carried away with the effect but, rather, with the cause. We are to rejoice that our names are written in the Lamb's book of life and that we are children of God.

Before the Cross, Satan was not a defeated foe. It would take some special endowed authority agent to cast out demons. After the Cross, Satan and his demons were defeated, and the Church has been raised up to be seated with

Christ in the heavenlies (see Eph. 2:6). We are joint heirs with Jesus. Every child of God, and therefore, every encourager, has the same spiritual position, and therefore, the same authority over the kingdom of darkness. Paul presents the whole gospel in Colossians 2:13-15 (*NIV*):

> When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

I was helping a large lady who was struggling with a dissociative identity disorder (DID) due to ritual abuse.[1] She suddenly got out of her chair with glazed eyes and started to walk toward me. If you were her encourager, what would you do? I calmly took my place in Christ, saying, "I am a child of God, the evil one cannot touch me. Sit down" (see 1 John 5:18). The lady immediately stopped and returned to her chair. It is important to know that authority does not increase with volume. We do not shout at the devil. The same holds true for parental authority. If you are shouting at your children in an attempt to control them, you are not properly exercising your God-given authority; you are undermining it.

Exercising our authority during counseling sessions will require us to *speak* the truth in love (see Eph. 4:25). Children have no obligation to obey our thoughts and neither does the devil. Only God is omniscient, and only He knows the thoughts and attitudes of the heart (see Heb. 4:12). Satan does not perfectly know our thoughts, even though it may seem as though he does. He has the advantage of having agents who can observe us up to 24 hours of the day (encouragers as well as counselees). Therefore, on the bases of experience and practical knowledge of human nature, he can fairly well determine what we are thinking, because eventually we act out, or will out, our thought life. Also, it is not hard for Satan to know what we are thinking if he gave us the thought. In this instance, both the encourager and the counselee could be spiritually deceived. That is why we are called to make a public profession of faith:

> For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved (Rom. 10:10, *NIV*).

Every occult practice dabbles either with the mind or the future and usually both. Satan wants us to believe that he perfectly knows our minds and the future, but he does not. Many of our counselees have visited fortune-tellers, consulted New Age mediums, read their horoscope, and so on. The lure of knowledge and power has trapped many. Even in Christian circles, the desire to know the future and other people's minds has led many people astray. We have to learn to trust God for tomorrow and learn to live a responsible life today by seeking the power of revealed truth, not the hidden esoteric "knowledge" of gurus, psychics, New Age mediums and false prophets.

Fear has prevented many Christian encouragers and even pastors from dealing with this spiritual issue, which plays right into Satan's hand. He wants to be feared because he wants to be worshiped. There is not a verse in the Bible that says we are to fear Satan:

> For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline (2 Tim. 1:7, *NIV*).

Some encouragers and pastors also feel personally insecure about dealing with spiritual issues. They are not sure what they would do if they did detect spiritual opposition. This concern usually disappears when they understand how to maintain control in the counseling session by putting the responsibility back on the counselee. How to do this will be discussed in chapter 7.

We Are to Resist the Devil

People's lives are like houses where the garbage has not been taken out for weeks and spills have not been cleaned up. This attracts a lot of flies. The natural tendency is to focus on getting rid of the flies, because they are so distracting. People tend to swat flies instead of getting rid of the garbage. Even if you did get rid of the flies, what would keep them from coming back and maybe seven times worse? A better solution is to get rid of the garbage and ignore the flies that will leave when the garbage is gone. Repentance and faith in God have been and will continue to be the answer in this present church age. Once the counselee has submitted to God, it is no problem to resist the devil. The enemy no longer has any right to be there.

It is never our responsibility to defeat the devil.

Some see this as a power encounter between the spiritual forces of good and evil. Whenever a spiritual problem is discerned, they call in the missionary, pastor or encourager who will do battle with the evil one. They will attempt to call up the demons and proceed to cast them out. In this kind of deliverance ministry, the deliverer is the pastoral agent and is getting the information from the demons. Why would we believe them? Whenever the devil or the demons speak, they do so from their own nature, and it is their nature to lie because Satan is the father of lies (see John 8:44).

I believe the Epistles teach a different process for the believer. The deliverer is Christ and He has already come. The encourager should be getting his or her information from the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of truth. He will lead the counselees into all truth, and that truth will set them free. Setting a captive free is better understood as a truth encounter because it is the truth that sets the captive free, and it is never our responsibility to defeat the devil. Jesus has already done that. The encourager has the privilege of facilitating this truth-encounter process.

This may explain why there are no instructions in the Epistles to cast out demons (though Philip and Paul did cast out demons in Acts 8:7; 16:18). After the Cross, the devil is defeated and every believer has the same authority over the devil and his angels. The responsibility has shifted from the outside agent to the individual. The encourager cannot put on the armor of God for his or her counselees, resist the devil for them or take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ for them. An encourager cannot repent for counselees, believe for them, confess for them or forgive others for them; but the encourager can help them. With that understanding, there is a very definitive passage right in the middle of the Epistles:

> The Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will (2 Tim. 2:24-26).

THE ENCOURAGERS’ RESPONSIBILITY

So far we have seen that we cannot play God in someone else's life, and we cannot do for someone else what God requires them to do. The role of the encourager is more like that of a facilitator who has the ministry of reconciliation (see 2 Cor. 5:18). Let us examine the qualifications of the person whom God is going to use to liberate His people as stated in 2 Timothy 2:24-26.

We Must Be the Lord's Bond Servants

To be the Lord's bond servant means that we are totally dependent on God. I begin every counseling session with the knowledge that I cannot bind up the brokenhearted. Only God can do that. I cannot set people free. Only God can do that. I cannot change them or make them whole. Only Christ can change them and make them complete. What can I do? I can share the gospel. Jesus said, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (John 6:44, *NIV*). Discipleship counseling is not just a technique we learn; it is an encounter with God, who is the wonderful counselor.

Discipleship counseling is not just a technique we learn; it is an encounter with God, who is the wonderful counselor.

We Must Not Be Quarrelsome

Quarreling will usually put one or both of you on the defensive, and that is not where you want to be. It is not the role of the encourager to convince counselees of anything. If they do not want to believe the truth, you have no choice but to let them believe something else. Even God would say to them, "Let it be done to you according to how you believe." If they do not want to deal with their issues, then you cannot. It is not the role of the encourager to bring conviction, but it is our role to share the truth in love.

Some people do not want to resolve anything; they just want to argue. We cannot fall into the temptation of trying to win the argument. It is counterproductive to get into useless dialogue. An old proverb says, "A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still." The goal is not to win the argument; the goal is to avoid it. The reason a nuclear physicist does not trust in Christ is the same reason a garbage collector does not. They do not want to. This is not an intellectual issue, it is a moral issue. John Stott once said, "You cannot

pander to mankind's intellectual arrogance, but you must cater to their intellectual integrity."

The devil will take a deceived person down 1,001 rabbit trails. We have to avoid going down these trails with them. Some will put up smoke screens to keep from getting at the real issue. We must have enough discernment to see through the deception. Experienced encouragers have learned to stay focused and keep the session moving in a meaningful direction.

We Must Be Kind to Everyone

From the wisdom literature, we read, "What is desirable in a man is his kindness" (Prov. 19:22). Jesus said, "Go and learn what this means: 'I desire compassion, and not sacrifice' " (Matt. 9:13). Compassion is the Hebrew word *hesed,* which is translated "loving-kindness" in the Old Testament. It refers to the character of God. Compassion is the one essential character prerequisite for Christian ministry, because people do not openly share with a person they do not believe is kind.

We must strive to be the type of person that others trust, but there are limits to what that can accomplish. Just being a good person by itself is not enough. Most counselor-training programs help their students develop skills of congruence, accurate empathy, genuineness and concreteness, as well as various types of listening and probing techniques. These are also good pastoral skills, which every encourager should learn. The purpose for these skills is to draw necessary information out of the counselee. You need this disclosure to get at the root issues, so you can have the correct diagnosis.

Suppose a secular counselor is very skilled at doing these things. This counselor is able to establish a trusting relationship so that counselees fully disclose their past. The counselor is able to reconstruct their past and explain with great precision why they are struggling. At this juncture, a cognitive therapist may help them understand how their thinking is affecting them emotionally and contributing to irresponsible behavior. Counselees may leave with a better understanding of what has happened to them and know how to cope better in the future, but they are still the same persons. They are still a product of their past on a journey of self-improvement. Plus, there is a potential danger in explaining what happened to them. They could use it as an excuse for their pathology and irresponsibility: "No wonder I am this way, look what happened to me!"

Few people would be willing to share all the dirt in their lives just for the

purpose of sharing it. More would be willing to share all the dirt in their lives in order to gain some understanding of why they are so dysfunctional, but that is as far as secular counseling can take them. They have no gospel. This is where discipleship counseling is so radically different from secular counseling. Christians readily share all sin in their lives with God for the purpose of resolving it.

Intimate details do not come out when we are listening to counselees' stories. They come out when the session is an encounter with God. The Holy Spirit brings conviction (see John 16:8) and guides them into all truth (see v. 13). This is not something we can do. If people share painful and sinful things about their lives without resolution, they will usually regret it later. But I have yet to see a person share every painful and sinful part of his or her life for the purpose of resolving it and regret it later. "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death" (2 Cor. 7:10, *NIV*). Judas denied Christ, experienced the sorrow of the world and committed suicide. Peter denied Christ three times, came under the conviction of the Holy Spirit and became the first spokesperson for the Church.

Some people are sorry when they get caught, and some express sorrow when confronted by others; but confrontation does not always lead to repentance. People can have a moment of catharsis with another person and deeply regret it later. They leave thinking, *I can't believe I told that person all those intimate details! What must they think of me?* Often they do not come back because they are too embarrassed. When God is functioning as the wonderful counselor and granting repentance, we hear people say all the time, "I have never shared this with anyone ever before." That is not because I am such a good counselor. Actually it has little to do with me. They are sharing this for the first time with God (in our presence) for the purpose of resolving it, and that makes all the difference in the world.

We Must Be Able to Teach

The emphasis is not on the ability to communicate but, rather, on the ability to apply the truth. This is the major function in discipleship counseling because people are living in bondage to the lies they believe. Cognitive therapy will produce no liberating results if we do not know the truth:

> Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32,

NIV).

In order to liberate counselees, the truth has to penetrate their hearts. It is not enough for people to give mental ascent or nod their heads in agreement, because nothing will change. When David came under conviction for his sin with Bathsheba, he wrote, “Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place” (Ps. 51:6, *NIV*).

Contrary to popular thinking, the dominant function of the heart is not emotional. Instead, the heart is first, the place where we think; second, where we will; and third, where we feel.

H. Wheeler Robinson counted 822 uses of the word “heart” for some aspect of human personality:

> According to his categorization, 204 of the 822 uses refer to intellectual activity, 195 to the volitional aspect, and 166 to an emotional state.[2]

Rather than understanding the heart to be the seat of our emotions, it is better to understand the heart as the seat of reflection. Only in the heart do the mind, will and emotions come together. Our emotional core is impacted the moment truth enters the heart, and together they drive the will. There is a huge difference between intellectual knowledge and truth that has entered the heart.

Every encourager has seen counselees *mentally* nod in agreement with *no emotional response* and little, if any, change in behavior. They may have agreed with what the encourager said, but the truth was never owned by them. Counselees can harden their own hearts by the deceitfulness of sin. “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8, *NIV*). Paul gives another reason why some counselees cannot seem to process the truth:

> And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for *you were not yet able to receive it.* Indeed, even now *you are not yet able,* for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? (1 Cor. 3:1-3, emphasis added).

There are people sitting in our churches who are not able to receive good

teaching. Paul explains later that this inability to receive the truth is because of their unresolved quarrels and conflicts. Simple logic says that unless we have some means of resolving these conflicts, the truth will not set them free, because they are not even capable of receiving it. This is where repentance comes in. We have to help people resolve their personal and spiritual conflicts first, and then they will be able to receive the truth. David did not come to repentance until God sent him Nathan, who confronted him with his sin. First he repented, and then he knew the truth in the inner person.

We see this all the time in our counseling. A father wanted me to counsel his unmarried daughter who was sexually active. Her opening statement was, "I don't want to get right with God or anything like that."

"That's your choice," I replied, "but since you are here, is there any way that I could help you? Why don't you start by telling me your story." I found out she had been very active in church until the night she was date-raped. Sexual promiscuity followed this unfortunate experience. After hearing all her troubles, I asked, "Would you like to resolve these difficulties?" She said she would. I walked her through the Steps to Freedom in Christ, and she walked out free. Her opening statement was just a smoke screen. The joy on her face revealed the truth in her heart.

We Must Be Patient

It is not uncommon for counselees to turn on their encouragers in a moment of despair. The grace of God is never more evident than when we show patience under fire. The degree of our own security in Christ will be revealed. Let them have their emotional catharsis, even if it is momentarily directed at you. Nobody does that out of a position of strength. Mature people do not strike out at others. These are hurting people. If we are not defensive, it will open the door for ministry.

Patience is also needed for another reason: It may take several hours to help a person resolve major conflicts. Ideally, we do not want to open a wound without closing it in the same session. Knowing that some wounds can be difficult to get to and difficult to resolve, we discuss this with counselees and let them know we will be patient and work with them for as long as it takes to accomplish their treatment goals.

This is why a theology of resolution is so vitally important. To open a wound without having some way of closing it is not healthy. This requires spiritual surgery. Seldom can we start the next week where we left off last week. More

concentrated time is needed for some cases. If you opened a wound without closing it or exposed a spiritual conflict without resolving it, your counselees could go home and experience the worst week of their lives.

If I had to choose between five consecutive hours to work with a person or weekly sessions of 50 minutes for the next six months, I would take those five hours every time and accomplish a lot more. If you are in full-time ministry, you may think you do not have enough time, but I disagree. We do not seem to have enough time to do it right, but we always have enough time to do it again and again and again with no resolution.

When people seek help, does their problem initially get worse or better? It will usually get worse. So they reason, *It was bad before, but now it is worse. I think I will go back to where I was before.* That is exactly what happened when the Israelites left Egypt. It was very bad in Egypt, but in the wilderness it got worse. They all wanted to go back into bondage, but Moses encouraged them to press on to the Promised Land. We must do the same for those we are helping. That risk is substantially minimized when we work in extended sessions and when resolution is accomplished.

Finally, the Christian encourager is gentle. The only time Jesus ever described Himself was when He said:

> Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light (Matt. 11:28-30, *NIV*).

We have been invited to walk with the gentle Jesus. Gentleness is a fruit of the Spirit. Being a gentle person is a cherished Christian value that keeps us from running roughshod over people. We should not get ahead of God's timing, nor force people to respond. The encourager is yoked together with Jesus. Apart from Christ we can do nothing. God is the One who grants "repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim. 2:25), but He has chosen to work through His bond servants to bring freedom to His people. May every encourager be one of Christ's bond servants.

The encourager is yoked together with Jesus. Apart from Christ we can do nothing.

The following poem, written by one of my counselees, captures this process so well:

The Wreath

A friend of mine, whose grapevine died, had put it out for trash.
I said to her, “I’ll take that vine and make something of that.”
At home the bag of dead, dry vines looked nothing but a mess,
but as I gently bent one vine, entwining ’round and ’round,
A rustic wreath began to form, potential did abound.
One vine would not go where it should, and anxious as I was,
I forced it so to change its shape, it broke—and what the cause?
If I had taken precious time to slowly change its form,
It would have made a lovely wreath, not a dead vine, broken, torn.
As I finished bending, adding blooms, applying trim,
I realized how that rustic wreath is like my life within.
You see, so many in my life have tried to make me change.
They’ve forced my spirit anxiously, I tried to rearrange.
But when the pain was far too great, they forced my fragile form,
I plunged far deeper in despair, my spirit broken, torn.
Then God allowed a gentle one that knew of dying vines,
To kindly, patiently allow the Lord to take His time.
And though the vine has not yet formed a decorative wreath,
I know that with God’s servants’ help, one day when Christ I meet,
He’ll see a finished circle, a perfect gift to Him.
It will be a final product, a wreath with all the trim.
So as you look upon this gift, the vine round and complete,
Remember God is using you to gently shape His wreath.



CHAPTER FIVE

THE SANCTIFYING PROCESS

God is the author of life—not death. He formed the universe and all that is in it by the word of His mouth. He spoke matter and time into existence. Adam and Eve were uniquely created in God's image. They had perfect communion with their creator and each other. All their needs were provided for in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve were without flaw in body, soul and spirit. God gave them dominion over the birds of the sky, the beasts of the field and the fish of the sea.

Yet there was another presence in the Garden—a spiritual being who had defied God in eternity past (see Isa. 14:12-15). He tried to dethrone God and set himself up to be His equal. Such arrogance and pride caused Lucifer to lose his position, and this "model of perfection" (Ezek. 28:12, *NIV*) became Satan—the personification of evil. In the Garden, this "father of lies" (John 8:44) whispered to Eve, "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5, *NIV*).

Deceived into believing that God was denying her the wisdom He alone possessed (which Eve may have thought was rightfully hers), Eve ate the forbidden fruit. Adam, who was the first in creation, failed in his leadership and willingly chose to sin (see 1 Tim. 2:14). Therefore, God's new creation fell into the same rebellion as Satan, and judgment likewise fell on them. This sin of

rebellion exacted a penalty, which was spiritual death. Just as Satan had lost his honored position with God, Adam and Eve lost their position and their dominion over the earth, not only for themselves, but for all their descendants. Satan became "the ruler of the world" (John 14:30), "the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient" (Eph. 2:2, *NIV*). John says:

> We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one (1 John 5:19, *NIV*).

Thus, we as encouragers need to know Satan's role and how the reality of the Fall and God's subsequent plan of redemption enters into every counseling session.

THE RESULT OF HUMANITY'S FALL

The once perfect creation became corrupt. Entropy and death entered time. Adam and Eve—created perfect in body, soul and spirit—were now imperfect. Their bodies, which were free from disease and susceptibility to trauma, now became subject to both. They were created spiritually alive with the ability to communicate openly with God; but after the Fall, they were spiritually dead and unable to receive from God. Their hearts were hardened by the deceitfulness of this world, and their minds became the target for every kind of deception. According to Paul, even as believers we retain a degree of mental vulnerability:

> I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ (2 Cor. 11:3, *NIV*).

The guilt and shame Adam and Eve experienced were overwhelming. Their newly birthed sin nature was evident when the Lord questioned them about their abrupt change in behavior. The fact that they were "darkened in their understanding" (Eph. 4:18) became immediately evident when they tried to hide from an omnipresent God. Adam blamed Eve, who blamed the serpent. This propensity to blame others was the first recorded use of defense mechanisms. Notice in diagram 5.1 how the Fall affected the total nature of humanity.

Diagram 5.1

	Pre-Fall Man	Post-Fall Man
Nature	righteous	"by nature children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3)
Mind	truthful and right	"darkened in their understanding" (Eph. 4:18)
Spirit	alive	"excluded from the life of God" (Eph. 4:18)
Emotion	safe, secure and free	"the hardness of their heart . . . having become callous" (Eph. 4:18-19)
Will	free to choose	"given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness" (Eph. 4:19)

The apostle John wrote, "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work" (1 John 3:8, *NIV*). God had a plan to restore this fallen humanity. He would send His Son to die for our sins and defeat the devil at the Cross and, through His resurrection, give new life to all who believed in Him. Consequently, by virtue of their position in Christ, all believers are alive and free *in Christ*, which makes possible their growth *in Christ*. Paul reveals how this process of growth is dependent on who we are in Christ in Colossians 2:6-10 (*NIV*, emphasis added):

> So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live *in him*, rooted and built up *in him*, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. For *in Christ* all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness *in Christ*, who is the head over every power and authority.

This passage reveals the fundamental difference between discipleship counseling and secular counseling. The first is according to Christ, and the other

is according to "human tradition and the basic principles of this world." Salvation brings forgiveness of sins and spiritual life "in Christ," which means that our soul is once again in union with God. Every born-again believer is spiritually alive "in Christ," and therefore united with Him.

Diagram 5.2

In His death	(see Rom. 6:3; Gal. 2:20; Col. 3:1-3)
In His burial	(see Rom. 6:4)
In His resurrection	(see Rom. 6:5,8,11)
In His ascension	(see Eph. 2:6)
In His life	(see Rom. 5:10-11)
In His power	(see Eph. 1:19-20)
In His inheritance	(see Rom. 8:16-17; Eph. 1:11-12)

According to Paul, we first have to be rooted "in Christ," before we can be built up "in Him," and then we will be able to walk or live "in Him." This progression of growth is all dependent on our life in Christ. If there is nothing living, then nothing grows. Jesus said:

> I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing (John 15:5, *NIV*).

In order to develop a strategy for discipleship counseling, we need to assess the level of maturity of those we are helping. Diagram 5.3 defines levels of conflict. Diagram 5.4 shows what the maturity should be at each level.[1] Level 1 relates to *root issues* (being firmly rooted in Christ). Definable root issues need to be resolved before any growth can take place. Level 2 relates to *growth issues* (now being built up in Him), and most of these conflicts are overcome as we move toward maturity. Level 3 relates to *living issues* (walking in Him). Positional sanctification (level 1) is the basis for progressive sanctification (levels 2 and 3). I believe there are certain identifiable spiritual and psychological conflicts at every level. Growth and productivity are impeded unless there is some resolution of these conflicts. I will discuss these levels of conflict and how they relate to counseling.[2]

Nobody is diced up into little squares as the charts indicate. There are,

however, certain identifiable hurdles—spiritual, rational, emotional, volitional and relational—that must be overcome in order to begin or continue growing in Christ. I am not suggesting a nice neat order that every counseling session follows. It may take several sessions just to develop trust with some people, and others will not even be willing to submit to biblical counseling. We need to accept people where they are in their relationship with Christ. For instance, the level 1 spiritual conflict is lack of salvation or the assurance of salvation. We cannot help a person mature in Christ if they are not first rooted in Christ. To resolve the conflict at this level, we would have to lead them to Christ and provide them with some assurance of salvation.

Diagram 5.3

LEVELS OF CONFLICT

	Level 1 Rooted in Christ (Col. 2:10)	**Level 2** Built Up in Christ (Col. 2:7)	**Level 3** Walking in Christ (Col. 2:6)
Spiritual	Lack of salvation or assurance (Eph. 2:1-3)	Walking according to the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21)	Insensitive to the Spirit's leading (Heb. 5:11-14)
Rational	Darkened understanding and pride (Eph. 4:18; 1 Cor. 8:1)	Wrong beliefs and philosophy of life (Col. 2:8)	Lack of knowledge (Hos. 4:6)
Emotional	Fear, guilt and shame (Matt. 10:26-33; Rom. 8:1-2)	Anger (Eph. 4:31), anxiety (1 Pet. 5:7), depression (2 Cor. 4:1-18)	Discouragement and sorrow (Gal. 6:9)
Volitional	Rebellion (1 Tim. 1:9)	Lack of self-control, impulsive (1 Cor. 3:1-3)	Undisciplined (2 Thess. 3:7,11)
Relational	Rejection (1 Pet. 2:4)	Bitterness and unforgiveness (Heb. 12:15)	Selfishness (Phil. 2:1-5; 1 Cor. 10:24)

Diagram 5.4

LEVELS OF RESOLUTION

	Level 1 Rooted in Christ (Col. 2:10)	**Level 2** Built Up in Christ (Col. 2:7)	**Level 3** Walking in Christ (Col. 2:6)
Spiritual	Child of God (Rom. 8:16; 1 John 5:13)	Walking according to the Spirit (Gal. 5:19-21)	Led by the Spirit (Rom. 8:14)
Rational	Desire to know the truth (John 8:32-33)	Handling accurately the Word of God (2 Tim. 2:15)	Adequate and equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17)
Emotional	Free in Christ (Gal. 5:1)	Joy, peace and patience (Gal. 5:22)	Contentment (Phil. 4:11)
Volitional	Submissive (Rom. 13:1-2)	Self-control (Gal. 5:23)	Disciplined (1 Tim. 4:7-8)
Relational	Accepted and affirmed (Rom. 5:8; 15:7)	Forgiving and accepting (Eph. 4:32)	Brotherly love (Rom. 12:10; Phil. 2:1-5)

LEVEL 1 CONFLICT RESOLUTION

In Him you have been made complete (Col. 2:10, emphasis added).

In order to be free from their past and live a productive life in Christ, Christians need to change from their old ways of thinking and living to a new way of living in a righteous relationship with God. The first step for new believers is to repent of their old sinful ways and to put their trust in God by believing the truth. Recall that “repent” literally means “a change of mind.” Part of the discipleship process is to help new believers see the lies they have believed and encourage them to choose the truth.

Counselees who are not firmly rooted in Christ need to know who they are in Christ and what it means to be a child of God. In other words, they need to know

their new spiritual heritage. That is why Paul prays in Ephesians 1:18-19 (*NIV*):

> I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of the glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

If we are saved by faith and instructed to walk by faith, then we must know the object of our faith, which is God and His Word. If what we believe is not true, then our walk of faith will not be fruitful. The foundation upon which believers build their lives is grounded in three biblical assurances:

1. The finished work of Christ (see Col. 2:14-15)
2. The believer's union with Christ (see Col. 2:9-10,13)
3. The present work of the Spirit of Christ (see Col. 2:6; 3:15)

Possessing a true knowledge of God and who they are in Christ greatly impacts how believers understand themselves and how they are supposed to live as children of God. In order to sense God's presence, believers need to resolve those issues that are critical between themselves and their heavenly Father and then resist the devil. This accomplishes two critical objectives:

1. It enables believers to appropriate the power of God for Christian living.
2. It gives believers a clear mind with which to make conscious choices. Knowing who they are in Christ is an essential foundation to be all that God wants them to be in Christ.

In-Depth Resolution

The resolution of level 1 conflicts is the primary focus of discipleship counseling. When level 1 issues are resolved, level 2 conflicts usually can be overcome by participating in the various growth opportunities in a good church. At level 3, people are mature enough to do what is required of them, but they may not always know what the proper course of action should be. Wise counsel is all they need. Conflicts at level 1 include those shown in diagram 5.5.

Diagram 5.5

Spiritual:	Lack of salvation or assurance (see 1 John 5:11-13)
Rational:	Darkened in their understanding and pride (see Eph. 4:18; 1 Cor. 8:1)
Emotional:	Fear, guilt and shame (see Matt. 10:26-33; Rom. 8:1-2)
Volitional:	Rebellion (see Matt. 16:24)
Relational:	Rejection (see Rom. 5:8; 15:7; 1 Pet. 2:4)

The level 1 spiritual conflict is the lack of salvation or the assurance of salvation. People cannot grow in Christ unless they have the life of Christ within. Even in the natural realm, if there is no life, there is no growth. The discipleship counselor (encourager) should be trained to help people make a decision for Christ, and then provide true converts with some assurance of salvation based on the authority of God's word. God wants all Christians to be assured of their salvation according to 1 John 5:13:

> These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

However, salvation is reestablishing a personal relationship with our heavenly Father. If there are unresolved issues between ourselves and our heavenly Father, we will probably lack internal assurance. After we help counselees resolve their personal and spiritual conflicts—critical issues between themselves and God—the assurance of salvation comes when "the Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom. 8:16). In addition, their fears and feelings of rejection will dissipate when they become firmly rooted in Christ.

Resistant People

It is almost impossible to work with rebellious (volitional) people. Rebels seldom seek counseling anyway. "Tough love" advocates recommend strict programs of behavior modification for such people. The goal is to orchestrate negative consequences for their rebellious behavior and positive consequences for when they submit. Others will call for a well-planned intervention, where family and friends share what the destructive behavior is doing to the rebel and themselves, and then provide an opportunity to get help.

Regardless of whether the consequences are natural or orchestrated, rebellious people must come to their own conclusion and the inner conviction that they no longer want to live that way. Some people have to be severely

beaten up by life before they are broken enough to ask for help. Concerning such people, Paul wrote:

> I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 5:5).

In other words, commit these persons to Satan's domain, which is the world. "Destruction" does not mean annihilation but ruin, and "flesh" refers to their physical body in this passage. Yet some will hang on to their pride and rebellious spirit with their last dying breath.

Many encouragers experience some resistance from those they are trying to help. Counselees have defense mechanisms, which they have erected to protect themselves, and one of the goals of discipleship counseling is to help them evaluate whether or not these defenses are healthy. The skillful encourager copes with this resistance and patiently guides counselees to the right conclusion. Yet it is probably impossible, unless the Lord has already convicted them of the need to do so.

Most people who are asking for help have experienced some degree of brokenness or they would not be asking for help. As encouragers, we try to relate to them with the unconditional love and acceptance of God. This understanding stance helps alleviate two other level 1 conflicts: fear (emotional) and rejection (relational). Helping counselees to feel safe and accepted lays a very important foundation for further work. Overcoming the level 1 conflicts of pride and ignorance (rational) will require instruction and possibly reading assignments. God said, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hos. 4:6).

In Summary

The goal for level 1 counseling is to establish people alive and free in Christ. This entails the following:

- Establishing sufficient rapport so that they can share openly, identify root issues and initiate resolution.
- Leading them to Christ who provides the assurance of salvation.
- Breaking down the defenses that have been erected to protect them from fear and rejection.
- Guiding them to a true knowledge of who they are in Christ.

- Exploring ways in which they may be playing God or rebelling against God's authority.
- Helping them to understand the unconditional love and acceptance of their heavenly Father.

LEVEL 2 CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Built up *in Him* (Col. 2:7, emphasis added).

The key to understanding level 2 Christian counseling is to adopt the same goal that God has for every one of His children; namely, their sanctification—the process of conforming to the image of God. Consider these following verses:

> For this is the will of God, your sanctification (1 Thess. 4:3).
>
> But like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written "You shall be holy, for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:15-16).
>
> For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His son (Rom. 8:29).
>
> But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith (1 Tim. 1:5).

Level 2 conflicts include those shown in diagram 5.6.

Diagram 5.6

Spiritual:	Walking by the flesh (see Gal. 5:19-21)
Rational:	Wrong belief or philosophy (see Col. 2:8)
Emotional:	Anger (see Eph. 4:31)
	Anxiety (see 1 Pet. 5:7)
	Depression (see 2 Cor. 4)
Volitional:	No self-control, impulsiveness (see Gal. 5:23)
Relational:	Bitterness and unforgiveness (see Col. 3:13)

Resolving level 2 conflicts should help Christians solidify their identity in Christ and provide them with a biblical sense of purpose and meaning in life. As encouragers, our sense of worth is found in our identity as children of God and experienced as we grow in grace. It is not found in performance, appearance or status, nor through spiritual gifts, talents or intelligence, which God does not uniformly distribute to His children. God has uniformly distributed Himself, because every Christian is His child and He loves them all the same. Any Christian who deeply understands his or her personal identity in Christ and whose life is characterized by the fruit of the Spirit will have a true sense of self and be mentally healthy, provided there are no neurological or physical abnormalities. The fact that all Christians have the same opportunity to be all that God has called them to be is the good news.

The fact that all Christians have the same opportunity to be all that God has called them to be is the good news.

LEVEL 3 CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Walk *in Him* (see Col. 2:6, emphasis added).

Discipleship counseling takes into account every level of conflict. If the root issues are resolved, then progress toward goal attainment is not impeded. In our experience, Christians who have found their identity and freedom in Christ heal from their wounds rather rapidly. They are teachable and have a new hunger for the Word of God.

Scripture teaches the priorities of maturity before ministry, character before career and being before doing. Recall that it is not what we do that determines who we are, it is who we are that determines what we do. Many Christians have wrongly asserted that women get their identity from their family and their role as mothers, and that men get their identity from their jobs, or careers, and their role as providers. If that were the case, then what happens when a mother experiences empty-nest syndrome or a husband loses his job? Do they lose their identity? Some have argued this point from Genesis 3—a man shall work by the sweat of his brow, and the woman shall bear her child in pain—but that is a fallen identity and part of the curse. Being separated from God, man and woman

had no choice but to seek their identity and purpose in their physical existence. We cannot expect people to behave in a way that is inconsistent with who they are (both in reality and maturity). The growth process begins by first knowing (cognitive), then being (affective) and finally doing (volitional).

Level 3 conflicts include those shown in diagram 5.7.

Diagram 5.7

Spiritual:	Insensitivity to the Holy Spirit's leading (see Rom. 8:14)
Rational:	Ignorance (see Hos. 4:6)
Emotional:	Discouragement and sorrow (see Gal. 6:9)
Volitional:	Lack of discipline (see 2 Thess. 3:7,11)
Relational:	Selfishness (see Phil. 2:1-5; 1 Cor. 10:24)

Level 3 counseling helps counselees function as children of God in their homes, on their jobs and in society in a responsible way. In the sanctifying process, God works primarily in believers' lives in the context of committed relationships for two reasons:

1. We cannot be a phony at home. Our children and spouses will see through us, because our true character reveals itself at home.
2. In committed relationships, we cannot easily walk away from our responsibilities.

The home is the primary place where we grow. This is evident in the book of Colossians. In the first two chapters, Paul explains all that Christ has accomplished for us. Once our identity and position in Christ were established, Paul wrote:

> Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity (Col. 3:12-14, *NIV*).

After admonishing us to grow in our character, Paul gives instruction concerning

the family. Either we grow up in our homes or the family is torn apart.

Hopefully believers are mature enough to live a righteous life by the grace of God. This is wisdom counseling based on Scripture and common sense. Conflicts at this level are overcome when we use our spiritual gifts, God-given talents and intellect to serve one another and be a positive witness in the world.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION FROM APOSTLE JOHN'S PERSPECTIVE

The apostle John provides additional insight into these three levels of maturity:

> I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, dear children, because you have known the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one (1 John 2:12-14, *NIV*).

In order to progress in maturity from a little child to a young person, we have to learn how to overcome the evil one. Understanding the spiritual battle for the mind has been strangely missing in most counseling strategies. If all encouragers are doing is listening to their counselees, explaining their pathology and suggesting changes of behavior, the battle for their minds will never be exposed. Why should demons reveal themselves if we are doing nothing to free the counselee? The battle for the mind is exposed when we seek to help people resolve their personal and spiritual conflicts. A fine Christian counselor attended my conference and introduced himself by saying, "I have never seen any evidence of the demonic in my counselees, and I have been counseling for 15 years. Given the popularity of the New Age movement, I will probably have to deal with it some time, so I'd better get prepared." He wrote me a letter a few months later and said, "I went back to my practice and found out that most of my counselees were being deceived and so was I." Good people can be deceived and I can state that I have been deceived many times in the past. Additionally, the present possibility always exists if I am not staying current in my relationship with God.

If all encouragers are doing is listening to their counselees, explaining their pathology and suggesting changes of behavior, the battle for their minds will never be exposed.

When I was teaching at Talbot School of Theology, three undergraduate students at Biola University were referred to a local clinic that specialized in eating disorders. All three students tried to share their mental struggles with their counselor. The counselor had each of the young ladies write a three-page paper explaining why blaming the devil absolved them from their responsibility to get well.

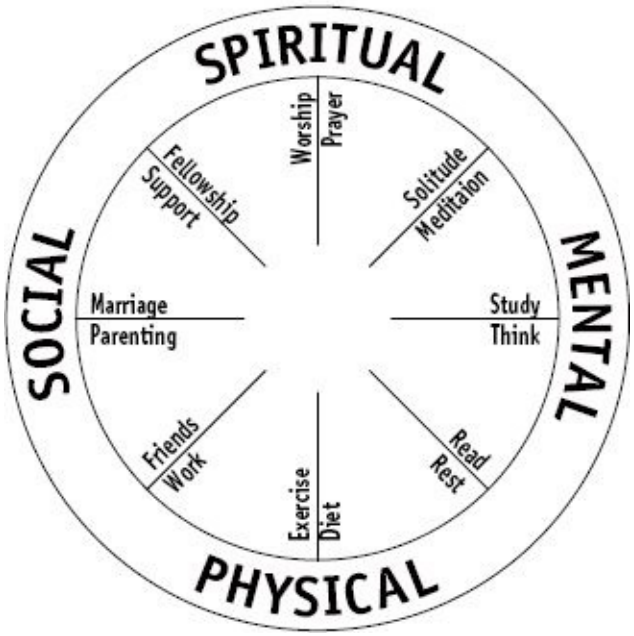
They were not blaming the devil; they were just trying to share with their counselor what their mental struggle was. Apparently the counselor did not believe them or did not have any idea how to help them find their freedom from such mental torment. He definitely was not counseling them from a Christian perspective. All three eventually came to see me on campus, and I was able to help them resolve their conflicts and find freedom in Christ.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

There are several disciplines in the Christian life that are an essential part of the growth process. It was recorded in Luke 2:52 (*NIV*) that "Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men." In other words, He grew mentally, physically, spiritually and socially. Diagram 5.8 illustrates these personal disciplines:

Diagram 5.8

Personal Disciplines



In order to practice these disciplines, we have turned to our concordances to understand how God would have us live. There we are directed to some Old Testament passages and to the second halves of Paul's Epistles. New Testament professors have noted that Paul's Epistles are almost evenly divided. The first half of each Epistle is *theological* and the second half is *practical*. Suppose we accurately exegete every practical passage and encourage our counselees to live according to these principles. Would they be able to do so? If that was their only approach to living the Christian life, most would fail. They would be missing the essential theological foundation.

Trying to live according to New Testament principles results in a subtle form of Christian behaviorism. Such advice sounds like this: "That is not the best way to live or do it; here is a better way that is more biblically accurate. Do this and don't do that and you'll be rewarded." In too many cases, the Church has only progressed from negative legalism (don't do this and don't do that), to positive legalism (do this and do that). This attempt at external conformity to biblical principles seldom produces any lasting fruit. There has to be an inner transformation before any lasting external conformity takes place—or we are only acting.

Take for instance the disintegration of the nuclear family since the cultural revolution of the '60s. Never in the history of humanity has there been such a concerted effort made to save the family. Graduate programs have sprung up in

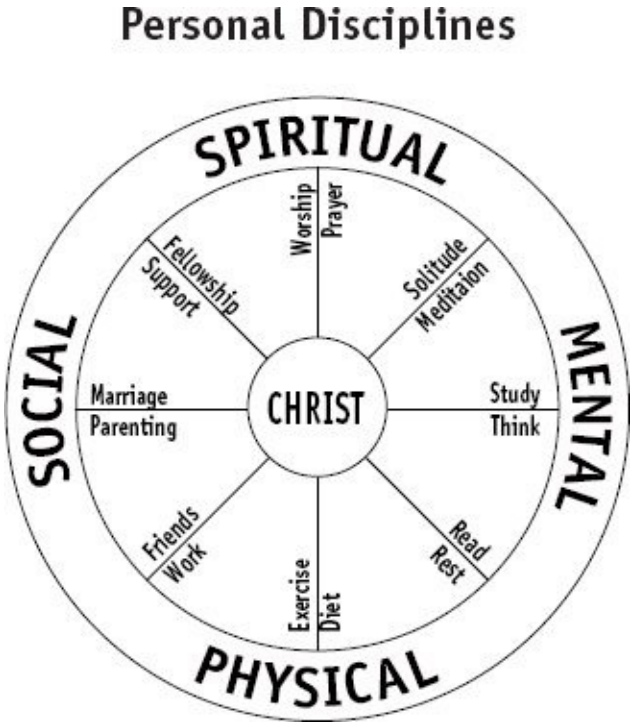
Bible colleges and seminaries. Books, videocassettes, audiocassettes and radio programs are addressing the number one felt need in America. How are we doing? Not well! What is wrong? There is obviously nothing wrong with biblically based material instructing us to live according to Christian principles. Telling a husband to love his wife as Christ loved the Church and suggesting several ways he could do so is certainly biblical. Telling a wife to be submissive to her husband so that the Word of God is not dishonored and suggesting some ways that she could show him more respect without becoming a doormat is appropriate. If they go home and try to do as they have been advised, they may have some limited success for a few days or even weeks. But if they are all torn up on the inside with unresolved level 1 conflicts, it will *not* work in the long run.

This problem is so subtle and is easily overlooked. Principles explaining every spoke in the wheel (see diagram 5.8) could be biblically accurate, but these spokes may not be functionally connected to the hub. In such cases, we have put our confidence in our programs and strategies instead of in Christ and His Word. John wrote:

> My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples (John 15:8).

It is wrong to conclude that we have to bear fruit. That is not what God requires of us! He has instructed us to abide in Christ (see John 15:4-5). Bearing fruit is just the evidence that we are abiding in Christ. No life can flow to the branches unless they are connected to the vine. Remember, if there is no life, there is no growth. Diagram 5.9 shows the need for this spiritually organic connection:

Diagram 5.9



The theological (first) halves, of Paul's Epistles establish us in Christ. It is my belief that if we, as encouragers, can help others be connected to God in a living and liberated way, counselees will naturally (or, better, supernaturally) live out the second halves of the Epistles. I have told many people to temporarily set aside their desire to save their marriage and family. Their first concern should be their relationship with God. If we can individually help counselees resolve their personal and spiritual conflicts, then the family can function in the way God intended. This is possible because no one or nothing on planet Earth (including Satan) can keep them from being the spouse, parent or family member God called them to be, which is God's will for their lives.

CONNECTING PEOPLE TO GOD THROUGH RESOLVING ROOT ISSUES

Bob was raised in a physically abusive and chaotic home. When his parents and siblings became angry, they would strike each other and throw chairs, food or anything not attached to the house. He married and found that the abusive behavior followed him into his marriage and family. He knew the negative impact these violent behaviors had on him as a person. He detested his angry responses, knowing how they frightened and terrorized his wife. Yet when the

pressure mounted, he would erupt. Afterward, he would be torn up with guilt and remorse, vow never to again behave in such a way, only to find the pattern repeating itself again and again. He received Christ six years ago, hoping these behaviors would finally cease. They have subsided somewhat, but they have not gone away. He periodically repeats the destructive behaviors.

Terri, a 28-year-old single woman, carried wounds from her parents' divorce. She shared issues of male dependency, shame and a promiscuous relationship pattern. She made a decision for Christ at age 20 but was perplexed with the continuation of these sinful behavior patterns. She even dated and slept with a married man "because he loved me and needed me." She experienced tremendous guilt and remorse afterward. She desired not to sin, and yet she continued to do so. She admitted that she felt an oppression coming from somewhere that weakened her resolve to flee from the dependency on sex with men.

When considering such cases, where do you start? Both Bob and Terri made a profession of faith in God—let us assume for the sake of discussion that they are both born again. From experience, I can almost assume that they have a distorted concept of God and themselves. They probably have a poor sense of worth and little mental peace, and they are probably questioning God's love and their salvation. Their personal relationship with God is not very intimate or personal. Consequently, their devotional life and prayer life is virtually nonexistent.

It Takes Intimacy

Our relationship with God is personal. Like any relationship, there are certain issues that have to be resolved in order for the relationship to work. We cannot expect God to bless us if we are living in open rebellion to Him:

> Rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry (1 Sam. 15:23, *NIV*).

If we are proud, God is opposed to us (see Jas. 4:6). If we are bitter and unwilling to forgive, God will turn us over to the torturers (see Matt. 18:34). These issues have to be resolved first, since only God can bind up the brokenhearted and set the captives free. Perhaps a testimony from a veteran missionary will illustrate this point. She was seeing her psychiatrist, psychologist and pastor once a week just to hold her life together. The next step was hospitalization. I spent one Friday afternoon with her, and two-and-a-half

months later, I received this letter:

> I've been wanting to write to you for some time, but I've waited this long to confirm to myself that this is truly "for real" (as my four-year-old daughter says). I'd like to share an entry from my journal, which I wrote two days after our meeting.
>
> "Since Friday afternoon, I have felt like a different person. The fits of rage and anger are gone. My spirit is so calm and full of joy. I wake up singing praise to God in my heart.
>
> "That edge of tension and irritation is gone. I feel so free. The Bible has been really exciting and stimulating and more understandable than ever before. There was nothing 'dramatic' that happened during the session on Friday, yet I know in the deepest part of my being that something has changed. I am no longer bound by accusations, doubts and thoughts of suicide or murder or other harm that come straight from hell into my head. There is a serenity in my mind and spirit, a clarity of consciousness that is profound.
>
> "I've been set free!
>
> "I'm excited and expectant about my future now. I know that I'll be growing spiritually again and will be developing in other ways as well. I look forward happily to the discovery of the person God has created and redeemed me to be, as well as the transformation of my marriage.
>
> "It is so wonderful to have joy after so long a darkness."
>
> It's been two-and-a-half months since I wrote that, and I'm firmly convinced of the significant benefits of finding freedom in Christ. I've been in therapy for several months, and while I was making progress, there is no comparison with the steps I'm able to make now. My ability to "process" things has increased manyfold. Not only is my spirit more serene, my head is actually clearer! It's easier to make connections and integrate things now. It seems like everything is easier to understand now.
>
> My relationship with God has changed significantly. For eight years I felt that He was distant from me. Shortly before I met you, I was desperately crying out to Him to set me free—to release me from the bondage I was in. I wanted so badly to meet with Him again, to know His presence was with me again. I needed to know Him as friend, as companion, not as the distant authority figure He had become in my mind and experience. Since that day two-and-a-half months ago, I have seen my

> trust in Him grow. I've seen my ability to be honest with Him increase greatly. I really have been experiencing that spiritual growth I'd anticipated in my journal. It's great!

This woman had all the symptoms of severe depression and was being treated as such. Her thoughts went from scrambled to clear. However, she now mentally processes issues she could not process before. Her perception of God and of herself changed dramatically. It was God who granted repentance and brought the change. Resolving personal and spiritual conflicts does not result in maturity. There is no such thing as instant maturity. Growth will only take place when the root issues are resolved. I will briefly discuss here what these root issues are. The last seven chapters of this book will explain them more fully.

Root Issue 1: False Guidance and Participation with Cults and the Occult

If there is one passage in the Bible that describes this false guidance, it is 2 Corinthians 4:1-2:

> Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we received mercy, we do not lose heart, but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

Paul is contrasting the truth of divine revelation with that of false teachers and prophets. Knowing God's holiness and His call for Church purity, Paul exhorts us to renounce every immoral practice, every distortion of truth and all deceitfulness of the heart.

God does not take lightly false guidance and false teachers. They were to be stoned to death, and there were serious consequences for those who consulted them:

> As for the person who turns to mediums and to spiritists, to play the harlot after them, I will also set My face against that person and will cut him off from among his people (Lev. 20:6).

There are similar warnings about false teachers and false prophets in the New Testament. That is why we have found it necessary to renounce any and all

involvement with false guidance, false teachers, false prophets and every cultic and occult practice. We do not want to be cut off from God; we want to be connected to Him.

Root Issue 2: Deception

People are living in bondage to the lies they believe. They are not in bondage to the abuses they have suffered, they are in bondage to the lies they have believed as a result of the abuse. In order to live free in Christ, they have to reject lies and choose the truth. They are admonished to speak the truth in love (see Eph. 4:25), to walk in the light and to have fellowship with one another (see 1 John 1:7). People living in bondage believe lies, walk in darkness and avoid intimate contact with others. They pay attention to deceiving spirits and are deceived by the world; they also can deceive themselves. Deception is the major strategy of Satan, the father of lies, and that is one reason why the truth sets them free.

In every legitimate recovery program, the first step is to stop living a lie and choose the truth. We cannot instantly change long-established flesh patterns or defense mechanisms that have become a habitual part of our daily life, but we can, with God's guidance, identify them and make a decision to confess them as wrong in order to find healthier ways of living.

Root Issue 3: Bitterness

Almost every person I have tried to help carries the emotional scars and bears the pain of wounds inflicted upon them by others. Most do not know how to let go of the past and forgive from the heart. Some have chosen not to. Others hang on to their anger as a means of protecting themselves from being hurt again, but they are only hurting themselves. Forgiveness is intended to set a captive free, and only after a captive is set free can he or she recognize that he or she was being held captive. Nobody today can be emotionally free from the past without forgiving from the heart. If we do not forgive from our heart, God will turn us over to the torturers (see Matt. 18:34), because He does not want to see His children live in bitterness.

God is not out to punish us; He is out to restore us. He knows that if we hang on to our bitterness, we will only hurt ourselves and others (see Heb. 12:15). Paul admonishes Christians:

> Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted,

> forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you (Eph. 4:31-32).

We forgive others for our own sake and for the sake of our relationship with God. What is to be gained in forgiving others is freedom. We also are warned by Paul that we need to forgive others so that Satan does not take advantage of us (see 2 Cor. 2:10-11).

Root Issue 4: Rebellion

We live in a very rebellious age. Everyone thinks it is a personal right to criticize and sit in judgment of those who are in authority over them. When sown, the seeds of rebellion reap anarchy and spiritual defeat. If we have a problem with rebellion, we may have the worst problem in the world. Scripture instructs us to submit to and to pray for those who are in authority over us. Honoring our mother and father is the first of the Ten Commandments that ends in a promise. The same is true in the New Testament:

God is not out to punish us; He is out to restore us.

> Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same (Rom. 13:1-3).

However, there are times when we must obey God rather than an authority figure. When a human authority requires us to do something that is forbidden by God and restricts us from doing what God has called us to do, then we must obey God rather than the authority figure. The same applies when a person tries to exercise control over us when it exceeds the scope of his or her authority. A police officer can write us a ticket for breaking the traffic laws, but he or she cannot tell us what to believe or prevent us from going to church.

Living under a repressive political regime, critical boss or hypocritical parents can be oppressive, but they are not determining who we are unless we let them.

There are times when it is legitimate and necessary to set up scriptural boundaries to protect ourselves from further abuse. For instance, a battered wife should report her abusive husband to authorities. We should righteously assert ourselves by setting boundaries and confronting any unbiblical behavior that is abusive.

It is a great act of faith to trust God to work through less-than-perfect authority figures—that is what He is asking us to do. In order to have a right relationship with God, we need to be submissive to Him and all governing authorities who are not violating biblical boundaries. Our commanding general, the Lord Jesus Christ, is saying, "Trust Me, be submissive to My authority and follow Me! I will not lead you into temptation but will deliver you from evil" (see Matt. 6:13).

Root Issue 5: Pride

Pride often keeps us locked in a pattern of false thinking and prevents us from seeking the help we need. *I should be able to work this out myself!* That is false thinking, because we were never intended to live this life alone. God created Adam and Eve to live dependently on Him. All temptation is an attempt to get us to live our lives independently of God. Pride is an independent spirit that is self-serving:

> God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble (Jas. 4:6).

Pride says, "I can do this, I can get out of this myself." Oh, no we can't! Such arrogant thinking sets us up for a fall, because "pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling" (Prov. 16:18). Paul wrote:

> We are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and *put no confidence in the flesh* (Phil. 3:3, emphasis added).

Shame and self-deprecation are not the same as humility. Humility is confidence properly placed. That is why we put no confidence in our flesh. Our confidence is in God. Self-sufficiency robs us of our sufficiency in Christ, because only in Christ can we do all things through Him who strengthens us (see Phil. 4:13). God intended for His children to live victoriously by having great confidence in Him:

> Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life (2 Cor. 3:5-6).

Root Issue 6: Habitual Sin

Habitual sin will keep us in bondage, inhibiting our desire to live free in Christ. Paul wrote:

> The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts (Rom. 13:12-14).

Repentance and faith in God are the only answers for breaking the bondage to the sin that so easily entangles us. You can be free from bondage to sin, because you, with every other believer, are to consider yourself alive in Christ and dead to sin (see Rom. 6:11).

Root Issue 7: Family Ties

The last step in helping others find freedom in Christ is to renounce the sins of our ancestors, to actively take our place in Christ and to resist the devil. The Ten Commandments reveal that the iniquities of fathers can be visited upon the third and fourth generation. This is evident in our society in the well-known cycles of abuse. We are not guilty of our parents' sins; but because they sinned, we will have to live with the consequences of their sins and will likely live the way we were taught by them unless we repent. "A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher" (Luke 6:40). For most people, the primary teachers in the first five years of their life have been their parents. Much of their personality and temperament has been established in those early and formative years of life.

When people repented in the Old Testament, they confessed their sins and the sins of their fathers (see Lev. 26:39-40; Neh. 1:6; 9:2; Jer. 14:20; Dan. 9:8-11). We have the same responsibility today, "knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life *inherited*

from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ" (1 Pet. 1:18-19, emphasis added).

In part 2 of this book, we will expand upon the seven root issues that have to be resolved if we are going to grow in Christ and bear fruit.



CHAPTER SIX

COUNSELING IN CHRIST

Discipleship counseling is based on the Word of God, and therefore, it is applicable in every culture in the world, for all times. It also requires less training than professional secular programs that are trying to understand all the flesh patterns of fallen humanity. It does, however, require knowledge of God's Word, an appreciation for natural law and godly character. Such people are able to use our material without a lot of special training. Let me illustrate. I was invited to speak at a national conference for an evangelical denomination. A pastor, whom I had never met before, and who had not received any special training from our ministry, handed me the following letter:

> I want to thank you for the materials you have created. It is wonderful to use something with all sorts of people with all sorts of problems. I stumbled on to your material a year ago. I used it for teaching a Sunday School class, and God was using it to prepare me for helping a severely demonized man. The elders and I went through the Steps to Freedom first, in preparation for helping this man. I personally had bondage to sin broken in my own life. As a result of my freedom, my wife found her freedom from her family's occult background.
>
> I'm in a new church now, and the Lord has sent me 12 people to go through the Steps with me in the first month. There has been a great work

of God in people's hearts. Two elders resigned to get their lives straightened out. One has been having an affair for the last two years. He told me that his hypocrisy did not bother him until I came. It was the Lord! Not me!

I took the other elder and his wife through the Steps last week. He had bondage to pornography, masturbation and strip joints when he was on business trips. It is wonderful to see both of them find their freedom, and renew and deepen their relationships with God and each other.

One of our Sunday School teachers has been experiencing night terrors and demonic dreams. Through God's "chance events," she told my wife about these difficulties. I took her and her husband through the Steps. When we came to forgiveness, I had to teach, exhort and encourage her for over a hour. I had to physically put the pencil in her hand. It took her another 30 minutes to write down her first name. But eventually she made a decision and went for it. God is so good! The next Sunday there was so much joy, peace and freedom on the face of both her and her husband.

There is nothing new or magical about the Steps to Freedom in Christ. It is just a tool to help people connect with God, who is the very One who grants repentance. The Church has been around for 2,000 years without the Steps, but there has never been a time in Church history when the seven root issues have not needed to be resolved in order for believers to experience their freedom and peace with God. Whether the demonic part is 0 percent, 5 percent, 10 percent or 50 percent does not make any difference. The critical part is submitting to God. Resisting the devil is simple if there are no unresolved issues between us and our heavenly Father. If there is some demonic presence or influence, it will leave if repentance and faith in God is genuine.

WHY THE STEPS?

After counseling Christians for more than 30 years, I have discovered that the presenting problem is often symptomatic and not the root issue. The root issue must be resolved if a person is going to find resolution and experience freedom in Christ. Counselees are usually aware of a root issue, but they do not see its connection with what they are struggling with. Many are too embarrassed to share secret sins. God certainly knows everything about us, and that is why we need Him to direct us to the source of the problem. The Steps will bring to the

surface any issues that are critical between a person and God. The counselee is often surprised that the symptoms disappear or start to dissipate when these root issues are resolved with God.

Some time ago a single, middle-aged and very attractive lady wanted a personal appointment to deal with her fears. She wanted to serve God, but panic attacks were preventing her from doing that. The symptom was agoraphobia—a fear of open or public places. After hearing her story, there seemed to be no good reason why she was struggling with fear. She came from a good home and was very involved in church. She had never been married, and she led us to believe that she was sexually pure. When she came to step six, which deals with habitual sin, she couldn't lie to God, and out came the fact that she had engaged in several affairs. Guess what happened to her agoraphobia?

Most counseling approaches would never even consider many of the issues in the Steps when dealing with specific problems. Consequently, the root issue often remains uncovered and unresolved. I have heard hundreds of people say, "I have never shared this with anyone before." What follows is critically important in terms of the person's relationship with God and will more times than not be related to the symptoms that prompted his or her request for help in the first place. People do not have sex problems or drug problems or family problems; they have life problems that affect their relationship with God.

Nobody likes living in bondage. If people knew how to resolve their problems, they would have done so a long time before they came to see you or me. What they need is a clear road map to resolution and the Holy Spirit to guide them. These are not seven simple steps that people mechanically go through. Each step is a critical issue that needs to be resolved between God and His children. I have yet to help a person who has root issues that does not fit into one of these seven categories. Not everything in the Steps applies to every person, but most people find every step to be meaningful. Although the road map is the same for every person, everyone will process them differently as they pray and ask God to guide them.

BECOMING THE RIGHT KIND OF PERSON

About halfway through each semester of the seminary class I taught on pastoral counseling, I asked the students to take out a blank sheet of paper. On their sheet of paper, they were to write down the most negative and damaging aspect about their lives—the last thing they would ever share with anybody, or the one thing

they wished nobody would find out about them!

Can you imagine the thoughts going through their minds? *Why does he want us to do this? What is he going to do with this information? There is no way I'm going to write that down on a piece of paper!* Most students were probably considering the possibility of putting down the fourth or fifth most offensive thing, but not the first!

I waited a minute until the level of anxiety was unbearable. Then I told them to stop because I really did not want them to expose themselves on paper. I just wanted them to experience what it must feel like to face that prospect one time in their lives.

Put yourself in the shoes of those seeking help. Suppose some deep, dark, horrible secret was eating away at you, and you just could not live with it any longer. You knew you needed some help to resolve the issue. If trained encouragers were going to help you, would they need to know that horrible secret? Of course they would, or they would not be able to help you resolve it.

After the high blood pressure and heart palpitations had decreased in my counseling class, I told the students, "What I do want you to put down on that piece of paper is this: What kind of person would it take for you to share the worst possible thing about yourself with that person? I do not want a name. I want one dominant characteristic. What would this person have to be or not be, do or not do? What is the one dominant prerequisite that this person would have to meet?" After they thought about it for a moment, I had all the members of the class share their person's most important trait while I listed them on the board. I have discovered that what may be a big issue for one person may not even be considered by another. The typical responses are confidentiality, loving, godly, kind, nonjudgmental, compassionate, accepting, patient, understanding and able to help.

Becoming like God in our character is the core issue of discipleship counseling for both the counselee and the encourager.

After I completed the list on the board, I asked the students to tell me who that list described. They always said, "God!" Becoming like God in our character is the core issue of discipleship counseling for both the counselee and the encourager. If you have not before, would you now commit yourself to

becoming that kind of person? If we do not become that kind of pastor, discipler or encourager, we will never hear other people's stories, because nobody will want to share them with us. Consequently, we will end up dealing with the symptoms and not the root causes. If we do not know the whole story, we will not be able to provide a whole answer.

One pastor said, "We do not have these kinds of problems in our church, and I'll tell you why, because I preach the truth around here." He may be preaching the truth, but what he does not realize is that few, if any, in his church would ever share anything personal with him, and that probably includes his family.

That is the problem with legalistic and controlling Christian leaders. They see only the external behavior and try to correct that, because they do not have a clue what is going on inside the people they are trying to lead and help. Proverbs 23:7 says, "For as he thinks within himself, so he is." Can you see the futility of just trying to change the behavior? Instead, we need to find out what is going on inside people. What they are doing is just a result of what they are thinking and choosing to believe.

NOTHING IS HIDDEN FROM GOD

A man in a church I pastored years ago made a lunch appointment with a mutual counselor friend to talk about a problem he had. Three times they had lunch together, but the man could never muster the courage to talk about his pornography addiction and bondage to lust. So he discussed his symptoms of apathy toward God and disinterest in his wife.

Eventually, he confided in me. He could not keep doing what he was doing any longer because he was about to be exposed for inappropriate behavior with his daughter. The fear of getting caught and the subsequent consequences became greater than the shame of sharing his problem with his pastor. With this disclosure, I was able to help him. If he had not shared with me, we would have dealt only with the symptoms. I hope you are beginning to understand that trying to improve a person's behavior is not enough. If I had told him to pray and read his Bible more and helped him better communicate with his wife, I would not have been successful helping him. Those are important disciplines, but they would not be successful if root issues were not resolved.

Let's face it—it is difficult to share with others the things that shame us. Consequently, many people live with unresolved issues they are too embarrassed to talk about. They fear being exposed and are scared to death that someone may

find out what is really going on inside.

Meanwhile, God knows what has happened to them, what they did and how they think and feel. “There is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do” (Heb. 4:13). Most people, however, are more concerned about what *others* think about them than what God thinks about them. Our spiritual lives are headed for ruin when we start living our lives before people rather than before God. When the prophet Samuel confronted Saul, the king finally confessed, saying:

> I have sinned; I have indeed transgressed the command of the LORD and your words, because I feared the people and listened to their voice (1 Sam. 15:24).

Paul said, “For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still striving to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ” (Gal. 1:10). If you are a man pleaser, you have allowed yourself to be the bond servant to other people. Too many Christians play for the grandstand when they should be playing for the coach. Believing and living even that truth alone will liberate many.

One lady could not hold in her secrets any longer and dumped years of frustration and defeat on me after church when there was no time or opportunity to help her resolve what she was dealing with. The next day, I got a call from her. She said, “I feel terrible that I shared all that stuff with you. What do you think of me?”

I said, “Well, I thank you for sharing that with me and I love you for doing it. If you had not shared that, there is no way that I could help you.”

There was a slight pause, and then she said, “Oh! Well then, I have a lot more to tell you.”

LEARNING TO LISTEN AND BE TRUST WORTHY

When I first went to seminary, my counseling professor challenged his students to work on just one area of their life. I chose marital communication, because I thought it was safe and I thought I had worked all of that out with my wife. When I shared my decision with Joanne, I was expecting something like, “Oh, that’s great! Yes, let’s work on our communication.” But she did not respond that way. In fact, she seemed a little concerned.

Two weeks later, Joanne and I were talking about the prayer group she was meeting with once a week. Most of the ladies were married to men who were not saved. They were always complaining about their marital relationships and how their husbands were treating them. So I asked Joanne, “Are they sharing this with their husbands?”

“No, I’m sure they’re not,” she said.

I responded, “How can they expect their husbands to meet their needs if they do not know what they are?”

When she did not answer right away, I asked Joanne if she were sharing anything about us in the group.

Reluctantly, Joanne confessed that she had shared some concerns about our relationship with her prayer group. My first response was, “Well, what’s wrong with you? Why didn’t you tell me? I share everything with you.”

That was a painful night. I found out what was wrong with me, not what was wrong with Joanne. Why was I not the kind of person with whom she would feel free to share? Apparently, she could not trust me. Ironically, I thought trustworthiness was my strongest attribute. I thought, *You can count on good old Neil!*

Why couldn’t she trust me? Was it because I could not keep the information confidential? No, that was not the issue. The problem was how I responded to the information she shared. I had a tendency to respond with two reasons she should not feel that way and three things she ought to start doing.

We made a commitment to each other that night. She agreed not to share with others about our relationship unless she first shared with me. My commitment was to learn how to truly listen and not to give unsolicited advice and opinions. I told her I did not want to be that kind of a husband or pastor. So I asked her to hold me accountable.

For the next several years, Joanne would preface some statements with, “Now I’m going to share something with you, but don’t give me two reasons why I should not feel that way and three things I ought to start doing.”

“Come on, Joanne, don’t you trust me yet?”

As soon as she started to share something personal with me, guess what was going through my mind—two reasons she should not feel that way and three things she ought to start doing! It is incredible! Many of my colleagues in ministry in the Western world are wired that way. Instead of learning to listen, we give advice. There is a time when giving advice is appropriate, but as Proverbs 18:13 says, “He who gives an answer before he hears, it is folly and

shame to him."

A mother once asked me, "Why won't my teenager talk to me? I know she's struggling at school."

I asked her, "Do you really want to know?" "Of course," she said.

I knew her well enough to say, "She probably thinks she can't trust you."

She was surprised by my answer and said, "What do you mean she can't trust me? Of course, she can trust me. I'm her mother."

I said, "Let me illustrate. Suppose your teenager came home from school and said, 'Mom, my best friend is smoking pot.' What would you do or say?"

She had to think long and hard about her response.

How do you think the average parent would respond? I am sure many good parents would try to keep from overreacting, but most would have some strong advice, especially concerning that friend.

Finally, the mother said, "I would tell my daughter to stop hanging around with that friend."

I said, "She probably knows that is how you would respond, and that's why she won't share with you."

"Well, what would you do?" she asked.

The mother had not heard enough to know what the real problem was. Was this the first time her friend tried drugs, or has she been using for some time? Does she plan to continue, or was it a one-time experience? What does her daughter think about it?

Wouldn't it be better to say something like, "Honey, I'm really sorry to hear that. Can we talk about it?" Parents need to realize that there is a very good chance that the one smoking pot is sitting right in front of them. When children suspect their parents will overreact, that is the end of the story. They will not share any more unless they are absolutely desperate. Every parent, pastor and encourager needs to understand this when helping hurting people.

When people have the courage to share something intimate, what do they need initially? They need acceptance and affirmation. When people unload, I always say something like, "Thank you for sharing that with me, I could not help you if you had not." If you confess to God, what do you get, according to 1 John 1:9? You receive forgiveness, acceptance and affirmation. Consider what happens when we approach our spiritual parent:

> For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet

> without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need (Heb. 4:15-16).

Consider the following four words:

Authority

Accountability

Affirmation

Acceptance

From what end of the list does God initiate His relationship with us?

First, let's agree that God has established authority in our country, homes and churches, and that there is a great need for accountability. How you answered the above question will speak volumes about your understanding of parenting and ministry. It was God's unconditional love and acceptance that initiated His relationship with us. "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). After the acceptance came the affirmation, "The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom. 8:16). When authority figures demand accountability without acceptance and affirmation, they will never get it. Out of fear and intimidation, their subjects may fill out a form and share what they have done or not done, but such leaders will never find out what the counselees really think and feel. Yet those counselees who have been accepted and affirmed by authority figures will voluntarily submit to them.

Suppose a child comes home late and irate parents shout, "Where were you?"

The child will likely say, "Out!"

To which the parents respond even angrier, "And what were you doing?"

The teenager says, "Nothing."

God is the ultimate authority, but you will not read anywhere in Scripture where Jesus said in effect, "Listen people, shape up, because I am God!" He did not have to, because those who knew and believed Him were loyal subjects. They responded to His mercy and grace. The same could be said for the apostle Paul, but to a lesser degree. He wrote:

> For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness—nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority. But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us (1 Thess. 2:5-8).

In *Finding Hope Again*, I tell the story of a lady in my church who was clinically depressed. My wife suggested that she make an appointment to see me for counseling.

She responded, "You want me to see Neil? He's always up!"

If you were emotionally down, what kind of person would you want to see? Somebody who is down? If you were sick, would you seek out the most sickly, emaciated, wasted, sniffling, wheezing doctor in town and ask him what his secret was for good health? Of course you would not, but that is not the initial problem. This depressed lady was questioning whether I could really understand or respond in mercy and grace, since I never appeared depressed.

Many people do not see the Church as a house of mercy, and in too many cases, they are right. It is tragic when people receive more mercy and less judgment in a secular program or at the local bar than they do in our churches. There are secular programs that accept people for who they are. They are encouraged to depend on the group and work the program. Bartenders allow them to drown their sorrows in a bottle of booze. However, these places and programs have no godly grace to help in times of need. The Church has the grace to help, but we will not be given the opportunity if we cannot withhold judgment and do not extend mercy. Jesus said:

> Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned (Luke 6:36-37).

Many people do not see the Church as a house of mercy, and in too many cases, they are right. It is tragic when people receive more mercy at the local

bar than they do in our churches.

As a fairly new believer, I attended seminary to get answers so that I could give good advice. I learned a lot of answers to questions that people were not asking. I even thought I had arrived as a person. It does not take many years of ministry to correct that kind of thinking! Peter said you have to "sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence" (1 Pet. 3:15). We cannot impart to others what we do not possess. We cannot be instruments in God's hand to bring freedom to others if we are in bondage ourselves. Christ has to first be the Lord of our lives. Then we have to be able to share with others the hope that lies within us and learn to do it in gentleness and reverence.

DISCIPLESHIP COUNSELING IS UNIQUE

If believers are firmly rooted in Christ, the counsel they seek is usually nothing more than good common sense and biblical knowledge. Many people are helped by simply having objective people listen to them and bring clarity and fresh perspectives to their issues. When such people drop by my office, they often come to their own conclusions in the process of sharing their stories. They get up to leave and say, "Thanks, Neil, you've helped me a lot." I did not do anything other than listen and maybe ask some clarifying questions. In all likelihood, they will do the right thing if they are mature enough to do it. Such counseling has value because a problem well stated is half solved. Discipleship counseling, however, is more concerned with helping people resolve root issues. As Christian encouragers, we have four critical advantages over secular counselors, and they are the central issues in discipleship counseling.

Allowing God to Cure the Soul

First, we have a theology of resolution. This is a present debate among Christian encouragers. Wheaton College sponsored a conference titled, "The Cure of the Soul." The conference brought together leading theologians, philosophers and psychologists who are interested in the relationship between psychology and theology. Dr. Mark McMinn wrote:

> A number of psychologists at the conference expressed discomfort with the grandiosity implied in "The Cure of the Soul." Surely curing the soul is not the job of psychologists. Psychologists treat the soul by easing suffering, helping people in emotional pain to reclaim meaning and purpose, and encouraging people to see themselves, others and the world more accurately. In short, psychologists care for the soul. The cure of the soul, most Christian psychologists would suggest, is God's work and is beyond the scope of mainstream psychological interventions.[1]

I applaud Wheaton College for hosting such a conference, because the Christian community needs this kind of integration. But why is God not included in mainstream psychological interventions? Why do we settle for care of the soul when we have in Christ the potential for a cure? Sure, our outer person is decaying, but not our inner self. The resurrection from the dead will cure the outer person, but the inner person is a new creation in Christ and in the process of conforming to the image of God. Lowering the bar lowers our expectations and dampens our enthusiasm for pressing on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Nobody can keep us from being the person God created us to be. Of course we have distress, trials and tribulations, "but in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us" (Rom. 8:37). Let's work in cooperation with God as He cures the soul.

Relying on God's Strength to Find Freedom

Second, Christians have the privilege to start with positive affirmation. We can say in truth to every Christian we are trying to help, "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are" (1 John 3:1). Once people have been accepted and affirmed, their identity and sense of worth is intact. They are likely to ask or at least think, *If all this is true about me, then why isn't it working?* Now their defenses come down and they are open to resolve whatever is keeping them from finding their freedom in Christ.

Secular counseling takes a long time to draw out all the intimate details, and the more they disclose, the more they realize that they really are a mess. Trying to give people positive affirmation without Christ is like stroking their egos and encouraging them to pick themselves up by their own bootstraps. This makes counselees products of their past, and their inner person is not being renewed. Their hope is based on their own strengths and resources rather than God's.

A pastor asked if I would counsel his exceptionally gifted daughter. From the time she was little, she had been on the platform of churches singing like few others could. She also was exceptionally attractive; but when I heard her sing for the first time, I could not look at her. Something was radically wrong. She was failing in school and suffering from a pathetic self-image. All her life, she received strokes for her ability to sing and for her physical beauty. The appearance and performance treadmill had finally caught up with her.

I knew where we had to start. She had no idea who she was as a child of God, and her relationship with the Lord was based totally on her ability to perform. I asked her what would happen if she lost her looks and her ability to sing. She could not answer.

After a few weeks of meeting together, a remarkable event took place. Her parents went out of town for the weekend and she had to stay home to look after her younger brother and cousins. She resented that, and on Friday evening, she got drunk. I do not know how I found that out even to this day.

The next week in my office, we had the following conversation:

Neil: How did your weekend go?
Jane: Fine.
Neil: The whole weekend went well?
Jane: Yes.
Neil: Friday night went well?
Jane (*There was a pause before she finally answered*.): Yes.
Neil: Jane, I want you to know that I would not purposefully inquire about what you have or have not done, but I happen to know that Friday night did not go well. What I want you to know is that it does not make any difference how I see you. You are a child of God, and I love you whether you perform well or not. Okay?

What followed was the most incredible emotional catharsis I have ever seen. She did not cry—she bawled for 15 minutes. Eighteen years of performance-based living that could not give her the affirmation, the acceptance, the security or the significance that can only be found in Jesus Christ finally came to an end. When the sobbing finally ended, I asked, “May I ask you a personal question? What were you thinking just now?”

“I just hate myself,” she said.

Getting to the Root Issues

The third critical advantage is the presence of God. God will provide the guidance we need in order to get at root issues, and He will provide the power to change. I have counseled hundreds of people by using general counseling techniques and many more by using the Steps to Freedom. I can assure you that using the Steps will surface more issues in a half-day session than what most professional counselors are able to draw out of their counselees in months and sometimes years. And it is not because I am a good counselor. It actually has very little to do with me; it has everything to do with God, because God is the One who grants repentance. When counselees pray and ask whom they need to forgive, God brings all the names to their minds. When they pray and ask God to reveal every sexual use of their bodies as an instrument of unrighteousness, He does. Why does that even surprise us?

Dr. Fernando Garzon, a licensed clinical psychologist, gave the following 10 advantages for using the Steps in counseling from his perspective:

1. **Clearly connect the counselee's faith in Christ with the healing process.** The Steps clearly connect the therapeutic process with the healing power of Christ. Their overt, explicitly Christian focus connects the counselee more fully to the role the Holy Spirit wants to play in the healing process.
2. **Establish the counselee's identity and sense of worth in Christ.** If we as encouragers try to help people discover their identity and sense of worth without God in their lives, then we are working against the spiritual truth that without God we are incomplete.
3. **Deepen the counselee's faith commitment.** A key assumption behind the Steps is that the Holy Spirit will lead us into all truth, and that truth will set us free. As many counselees go through the Freedom in Christ process, they report that their faith has been built up. We've even had some people stop in the middle of the process and say, "I do not know Jesus in this way, but I want to."
4. **Clearly connect the Word of God itself with the healing process.** Many Christians have little or no real understanding of how the Bible relates to their mental and emotional health. The Steps are based entirely on the Word of God. As the counselee reads the Scriptures from the written prayers and goes through the doctrinal affirmation, it becomes clear how the Word of God is quick and powerful like a two-

edged sword.

5. **Increase personal responsibility in the healing process.** The Freedom in Christ process puts the personal responsibility on the counselee to do the work. Some people have spent years in therapy talking about various problems and getting some relief from the process, yet without really resolving their root issues. The counselee must decide and choose to believe the truth and assume their responsibility in partnership with an encouraging and godly helper.
6. **Empower the counselee.** Another advantage to using the Steps in therapy is that the counselee is empowered as he or she learns to discern truth from falsehood. This is similar to secular cognitive therapy. The counselee learns to connect the discomforting feelings experienced to what is being thought (believed assumption) and to discern whether this thought is the truth or a lie. Unlike secular cognitive therapy, if they recognize that the thought is a lie of the enemy, they have the power through their identity and position in Christ to come against this lie with the truth of God's Word. Such spiritual resources in the battle for the mind are something secular counselors do not have.
7. **Strengthen object constancy.** Sometimes a counselee is looking outside of himself or herself to relationships for a sense of worth or validation. No internal sense of well-being exists to provide an anchor that stands outside what others might think. This is a layman's description of what many counselors would label "a dysfunction in object constancy."
8. **Speed up the awareness of defense mechanisms.** The Steps facilitate the quick identification of defense mechanisms. Often a sort of "aha" experience occurs for the counselees when they recognize patterns of thought and behavior for the first time.
9. **Shorten the uncovering process.** The Steps consist of a thorough spiritual inventory encompassing many different areas of the counselee's life, which are often inadequately investigated in the first few therapy sessions. Because of the comprehensive structure, the process of uncovering issues moves much more quickly than in traditional therapy. People disclose things that normally could take years to get to in traditional therapy.
10. **Confront the past.** The Freedom in Christ process allows the

> counselee to recall past issues and face them squarely. Sometimes resolution comes quickly and sometimes it takes more time to uncover the layers.[2]

Dealing with Repressed Memories

The ability to confront repressed memories is the fourth critical advantage that we have as Christians. Secular counselors regularly come across counselees who cannot recall major events or periods of their lives. They hear as much as their counselees can remember, but then they come to a wall. Just trying to remember will not usually be enough. Secular counselors, as well as some Christian counselors, try to get past the barrier by using hypnosis, and some psychiatrists are using a prescription medication that is supposed to induce memories. I will not recommend either method.

First, God never bypasses our minds. All scriptural instruction concerning the mind admonishes us to direct our thoughts externally and actively, never internally and passively. God works through our minds. I will do everything I can to help people maintain control of their minds. I have worked with some counselees who have had to renounce previous therapy sessions where hypnosis was used. The process of inducing a passive state of mind left them spiritually vulnerable. In fact, occult practices intentionally induce a passive state of mind. Some eastern religions teach their followers to get their minds out of the way so that they can pursue truth directly. That is the most dangerous thing you can do spiritually.

We should follow David's example when he said to the Lord, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way" (Ps. 139:23-24). The Holy Spirit will lead us into all truth, and He "will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment" (John 16:8). Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 3:19—4:5:

> For it is written, … "The Lord knows the reasonings of the wise, that they are useless." So then let no one boast in men. For all things belong to you, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you, and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God. Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy. But to

> me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord. Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.

According to this passage, we have entitlement. So great is that entitlement that Paul prays in Ephesians 1:18, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints." What we have in Christ is more than we can comprehend, but our riches in Christ are also an entrustment. It is required of us by God to be good stewards of all that we are entitled to, and that we be found trustworthy.

I take that seriously. I belong to God, and so does my family, my ministry and everything else that God has entrusted to me. All that I have of lasting value has been freely given to me. I did not earn it; I cannot claim ownership of it. Any part of my message that is true did not originate with me. If it is new, it is not true, and if it is true, it is not new. If you took Christ out of my life, I would be no different than any other lost soul, and neither would you.

CHRIST IS THE ONLY WAY

Before I became a Christian, I did not know what I know today, and the only reason I do now is because of Christ in me. This book is not my message, and Freedom in Christ Ministries is not my ministry. Both belong to God, and I pray every day that I do not undo what God has done in me and that I am kept from scandal and the evil one. What I am sharing with you in this book is not *the* way. It is *a* way but not the *only* way. Christ is the *only* way. I hope what I am teaching gives *an* answer for the hope that lies within me, but only Christ is *the* answer.

Any part of my message that is true did not originate with me. If it is new, it is not true, and if it is true, it is not new.

Other than God, I fear only the loss of His blessing on my life and ministry. I can say with Paul that it is a very small thing to be examined by you or by any human court. I really do not care much what others think of me, and you should not either. I am concerned about what God thinks of me, and I trust that you are concerned as well. To my knowledge, at this moment, I have no unresolved issues in my life. I cannot think of anybody I need to forgive, and there is nothing I need to confess or renounce. But I am not by this acquitted. In other words, I have not arrived. I am alive in Christ, but certainly I am not yet perfected.

We need to realize that our examination of counselees is a very small thing. God is the One who justifies and also the One who sanctifies. We are privileged to be used by God, who will work through us to facilitate the process. The Lord is the One who examines us and those we seek to help. He allows us to have some mountaintop experiences when all is well with our souls. Then He gently reveals to us that we are not qualified to be a member of the Trinity.

Many proverbs show that rebukes and reproofs are a way of life. Paul says we should:

> Exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us (Rom. 5:3-5).

We must own up to our mistakes, face our inadequacies, resolve our conflicts and decide to grow up. We can do this because we are already forgiven, and the key is to grow daily. Life is a lot easier if we make small incremental steps toward maturity in Christ than it is if we refuse to grow up. The Lord asks, “What do you desire? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love and a spirit of gentleness?” (1 Cor. 4:21). The choice is ours.

ONIONS AND BANANAS

Establishing our freedom in Christ is one thing, maintaining that freedom is something else. Paul says, “It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery” (Gal. 5:1). In other words, we can fall back into legalism. We also can fall back into license:

> For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another (v. 13).

To stay free, people need to know: (1) who they are in Christ; (2) the authority and protection of the believer; (3) the nature of the battle that is going on for their minds; and (4) how to walk by faith by the power of the Holy Spirit according to what God said is true.

I cannot always afford the time to sit down one-on-one and educate these needy people, and you probably cannot either. That is what led me to write the books *Victory over the Darkness* and *The Bondage Breaker* and to produce the audiocassette and videocassette series that coincide with them. People can read, listen or watch the materials before we meet, and I encourage them to do so. All the material from these resources is covered in my conferences before I take them through the Steps. This greatly increases the chances of people maintaining their freedom. I cannot guarantee they will maintain their freedom any more than I can guarantee that every person I have led to Christ will go on to spiritual maturity. That is their choice, but I want to do what I can to increase their chances.

Many people cannot read a book or listen to an audiocassette because of the terrible bondage in which they are trapped. Some individuals even are dealing with dissociative identity disorders (DID). In those cases, we have to lead them through the Steps first and then make sure they have follow-up. After this we encourage them to get into the books and audiocassettes right away. People must have enough conflict resolution and faith basis to continue growing, or what they have will be snatched away:

> When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart (Matt. 13:19).

When I taught at Talbot School of Theology, Jan Frank came to one of my classes with two baby dolls. One had bandages on it, and the other doll was wound up in gauze. The first baby, she explained, was wounded and it would take time for those wounds to heal. The other baby was in bondage, but it would not take too long to set that baby free. That is a great illustration; but if you took the gauze off the second baby, you would probably have the first baby. In other

words, many wounds will not heal until people have established their freedom in Christ.

Some counselees are like onions, and other counselees are like bananas. Bananas have only one layer to remove. They have recall of their entire life and can sit down in one extended setting and resolve all they know. Onions have many layers to remove. Some people have too much baggage to deal with all at once. If God did reveal everything in one sitting, they probably could not deal with it. Therefore, He graciously reveals one layer at a time and instructs us to be faithful stewards of what God has entrusted to us. Until we are willing to deal with what we know, He will not reveal to us what we do not know. We have to show ourselves faithful in little things before He will put us in charge of greater things.

When people start experiencing difficulty days or weeks after going through the Steps, it may appear that they have fallen back into sin or deception, but that may not always be the case. God could be revealing another layer of issues to work through. One lady whose story was recorded in *Released from Bondage* went through three major layers in one week. She finally heard an explanation of the voices in her head that made sense. She took herself through the Steps and dealt with many surface issues. She felt totally free. Two days later, she started to struggle again and was confronted with the need to forgive her mother. After she worked through all the forgiveness issues, the Lord allowed her to recall all the occult games she had played when she was young. She had totally "forgotten" those times.

Repressed Memories

How can people forget traumatic events in their lives? Is the devil blocking out their memories in order to keep them from resolving their issues? That may be a possibility, but I believe it is a God-given ability to dissociate. It is a severe defense mechanism in which people continue developing as though harmful things had not happened. Some people do not recall painful memories until they are 30, 40 or even 50 years old. Like any other defense mechanism, it breaks down over time. What was needed to survive years ago is no longer needed. I think the Lord is waiting until believers have reached enough maturity and have enough support before He reveals the past. Even then it will be traumatic, but hopefully, they will have the means to resolve it. Eventually, "There is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known" (Matt. 10:26).

If we are working with God, we will do all we can to get these people established in Christ. That is their hope and assurance of freedom and victory. The biggest error is to expose all the issues without resolving them. Whenever God reveals issues from the past, help people resolve those issues. There is usually somebody they need to forgive and something they need to confess and renounce.

God's Timing

There is a major difference between the Lord revealing and the person remembering. Each Step has a prayer that asks God to reveal what it is that He would have them know. Banana-type people already know what they need to deal with. The Lord convicts them and they deal with it. It is wonderful that the encourager does not have to do that. Some may choose to be quiet about their issues and even lie to their encourager, but most do not lie to God when He is guiding them. That is another reason the Steps process uncovers so much so fast.

When we as encouragers sense that we are not getting to the core issue, we stop and pray, asking the Lord to direct us to where He wants to go. I will usually have the person I am trying to help pray something like this: "Lord would You reveal to me what is still keeping me in bondage and lead me to whatever You want me to know so that I can deal with it?"

When God reveals something hidden from the past, it is as though the person is transported back in time. One lady shared that it was as if a window had opened up to her past. Often the pain of the experience is felt again. This is different from accessing another personality that was formed in the past. God is not revealing anything new to the personality because it already knows too well what has happened. God is not using the past against them. He wants them to know what has happened, so they can finally be free from the past.

What if people pray and nothing happens? Encourage them to let it go and get on with their life. Either nothing is there or the timing is not right. If something in the past is important to know, trust God to reveal it at the right time. Some people become obsessed with what is wrong with them, even though the New Testament is teaching what is right about them. Paul says:

> Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:13-14).

How can we know those memories are true? What God reveals is always true, but people can be deceived. For the sake of counselees, I believe what they share with me, because that is what they have to deal with. I would never take what I hear in a counseling session and use it to accuse another person of abuse unless I had some hard-core, external and objective evidence to substantiate it.

False memories usually come by way of dreams, by suggestive thoughts from irresponsible encouragers, by counterfeit "words of knowledge," from deceived "Christian" workers and from deceiving spirits. We have been warned "that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits" (1 Tim. 4:1). If Satan can put a thought in our minds—and he can—then he can certainly put a thought in the form of a false memory. I have helped clear the names of Christian leaders who have been falsely accused of incest and of being satanists.

This kind of ministry requires us to be godly and discerning. "For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil" (Heb. 5:13-14). I attempt to explain discernment and distinguish between counterfeit guidance and God's guidance in my book, *Finding God's Will in Spiritually Deceptive Times*.[3]

There are rapists, abusers and those who worship Satan, and chances are they will never own up to what they do unless they are caught in the act. Many will never be brought to justice. If legitimate charges are brought against them, they point at the abused and accuse them of trying to tear up the family, discrediting them. They are often believed, because they may appear to be doing better than their victims, who are deeply wounded because of the abuse. My heart cries for justice, but we will not have perfect justice in this lifetime. God will make it right in the end. Secret sin on Earth is open scandal in heaven. " 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay,' says the Lord" (Rom. 12:19). Until then, let us do what we can to help people break free from their past and from their abusers.

Secret sin on Earth is open scandal in heaven.



CHAPTER SEVEN

COUNSELING THE SPIRITUALLY OPPRESSED

The first power lawn mower I bought was a basic, no-frills, bottom-ofthe-line model. It had a pull cord, throttle and a new owner to push it. The first time I used it I pushed it into an irrigation valve and bent the shaft in the engine. It stopped immediately, and I could not even turn the engine over by pulling the cord. So I decided to fix it.

First, I had to get the blade off, but it would not budge. I beat on it with a hammer, pried it with a crowbar and tried a dozen other ways before I finally gave up. I threw the pile of parts into a cardboard box and took it to a lawn-mower repairman.

He looked at the mess I made and pointed across the shop. “See that machine over there?” he said. “It straightens the shaft of a power-mower engine while it is still in the block. I usually charge 10 dollars for doing it!”

Looking at the damage I had done, I said, “Great, what is it going to cost me now?”

“I’ll fix it for 20 dollars,” he said with a grin on his face.

“Go ahead,” I said. “But tell me, how do you get the blade off the shaft?”

He reached over with a pair of pliers and pulled out a key I had not seen, and the shaft almost dropped off by itself!

THE KEY OF KNOWLEDGE

My struggle with the lawn mower illustrates the wrong way to handle problems. When we lack the expertise and the patience, we resort to some kind of power mode to correct people or circumstances. We act out of frustration and ignorance. Parents lash out at their children. Church leaders run roughshod over people. Yet we should be looking for the key that unlocks the answer. Jesus said, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 16:19). The keys open the door to spiritual victory and unlock the mysteries of the Kingdom.

Jesus said, "Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge; you yourselves did not enter, and you hindered those who were entering" (Luke 11:52). The "key" is the key of knowledge, without which we perish (see Hos. 4:6) or remain in bondage, since the truth is what sets us free (see John 8:32).

OPPOSITION TO THE TRUTH

External opposition to the Church will usually cause the Church to unite and work together. Some of the greatest work of the Church comes out of persecution. The light is most evident in the darkness. The greatest damage is done when the light is extinguished within the Church. Why would any Christian be a part of this? Jesus said:

> Men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed (John 3:19-20).

If people are confronted with the truth and do not repent, they either run from the light or try to discredit the source of the light. That is why some people do not go to church. They do not want the light to expose who they are and what they are doing. Those who discredit light sources are usually trying to cover up their indiscretions to protect their reputations. Some fear losing their position of leadership if people found out the truth. Therefore, they set up smoke screens to protect themselves and keep everyone else on the defensive. Those are some of the reasons why the Pharisees tried to discredit Jesus. Let me briefly expand on why some people may oppose in their churches the kind of ministry I am explaining.

Some People Have Never Discovered the Key of Knowledge Themselves, So They Continue in Their Pharisaic Traditions

Somebody once said, “Even if the Holy Spirit were removed from the Church, 95 percent of our programs would continue on as scheduled.” God help us if that is even remotely true. Pharisaic leaders in such ministries are more concerned about controlling others than about developing self-control. They do not want to set their people free. They want to control them. Such people have never really entered into the experience of spiritual life. They go to church and critique the message and the music. We are not supposed to sit in judgment of the message. A biblical message shared in love sits in judgment of us, and we should enter into the worship experience rather than criticize the worship team.

A godly pastor made a motion to his board that they have our Living Free in Christ conference in their church by using videocassettes. An older gentleman, who was the pillar of the church and a board member for years, was against it. By a slim majority, the board voted to have it anyway. A couple from our ministry provided counseling and encourager training. The old elder came to the conference to check it out. He stood at the back with his arms folded across his chest, just waiting to hear something he did not like. Hoping to reach this dear man, one of our staff members asked him to sit in on a counseling session as a prayer partner. Being retired, this man had the time, so he reluctantly agreed. In one afternoon, he saw a young man come to freedom in Christ. That same evening, he humbly asked to be led through the Steps; and the following Sunday afternoon, he found his freedom in Christ. For 60 years he had been living under the bondage of bitterness toward his own father, and for 60 years he was a critical, controlling member of the church. No longer!

Any ministry that turns on the light has to expect opposition and not just from troubled people.

Any ministry that turns on the light has to expect opposition and not just from troubled people. I have had many people share with me at conferences that they have had thoughts of killing me. One lady said she drove by a gun shop for three weeks in a row before a conference. She fought off the temptation to buy a gun and bring it to the conference for the purpose of shooting me. She glared at me with hatred from the front row on the first evening of the conference. That week I had the privilege of leading her to freedom in Christ. At the end of the week,

she gave me a foot washer/massager. The note on the box said, “You washed my feet, now let me wash yours.”

A policeman approached me during a break at a conference and said, “Neil, this can’t be me! While you were talking, I had overwhelming thoughts to grab a knife and stab you!” Of course, those were not his thoughts, and by now I hope you know who the source is—Satan.

Every staff member in our ministry has had people in bondage attack them verbally. Many became our good friends and supporters after they found their freedom in Christ. Nobody opposed the Church with more zeal than Paul did before he encountered Christ on the Damascus road; but when his eyes were opened, nobody promoted it more. We regularly pray for those who curse us and ask the Lord to open their eyes.

Sadly, some choose to remain in bondage and oppose what God is doing. Paul wrote: “Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Be on guard against him yourself, for he vigorously opposed our teaching” (2 Tim. 4:14-15). When Paul wrote his first letter to Timothy, he exhorted him:

> Fight the good fight, keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, so that they will be taught not to blaspheme (1 Tim. 1:18-20).

Some Pharisaic Leaders Actually Hinder Those Who Are Seeking the Truth That Will Set Them Free

Jesus said, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in” (Matt. 23:13). It takes the grace of God to love these “blind guides” (v. 16), especially when they are attacking you. The damage they do to the kingdom of God cannot be overestimated. I have helped many people find their freedom from these spiritual abusers.

A pastor who loved our ministry had a brother who lost his ministry for moral reasons. He tried to set up an appointment for his struggling brother, but the man refused to see me because he disagreed with my theology. Instead he saw a secular counselor who had no light to shed on his problem and who stood in almost complete disagreement with what this fallen pastor had taught and professed to believe.

Spiritual Abusers Actually Try to Discredit Those Who Are Bearing Fruit

Legalism is the religion of the self-righteous. It is a subtle form of bondage and hard to confront because these people are holding to the letter of the Law. Many see themselves as the guardians of the faith and have no clue of the liberated life they could have in Christ. The Lord was able to confront pharisaic practices and legalism in Matthew 23 because He knew their hearts. We cannot judge them, and we usually cannot discipline them because they will do very little wrong publicly. Privately these driven people are struggling under the Law. Paul says:

> For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them." Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, "The righteous man shall live by faith" (Gal. 3:10-11).

Why is the Church still living under the curse of the Law 2,000 years after Christ set us free? "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law … in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (vv. 13-14). Those who enter into the life of Christ can say, "Our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Cor. 3:5-6).

Spiritual abusers, or legalists, usually will find one little theological issue that does not agree with their teachings and use it to justify their slander. Jesus did not fit into the theological system of the Pharisees, so "they were watching Him to see if He would heal him [a man with a withered hand] on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him" (Mark 3:2). Sure enough, the Lord healed the man. What a gracious act of God to heal someone with a withered hand. What did the Pharisees do? They "went out and immediately began conspiring with the Herodians against Him, as to how they might destroy Him" (v. 6). If they really loved the Lord and His people, they would have said, "Thank You for doing that. What a wonderful thing You did."

Why do some people want to discredit those who are bearing fruit? Some actually believe they are defending the faith, but most are just hurting people. I learned years ago that people do not cut down other people out of a position of strength, and I also learned not to try to defend myself against them. That will only cause them to double their efforts. We need to voluntarily be accountable to

wise, godly people for both our message and our ministry, but we cannot be accountable to these kinds of people. To do so would only put you under bondage to them. We have to be bond servants of Christ instead.

Every legitimate Christian ministry will establish people alive and free in Christ and enable them to be the people God created them to be. We can be a part of the building crew or the wrecking crew, as James urges us:

> Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace (Jas. 3:13-18).

LEADING OTHERS TO THE TRUTH

The keys to the Kingdom come through wisdom from above and are sown by gentle, merciful peacemakers who enable others to enter in. Let's read Matthew 16:19:

> I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.

Contrast the last half of the verse with the *New International Version*:

> Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

The difference is very subtle. In the *NASB*, whatever we loose and bind on Earth has already been loosed or bound in heaven. In other words, the binding and loosing originated in heaven. In the *NIV*, it would seem that the loosing and binding originated from two or three of us who agreed together in prayer (see Matt. 18:18-20).

Another similar passage, grammatically, is John 20:23:

> If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained.

The *NIV* reads:

> If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.

I do not believe that *my* forgiveness or lack of forgiveness is going to determine whether another person is forgiven or not. These passages are difficult to interpret, and the wrong interpretation can result in Church practices that may or may not be biblical. Grammatically, they can be translated either way, so we should translate these passages in light of the larger context.

Most English translations understand the verbs to be future tense (i.e., "shall be bound in heaven" and "shall be forgiven in heaven"). Taken literally, these passages can be used to justify extreme sacerdotalism. In other words, the Church has the power to bind, loose and forgive whomever it wishes as long as two or three agree. The Catholic Church has generally taken this position; but only the pope can speak with ultimate authority, and only ordained priests under the authority of the pope can communicate such statements. Some Protestant groups use these passages to justify binding and loosing whatever they wish.

Most evangelical scholars teach that we should understand these passages to be saying, "Whatever you bind on Earth shall have been bound in heaven" and "If you forgive anyone his sins, they have already been forgiven." I personally believe that is the only correct way to understand these passages, especially in light of the rest of Scripture. We are called by God to do His will and are assured of His presence for the purpose of discerning it. Two or three Christians gather together in His name for the purpose of discerning His will. Heaven—not us—initiates the binding and loosing, which we have the privilege of announcing.

We do not have infallible communication from God in every situation that calls for binding and loosing. I think God has communicated with His Church in such a way that we have the keys to the Kingdom, but I do not think any of us can claim perfect discernment, totally renewed minds or perfectly pure hearts. For instance, we cannot say with absolute authority that another person is a Christian, and therefore, that person's sins are forgiven. Yet we can say with

authority that every Christian who sins is forgiven because God has already said that. We can tell people how to become Christians and by what means they can be assured of their salvation, but only God can bear witness with their spirit that they are His children.

The danger is when two or more people agree together on what *they* want to do and then claim the passage in Matthew to support their activities. In effect, they are putting God to the test. God will always honor His Word, but who initiated the agreement? Was it God or them? Jesus stood up against this kind of twisted thinking when the devil tempted Him to throw Himself down from the pinnacle of the Temple. Satan had the audacity to quote Scripture, but Jesus responded, "You shall not put the LORD your God to the test" (Matthew 4:7). We do not put God to the test; He tests us. There is no way we can cleverly word a prayer so that God is obligated to do what we ask of Him. God is under no obligation to humankind. He is under obligation only to Himself to keep His word and His covenant with us. Another serious warning was given to us by Jesus in Matthew 7:21-23:

> Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?" And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness."

However, there is a proper time, place and means for binding and loosing. The Pharisees had charged Jesus with doing exorcisms by the power of Beelzebul (a high-ranking demon). Jesus responded by saying, "How can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man?" (Matt. 12:29). Jesus is the One who ties up the strong-man (Satan) and carries off his property. The Lord argues that if His exorcisms cannot be attributed to Satan (see vv. 26-28), then they reflect an authority that is greater than that of Satan.

Satan has gained access to people's lives because of the openings they have given him. He may claim squatter's rights, but we always belong to God. To recapture that ground, we have to first bind the strongman by the authority we have in Christ. Jesus said, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:18). "He had disarmed the rulers and authorities" (Col. 2:15),

and He is the head over all authority and rule (see Eph. 1:19-21). We do not minister in our authority, but in His authority, and then only by the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul says, "Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might" (Eph. 6:10).

Satan has gained access to people's lives because of the openings they have given him. He may claim squatter's rights, but we always belong to God.

Based on what has already been accomplished by Christ and established in heaven, I have the counselee pray the following prayer before we start:

Dear heavenly Father,
I acknowledge Your presence in this room and in my life. You are the only omniscient (all-knowing), omnipotent (all-powerful) and omnipresent (always-present) God. I am dependent on You, for apart from Christ I can do nothing. I stand in the truth that all authority in heaven and on Earth has been given to the resurrected Christ, and because I am in Christ, I share that authority in order to make disciples and set captives free. I ask You to fill me with Your Holy Spirit and lead me into all truth. I pray for Your complete protection and ask for Your guidance. In Jesus' name, amen.

Then I have the counselee make the following declaration out loud:

In the name and authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, I command Satan and all evil spirits to release me in order that I can be free to know and to choose to do the will of God. As a child of God who is seated with Christ in the heavenlies, I command every evil spirit to leave my presence. I belong to God and the evil one cannot touch me.

LIMITATIONS OF BINDING AND LOOSING

Binding and loosing is not all-encompassing, but it is sufficient to accomplish God's will. Let me explain.

If God Requires Us to Do Something, the Grace of God Will Enable Us to

Do It

John wrote, “This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him” (1 John 5:14-15). I think we can say with confidence that it is God’s will for us to renounce false religious experiences and lies that we have believed, to forgive others and to genuinely repent of our old ways.

God Grants Enough Freedom When We Pray Authoritatively for the Person to Know, Choose and Do the Will of God

In difficult cases, with counselees who are in deep spiritual bondage, I have had to take authority over the enemy more than once. I simply command Satan, in the name of Christ, to release them. Why are people not totally free after the initial prayer and declaration? Because the encourager’s prayer and declaration is not the solution to their bondage. If that were the solution, counselees would be calling us every time there were spiritual trouble. Instead, the solution is repentance, and God is the One who grants it (see 2 Tim. 2:25). Counselees become more and more aware of their freedom as they progressively go through the Steps to Freedom. I tell some that every step is like cleaning a room in a house. You will not have a clean house until you have cleaned the last room.

Every Passage of Scripture Must Be Understood in Light of the Immediate and Larger Context of the Bible

Every ministry and minister of the Church is subject to all governing authorities that are established by God (see Rom. 13:1-7), and each has the responsibility to be a faithful steward of what God has entrusted to them (see 1 Cor. 4:1-2). I have spoken on secular campuses on the topic of demonic influences in the world today. In each case, I prayed before the meeting with the local leadership of Campus Crusade for Christ, who had invited me. First, we committed ourselves to the Lord and then the auditorium and then the sound system. Finally, we agreed together that every enemy of the Lord Jesus Christ be bound in that auditorium, and we prayed against the blinding of the unbelieving.

We prayed this way with confidence because we had a right to be there. That auditorium was under our stewardship. We followed all legal and administrative procedures to reserve the time and place for our use. The Lord had entrusted us with the auditorium, and we were trying to be good stewards by committing it to the Lord. Also, we agreed together to bind the enemy because we were under

God's authority and the governing authorities of the university and state. In every meeting, you could hear a pin drop as I spoke, and many students gave their hearts to Christ.

On the contrary, when I was in India, I talked to a young missionary who was under psychiatric care. He and several others had gone into Hindu temples and attempted to bind the enemy, but they were unsuccessful, and this missionary was in spiritual bondage. Why? I think they overstepped their authority. Those temples did not belong to them, and they had not sought permission from the governing authorities to use them for their own purposes. We cannot exercise our given authority in the spiritual realm and at the same time be rebellious against earthly authorities that God has established, according to Romans 13:1-2:

> Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.

I appreciate the missionaries' zeal to see others won to Christ, but I seriously question if what they agreed together to do originated in heaven.

Stewardship is an important part of ministry. We should commit to the Lord everything that God has entrusted to us. It begins with our bodies:

> Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship (Rom. 12:1).

We should then commit to the Lord our marriages, families, ministries, homes and everything in them. We do not want to leave any room for Satan to have access to ourselves, our families or our ministries.

When I rent a room in a hotel on the road, I have a legal right to be there, and it is under my stewardship. I have no idea what occurred in that room before I rented it, so I renounce any previous use of the room that would not please my heavenly Father. (People hide pornographic material in hotel rooms, use them for adulterous affairs and watch X-rated movies in them.) Then I commit the room and all that is in it to the Lord and command Satan and all his evil workers to leave the room in the name and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Finally, I ask for the Lord's protection while I sleep. If you think that is unnecessary, then maybe you should do the kind of ministry that I am doing for a few years and let me know how you are sleeping.

UNBLOCKING THE LEARNING PROCESS

After we have taken our rightful place in Christ, we need to understand what is happening in the lives of those who want to be free in Christ and how we can maintain control in the counseling process. Most counselees have had difficult experiences that have left them wounded, and they all come for help with preconceived notions about God, themselves and the world they live in. Several years ago, a pastor's wife made an appointment to see me. She was being distracted by accusing and condemning thoughts, which threatened to curse her son. A half hour into our conversation, I said, "You really love Jesus, don't you?"

"Oh, yes," she said.

"And you really love the Holy Spirit, don't you?" I asked.

"Oh, yes. He is my comforter," she said.

"But you don't even like God, the Father, do you?"

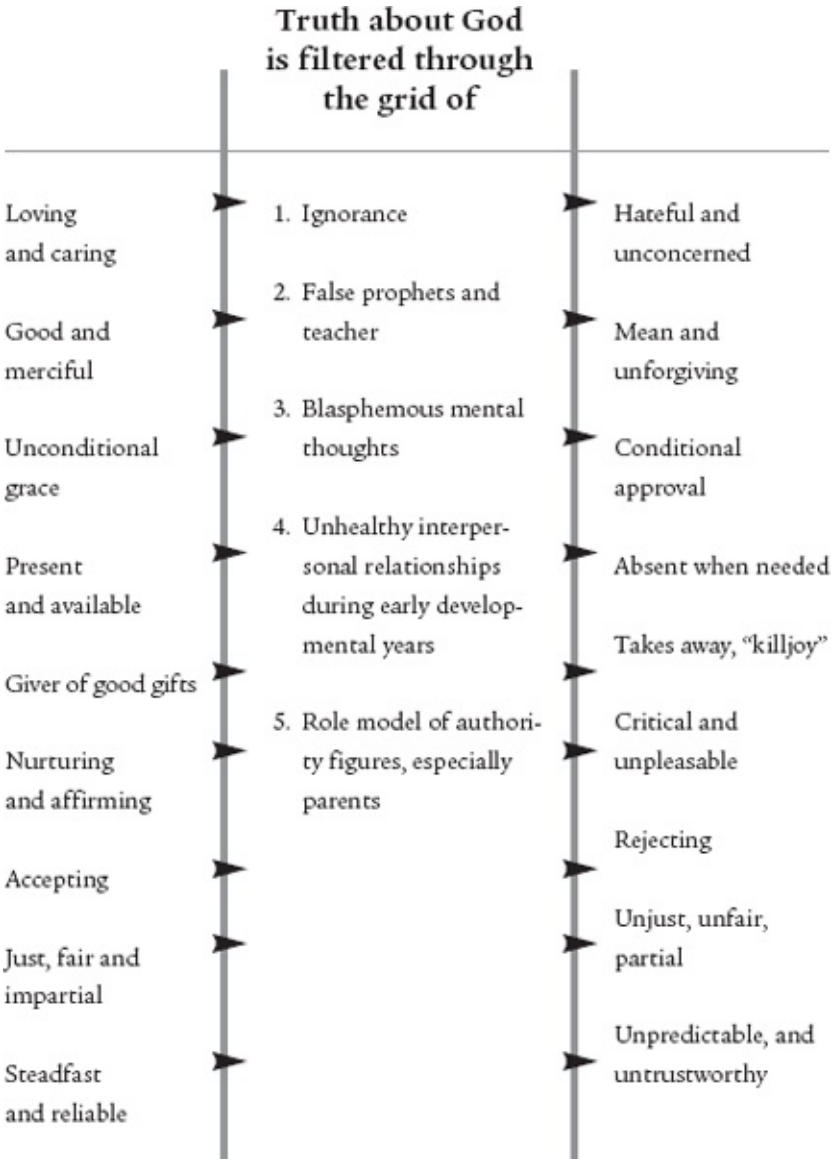
When I asked her this question, she began to cry. Her mother was a legalistic woman who had verbally abused her for as long as she could remember. Her father sat there like a lump and never once came to her defense. This woman loved Jesus because He did something for her; He went to the Cross. The Holy Spirit talks to her, or at least she thought it was the Holy Spirit. But she thinks her heavenly Father is just like her earthly father. He sits up there in heaven like a lump! A little voice kept telling her not to do certain things or her son would be cursed.

Her knowledge of her heavenly Father needed to be corrected, so I gave her a set of audiocassettes on the attributes of God by A. W. Tozer. She listened to the audiocassettes three times. As near as I can tell, it did not have any effect on her. That really astounded me. At the time, I was chairman of the Practical Theology Department at Talbot School of Theology. I was teaching evangelism, discipleship and Christian education. Having a master's and a doctoral degree in education, I was deeply committed to preaching and teaching God's Word, and I still am. But I had just given her the best possible teaching on the attributes of God, which she listened to three times, and the effect was zero!

I began to question how much influence our teaching and preaching was

really having on the average person in our congregations. About that time, Dr. David Seamands, author and professor at Asbury Theological Seminary, spoke at a chapel service at Talbot. He showed us a diagram similar to the following one:

Diagram 7.1



I do not recall Dr. Seamands's message, but his presentation stimulated my thinking. Apparently, he had students in his seminary, as we did in ours, who took their theology class exams and answered the questions about the attributes of God correctly, as given on the left side of the diagram. But emotionally, the

students still had the same feelings about God as those given on the right side of the diagram.

Every person we are trying to help has some thoughts "raised up against the knowledge of God" (2 Cor. 10:5), and saying something to a counselee does not ensure that he or she is hearing it or is able to process the information. I have had people tell me that they saw my lips move during counseling sessions but did not hear a word I was saying.

This happened to the pastor's wife who heard the truth about God three times, but it was being drowned out by the "noise" in her head. How do we help people love the Lord their God with all their hearts and with all their souls and with all their minds if they cannot even receive the message? First, we must realize that we cannot accomplish this by just preaching and teaching harder and better. Please do not misunderstand me. I think we ought to have the best possible teaching and preaching. I make my living practicing both, but I also know that some people who sit in our churches catch only a portion of what we say. There has to be an additional ministry to help them.

These people need personal help in resolving personal and spiritual conflicts. We routinely see people emotionally go from the right side of diagram 7.1 to the left side in a three- or four-hour counseling session. Once they have established their freedom in Christ, then watch them grow. They gobble up the Word of God, whereas before it was so scrambled; they cannot get enough of it. They have resolved the personal and spiritual conflicts that are critical in their relationship with God, and the Holy Spirit is now bearing witness with their spirit that they are children of God (see Rom. 8:16).

Defeated Christians still operate according to their old nature—the flesh. Paul says to them:

> I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for *you were not yet able to receive it*. Indeed, even now *you are not yet able*, for you are still fleshly (1 Cor. 3:1-3, emphasis added).

Paul explains why they were not able to receive it. They were getting their identities from men and walking with conflicts of jealousy and strife. Until we help people resolve these conflicts and establish their identities in Christ, they will not be able to receive solid food, no matter how well we preach or teach.

A BATTLE FOR THE MIND

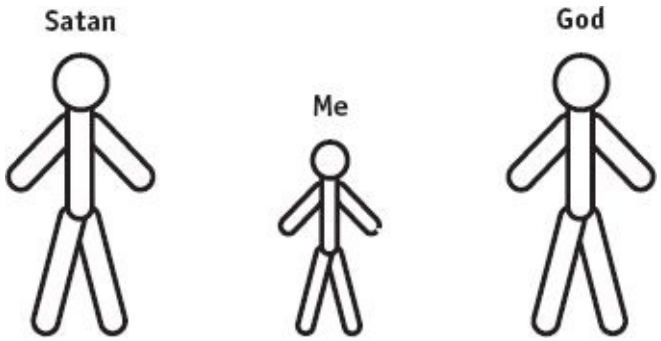
We as encouragers need to understand how the spiritual battle for the mind is impeding the process. A highly educated professional man asked if he could spend some time with me. He told me he was experiencing great difficulty, and he was willing to drive six hours to meet with me. I sent him a set of my audiocassettes *Resolving Personal Conflicts* prior to our meeting. I wanted him to understand who he was in Christ, how to walk by faith, how to win the battle for his mind and how to forgive from his heart. When he arrived at the meeting, he handed me the audiocassettes and said they were all blank! However, after I led him through the Steps, he was able to listen to the same set all the way home.

We also need to know that to some people the enemy is more real than God is. Consider what a victim of satanic ritual abuse wrote in her diary:

Dear God,
Where are You? How can You watch and not help? I hurt so bad, and You don't even care. If You cared, You'd make it stop or You'd let me die. I love You, but You seem so far away. I can't hear You, feel You or see You, but I'm supposed to believe You're here. Lord, I feel them, I see them and I hear them. They're here. People tell me You're here, but I can't tell. I'm sorry if I'm that bad, God, but I'm trying.
Please love me and help me. I want to be a part of You. Why won't You help me do that? I know You are real, God, but they are more real to me right now. You know how real they are, Lord, but no one will believe me. Please make someone believe me, Lord. I'm alone in this, and it hurts so bad. Why, Lord? Why? I have no answers, but I have so many questions. Why won't You give me some answers? Why won't You make it stop. Please, Lord! Please! If you love me, You'll let me die.

Ten minutes after recording this entry, this woman tried unsuccessfully to commit suicide. Many people break down and cry when I read this to them in my office. All of them have a distorted concept of God, and none of them know who they are in Christ. They fear the possibility of having a mental breakdown. They feel unloved, worthless and rejected. Most think they are different from other people. They see themselves as caught between two equal and opposite powers as depicted in the following diagram:

Diagram 7.2



If counselees believe this, then they are defeated. God is higher and greater than what can ever be shown on a diagram. He is omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, kind and loving in all His ways. Satan is a defeated foe, and we are in Christ, seated with Him in the heavenlies. The severely oppressed perceive Satan as more powerful, real and present than God in their experiences, as did the lady whose diary entry I cited. On the other hand, some are not aware that they are spiritually in trouble. Some do not want to give up the little voice in their head. It is the only companionship they have. I have talked with leaders in churches who do not want to get rid of their spirit guide. I know it sounds bizarre, but it is not that uncommon.

Helping Counselees Break Free

What is going to work and keep on working for these people is not what we do, but what *they* do. We have an important role to play as the Lord's bond servants. We must help them maintain control by guiding them through the process. To do this, I always ask them for one major area of cooperation: They must share with me what is going on inside their head that is in opposition to what we are doing or what I am saying. The mind is the control center. If they do not lose control in their minds, we will not lose control of the counseling session. I do not care if the thought is coming from the pit or from an external speaker in the room. The only way it can have any power over them is if they believe the lies. Satan's major tool is deception (see chapter 5). The power of Satan is in the lie, and the power of the Christian is in the truth. If you expose the lie, you break the power. Remember, demons are like cockroaches. You turn on the light, and they head for the shadows.

Helping Counselees Expose the Lies

One lady said, "They're laughing at you" (referring to the voices in her head). The first time I heard this I thought, *They're making fun of my feeble efforts.*

This can be intimidating unless you understand it is just a scheme of the devil. As soon as it is exposed, the laughing stops. When people reveal what they are hearing, no matter how vile or threatening it is, I always say, “Thank you for sharing that.” Then I proceed with the Steps.

Some people may be reluctant to share what they are hearing in their minds for two reasons:

1. They will not tell us what is going on inside if they suspect at all that we will not believe them.
2. They may not tell us what they are hearing because they are being intimidated. For example, they could be told that they will be harmed when they go home. This is just an intimidating lie intended to keep them from resolving their conflicts. I told one lady that if she resolved her problems in the counseling session, her problems would be resolved at home as well. She blurted out, “I wish you could prove that to me!” The intimidation also may be a threat to their loved ones, such as a spouse or children.

Many pastors and encouragers are not aware that this is going on in the minds of people they are trying to help. As long as counselees are doing nothing to resolve the conflicts, they will not experience any opposition. Take the extremely abused lady who was threatening suicide before we conducted a conference at her church. The church leaders set up an appointment with me to meet her during the week. I was able to calm her down, and I convinced her to attend the conference. The night I talked about forgiveness, she came under a spiritual attack and left the auditorium! She heard enough to make a list of people she needed to forgive—four pages long. I asked for her cooperation and then started to pray. Before I could finish, she was headed for the door in panic.

“What are you thinking?” I asked.

“You’re going to hurt me,” she said.

“No, I’m not,” I said. “That is a lie.”

The woman had a few more similar episodes, and we dealt with them calmly. We worked through the Steps, and she found her freedom in Christ. When the pastor and I got to his home, the phone was ringing. “Pastor,” she said from her phone at home, “they’re not here either!”

Helping Counselees Not Lose Control

I tell people that I am not going to bypass or violate their minds, and they are free to leave anytime. I never try to physically restrain anyone, because "the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh" (2 Cor. 10:4). I have had many people say, "I have to get out of here!"

When this occurs, I tell them, "You are free to leave if that is what you choose to do." I have never had a person leave who did not come back by personal choice in a matter of minutes. I just pray for them while they are gone.

In the majority of cases, you will get little or no spiritual opposition. Even in difficult cases, the opposition initially comes when you start to pray and resolve the problems. Watch the person's eyes closely. If they start to look around the room or get glassy eyed, get their attention immediately. If they are starting to lose control, back off from what you are doing. If you move too fast, they could go catatonic. If that should happen, do not panic. They will come out of it on their own in a matter of minutes.

After a conference in Singapore, I received an urgent call from a missionary. A college student had heard me speak the night before and came to the location of the conference to see me, but I had already gone back to my apartment. The student was threatening to kill me, and then he went catatonic. The missionary wanted me to come and help him. I told him the student should be left alone for a while. He would wake up in a few minutes, and when he did, he could make an appointment to see me the next day. The student came by my apartment the next day, and I walked him through the Steps. He left the apartment free in Christ.

We will lose control if we respond in fear of Satan rather than express our faith and confidence in God.

The key is not to let the counselee lose control, but if the person should go catatonic, you can say, "Satan has no authority here. This person has given his [her] heart to Christ." Then address the person by saying, "You can open your eyes now." In our experience, the person has done so every time. The only reason they closed their eyes was because they believed a lie.

Helping Counselees When They Are Too Weak Mentally

Occasionally, we have to confront the demonic when the person is too weak in his or her faith. Command Satan in the name of Christ to release the person and

go on. The two most common physical symptoms we observe are headaches and nausea. The symptoms usually subside when the person shares what he or she is feeling. In most cases, I ignore the physical symptoms and go on. Both will be gone when the person is free in Christ.

The interference is intended to intimidate us and cause us to respond in fear or to overreact. We will lose control if we respond in fear of Satan rather than express our faith and confidence in God. Satan wants us to fear him because we are then operating in the flesh, where we are impotent.

When I was in Europe, I asked a couple of missionaries to help the adult child of another missionary couple. The two came back looking defeated. One of them had a bruised shoulder and a button missing on his shirt. They had lost control at the very beginning and gone into a defensive mode. The next day, I met with the boy. I told him he had to cooperate with me by sharing what was going on inside, because what we were up against was nothing but deception. “No, it’s power,” he said. I had him renounce that lie and declare that all authority was given to Jesus in heaven and on this earth. Then I asked him to share with me what he was thinking. “They want me to kill you,” he said. I thanked him for sharing that, and we had no more interference after that.

The hardest people to help are those who are highly subjective. They do not seem to have any mental discipline. Many do not realize that they have a “no” button—a will that they can exercise. Instead, when they have a thought, they act on it. I tell these people, “You don’t have to do whatever comes to your mind. You have a choice and there is no need to obey every thought. Throughout our time together, if you have a thought, share it with me; but don’t act out.” In some extreme cases, I have taken people for a walk, just to show them that they have a will and can make choices. If you could see a demon, it is a little bitty thing with a great big mouth. It is all deception.

In every case, look for the key and don’t give up hope. People are counting on us to not give up on them. I received the following from a severely abused young lady:

> While on vacation as a child one year, I happened upon a gold watch that I had noticed was lying on the ground. It was covered with dirt and gravel and was facedown in the parking lot of our motel. At first glance, it did not seem worth the effort to bend down and pick it up, but for some reason I found myself reaching for it anyway.
>
> The crystal was broken, the watchband was gone, and there was

moisture on the dial. From all appearances, there was no logical reason to believe this watch would still work. Every indication was that its next stop would be the trash can.

Those in my family who were with me at the time laughed at me for picking it up. My mother even scolded me for holding such a dirty object that was so obviously destroyed. As I reached for the winding stem, my brother made comment as to my lack of intelligence.

"It's been run over by cars," he chided. "Nothing can endure that kind of treatment."

As I turned the stem, the second hand of the watch began to move. My family was wrong. Truly, odds were against the watch working, but there was one thing no one thought of: No matter how broken the outside was, if the inside was not damaged, it would still run. And, indeed, it kept perfect time. This watch was made to keep time. Its outside appearance had nothing to do with the purpose for which it was designed. Although the appearance was damaged, the inside was untouched and in perfect condition.

Twenty-five years later, I still have that watch. I take it out every once in a while and wind it up, and it still works! I think as long as the inside remains untouched, it always will. However, unless I had not bothered to pick it up and try to wind it years ago, I never would have known that the part of the watch that really mattered was still in perfect condition. Although it looks like a piece of junk, it will always be a treasure to me, because I looked beyond the outside appearances and believed in what really mattered—its ability to function in the manner for which it was created.

Thank you Neil and Joanne for making the effort to "pick up the watch" and "turn the stem."

You are helping me to see that my emotions may be damaged, but my soul is still in "perfect condition," and that is what was created to be with Christ. The only permanent part. The part that really matters. I know that deep within my heart, no matter what my feelings are telling me, this is true. I also believe that with the help of God's servants, even the "casing" can be repaired, and maybe even that will become functional again!

I had the privilege to help this woman in her initial stages of recovery. She is completely functional now, but it took several years to remove one layer after

another. She called recently and told us that victory would never have come if we had given up on her.

PART 2

DISCIPLESHIP COUNSELING IN PRACTICE



CHAPTER EIGHT

THE FREEDOM APPOINTMENT

Taking somebody through the Steps to Freedom in Christ is not a traditional counseling session. The freedom appointment is an encounter with God, where the encourager is facilitating the ministry of reconciliation as an ambassador for Christ. The encourager helps Christians assume responsibility for their own lives by (1) affirming their identity in Christ; (2) renouncing the lies they have believed; (3) choosing the truth as revealed in God's Word; and (4) resolving the personal and spiritual conflicts that are keeping them from living a productive life in Christ.

BEGINNING NOW

Although I will provide step-by-step detailed instruction on how to lead someone through the Steps, you do not have to know everything and master all the material in this book to be an effective encourager. I knew little of this material when I first began, and I learned most of it through trial and error. I have received powerful testimonies from people who have gone through the Steps on their own, which is possible since Jesus is the wonderful counselor. However, many cannot get through this process on their own, and difficult cases

will require higher levels of competence.

Most committed Christians can do what I have been doing to help others find their freedom in Christ. It does not require the exercise of any special gifts; instead, it requires dependence on God, Christlike character and the ability to apply truth. Our ministry has trained thousands of people, who are now helping others all over the world.

Discipleship counseling does not require the exercise of any special gifts; instead, it requires dependence on God, Christlike character and the ability to apply truth.

DISCERNING WHOM TO COUNSEL

Going through the Steps must be a personal choice that people make, and they should not be coerced into doing so. After hearing someone's story, I ask, "Would you like to resolve this?" If they say no, then I do not proceed, although I may explore why they do not want to. Almost nobody says no, however. If they say yes, I ask, "I would like to take you through these Steps to Freedom, would that be alright?" Again, I have never had anybody say no, but I want them to know that it is their choice and that I am not forcing them to do it. They have voluntarily asked for help, and they are free to leave at any time they choose. I will not violate their will, because assuming responsibility for their attitudes and actions requires them to exercise their will. It is their choice and I respect that.

Those who have found their freedom will often want their spouse or friends to experience the same release and joy. However, taking people through the Steps because third parties have asked or required them to do it is not advisable, for a number of reasons. First, the individual may feel obligated to the person to do it, but have no desire to face the truth or get right with God. The desire to repent has to come from within, and repentance rarely happens when external forces demand or push for it. Second, if the individual does not sense the need, he or she will not be very cooperative. Third, the individual may go through the motions but not be totally truthful. Fourth, the individual may have tried counseling before without experiencing any results; therefore, he or she sees no need to try again. If you want someone to have a freedom appointment, then pray for this person and allow the Holy Spirit to prepare his or her heart for the

time when this individual may seek help.

In other words, the person seeking help should ask for it personally. If parents bring their teenagers and ask me to take them through the Steps, I usually say no unless I am sure the young person wants to. In such cases, I make an appointment to talk to the parents first. The adult may not always be a part of the problem, but parents will play a critical role in the aftercare. The point is, you cannot help someone who does not want to be helped, nor can you help someone who will not assume responsibility for his or her own attitudes and actions.

ADDRESSING DEFENSES

Be aware of two defenses that are fairly common. The first comes from those who have tried traditional counseling and have not seen any results, or from those who do not believe in counseling. In such cases, I would say something like the following: "I want you to know that I care about you, and I believe that you can be free in Christ. I have no desire to psychoanalyze you or offer you advice unless you ask for it. This is more of an encounter with God and quite unlike most counseling sessions. I believe that your conflicts can be resolved in Christ, and I want to help you understand how your needs can be met in Him."

The second defense comes from those who have been burned by the Church. They have gone to church, and they have tried reading their Bibles and praying, but for some reason it did not work for them. Most of these people are disappointed with God and Christians (usually the authority figures, such as pastors, teachers and parents). They need to understand that institutions and programs—no matter how well intended—cannot set them free. *Who* sets them free is Christ, and *what* sets them free is their personal response to Him.

Christian institutions and programs *should* facilitate repentance and reconciliation on a personal basis, but some do not. In some sad situations, parents and pastors have been the perpetrators. In every case, there is no perfect pastor or parent, and even the best will let others down sometime. The good news is that Jesus loves us perfectly, and He will never let us down or forsake us.

On the other hand, sometimes the defenses are not consistent with what the counselees really desire. I was asked by a man at a camp if I would help his daughter. I answered, "Only if she wants to."

He assured me that she did, but her opening statement to me was, "I don't want to get right with God or anything!"

I have learned to ignore such opening statements and respond with something

like this: “That is your choice, but since we have this time together, we may as well make the most of it. Would you like to share with me how you have been hurt, or what you are struggling with?” If the person shares his or her story, and many do, I ask, “Wouldn’t you like to resolve that?” or if appropriate, “Wouldn’t you like to get rid of those voices?” In almost every case, they proceed through the Steps as all others do.

EVERYONE IS A CANDIDATE

Everyone who desires a one-on-one appointment to walk through the Steps is a candidate. Submitting to God through genuine repentance and resisting the devil is something every Christian should do at least once in this life. If you have backslidden, you will have to do the Steps again if you want to experience your freedom in Christ. Those who have a deeply troubled past will need the objectivity of a fellow believer to help them through the process.

One pastor told me he would not take people through the Steps unless they were assured of their salvation. The main reason they are struggling with the assurance of salvation, however, is because of all their unresolved conflicts, and they probably do not know who they are in Christ. Trying to help them gain the assurance of salvation in Christ before their freedom in Christ will be counterproductive. The assurance comes after they have resolved the issues that are critical between themselves and God. “But suppose they aren’t Christians?” he protested.

“If they are sincere, they will be Christians when they are done,” I said. Unbelievers are not likely to submit to the process. On the other hand, I have had some who thought they were Christians, and during the process, I had the privilege of leading them to Christ.

At one conference, the wife of a professional man made a guarded inquiry about some needs in her life. I simply suggested what going through the Steps to Freedom could mean to her, but I left the decision up to her.

Later, she asked for an appointment, and I walked her through the Steps. The issues were not extreme, but she felt abused because of legalism in her childhood. It was deeply moving to observe how earnestly she chose to be free of her bitterness and to see the joy she expressed after dealing with forgiveness in Step 3. After the conference, she sent me a testimony regarding the many effects of her freedom in the lives of her husband and family.

There are others with backgrounds of more serious trauma, such as the

teenager who had seen her father strangling her mother. A few months after she went through the Steps, a friend of this teenager wrote: “Kim is doing great. The voices are gone. The blank stare in her eyes is gone, and she is back to the quiet, calm Kim that I used to know.”

Another woman wrote: “I feel like a different person. I don’t have this big dirty black hole inside me that needs to be filled up by my husband’s abuse or my abuse of food. I found out who I am. I’m a precious child of God. If Jesus can change that much pain in me, He can help others, too, and I want to be utilized by Him. I now have three girls I am discipling.”

PREPARING FOR THE COUNSELEE

The best scenario for people who want to go through the Steps is to attend a Living Free in Christ conference, to listen to or view the audiocassette or videocassette series, or to read *Victory over the Darkness* and *The Bondage Breaker*. Being exposed to this teaching in advance of the appointment will result in far greater resolution, because people have a faith foundation to work with. To maintain what is gained through the counseling process, they will need to know who they are in Christ and what it means to be a child of God. They also will need to understand the battle for their minds and know the position, power and protection of the believer. When people have been struggling for years and suddenly realize that legitimate help is available, they are more willing to invest the time to read books and gather helpful information. If they are unwilling to take some initiative to help themselves by reading a book or listening to audiocassettes, I would question how serious they are about getting well. Some people, however, cannot read the books or even listen to the audiocassettes. In such cases, you will have to take them through the Steps first, but then follow-up is critical.

PLANNING YOUR TIME

We recommend that you complete the Steps in one appointment. This will usually take anywhere from two to five hours. It is a sacrificial commitment to make for the sake of another person, but you will find that the hours invested will accomplish far more than meeting only one hour at a time, week after week. Greater resolution results when you hear people tell their stories and then deal with all of their sin and pain while the memories and emotions are surfaced and

fresh. In a short session, you can deal with only one or two Steps; but if you leave an open wound, counselees will be more vulnerable to the enemy if they have deep spiritual conflicts.

If a surgeon opens a wound but fails to provide proper closure, germs will be afforded an opportunity to cause infection, and the healing process will not be given a reasonable chance.

This kind of counseling is better suited to churches because of time constraints. Pastors will set aside mornings or afternoons. Working laypeople use evenings or weekends. Some professional counselors and therapists do not have the luxury of time, but they can still be effective if careful. Judy King, a professional counselor, has shown how she uses the Steps in therapy in part 2 of *Released from Bondage.*[1]

IDENTIFYING PRAYER PARTNERS

If the counselee approves, we as encouragers should have prayer partners sit in with us for the primary purpose of training them. We multiply our efforts this way. At conferences, we often include two or more prayer partners for the purpose of training. This has seldom been a problem when those we are helping have been advised in advance. In fact, they often express gratitude for the time commitment and intercessory prayer provided for them.

Male Versus Female

Usually, it is desirable for men to help men and women to help women, but there are times when it may be necessary for the opposite to occur. Since women are often quicker to recognize their needs and to ask for help, there are more women seeking appointments. Therefore, mature men sometimes help women, but a woman prayer partner is recommended for those sessions.

I do not recommend that men counsel women for an extended period because of the intimacy that takes place. They can begin to bond. However, the danger of long-term counseling in this manner is not as big of an issue, as the counselees are bonding with God, not with the encouragers.

Family

It is not wise to use the spouse of the one you are helping as a prayer partner because the person needs to assume personal and complete responsibility and not rely upon his or her spouse. Issues may arise that the individual would hesitate to

share in front of a spouse. The same would apply to parents and older children. With young children, on the other hand, it is often better for the parent to take them through the Steps (using the children's version), or at least for the parent to sit in as a prayer partner. The trust between a parent and younger child is important, and sometimes necessary, for the child to feel safe. However, if an adversarial relationship exists between the parent and child, then it will be virtually impossible for the parent to help the child.

Friends

If a person says that he or she would like to bring a close friend as a prayer partner, we explain that his or her freedom depends on being totally open and honest about everything—past and present. We explain this so that if having a friend present would inhibit the counselee from open communication, it would be better for the friend not to attend. On the other hand, we must respect their need for safety. This process may seem simple and straightforward to us, but to the counselee it may be extremely intimidating. Some counselees fear losing control in a horrible demonic encounter, but that never happens if the session is handled right. The person needs to know that he or she will be respected, believed and helped in a safe and controlled way. Having a trusted friend present may give the person a sense of safety and provide emotional support. They can also help in follow-up.

Trusted Confidant

In more severe cases, such as victims of satanic ritual abuse (or other extreme traumas), it is best for the person seeking help to ask his or her professional counselor, encourager or trusted friend to be in the session if the individual has one. Or if the person has a primary caregiver, the option should be given to bring that person to the appointment. Knowing what the issues are enables the caregiver to continue the process of recovery and discipling.

CHOOSING THE LOCATION

The setting of the counseling appointment is important. Try to have comfortable chairs, proper room temperature, quiet, freedom from interruptions, rest room access, tissues, a wastebasket and water to drink.

The most desirable location is an appropriate room in your church. It is not advisable to go to the homes of the people you will help since that may not be

neutral ground and you may experience interruptions—either spiritually or from family, pets, phone calls and so on.

SETTING THE APPOINTMENT

When someone asks for an appointment, it is a good idea to do a brief interview. Ask for the following:

1. Name and phone number
2. Reason for the appointment
3. Further clarification to determine possible involvement in abuse or the occult
4. Whether he or she has attended a Freedom in Christ conference or read *Victory over the Darkness* and *The Bondage Breaker*

If the person has not had any exposure to a conference, audiocassettes or books, explain the importance of reading at least *Victory over the Darkness* and, if possible, *The Bondage Breaker*, prior to the appointment.

If a person knows the message and is ready for an appointment, the following explanations should be given:

1. During the session, a leader will hear the counselee's story and then take him or her through the Steps to Freedom.
2. The appointment will last anywhere from two to five hours.
3. There is nothing to be afraid of; although, condemning, doubting and fearful thoughts may try to prevent the counselee from keeping the appointment. The appointment itself is a quiet and controlled process that will help resolve personal and spiritual conflicts.
4. Nothing will be done to violate the counselee's will. He or she is free to come and free to leave at any time.
5. There may be a prayer partner or two present.
6. Everything will be kept in confidence.

You may have the counselee fill out the Confidential Personal Inventory before taking him or her through the Steps (see appendix B). The inventory is most helpful when the person can fill it out and return it in advance of the appointment, so the leader will have adequate time to review it and perhaps highlight areas where further information would be helpful.

When the person requesting help and you are in agreement that all the necessary preparations are in order (basic understanding of the message, the interview, the inventory and the prayer partners), the time and place for the appointment can be scheduled.

Setting Up for the Appointment

Arriving 15 minutes prior to the appointment gives the leader and prayer partners an opportunity to have prayer in the room they will be using. We have the privilege to be good stewards of all that the Lord has entrusted to us. Start by committing yourselves and the space you are using to the Lord. I verbally announce that all authority in heaven and on Earth has been given to the Lord Jesus Christ (see Matt. 28:18); therefore, Satan has no authority in this time, this place or in our lives.

There should be a copy of the Steps to Freedom for each person, and paper and pencil for the leader.

You can help create a calm environment by being as prepared as possible. Prearrange the seating. Choose a comfortable chair for the person you are helping, and seat yourself directly across from him or her at a distance that will ensure good eye contact. Seat the prayer partners off to the side, out of the direct line of vision, between you (the leader) and the person you are helping.

Starting the Appointment

After introductions, ask the person who has come for help to fill out a Statement of Understanding (see appendix B), explaining that you are not a professional counselor or therapist (if this is the case) but a brother or sister in Christ desiring to be an encourager with the truth of God's Word.

A gracious and relaxed leader and prayer team will make a person feel welcome when he or she arrives for the appointment. Having never done this before, most people are apprehensive. They may think that you are going to cast a demon out of them or that they will roll around on the floor and embarrass themselves. They may be having thoughts or hearing voices telling them such things as *This isn't going to work. Sit close to the door so that you can escape if you need to. This leader can't be trusted. If you tell them your problems, they won't like you*. You can help relieve those fears by the way you relate to the individual and by saying that people's struggling with foul, accusing,

condemning and blasphemous thoughts while going through the appointment is common.

After introductions, there are some assurances the person seeking help will need to hear. You may want to say:

> There is nothing you could share that would shock or embarrass me, and there is nothing you could share that would cause me to think less of you. I know who the enemy is, and it is not you. After hearing your story, I will care more deeply about you because I will understand the trauma that you have experienced. Also, everything you say will be in confidence. The prayer partners are here to pray for us and to gain experience in order to help others.

Introducing the Steps and Acknowledging Christ's Lordship

The people you help need to be reminded of their identity in Christ, that they are not just products of their past and that they do not have to be victims anymore. They need to know that Satan has no power over them unless they allow it. You can remind them of that by reading the preface of *The Steps to Freedom in Christ*. As you gain experience, you may prefer to paraphrase that content as follows:

> I'd like to remind you of God's attributes. God is omnipotent (all-powerful). His power is greater than we can comprehend. He defeated Satan at Calvary in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. He disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities: "He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him" (Col. 2:15). Though you may feel you are being pulled by two equal but opposite powers, that is not the case. That is deception. You must choose to "be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might" (Eph. 6:10).
>
> God is omnipresent (everywhere at once). He is here right now. As Psalm 125:2 says: "As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds His people." Satan cannot be everywhere at once. There is a hierarchy of his emissaries, but they are like little gnats. They get in your face and distract you, but they have no power over you.
>
> God is omniscient (all-knowing). He knows the thoughts and intentions

of your heart (see Heb. 4:12), and He loves you unconditionally (see Rom. 5:8). He knows the trauma you have experienced, and He stands ready to set you free from your past if you will submit to Him. Satan cannot perfectly read your mind, although he can give you thoughts to deceive and condemn you.

My role is to help you understand and assume your position in Christ by resolving the personal and spiritual conflicts that are critical between yourself and God. What counts is not what I can do for you but what Christ has already done for you. He came "to destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8) and to give you life (see John 10:10). He is the only One who can set you free as you submit to Him.

Jesus said, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:18). Would you personally choose to believe that and profess it as true? [Wait for a positive response.] Would you also choose to believe and profess as true that Satan has no authority here? [Wait for a positive response.]

I need cooperation from you in a major area: If you get thoughts or feelings that are negative and contrary to what we are doing, please share them with me. Your mind is the control center of your life. As long as you don't lose control, then we won't lose control during our time together. Once the lie is exposed to the truth, the power of the lie is broken. It doesn't make any difference if the thoughts you are hearing are coming from a loudspeaker on the wall, your memories or lies from Satan. The only way they can have any power over you is if you listen to them and believe them. Demons are like cockroaches. They scurry around in the dark, but when the light of God's truth shines, they run for cover. Don't be afraid to say whatever it is you are thinking or hearing, regardless of what it is. I have heard it all before, and I don't think you could surprise or shock me. I know those threatening and condemning thoughts aren't coming from you, because you "joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man" (Rom. 7:22). As we address each issue, I will try to help you understand this battle for your mind by helping you to renounce the lies and choose the truth.

I always start every session with a verbal prayer acknowledging my total dependence on Him, for

apart from Christ I can do nothing.

LEADING AND CONTROLLING

It is of utmost importance that the leader—rather than the person seeking help—be in control of the session. This is not difficult, and instructions will be given throughout this book. Actually, the One who is in control is the Lord, if the leader is truly the Lord's bond servant. I always start every session with a verbal prayer acknowledging my total dependence on Him, for apart from Christ I can do nothing (see John 15:5).

A loss of control would mean that the person you are helping is no longer in control of his or her own mind. Some form of interference is interrupting the process. Some of the interference you could encounter might include the following:

- Deception (i.e., lies the person believes)—Your most important weapon is to know the truth of God's Word and prayer.
- Fear and flight—If someone does get up to leave, never attempt to restrain or hold the person back. If the person leaves, simply pray and wait patiently. Usually, he or she will return in a few minutes. This happens very rarely and only in extreme cases.
- Mental interference (i.e., confusion, noise, voices in the person's head)—The best way to deal with mental interference is to become aware of it and address it briefly but otherwise to ignore it. Watch the individual carefully, especially the eyes. If the eyes start to cloud over, drift away or lose focus, get the person's attention immediately. If you do not get the person's attention and help him or her assume responsibility for the distracting thoughts, you will lose control. I ask, "What are you thinking?" Or I say, "Share with me what is going on in your mind." When the individual tells me, I always say a thank-you for sharing it with me, no matter how vile or threatening it is.
- Physical interference—Internal interference may manifest itself with physical symptoms. The most common symptoms are pounding headaches and nausea. Simply address the problem directly in prayer, affirming that the enemy is a defeated foe and has no authority to inflict bodily pain. Usually, the physical symptoms stop or subside when the person acknowledges them, allowing you to continue with the Steps.

One lady kept having cramps in her legs throughout the session. She thought it had to be withdrawal from drugs. When she finished, there were no cramps.

THE PRAYER AND DECLARATION

The prayer and declaration at the beginning of the Steps acknowledge our dependence on Christ and our authority in Him. Have counselees pray out loud and then follow the prayer with the declaration. Explain that they do not have to read what is in the parentheses because these things are just explanatory notes or biblical references.

Prayer

Dear heavenly Father, I acknowledge Your presence in this room and in my life. You are the only omniscient (all-knowing), omnipotent (all-powerful) and omnipresent (always present) God. I am dependent on You, for apart from You I can do nothing. I stand in the truth that all authority in heaven and on Earth has been given to the resurrected Christ, and because I am in Christ, I share that authority in order to make disciples and set captives free. I ask You to fill us with Your Holy Spirit and lead me into all truth. I pray for Your complete protection and ask for Your guidance. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

Declaration

In the name and authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, I command Satan and all evil spirits to release me in order that I can be free to know and choose to do the will of God. As a child of God who is seated with Christ in the heavenlies, I command every evil spirit to leave my presence. I belong to God and the evil one cannot touch me.

HEARING THE STORY

I usually hear counselees' stories before I ask them if they would like to go through the Steps. However, the Steps contain a brief list of questions about their family and personal history intended to extract the essential information the encourager needs. In order to help the people stay focused and brief, you may want to preface your time by saying, "I'm going to ask you some questions to learn what I need to know before we go through the Steps together—just a brief

outline of your life. Other pertinent details will surface as we go through the Steps. When I'm finished, I'll give you an opportunity to add anything you might want me to know if you feel it's important."

The primary reason for delving into their history is to understand what they have lived through and how they've responded to it. I always start with the parents and grandparents. Were they Christians? Did they ever participate in any cults or occult experiences? I want to know if there are any generational issues that are contributing to the person's problems. Then you need to hear a brief chronological history of their life, which should include at least the following:

- Marital history of parents and grandparents
- Present circumstances of brothers and sisters
- The spiritual, emotional and physical climate of the home when growing up
- Types of friends
- School experiences
- Traumatic events experienced
- Church experiences
- Frequency and description of nightmares or spiritual visitations, if any
- Thought patterns
- Emotional problems
- Medication, if taking any

The Confidential Personal Inventory in appendix B addresses most of these issues. Hearing people's stories also demonstrates that you care for them. They need to know that you believe them and will not judge them regardless of what you hear. I regularly hear people say, "I know you won't believe me, but … " As they go through the Steps, you will also hear a lot of people say, "I have never told anyone this before."

Remind them that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus and that this is a time for them to be totally open and honest because their freedom depends on it. While listening, take brief notes and mark the issues you might want to address. It is best not to deal with problems while listening to their stories. Wait until the appropriate Step, and do it in that context.

A word of caution: If you use the Confidential Personal Inventory, do not rely upon it totally. Often a person will be reluctant to write down some of the most critical issues you will need to address. On the other hand, using the inventory

may give you an indication of where to gently ask some probing questions. The following is what you should be looking for:

- A dysfunctional family background—mental illness, chronic depression, chronic illness, addictive problems, involvement in the occult or false religions, extreme legalism or control, extreme permissiveness or neglect, an adoption, living overseas under pagan influences, and so on
- Personal problems—depression, fear, anxiety, unresolved anger, a failure to forgive, lust, pride, rebellion, addictions, the occult, mental or physical illness, rape, abortion, compulsive behavior, an evil or frightening presence, difficulty with relationships or sexually deviant behavior
- Spiritual problems—lack of assurance of salvation, false beliefs, not knowing their identity in Christ, not knowing that Satan is a defeated foe, not knowing the limitations of Satan's power or unaware of the nature of the battle for the mind

The above lists are only suggestive of the various kinds of problems for which we should be listening. People do not always know or cannot specifically say what they are in bondage to. But as they tell their stories, there will be indicators—surface issues that point to root problems. The more you meet with people, the more you will become sensitive to what might be an indicator and how to pursue it. Remember, you are not alone in the counseling session—the Holy Spirit knows every detail of everyone's life and promises to be your guide.

A common pitfall is to get bogged down and spend too much time hearing the story. The life history may seem important to the person you are helping, but the resolution comes from going through the Steps, which surfaces the critical issues that need to be addressed. You need to gently guide them through the process of telling their stories and assure them that the details and the abuses of the past will be acknowledged and dealt with as you go through each Step.

Hearing the story should take less than a hour. Normally, a good time to take a break is after Step 2. The time needed for Step 3 will vary greatly because forgiveness is a primary issue and the number one ticket to freedom from the past. After Step 3, you will generally be able to finish within a hour.

CLARIFYING THE SALVATION EXPERIENCE

The Steps to Freedom are designed for people who have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Yet many people who do not have assurance of their salvation come for help. Their lack of assurance is not surprising, considering they are being harassed by the enemy and are believing lies. The very fact that they are troubled about their relationship with God and have turned to the Church for help suggests that they are Christians. The accuser wants us to question our salvation because without it we have no hope. Thoughts such as, *How can you be a Christian and do that?* or *God doesn't love you* are so common that you can almost expect them from anyone with unresolved conflicts.

Many people do not remember the specific time of their salvation decision. The questions in the Confidential Personal Inventory (see appendix B) dealing with spiritual histories will help clarify the issue. If they are uncertain, you may simply ask, "Would you like to follow me in a prayer right now affirming your relationship with Christ?" Then lead them to pray, "Lord Jesus, I thank you for dying on the cross for my sins. I now confess with my mouth that you are my Lord, and I choose to believe in my heart that Jesus was raised from the dead. I now receive You into my life to be my Lord and Savior."

Sometimes non-Christians who have been searching come to an appointment with their hearts so warm and hungry that they gladly choose to believe the truth and invite Christ into their lives.

It is not necessary to belabor this portion of the session or require that they word their testimonies exactly the way you would. These are wounded people who are seeking to be made whole in Christ. As they go through the Steps, they will affirm their relationship with Christ in many more ways. Assurance of salvation comes as they work through the Steps.

IDENTIFYING STRONGHOLDS AND REMOVING GROUND

Taking a person through the Steps to Freedom in Christ is not just a matter of mechanically confessing sins and reading prayers. The goal in counseling people with the Steps is to connect them with God. Those in bondage often lack the objectivity to do this on their own. As a leader, you can help them discern what needs to be addressed.

The Mind

There may be a battle going on for the minds of the people you help. Though

you can pray for them and encourage them, you cannot fight the battle for them. The battle can be won only as they personally choose truth. Their freedom will be the result of what *they* choose to believe, confess, forgive, renounce and forsake. You cannot do these things for them.

Though you can pray for them and encourage them,
you cannot fight the battle for them.

Be prepared also to confront false concepts. Almost all of the people you help will have some false concept about God or themselves that may potentially keep them in bondage. That is why it is highly recommended that they read *Victory over the Darkness* and *The Bondage Breaker,* or hear the audiocassettes before the session. This will save a lot of time because they will already have a basic familiarity with the key concepts, and only a brief review will be necessary.

Appropriate Nonverbal Communication

While they work through painful memories, there is a natural tendency to reach out and hold their hands or pat their shoulders. Most of the time, it is best to avoid touching them until the session has been completed. In severe cases, the conflict within them may cause resistance to the Holy Spirit in you, and touching them will cause them to recoil. I have seen people pushing their chairs away from me as the battle rages in their minds. Those who have experienced sexual abuse could perceive touching as the opposite of what you intended. Some may feel violated by your touch. Your compassion can be conveyed by your facial expression or your words during the session, and perhaps an appropriate hug afterward will be in order.

The difference between an experienced lay leader and one who is beginning to use the Steps is the ability to identify strongholds (or lies) and focus on areas where the person has given ground to the enemy by willful or involuntary involvement in sin. The only way for you to sharpen that ability is *through* experience. It will never be learned fully from a textbook.

STRONGHOLDS CAN SURFACE AT ANY TIME

The evidence of a stronghold, or belief in a lie, can surface at any time during

the session. It may be revealed in the Confidential Personal Inventory (see appendix B), hinted at or stated by the person while you are hearing his or her story, or uncovered while going through the Steps.

For example, when Sue went through the Steps, she first told of a supportive family and of love for her father and mother. Later, she revealed that when she was a little girl someone had robbed her of her innocence by taking advantage of her sexually. When she told her father, he did nothing about it, and she questioned whether he even believed her. Suddenly, she blurted out, "I hate my father." She had not wanted to face and acknowledge that hatred before. The way her father related to her throughout her life—along with the abuses from other men—developed a stronghold in her life that kept her from trusting men or God, her Father.

Strongholds will be clearly identified and destroyed by going through the Steps because the person has believed lies and is now embracing the truth. When Sue recognized and renounced the lies that she was worthless and could not trust anyone, she won the battle. By the end of the conference, she gave me a hug, which was significant because of her previous mistrust. She said, "I believe I can trust now." It is important to tell counselees that defense mechanisms can be identified but not instantly changed. That will take time as they mature in the Lord, but the growth process will never even get started if defense mechanisms are not identified.

MAINTAINING YOUR FREEDOM

Some strongholds—particularly addictions—will be exposed and renounced, but even after the bondage has been broken, the individual will require further discipling and support. Lifestyle issues will continue to surface, and additional counseling will be beneficial if it is Christ-centered.

Tim was caught in the web of homosexual behavior. After going through the Steps in a personal appointment, he was elated with the sense of freedom and joy he felt. A letter received a few weeks later proclaimed his belief that he was now free from the weight of his past. But a second letter, sent a few months after the first, gave a different appraisal.

Tim had taken a step backward, but he had not forgotten what he had learned in going through the Steps. He learned that he had not won a once-and-for-all victory, and that it is one thing to gain freedom and another thing to maintain it. After confession, he began practicing resisting the enemy and choosing truth on

a daily basis. When we saw him nearly a year after first taking him through the Steps, Tim was *maintaining* his freedom daily.

I would encourage you again to read through the stories in *Released from Bondage* as a companion to this book. One chapter deals with the onion effect (see chapter 6 of this book). Another chapter tells of a woman who flew across the country for help. She sent a letter a month later explaining her newfound freedom. Yet six months later, she was back in trouble. The problem was, she had not understood the message, so she really did not know her identity and position in Christ nor understand how to win the battle for her mind. She flew out again and attended a conference, and now she is doing great. Each chapter will help you better understand what people are going through. The remaining chapters in this book will cover each of the seven Steps.



CHAPTER NINE

OVERCOMING FALSE GUIDANCE

The first step to freedom in Christ is to renounce previous or current involvement with any activity or group that denies Jesus Christ, offers guidance through sources contrary to the Word of God or requires secret ceremonies or covenants. “He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy” (Prov. 28:13, *NIV*). To renounce means to forsake or say no to something or someone. Renounce is the First Step toward repentance, which means to turn away *from* one thing and *toward* something else. The Greek word for repentance is *metanoeo.* The word has two components. The first, *meta*, means “after,” which implies change. The second, *noeo*, means “to perceive.” This comes from the root word *nous*, which is usually translated as “mind.” It literally means a change of mind, but it is much more sweeping in its application.

When the Pharisees and the Sadducees came to be baptized by John, “He said to them, ‘You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance’ ” (Matt. 3:7-8). Jesus knew their repentance was incomplete. They wanted the blessing of God but did not want to give up their traditions, practices and religious positions. Simon demonstrated incomplete repentance when Philip preached the gospel in Samaria, even though

he had professed to believe and was baptized. Peter said to him, “You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity” (Acts 8:21-23).

NEEDING TO RENOUNCE SATAN

The public declaration “I renounce you Satan and all your works and all your ways” has historically been a part of the Church’s profession of faith since its earliest days. To this day, Catholics and members of most liturgical churches are required to publicly profess this at confirmation. In the Early Church, believers would literally face west and make that declaration. Then they would face east and declare their belief in God. The statement is only generic, however. Every work of Satan and every way of Satan had to be renounced in order for repentance to be complete.

To be completely free from the past, we have found it necessary for each person to specifically renounce every false religion, false teacher, false practice and every means of false guidance in which he or she has participated. Many people come to our churches and make professions of faith in Christ but continue in their old ways of seeking guidance and continue in their old practices. That is not complete repentance. If we declare something as true, then it is just as important to declare the counterfeit as false. You cannot believe the truth and a lie at the same time and still experience your freedom in Christ.

Some have argued that it is not necessary to renounce Satan and all his ways because all sin has been taken care of at the Cross. It is true that the Cross dealt with the forgiveness of our sins. The Resurrection provided us with new life in Christ, and the ascension of Christ to the right hand of the Father assured us of the authority and power to live a victorious life in Christ. But the moment we are born again, our *minds* are not totally renewed. That is why Paul said, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom. 12:2). The Cross, the Resurrection and the ascension make all that possible. Now we can repent and renew our minds. We can renounce the lies, the false guidance and the false teachers. We can choose the truth because “we have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16).

Many people under the influence of Satan say that Jesus is Lord, but when asked to say "Jesus is my Lord," they simply repeat, "Jesus is Lord."

RECOGNIZING DEMONIC FORCES AT WORK

Paul warned us what we should expect in the end times: "But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Tim. 4:1). Concerning the last days, Jesus said, "For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect" (Matt. 24:24). These deceptive belief systems and false teachings are counterfeits. They may appear to mimic the truth, but they are in fact satanically inspired lies. They are taught by false teachers who often represent themselves as followers of Christ (see 2 Cor. 11:13-15).

When assessing counterfeits of Christianity, no criterion is more important than the doctrine of Jesus Christ. If any person or group will not or cannot say that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the King of kings and the great I AM (see Matt. 26:63-64; John 8:58; 1 Cor. 3:11; Rev. 19:16), then that person or group should be considered suspect. I have had many people under the influence of Satan say that Jesus is Lord, but when I ask them to say "Jesus is my Lord," they simply repeat, "Jesus is Lord." The devil knows that Jesus is the Lord of the universe, but he will not profess Jesus as his Lord, nor will his followers.

A second identifiable trait of false religions and the occult is an offer of salvation or enlightenment through something other than faith in the finished work of Christ. Satan blinds people to the gospel of Jesus Christ because he knows "there is no other name … given among men by which we [may] be saved" (Acts 4:12; see also 2 Cor. 4:4; 11:3-4,14). New Age proponents teach that we are not separated from God by our sin and therefore have no need to repent. They say we *are* God and only need to be enlightened. What a lie!

Third, psychics, gurus, shamans and false prophets offer a special quality of life, esoteric knowledge or special power that is available by tapping into cosmic energy sources, secret rituals, ceremonies or covenants. Every late-night television channel advertises psychics who offer success and guidance to a gullible public.

"Occult" means hidden, concealed or secret, which is in total contrast to God

who does everything in the light. What is really hidden from view, however, is Satan, the puppet master. His goal is to keep humanity in bondage by drawing us away from the truth that would set us free. Genuine repentance is the means by which we experience our freedom, as we renounce the lies and choose the truth.

TAKING A VERBAL STAND

A casual reading of 2 Peter 2:10-11 and Jude 8-10 has led some to believe that we should not make a verbal stand against Satan and his spiritual forces. I believe that is an unfortunate conclusion. Peter is talking about false teachers who do not respect angelic beings. The passage teaches that angels do not bring judgment against them but leave that to God. We should not fear the devil, but we must respect our enemy; and we should thank God for ministering angels that are simply carrying out God's directives.

Jude 9 says that even "Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you!' " There are two important points about this passage: First, believers who take their God-given authority over Satan are not pronouncing a "railing judgment" against anybody. Only God can judge, and we are commanded *not* to judge. Resisting the devil and renouncing our involvement with him is not pronouncing a railing judgment. Believers have the right and the responsibility to exercise their authority in Christ by resisting the devil. Second, look at the context of Jude 9. The passage refers to the time of Moses, when Satan was not a defeated foe and the Church was not seated with Christ in the heavenlies.

Believers are not being self-willed or despising authority when they obey the command to submit to God and choose to resist the devil. On the contrary, they are recognizing God's authority over their lives and His authority over the demonic realm (see Eph. 1:20-21; Col. 2:15; 1 Pet. 3:22). They are taking their rightful position with Christ (see Eph. 2:6) and standing against the devil, using the sword of the Spirit (see 6:17). They are exercising dependent authority in Christ.

The Bible also mentions unregenerate men who try to exert authority over the demonic realm by using rituals and incantations. Such futility can bring disastrous results, as the seven sons of Sceva found out (see Acts 19:11-16). These unbelievers were trying to cast out demons in Jesus' name without an authentic relationship with Him. Their efforts were similar to the occult, which

tries to manipulate the spirit world to do its will.

The biblical example of breaking ties with the past is found in Acts 19:18-20. Many of the new Christians in Ephesus had been deeply involved in false religions and the occult through worship at the Temple of Artemis. Luke writes in verse 18, “Many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices.” The open disclosure of occult practices was followed by the positive action of ridding themselves of anything associated with that darkness. “And many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and began burning them in the sight of everyone” (v. 19).

EXPOSING THE DARKNESS

When we take people through the Steps, we are not fully aware of what needs to be brought into the light. They probably do not realize that their previous religious experiences have given a foothold to the enemy. That is why they pray and ask God to bring to mind all previous involvement with cult or occult practices, false religions and false teachers, whether done knowingly or unknowingly. Often people remember something they had not thought about for many years, and they begin to see how an accumulation of false guidance has influenced their minds.

Two important objectives will be accomplished in Step 1. First, mental strongholds that came from false belief systems will be exposed and broken by agreeing with God through verbal renunciation. Second, people will learn how to handle lies and strongholds that surface later. You are teaching the counselee how to recognize the counterfeit and how to deal with them in the future.

BEGINNING STEP 1

As you begin this Step, you are helping people take back any ground gained by the enemy in their lives, issue by issue, step-by-step. To help them understand the spiritual significance of what they are doing, you may want to use an illustration like the following:

> Suppose there is a 40-year-old man who has never done much right in his life. At a church service, for the first time in his life, he hears about Jesus. His heart responds to the gospel, and he prays, “Lord, I confess that I have sinned. Thank You for dying on the cross for my sins. I choose to believe

that we were raised from the dead in order that I may have eternal life. I now receive You into my life as my Lord and Savior."

If you and I were in the room when that man prayed, we may not have seen anything happen visibly. But in the spiritual realm, his sins were forgiven, and he passed from death to life and from eternity in hell to eternity in heaven. All of this happened because he wanted to be right with God. God hears and answers prayer, and neither Satan nor his demons, nor any other person, could block what God wanted to do in that man's life.

We're going to go through a series of prayers now. Many of them are short, simple prayers like the one that man prayed. As you are honest and sincere before God, every prayer you pray is going to be like the prayer of that man. Bonds the enemy has on your life will be broken because of your authority as God's child.

Explain that everything done in the session is done aloud, because there is no indication in the Bible that Satan can read our minds. God knows our innermost thoughts; but Satan is not God, and we should never ascribe the divine attributes of God to him.

Confessing with the mouth that Jesus is Lord is taught in Romans 10:9-10 and throughout Scripture. Even Jesus stood up against Satan by verbally quoting Scripture. The person you are helping will be declaring verbally that he or she is under the protection and authority of Jesus, choosing allegiance to Him and renouncing ties to the evil one.

The person begins by praying the first prayer in Step 1 aloud:

Dear heavenly Father,
I ask You to bring to my mind anything and everything that I have done knowingly or unknowingly that involves occult, cult or non-Christian teachings or practices. I want to experience Your freedom by renouncing all counterfeit teachings and practices. In Jesus' name, amen.

CHECKING THE LISTS

Those you help should silently read the Non-Christian Spiritual Checklist, found in *The Steps to Freedom in Christ*, placing a check mark by any activity they have been involved with. They have asked the Lord to reveal that to their minds, so trust the Lord that He will do so. God is the One who grants repentance,

leading to the knowledge of the truth, so that they may escape from the snare of the devil (see 2 Tim. 2:25-26). They should take seriously any impression they receive and check it. There is no harm in renouncing a counterfeit, even if they have not been involved. It is essential not to overlook anything God has surfaced.

Sometimes people ask for a definition of the terms. Answer with just a sentence or two. Some encouragers prefer to read the list to the people they are helping, giving a brief explanation of each item and having them check the ones that apply.

It is not necessary to know or understand every cult, false religion or occult practice in order to help people, though you need to be familiar with the terms. They must be honest about their participation, because they cannot just generally renounce a cult. They need to renounce false beliefs and practices, as well as all the vows, covenants and pledges they made. For instance, one lady who came out of the Mormon Church needed to renounce her secret initiation and the ceremonies in baptisms and marriages for the dead in which she participated.

If you are unfamiliar with something they have participated in, have them explain what their participation was. If they checked something but are not sure they participated in it, explain that they are simply renouncing any trust in the occult and breaking any possible connection. Explain that seeking guidance through an intermediary, such as a medium (present-day channeler) or spiritist, is strictly forbidden by God (see Lev. 19:31). God does not take lightly false guidance and will cut off those who do.

One area that sometimes needs explanation is sexual spirits. Demons may manifest themselves in vivid sexual dreams or fantasies, or by a presence in their room that aroused them sexually. Some may be reluctant to share what they experienced because of its vile nature and their embarrassment. If they stood against it at the time, there is nothing to renounce. It is no sin to be under attack. If they participated with the sexual spirits, they need to renounce any involvement and every sexual use of their bodies as an instrument of unrighteousness. I am fully aware that some in the Christian community deny this possibility, but they only reveal their lack of experience. Our ministry has helped many who have struggled with this.

The Non-Christian Spiritual Checklist is not exhaustive, so when they have finished checking off the items, ask them if they are aware of anything else they have participated in that they should renounce. One lady tripled the size of the list given in the Steps! Let the Holy Spirit bring those items to their mind, and as

He does, have them make their own list. Any number of things might surface: books, photos, movies, music or other materials, religious customs or traditions, praying to idols or angels by name, beliefs such as atheism, agnosticism, hedonism or pharisaic control groups.

Most will not add items to the checklist, and it is not the leader's responsibility to exhaust the possibilities. Use discernment and allow God to guide them.

Asking Nine Additional Questions

When they are finished, proceed to the nine questions included after the checklist. Have the person underline any area of involvement or write a brief explanation.

Question 1 asks if they have had some kind of demonic encounter in their house or room at home. What did they do about it, and how has this affected what they believe? Did they make some deal with the devil? I have had several recall that an evil presence entered their room and they made some kind of agreement with it. The Lord revealed to a lady during this step that a dark presence who entered her room when she was a child spoke to her mind saying, "I will not kill you if you let me share your body with you." A seminary student could not stop pulling out her hair. When I asked her how long that had been going on, she did not want to say because some deep dark secret had kept her in bondage for years. I had her pray and ask the Lord to reveal what that secret was. Coerced by a demonic spirit, she told the devil one night that she loved him. She was too ashamed to tell anybody and feared that she committed the unpardonable sin. She was instantly free when she renounced that.

Question 2 asks if they have had any recurring nightmares. Is there a present fear associated with these dreams? Are the nightmares related to anything they have seen or heard before? If not, these nightmares will usually end if they process the steps successfully.

Question 3 asks if they have ever had imaginary friends, spirit guides or some kind of angel offering counsel or guidance. One lady referred to them as her guardians. Many children play imaginary games and have imaginary friends, but if the imaginary friend is talking back to them, it is not imaginary. These counterfeit guides should be renounced specifically. Often these spirit guides came during trauma or abandonment experiences when they were young. Some are reluctant to renounce them. An elder in a church would not do so, even

though he knew it was not the Holy Spirit guiding him. It is not unusual for some people to experience sorrow as they choose to break and renounce these "companions" that have been with them for some time.

Parents need to exercise discernment in evaluating the imaginary friends of their children. We do not want to stifle the creativity of young children. We all played make-believe to some extent. However, when the imaginary friends talk back, visit a child at night or in dreams, tell them to do things that are wrong or offer guidance counter to their parents, there is legitimate reason to be concerned.

Question 4 asks about the battle for their mind. Many believe that negative, blasphemous and condemning thoughts are their own. When I ask them if they want to believe those thoughts and if these thoughts reflect what they want to believe, they immediately say no. Then why do they think those thoughts are theirs? That is the nature of deception. The enemy is also the accuser of the brethren. Almost everyone has dealt with condemning thoughts that come directly from the enemy or indirectly from the harmful programming of their minds. In either case, these thoughts must be taken captive and not be allowed to control their lives (see 2 Cor. 10:5). They would need to confess that they have paid attention to deceiving spirits, and to renounce any lies that they have believed as a result of these attacks.

Some may even believe they do not have a choice; but they do. Consider the following illustration:

> If I were to come to your house tonight and knock on your door, you would first come to the door to see who is there, and then you would have a choice to make. You could open the door to allow me to come in, or you could close the door to deny me access. In the same way, when the enemy tries to invade your mind with lies and accusations, you have a choice to make. You can choose to allow those thoughts to come in, or you can deny them access. To "open the door" to enemy lies, you simply remain passive. You let him set the agenda for your thoughts. To "close the door," you take your thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ. You can choose to believe the truth or you can choose to believe a lie. You can choose to think bad thoughts, or you can choose to think upon that which is lovely, pure and right. It is your choice.

Their minds can be a quiet sanctuary for them and God. Jesus gave His life for their peace of mind.

You should reinforce how important it is for counselees to assume responsibility for their own thoughts. Some may not realize how passive they have been about entertaining negative thoughts. Others have never even considered the possibility of *not* obeying what they are paying attention to. People in recovery groups often encourage one another not to pay attention to the "committee" in their heads and to stop their "stinking thinking."

Their minds can be a quiet sanctuary for them and God. Jesus gave His life for their peace of mind. This is a decision they need to make. When they pray to renounce the other items they have checked, encourage them to personalize the following prayer:

Lord, I confess that I have paid attention to voices or thoughts in my mind. I have believed and obeyed those repeating, nagging, condemning thoughts. They do not represent what I now choose to believe, and I renounce them all.

Questions 5 through 7 ask about their involvement with mediums, beings they thought were aliens and any secret vows or pledges they have made. It is helpful to ask what impact these experiences have had on them. Then they need to specifically renounce every involvement.

Question 8 asks about the possibility of any involvement with satanism. Have they participated in satanic rituals (which could have been practiced in a group or independently, passively or actively)? If there is any history of satanic ritual or secretive rituals indicated—or if you suspect it by the volume of the items checked on the cult and occult lists, by family involvement or by obvious blocked memories—you will want to have them read the Special Renunciations for Satanic Ritual Involvement in the appendix of the Steps. This is done separately at the conclusion of this Step.

Finally, question 9 relates to any religious or spiritual experience that was not of God. This would include experiences such as being visited at night by an evil presence or apparition, having believed particular superstitions as children, having visited a questionable church or having participated in some offbeat religious experience. They should mention any demonically oriented dreams and nightmares, counterfeit experiences or gifts. A missionary in China participated in a Buddhist temple funeral in which he had to take off his shoes before he

entered. He felt uncomfortable about doing it at the time, and that night he came under intense attack. It did not stop until he renounced that act of worship to pagan gods.

There are authentic spiritual gifts, but it is not uncommon for the evil one to counterfeit these gifts. One person was paranoid with fear because her New Age masseuse and mentor had whispered and prayed over her many times to receive gifts before she became a Christian. Many cults practice tongues, and there are apparent healings taking place in occult practices. Some have been exposed to these and other practices and have been deceived into believing that they were in a Christian context. If they raise the issue, doubting the authenticity of a gift they have received, they can simply pray, "Lord, if this gift of [name the gift] is not from You, I renounce it." Include anything that has unusual spiritual connotations, but let the *Lord* bring it to their minds.

Do not spend an inordinate amount of time exploring every minute detail of any one item that needs to be renounced. It is usually sufficient to cover the basic issue and move on through the Steps to Freedom.

I have learned that testing the spirits is a responsibility that is best put back on those I am helping. I encourage them to pray, asking the Lord to show them the true nature of their gifts, experiences and thoughts.

CONFESSING AND RENOUNCING

The person you are helping should confess his or her involvement and renounce the group or activity individually, repeating this prayer aloud for each counterfeit checked or written on the page:

Lord, I confess that I have participated in [name the group or activity], *and I renounce* [name the group or activity]. *Thank You that in Christ I am forgiven.*

You could demonstrate this by reading the first prayer yourself: "Lord, I confess that I have participated in the Ouija board (or whatever his or her first item is), and I renounce the Ouija board." There is nothing wrong with renouncing them all at once and then saying, "I renounce all these counterfeits of true guidance."

KEEPING CONTROL

In order to maintain control you must be aware of what is happening with the person you are helping. Stay alert and watch their eyes. Make sure you catch any omissions from their lists as they pray. Have them tell you if they are experiencing any interference of any kind: negative thoughts, voices or a feeling of sickness or pain.

Since most people are not accustomed to saying everything they think and feel, you can help by watching their eyes and facial expressions and by listening to their tone of voice. You can often detect interference before there is a loss of control and ask, “Share with me what is going on. What are you hearing?”

Those issues need to be addressed promptly to maintain control. Usually, for the person to say aloud what is happening is enough to break the harassment. If necessary, you can pray in the authority of Christ against the interference. In rare cases, a person will continue to be bombarded with voices. If this happens, you can give the following illustration:

> Suppose we’re trying to carry on a conversation in a room where there are speakers playing loud music or there is a talk show blaring on the television set. If we wanted to continue our conversation, we would have to simply ignore the speakers. In the same way, you can choose to ignore those voices or thoughts. You can choose to believe, “I’m a child of God, and I will continue to work through the issues and find my freedom in Christ.”

He is Lord of their problems, Lord of the harvest and Lord of their future.

When a person takes authority in that way, the problem usually subsides. Remember that these are just distracting noises and thoughts.

EVALUATING YOUR PRIORITIES

If you sense that counselees have objects of worship greater than God, turn to appendix A in the Steps and help them evaluate their priorities. The Lordship of Christ is not a negative doctrine. If they make Jesus the Lord of their lives, then He is the Lord of their problems, Lord of the harvest and Lord of their future.

Anything we put ahead of Jesus is an idol that must be torn down if we are going to experience the blessing of knowing Him. He will have no other gods before Him.

RENOUNCING SATAN

The majority of people you lead through the Steps will not require the Special Renunciations for Satanic Ritual Involvement. But you should consider using them if there has been an actual memory of an event or events, ritual involvement by family members or a family history of the occult or cults, an extremely large number of cult or occult items checked, severe nightmares, sexual dysfunction or blocked memories. (One encourager, who is herself a survivor of child molestation, takes people with that background through the renunciations. She feels that a child's innocence and virtue was sacrificed to Satan through the molestation.) You have nothing to lose by having a person go through these renunciations, and you may surface some very important information that will be necessary for resolution.

If people have been involved in satanic rituals, covenants and assignments, they need to renounce each one as the Lord reveals something. Some people will already be aware of the issues; for others, the memories may surface as they work through the renunciations.

At first I had trouble believing the stories of those who were professing to be victims of satanic ritual abuse (SRA). After hearing enough stories, I started to see a remarkable pattern: Every satanic renunciation is an antithesis of true Christianity. What we are up against is the antichrist. Our names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. Satanists will sign their names or force others to sign their names in a goat's book of life. We are the Bride of Christ. Satanists will have a mock ceremony where they are wed to Satan. They literally drink blood and eat flesh during a satanic ritual. Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves" (John 6:53). We celebrate this truth symbolically in Communion. You can see what they are counterfeiting in each one of their rituals.

HELPING COUNSELEES WITH MULTIPLE PERSONALITY DISORDER

Many SRA victims end up with a multiple personality disorder (MPD). The terminology has changed recently to dissociative identity disorder (DID). This is

a severe defense mechanism that allows SRA victims to develop somewhat normally apart from the rituals. Those who dissociate in order to cope with abuse are better off than those who do not. I personally have never come across a true DID who does not have severe demonic problems. I suppose it can happen, but I have never seen it.

In every conference we conduct all across the country, we always meet with one or more DID sufferers. During our advanced conferences, when I ask how many encouragers and pastors are dealing with this, many will raise their hands. This is not some isolated phenomenon that a few extremists are waving the flag about. Professional Christian counselors and pastors are dealing with it in every community in our country. One does not have to be ritually abused to have DID. It can happen for any extreme abuse, such as incest.

Such dissociative disorders go beyond the scope of this book. However, let me make some general comments. Try as best you can to help the host personality and any other primary personalities to resolve their spiritual issues first. We take people through the Steps and all the general satanic renunciations and have them renounce any other specific assignments, rituals or covenants that they made or were forced to make. They do not always know whether the voices in their heads are demonic or other personalities. Eventually, every personality that surfaces will need to resolve its own issues and agree to come together in Christ. It may sound simple, but it is not.

Remember that you can make three serious mistakes with victims of SRA. The first is trying to cast out a personality or asking the victim to tell it to go away. It cannot leave. It is a part of them. Such rejection will only further alienate the already damaged personality.

The second error is trying to integrate a demon into a personality. I have seen or heard about well-meaning pastors and encouragers making both of these mistakes. Each holds great potential for harm.

The third error is treating everything you hear as gospel fact. If the devil can deceive you with his lies, he is certainly capable of putting in a few false memories. I would never accuse a suspected abuser based only on what I heard in a counseling session unless I had some other external, objective and “hard” evidence to support it. That is especially true when the accusations are against a leader in your church. Paul says, “Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses” (1 Tim. 5:19). I believe that our major obligation is to set the captive free; we do not have to make any accusations of others to do that. Let God deal with them. “Never take your own

revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord" (Rom. 12:19).

Accepting What Victims Recall

On the other hand, I am going to believe what victims tell me for their sakes, because that is what they recall, and therefore, that is what they have to resolve. If I discern that what they are "recalling" is nothing but deceptive lies, then I have them pray, asking the Lord to reveal the source of their "memories." I never trust what they recover in dreams. Nor do I trust other well-meaning people who say they heard from God what another's problem is. God does not work through mediums. We are working with God's children, and He will reveal it to them. "For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5).

If there has not been any known involvement in satanic rituals, but you suspect some satanic roots for their problem, you may want to preface their declarations by saying:

> I'd like to ask you to work through the satanic renunciations, even though we don't know for sure whether you were involved or whether any of these things actually happened. What we do know is that renouncing a lie that has never been believed or an experience that has never happened will not do any harm. We are not suggesting that it has happened to you; we are just checking to see if anything bad has happened to you. Plus, you are not only renouncing the counterfeit, but you are also announcing the truth about your relationship with Christ.

The renunciations and announcements are read across the page—first renouncing the act in the kingdom of darkness, and then announcing the truth in the kingdom of light.

Trusting God In the Process

Trust the Holy Spirit to guide you, just as you trust Him to guide the person you are helping. When George went through the Steps, he was heavily in bondage to sexual addictions. He had no memory of being involved in satanic rituals. But when he told about the things he practiced, they sounded so ritualistic that the

encourager asked him to go through the satanic renunciations. When he came to the statement “I renounce any and all covenants that I made with Satan,” George pushed his chair back, covered his face with his hands and began to sob, saying, “I think I did that.”

At that moment, George recalled a time when he was alone in the bathroom, and Satan appeared to him as an image in the mirror, promising all the beautiful women he could ever want if only he would tell Satan that he loved him. George resisted at first but then began to see visions of beautiful women until he finally responded to Satan’s invitation. That was an opening for the enemy in George’s life, and he was exploited by other abusive experiences that put him in deep sexual bondage. That day, those bondages were addressed and broken, and with continuing help, George is now a free man.

Before we leave this Step, we sometimes advise people to discard any books, photos, materials, artifacts, music or any other items or gifts they own that may be tied to anything on their list. These may be symbols of allegiance to other gods, and if so, they are counterproductive to walking in the kingdom of light. Follow the example found in Acts 19:19, where believers got rid of anything associated with darkness. Recognizing that Satan could continue to use the tools of their former religious practices, they publicly destroyed about 50,000 days’ wages worth of books, a mind-boggling sum. These New Testament believers would make any sacrifice to be rid of Satan’s influence in their lives and prevent his further influence in their families.

HELPING COUNSELEES CHOOSE TRUTH

While going through the Steps, you may discern or hear of specific events that have had a dramatic effect on the life of the person you are helping or specific lies he or she has believed. You can lead the person to directly renounce them.

For example, in one session a woman had nagging fears and anxieties about her experiences with her aunt who was heavily involved in witchcraft. She was helped to pray, “I renounce any way in which Satan is using my relationship with my aunt against me. I renounce anything she said or did to me and anything she may have done on my behalf. And I thank You, Lord, that I am not a victim of those experiences. I am a child of God and free to be the person You want me to be.”

Another woman had been led into a life of prostitution by her mother. She remembered that at a very young age a fortune-teller said to her, “Honey, you

have a beautiful face and body. That will help you make it through life." She was led to renounce that false prophet and the lies that she should use her appearance and body to make it through life. Then she was encouraged to announce the truth "that [her] body is a temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 6:19) and that "God [would] supply all [her] needs" (Phil. 4:19). Whenever you renounce a lie or any counterfeit experience, you should also affirm the truth and the Christian practices that enable us to live free in Christ.



CHAPTER TEN

OVERCOMING DECEPTION

When Julie came to one of our conferences, there was no question about her deep desire to find her freedom in Christ. She did not just ask for an appointment to go through the Steps—she pursued it! As the session began, it did not take long to find out why. With deep emotion, she told the story of her troubled life: a violent alcoholic father, sexual molestation, pornography, demonic experiences in her room and exploitation by legalists at church.

She earnestly dealt with Step 1 of *The Steps to Freedom in Christ* on false guidance, which added to her composure as she went through Step 2. It was at the end of this Step that a wonderful thing happened. After reading through the doctrinal affirmation, she put her book down and looked at me. Tears welled up in her eyes. Overwhelmed with the truth of who God is and who she is in Christ, she said, "Wow! That is soooo great!"

TRUTH LIBERATES

Our Lord had just partaken of His Last Supper with His disciples. He knew the path toward the Cross was set before Him, and He knew that He would soon be leaving Earth. Left behind would be 11 of the chosen 12 apostles, who would face the god of this world and continue the work that Christ had begun. Satan had already deceived one of the disciples into betraying Christ.

Jesus turned to the Father and prayed, “I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one” (John 17:15). Then His prayer revealed how this can be accomplished. “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth” (v. 17).

Believing the truth about who Christ is, why He came and who we are in Him is the basis for our freedom. Knowing the truth set forth in God’s Word is the mark of a true disciple.

> If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free (John 8:31-32).

Girding our loins with truth is our first line of defense against the father of lies (see Eph. 6:14). We acknowledge this truth in the inner self (see Ps. 51:6) because a genuine faith is more than just intellectual assent or the accumulation of knowledge. God’s truth must penetrate the heart, the very core of our being. Only then will His truth bring freedom and lasting change in the inner self.

THE NEED FOR TRANSPARENCY

We have been called to speak the truth in love and walk in the light, which means that our lives should be transparent before God and honest with others. Anything less and we are living a lie. David was living a lie when he covered up his sin with Bathsheba, and he suffered greatly. He finally found freedom by acknowledging the truth. He wrote, “How blessed is the man … in whose spirit there is no deceit!” (Ps. 32:2). In Psalm 51:6, he wrote, “Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being.”

People who are caught in the bondage of sin lie. Bulimics lie about their bingeing and purging. Alcoholics hide their addictions and secretly stash bottles around the house. Sex addicts can keep their sin hidden for years. The first step in recovery is to get out of denial and face the truth. The only thing a Christian must admit to is the truth.

> If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:6-7).

One of the primary reasons Julie, the girl mentioned earlier, found so much resolution is that she held back nothing. She was ready to walk in the light and speak the truth to someone who knew how that truth could set her free. She found forgiveness, cleansing and freedom. Truth is never the enemy; it is a liberating friend. Jesus is the perfect embodiment of truth, the liberating light, the best friend a man or woman could ever have. “In Him there is no darkness at all” (v. 5). Jesus is the truth, and He is setting people free.

SATAN IS THE DECEIVER

Jesus described Satan as the father of lies. “Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44). He cannot speak from truth because there is no truth in him. He can distort the truth, and he will even quote Scripture, as he did when he tempted Jesus (see Matt. 4:6).

Satan keeps people in bondage by deceiving them and by blinding the minds of those who do not believe (see 2 Cor. 4:4; Rev. 12:9). It follows that the power of Satan is in the lie and that the battle is for the mind. If he is able to deceive Christians into believing a lie, then they will live in spiritual impotency. He cannot do anything about our identity and position in Christ; but if he can get us to believe it is not true, then we will live as though it is not true. When the lies are exposed, Satan’s power over the believer is broken.

Asking the Lord to reveal the deception and then declaring the truth in the doctrinal affirmation in this Step is a powerful experience for many who have been deceived for years. Some, like Julie, will become increasingly confident as they verbalize the truth. Some will struggle just trying to read through the doctrinal affirmation.

Most Christians honestly desire to live righteous lives but have distorted concepts of God and are ignorant of their position and identity in Christ. As they make this public declaration of faith before witnesses (prayer partners), they are choosing God’s truth about His nature, character and redemptive plan for their life.

THE BATTLE IS FOR THE MIND

Satan will twist Scripture or tell half-truths to subtly deceive. We must trust God to expose the deceit, remembering that “the weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish

strongholds" (2 Cor. 10:4, *NIV*). In this step, we use truth to "demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (v. 5, *NIV*).

As the person you are helping processes this Step, be dependent on the Lord for discernment. Step 1 is by far the most spiritually contested, but this Step can be as well. That is why we do these two Steps first. So let me remind you again to pay close attention to the people you are trying to help. Watch their eyes and look for any indication of interference. If they start to drift away, get their attention immediately. Ask them questions like Where is that coming from? and Is that the truth, or is it a lie? You are helping to expose the nature of the battle for their minds.

One lady suddenly said, "Do you know what I'm hearing now? It's just a thought! That's all it is! I don't have to believe that trash anymore." She got it. Another lady approached me at a conference with a bunch of cards she had printed up and was handing out to anyone who wanted one. Each card contained the questions, "Where did that thought come from? A loving God?"

Sometimes the voices, noises or laughter in the background of the person's mind is too overwhelming for him or her. You may have to stop and pray as you did at the beginning of the counseling session, or have the person exercise authority by calling upon the name of the Lord and telling the voices to stop in Jesus' name. One person could not get through the doctrinal statement without my prayer support. It was as though her tongue was swelling up in her mouth. Her speaking became garbled. Four times I had to command Satan to release her by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The primary approach is to maintain control by exposing the lies and revealing the battle for the mind and then ignoring the lies. Help people to understand the concept of not paying attention to deceiving spirits. Remember, freedom does not come from swatting flies, it comes from taking out the garbage. The way we overcome the father of lies is by choosing the truth. We are not called to dispel the darkness; we are called to turn on the light. The freedom progressively comes by resolving the conflicts. The noise in their heads is just an attempt by the enemy to get them off the track that leads to freedom.

We are not called to dispel the darkness; we are called to turn on the light.

OTHER SYMPTOMS OF ATTACK

Let me remind you again that during the Steps to Freedom, the counselee may feel physical symptoms such as nausea, light-headedness or headaches. Though these sensations are very real, you should recognize them as nothing more than harassment. The strategy of Satan is to get people to respond in fear, which elevates him as the ultimate fear object. God is the only legitimate fear object because He alone is omnipresent and omnipotent. Fear of anything other than God is mutually exclusive to faith in God.

In most cases, the physical pain will subside when the counselee shares it, but like the voices, the best approach is to ignore it. The symptoms will disappear as the conflicts are resolved. If the counselee seemingly cannot go on, then pray as you did for the voices or have him or her declare: "I renounce this attack and announce that my body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, and I choose to continue to seek my freedom."

While reading the doctrinal affirmation, a person may say, "I feel like I'm just reading words," or "I'm not connecting."

You can help the person by asking, "Isn't it your desire to be sincere?"

The person will answer, "Yes."

Then gently direct them, "Renounce the lie that you are just reading words, and declare the truth that this Scripture is what you choose to believe." It will be evident to you when someone has difficulty reading the doctrinal statement. Critical points of truth are being contested. Like buzzards hovering over a dying animal, it indicates where the problem is. Having the person renounce the lies he or she has believed or is presently hearing and choose the truth will thwart the plans of the buzzards and bring life to the dying body.

Marcy's difficulty in getting through the Steps was not that she had been involved in gross sins or satanism. She was a sincere and attractive Christian who was being mentally beaten up with lies and accusations. She had been deceived into thinking that God was not a good God, that she could not trust Him and that she would never be free from her past. This fragile lady had to be guided through the Steps slowly and gently, renouncing all the lies as they surfaced. A few days later, she wrote this:

> God is different from what my concept of Him has been, and I *choose* to trust that new concept. I am His child, and I choose to believe that He will relate to me as a good Father would. I am a new person. This day is new,

and I eagerly wait to experience it as a new creation, free from my past.

ADDRESSING STEP 2

We have not found it necessary to explain every detail of the Steps. Most people will have previously read or heard the teaching. I usually give a brief explanation of what we are trying to resolve and then ask the person to pray the prayer at the beginning of each Step. God is the one who reveals and grants repentance. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth, and He will lead them into all truth—the truth that liberates.

We encourage people to read through the Steps at home after we are done. Most will read through them more thoroughly, and many will work through issues that surface later or issues they chose not to deal with in the encourager's presence. Our desire is to move them along with understanding, to deal with lies they have believed and to overcome resistance or to reinforce the truth they need to hear.

The Steps to Freedom in Christ is written in such a way that people can go through the Steps on their own. We are receiving letters from people all over the world who have done just that. Some people have started taking others through the Steps by reading all of the light print and asking the person they are helping to pray the prayers. You may choose to do that as well, or you may want to underline and read the main points. In any case, it is God who sets people free, and He will use you regardless of your experience if you are yielded to Him and compassionate toward others.

An easy way to bridge from Step 1 to Step 2 would be to simply say:

> In Step 1 we dealt with counterfeit Christian guidance. In Step 2 we want to determine if you have been deceived in any way. Scripture does say that we can fall away from the faith by paying attention to deceiving spirits [see 1 Tim. 4:1]. We can also deceive ourselves and wrongly defend ourselves. We need God's help to determine this.

Then ask the person to pray aloud the following prayer:

Dear heavenly Father,
I know that You want me to know the truth, believe the truth, speak the truth and live in accordance with the truth. Thank You that the truth will set me free. In

many ways I have been deceived by Satan, the father of lies, and I have deceived myself as well. Father, I pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ by virtue of His shed blood and resurrection, asking You to rebuke all evil spirits that are deceiving me. I have trusted in Jesus alone to save me, and so I am Your forgiven child. Therefore, since You accept me just as I am in Christ, I can be free to face my sin and not try to hide. I ask for the Holy Spirit to guide me into all truth. I ask You to "search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way" [Ps. 139:23-24]. In the name of Jesus, who is the truth, amen.

After they have prayed the prayer, briefly explain the following:

> Satan's purpose is to cause us to think and live contrary to God's plan for us. Some of the ways he tries to do this are included in the three lists: Ways You Can Be Deceived by the World, Ways You Can Deceive Yourself and Ways You Wrongly Defend Yourself. Scripture reveals several ways that we can be deceived by the world and deceive ourselves, and before we came to Christ, we learned how to defend ourselves in order to survive. Now that we have come to Christ we no longer have to do that. Christ is our defense. We are forgiven and accepted just as we are. This is what allows us to be honest and real people, who walk in the light and speak the truth in love. We don't have to hide, cover up or pretend anymore. We may have done all of those things at one time or another in our lives. But what I'd like you to do is to take your pen and quietly go through those lists and place a check mark in front of the items that you can identify as patterns of behavior in your life.

Then just sit quietly, and let the person go through the following lists. Occasionally, there will be a question about the meaning of one or two of the statements that will require a brief explanation. (As an alternative, you may choose to read the statements aloud and have the people you are helping check the items that apply to them personally.)

Ways You Can Be Deceived by the World

- Believing that acquiring money and things will bring lasting happiness (see Matt. 13:22; 1 Tim. 6:10)

- Believing that excessive food and alcohol can relieve my stress and make me happy (see Prov. 20:1; 23:19-21)
- Believing that having an attractive body and personality will get me what I want (see 1 Pet. 3:3-4)
- Believing that gratifying sexual lust will bring lasting satisfaction (see Eph. 4:22; 1 Pet. 2:11)
- Believing that I can sin without any negative consequences (see Heb. 3:12-13)
- Believing that I need more than what God has given me in Christ (see 2 Cor. 11:2-4,13-15)
- Believing that I can do whatever I want and that no one can touch me (see Prov. 16:18; Obad. 3; 1 Pet. 5:5)
- Believing that unrighteous people who refuse to accept Christ go to heaven anyway (see 1 Cor. 6:9-11)
- Believing that I can associate with bad company and not be corrupted (see 1 Cor. 15:33-34)
- Believing that I can read, see or listen to anything and not be corrupted (see Prov. 4:23-27; 6:27-28; Matt. 5:28)
- Believing that there are no consequences on Earth for my sin (see Gal. 6:7-8)
- Believing that I must gain the approval of certain people in order to be happy (see Gal. 1:10)
- Believing that I must measure up to certain standards in order to feel good about myself (see Gal. 3:2; 5:1)

Ways You Can Deceive Yourself

- Hearing God's Word but not doing what it says (see Jas. 1:22)
- Saying that I have no sin (see 1 John 1:8)
- Thinking I am something I'm really not (see Gal. 6:3)
- Thinking I am wise in this worldly age (see 1 Cor. 3:18-20)
- Thinking I can be truly religious but not bridle my tongue (see Jas. 1:26)

Ways You Can Wrongly Defend Yourself

- Denial of reality (conscious or unconscious)
- Fantasy (escaping reality by daydreaming, watching TV or movies,

listening to music, playing computer or video games, abusing drugs or alcohol, etc.)
- Emotional insulation (withdrawing from people or keeping people at a distance to avoid rejection)
- Regression (reverting back to less threatening times)
- Displaced anger (taking out frustrations on innocent people)
- Projection (Blaming others for my problems)
- Rationalization (making excuses for my own poor behavior)
- Lying (presenting a false image)

Identifying areas of self-deception and self-defense is a way for people to discover wrong beliefs so that they can continue to deal with them. Some people will read quickly through the lists, make their check marks and be finished in just a minute or two. Some will labor over the lists, being very subjective and slow in making a decision. Resist the temptation to help them check their lists, but encourage them to take responsibility the best they can. The way you can help most is to keep encouraging them to trust the Holy Spirit and to go ahead and make a decision.

As they go through these lists, people with backgrounds of severe trauma may check many or all of the items under self-defense and may express concern about that. Encourage them by explaining that as they realize their true identities in Christ, they will know that they are forgiven and totally accepted by Him, that He is the only defense they need and that they will begin learning how to live new healthy ways.

You should explain to them that they cannot instantly renew their minds. Defense mechanisms have been learned over time and they have to be unlearned, which will take time. The purpose in this Step is to identify the ways they have been deceived and to expose unhealthy defense mechanisms. It reveals where they need to grow. Deciding what they have been doing is wrong is the first step to future growth. Many will make major changes quite rapidly. They can choose to stop lying, get out of denial, stop blaming others, etc. Each item they checked could indicate need for further counseling in that area.

When they have completed each list, encourage them to commit the items they checked to the Lord by using the prayers that follow each one. They do not have to repeat the prayer separately for each item they checked. They can read the prayer once; and when they come to the blank, they can read their entire list of the things they checked in both categories; and then finish the prayer.

CHOOSING THE TRUTH

The paragraphs in the Steps that precede the doctrinal affirmation are important and in many cases should be covered. I explain: “Choosing the truth may be difficult if you have been living a lie for many years, and believing the truth is a choice. Of course you can believe God. Faith is something you decide to do, not something you feel like doing.” You may want to read those paragraphs aloud or have them read them and see if they have any questions. Some people do not realize that faith is a choice.

The Importance of Objectivity

One of the values of being led through the Steps by another believer is having someone more objective about the person’s life than the person is able to be. The most difficult people to work with are those who are highly subjective and passive. They believe any little thought that comes to their mind. They have never understood the need to assume responsibility for their own thoughts. One person told me, “The idea of taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ never crossed my mind.”

Their feelings and thoughts tell them that they are hopeless and they need someone to do something *for* them. They are prime candidates for cults or legalistic pastors who maintain control over their people by doing their thinking for them. These people believe that God will not hear their prayers, that they do not have enough faith or that it will work for others but not for them. Those lies have been played over and over again in their minds for many years. They need to know that they are not helpless victims and that there is hope for them, but they will need to personally assume responsibility for choosing the truth, regardless of how they feel.

Some people think they are helpless victims with no will of their own. You could gently point out any lie that surfaces and help them exercise their choice to renounce verbally the lie and choose the truth. That will begin to expose and break the spiritual strongholds, but habitual patterns of denial and deception will need to be changed over time. It may be helpful to share the following illustration:

> Suppose there is a dirt road leading to your house in the country. If you continually drive over that road the same exact way, ruts will be formed over time. The sun will dry those ruts and make them hard as concrete.

> The easiest thing is to allow the car to drift along in those ruts. It will be a rough ride compared to the smooth ride that you could have on the surface right beside the ruts. When you only make a halfhearted effort to steer out of them, you will immediately feel the resistance on the wheel to return to the ruts in the road.
>
> If you want to get out of the rut, you will have to be totally committed and willing to make deliberate choices. In the same way, if you no longer want to be controlled by the strongholds or "rut thinking" that the world, the flesh and the devil has cemented in your mind over years, you need to be committed to breaking those strongholds and make deliberate choices based on the truth of God's Word. You choose; you don't passively let your old patterns of thinking decide. You take every thought captive in obedience to Christ and choose His truth. This is how we renew our minds —by knowing and choosing the truth, and by letting the Word of Christ richly dwell within us (see Rom. 12:2; Phil. 4:8; Col. 3:16).

The Truth About Your Heavenly Father

To some degree or another, all of us have had thoughts raised up against the knowledge of God. Appendix C in *The Steps to Freedom in Christ* is an exercise to help people choose the truth about God and renounce the lies they have believed about Him. This can be a powerful exercise for some.

Are You Fearful and Anxious?

Anxiety disorders are the number one health problem in the world. In appendices D and E in *The Steps to Freedom in Christ*, there are exercises to help those who are struggling with fear and/or anxiety. I suggest that you also read *Freedom from Fear* since these problems are so prevalent.[1]

The Doctrinal Affirmation

To some people, I have read out loud the doctrinal affirmation, which is mainly Scripture. I preface it by saying, "As you read out loud this doctrinal affirmation, let me know if you have any mental interference." If there is, it usually reveals a truth they have struggled to believe. A few may really struggle reading it, as I mentioned earlier. No matter how difficult it may be for them to read through, encourage them to persevere. This is an opportunity for them to take a stand and to testify to God and themselves who they are in Christ. If there is a word or statement they do not understand, take the time to explain it.

After they have completed the Steps, I have often used the doctrinal statement as a litmus test to show those who struggled with reading it during the Steps the immediate effect of their freedom. I say to them, “Remember how difficult it was to read through that doctrinal affirmation earlier? Why don’t you read it again and see if you can tell any difference.” Some can hardly believe the difference. Suddenly it is understandable, as is the Bible. Most have a hunger and thirst for the Word of God in a way that they have never experienced before.

EXPOSING LIES AND AFFIRMING TRUTH

A woman wrote to one of our staff members, “Going through the Steps to Freedom has been the most exciting part of my Christian walk.” She had struggled with voices and screaming in her head, nightmares and apparitions in her room, and strong deception through lies and condemnation. After watching our videocassettes, she said, “I have been unwilling to take responsibility for my own thoughts. I have wanted some kind of help from the outside without being willing to do the necessary work myself.” But now she has taken responsibility. In a letter she wrote to Jesus, she said, “I confess my unbelief, my selfishness, my obsessive thoughts. I renounce the lies that would destroy and incapacitate me. I ask Your forgiveness and forsake all thinking that would destroy the truth that is in me.” Attached to her letter were six typewritten pages of lies she had believed, accompanied by Scripture verses she found that exposed those lies and affirmed the truth.

The same woman wrote this letter after going through the Steps to Freedom:

> As I’ve thought about and weighed what happened in God’s presence in your office, I am awestruck at the reality that not only has Christ completely severed the spiritual bond between myself and Harold and all the others I was involved with, but He also touched the deeper issue—a place where I have held the belief that I actually became the slut, whore, adulterer, the evil one, the witch that Mom and Dad had always said I was.
>
> Facing the reality of that truth—or rather the lies that I have believed about myself—has been more than I ever believed God could make clean or redeem. I could not escape the embarrassment, nor could I forgive my willing participation. The violations were easier to renounce because I was not choosing them for myself.

Is it possible that as I've continued to renounce both the sexual acts themselves and the beliefs that I became the embodiment of the evil I participated in, that the Lord would expunge the record and change my life, that I am no longer identified by the names my father gave me, but I am truly a new person in Christ, that I am, as you said, "clean as a hound's tooth"? I have always thought of myself as a slut and an adulteress who was just taking up space in the church, but who could never take a position of responsibility or ministry because my past is so evil.

It's like God has taken a giant sponge to the battered and bloody portion of my life that has been a major stronghold, absorbed all the blood, all the pain, all the lies. And as He took all this away, He left me new and free and clean in Him. I don't have to contend with the weight of that sin because it's forgiven, nailed to the Cross through the blood of Jesus.

I have known all the lies in my head and have wanted to believe that God's Word was true; today I know it in my heart and spirit. As I renounced these things, I thought, *How can these words set me free?* How could they not? They are the power of God.

Today, I don't just believe God is cleansing me; I *know* I'm clean! I don't just believe God will free me from my past; I *know* I'm free! I am no longer Avery's daughter, his sex toy. I am no longer Harold's mistress. I am no longer the embodiment of the evil I participated in. I am a child of the King, called and chosen by Him. Cleansed, forgiven, made new to live in His family forever. Free to love and give and enter into relationship with Him and the Church, to be the person He has called me to be. Praise His name!



CHAPTER ELEVEN

OVERCOMING BITTERNESS

As I talked about forgiveness one evening during a conference, a woman sat shivering with fear on the front steps of the church. Threatening and condemning thoughts raced through her mind.

Talking about the same subject in another conference, someone darted out of the auditorium and into the lobby, exclaiming, “I can’t stay in there any longer!”

A seminary student abruptly got up and walked out of my lecture on forgiveness.

Of the hundreds of people I have had the privilege to help find their freedom in Christ, forgiveness has been the primary issue, and in some cases, the *only* issue that needed to be resolved. Ask any of our staff members what affords Satan the greatest access to the Church, and based on years of experience, they would all say *unforgiveness.*

RESISTING FORGIVENESS

Some people react negatively to the idea of forgiving others because they see it as another form of victimization. It rips at their sense of justice. “Oh, sure, just forgive and keep getting slapped around!” They believe it is another sign of weakness, a continuation of the sickening saga of codependency.

On the contrary, forgiveness is a courageous act that reflects the grace of God.

Forgiveness is not tolerating sin. God forgives, but He does not tolerate sin. Therefore, scriptural boundaries must be set up to stop further abuse.

Many people do not want to forgive because they want revenge. To seek revenge is to let the devil set the agenda. It puts you on the same level as the abuser and usurps God's role of exacting justice. Paul writes, "Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord" (Rom. 12:19). Some people just want the sole satisfaction of hating the wretch. But hanging on to bitterness only sickens the soul. Trying to cover it up does not fool anyone, least of all ourselves, because "the heart knows its own bitterness" (Prov. 14:10).

Those we help have been hurt, and many have been hurt badly. After helping hundreds work through their painful memories of unspeakable atrocities, my heart goes out to them in ways I can hardly explain. Working with these people has left me close to tears all the time. After hearing hundreds of stories, I still can hardly believe what people are capable of doing to one another. When confronted with the need to forgive, I discovered that none of them fully knew how to forgive, nor did they fully understand what constitutes forgiveness.

I went through a soul-searching time in the early days of this ministry. I did not want to hear any more horrible stories. In fact, I do not think I could hear them today if I did not see resolution. What keeps me going is the freedom that comes when people work through the Steps and forgive from their hearts. I thank God that there is an answer for these wounded people.

I have said to hundreds of people in counseling sessions, "I'm so sorry that happened to you." Instead of having fathers who would protect and provide for them, their fathers abused them physically, verbally and sexually. Instead of having mothers who would comfort and encourage them, their mothers verbally abused them. Instead of having pastors who would shepherd them, they had legalistic men who tried to control them under a cloud of condemnation. What some thought would be safe dates, turned out to be date rape. *Ad infinitum nausea!*

The vast majority of the victimizers will never come back and ask for forgiveness. They will not even acknowledge they did anything wrong. That makes forgiveness harder because the victims believe the abusers got away with something. They are suffering the consequences of the abusers' sin, but the abusers will not even acknowledge that they have sinned. Many times I have stood before a group of ladies and said, "I want to acknowledge and apologize for the way we men have looked at you as sex objects and for the way we have

touched you and violated you. As a father, husband and a man, I'm asking for your forgiveness. Would you forgive us men? It is not your fault. You did not deserve it. It is our sickness." Unless you witnessed it, you would hardly believe the impact that these words have. A number of times in personal counseling, I have vicariously asked forgiveness on behalf of the abuser to help people work through their anger and bitterness toward others. Why? I wanted to acknowledge their pain and the injustice of their abuse at the hands of others. I wanted to give them the best possible opportunity to finally be free from their abusive pasts.

No other Step requires greater patience, sensitivity or skill than this one.

INTRODUCING STEP 3

In the entire process of helping people find their freedom in Christ, no other Step requires greater patience, sensitivity or skill than this one. I prefer to establish who it is people need to forgive before I explain what forgiveness is and how they can do it. They may not share all the names if they knew beforehand what I was going to encourage them to do. The individuals need to pray and ask the Lord to reveal to them who it is they need to forgive. I usually explain to them, "In this prayer, all you are asking for are the names of the people you need to forgive." Then I will have them pray as follows:

Dear heavenly Father,
I thank You for the riches of Your kindness, forbearance and patience, knowing that Your kindness has led me to repentance [see Rom. 2:4]. *I confess that I have not extended that same patience and kindness toward those who have hurt or offended me. Instead I have held on to my anger, bitterness and resentment toward them. Please bring to my mind all the people I need to forgive in order that I may do so. In Jesus' name, amen.*

MAKING THE LIST

When they have finished praying, ask them to list the names that came to their mind. I usually record the names for them. If they begin to discuss the people they are thinking of, encourage them to just write the names and deal with the

"why" later. First names only are sufficient, or they can refer to the individuals as Dad, Mom, first-grade teacher and so on. In some cases they may have forgotten their names or never knew them. About 90 percent of the time, the mother and father are mentioned first. The first few names given are usually the people who contributed to their greatest source of pain.

The leader and prayer team should sit quietly and prayerfully while the names are being shared and recorded. Be careful to notice if they have left out some obvious names. Having heard their stories at the beginning of the session, you can offer suggestions of people they overlooked. They may have only a few names, or they may fill several sheets of paper. (Perfectionists usually have short lists because they blame themselves for a lot of their problems.) Allow enough time to ensure that the list is complete.

WORKING THROUGH BLOCKAGES

I have had some people pray the prayer and then say, "I don't think there is anybody I need to forgive."

"That may be the case," I respond, "but would you share the names that are coming to your mind right now?" A list of 25 names might suddenly appear, and I will spend the next hour or two helping them work through it. Even though they may be living in denial, God will bring those names to their mind. I have heard some say, "I don't know why I'm thinking of this person." Chances are they will know a reason when they get to that person in the process of forgiving. The Lord wants us to live free in Him, and He has commanded us to forgive, so He will bring to mind both the people and the events that we are chained to in unforgiveness. When we forgive, we set the captives free—only to realize that we were the captives.

You do not want to play the role of the Holy Spirit, of course. But if someone has difficulty thinking of *any* names or if only one or two names are mentioned, you might suggest that the person repeat the portion of the prayer requesting that God bring names to mind. Or you could gently probe a bit, asking "Are there any relatives you need to forgive? How about teachers? Employers? Friends? Someone at work? Someone at church?"

Occasionally, people will have short lists because they have truly dealt in depth with most of the forgiveness issues in their lives or they never picked up the offense in the first place. You can usually discern whether this is the case by noting how they respond to the Steps and how they deal with the names they do

have. Regardless, people cannot be forced beyond their understanding of the issues or their willingness to forgive. Forgiveness is a crisis of the will; it is a hard-core choice to forgive from the heart.

DEALING WITH SELF AND GOD

The two most overlooked names on the lists are "themselves" and "God." In many cases, anger toward self or God is greater than anger toward any other person. As we consider the need to forgive, recall from chapter 4 the discussion about who is responsible for what. I explain to most counselees the line that is drawn between God's sovereignty and our responsibility. This will help them understand their feelings toward God.

The devil capitalizes on our ignorance of God and of His ways and on our irresponsibility by pummeling us with thoughts such as *God is not going to help you. He does not love you. How can you be a Christian and do the things you do? Look how weak and helpless you are.* People who struggle with such thoughts frequently come to our conferences seeking help. They are ticked off at themselves and/or God, and disillusioned by the Christian life.

RECEIVING FORGIVENESS FOR SELF

The concept of *letting go* of anger, guilt and condemnation toward self is something many have never considered. Those feelings are rooted in our failure to understand God's cleansing and forgiveness. Only God can forgive our sins, which separate us from Him, and He has. But we need to forgive ourselves for our failures, for letting God down and for hurting others. Otherwise we believe the subtle deception that we must atone for our own sins.

Believers who are paralyzed by condemnation are victimized by the accuser of the brethren or by their own faulty consciences rather than the truth of God's grace. The latter is psychological guilt based on years of performance-based living and legalistic Christianity. These people live as though Christ's death was not sufficient to cover their sins. Sometimes I feel like saying, "Go ahead and hang on the cross if you want to, but it won't do you any good." Colossians 2:18 says, "Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement."

You are not being presumptuous by forgiving yourself, because you are not *accomplishing* forgiveness from God. Only God can forgive our sin through His

Son. Forgiving ourselves is actually *receiving* forgiveness from God. Forgiving ourselves is saying, in effect, "Lord, I believe that You have forgiven me and cleansed me of my sins. Because of Your great love and grace—not because I deserve it—I choose to no longer condemn myself when You have forgiven me. I receive Your forgiveness and cleansing."

RELEASING BITTERNESS TOWARD GOD

Bitterness toward God is far more common than most people would care to admit. When they become honest about their anger toward God, another stronghold begins to crumble. They believe God has been unfair and let them down by failing to answer an important prayer, by allowing them to suffer by not rescuing them, or by not endowing them with certain blessings, looks, gifts, abilities, success or financial security.

Obviously, God does not need to be forgiven because He cannot commit any sin of commission or omission. But we need to destroy "speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God" and take "every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). Satan's scheme is to turn us against God by raising up thoughts against Him. These deceptive thoughts often come in first-person singular form: *God doesn't love me. He isn't going to do anything to help me.* They cause us to rebel against His Lordship. Satan is defeated when we release God from our own false expectations and stop blaming Him for our own failures and the failure of the Church to adequately equip the saints so that they can stand.

Understand that people do not always forgive others because of what was done to them; they forgive others for what they *think* others have done to them. Bitterness is not always rooted in reality. It is rooted in people's *perceptions*. I have had people put my name on their lists for silly things like not answering the phone when they called. (I was not at home or I would have answered the phone!) I did not do anything wrong; but they thought I did, so they needed to forgive me. Roots of bitterness can spring up whereby many are defiled (see Heb. 12:15), all because of a misunderstanding.

RAISING UP THOUGHTS AGAINST GOD

That is why it is not blasphemous to "forgive" God, because the bitterness is not based in reality but in thoughts raised up against the knowledge of Him. God

understands that concept much better than we do because He alone knows the thoughts and intentions of our hearts (see Heb. 4:12). The only way to overcome bitterness is to forgive.

I have never had anyone work through their bitterness toward God without immediately acknowledging the fact that God has not done anything wrong. I have never been successful at helping people overcome their bitterness toward God by defending Him. First of all, God does not need me to defend Him. Second, we have to start where people are. It is futile to tell people they should not feel the way they do toward God or anyone else. They cannot change the way they feel. It is a subtle form of rejection when we will not accept or acknowledge their frustration and pain. If you find it uncomfortable having people "forgive" God or if you think it is absolutely wrong, you might try having them pray, "Lord, I know You haven't done anything wrong, but I want to repent of the anger I have against You for … " Either way, the feelings must be dealt with or it will not do much good to go on—because God is their only hope.

Most people will not submit to God if they are bitter toward Him or think they cannot trust Him. I can only tell you from experience that working through bitterness toward God brings tremendous healing and restoration. The prophet Job is a good example of a believer who repented of anger toward God: "Therefore I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:6). Forgiving others is not a self-righteous activity, nor a blaming exercise. It is a humbling and healing experience that faces the hurt and the hate and then chooses the way of the Cross.

FACING THE NEED TO FORGIVE

Once the list of names is complete, it is time to address the meaning of forgiveness. We cannot assume that people know how to forgive from the heart, so take time to cover the explanation in *The Steps to Freedom in Christ*. You can do this by reading it in its entirety, by emphasizing key points that are highlighted and adding brief explanations as necessary or by enumerating the main points by memory if you know them well. The main points are the following:

1. Forgiving is not forgetting.
2. Forgiveness is letting go of resentment. You do not heal in order to forgive; you forgive in order to heal.

3. Forgiveness is not seeking revenge.
4. Forgiveness is letting other people off your hook, knowing that they are still on God's hook.
5. Forgiveness is something you do for your sake; it is between yourself and God.
6. Forgiveness is God's way of stopping the cycle of abuse. Some say, "But they hurt me!" And I respond, "They're still hurting you! Forgiving is how you stop the pain!"
7. Forgiveness is agreeing to live with the consequences of another's sin. You pay the price of the evil you forgive.
8. Forgiveness allows God to touch your emotional core. You acknowledge the hurt and the hate in order to forgive from the heart.
9. Forgiveness is a crisis of the will. It is a choice that is only possible by the grace of God.
10. Forgiveness sets the captive free. What is to be gained by forgiving is freedom from the abuse and abusers.

GIVING UP OUR RIGHT TO BLAME

Some people deal with their emotional pain by pointing fingers. They say "That person violated me" or "I'm suffering because of that person." While that may be true, it does not resolve the problem. In some cases, blaming someone else can be a cover for their own guilt. For others, it reveals a heart that is more prone to seek revenge than to forgive.

To place the blame on somebody else is nothing more than an excuse to stay in bondage. Many people still feel the emotional pain from the past because they have not forgiven. I can empathize with these people because they have been hurt. But I also care enough to help them realize that bad things happen to good people all the time and that something may happen to them again. I cannot guarantee that a woman will not be sexually assaulted, but I can say that God has a means by which that event does not have to control her for the rest of her life. These people cannot fix their past, but by the grace of God they can be free from it.

Forgiving others would be a moral outrage without the Cross. The Cross reveals the cost of forgiveness

and the pain of bearing the penalty of someone else's sin.

Forgiveness is an act of the will whereby we give up our claim to seek revenge for an offense against us. God could have justifiably exercised His wrath against us and all mankind. Instead, "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21). Was it difficult for Jesus to accept His Father's will? He said to Peter, James and John, "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death" (Matt. 26:38), and He cried out, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will" (v. 39). The will of our heavenly Father was that Jesus go to the cross, but the grace of God was incredibly evident even in His hour of agony. As Jesus looked down upon those who would crucify Him, He said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

Forgiving others would be a moral outrage without the Cross. The Cross reveals the cost of forgiveness and the pain of bearing the penalty of someone else's sin. At the Cross, Jesus died once for all the sins of the world (see Rom. 6:10). He paid the penalty for my sins, your sins and all the sins committed by others against all the people you and I have the privilege to help. Through the Cross, we can help them find their freedom in Christ. The victim cries out, "Where is the justice?" It is in the Cross.

In the same manner that God has forgiven us, God wants us to forgive others.

> Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you (Eph. 4:31-32).

Remember, the grace of God will always enable us to do the will of God.

Why do so many Christians try to forgive over and over again but still feel hurt and confused? Many have not understood how to forgive from the heart, and others have not taken the next step of resisting the devil. "Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (Jas. 4:7). Forgiving from our hearts is part of submitting to God, but it will take the rest of the Steps before they are fully ready to resist the devil. People are usually depleted after this Step, but the freedom does not usually come until the last Step.

GIVING SATAN NO ADVANTAGE

One of the most definitive teachings on forgiveness is in Matthew 18:21-35. Several issues stand out in this passage. First, we are to continue forgiving no matter how many times we have been sinned against. Second, the degree that we have been forgiven by God is far greater than the degree we will ever have to forgive others. Third, repayment is impossible. Fourth, we are to forgive from our hearts or be tormented by the accuser of the brethren. If we will not forgive as we have been forgiven, our heavenly Father will hand us over to the torturers (see Matt. 18:34-35). He hands us over, not because He does not love us, but because He wants us to live free and productive lives in Christ. In the same way, God disciplines us because He loves us.

In 2 Corinthians 2:10-11, Paul warns us of Satan's entrapment when there is unforgiveness: "Whom you forgive anything, I forgive also; for indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, I did it for your sakes in the presence of Christ, so that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes [thoughts]." We are not to sin through anger, because that gives the devil an opportunity as well (see Eph. 4:26-27,31-32).

JUSTICE, MERCY AND GRACE

Consider the following simple definitions of justice, mercy and grace when applied to relationships:

- *Justice is giving people what they deserve.* If God were perfectly just in dealing with us, we would all go to hell. God is a just God, and "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23).
- *Mercy is not giving people what they deserve.* "But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy" (Titus 3:4-5). Because justice had to be served, Jesus took upon Himself the wrath of God.
- *Grace is giving us what we do not deserve.* "For by grace you have been saved through faith" (Eph. 2:8). Forgiveness and eternal life are free, underserved gifts from God.

So the Lord instructs us to "be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:36). The point is, we are not to give people what they deserve (instead,

be merciful); we are to give them what they do not deserve (be gracious). We are called to love people, not because they are lovable or deserve to be loved, but because we have "become partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4). God loves us because it is His nature to love us: "God is love" (1 John 4:8). "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). This ability to love one another is possible only by the grace of God, as is the ability to forgive as we have been forgiven.

The most common Greek word in the New Testament translated "to forgive," basically means "to send away" or "to let go." In forgiving, we *send away* the devil so that he cannot torment us, and we *let go* of the past, so it can no longer have a hold on us. The pain and anger is released as we forgive from our hearts.

AVOIDING TWO COMMON ERRORS

Two major errors are to be avoided when addressing the issue of forgiveness. The first is more common among encouragers. Influenced by secular resources, some encouragers teach that forgiveness is a process and tell many counselees that they are not ready to forgive. They tell people they have to go through all the painful memories first, and then they will be able to forgive. The problem is that they will never get there. Rehearsing the painful memories week after week only deepens the wounds and reinforces the abuse. The implication is that one has to heal in order to forgive, but in actuality, it is the other way around. We forgive in order to heal.

The second error is more common in the Church. The extreme version would sound like this: "You shouldn't feel that way; you just need to forgive." They just bypassed forgiveness. We have to forgive from the heart. Forgiveness is a hard choice that includes (1) allowing God to surface the name of every offending person with their painful memories, (2) agreeing to live with the consequences of the other person's sin without seeking revenge, and (3) letting God deal with the offending person in His way and in His time.

All forgiveness is substitutionary. Christ paid the price for our sins, and we pay the price for those who sinned against us. In a practical sense, forgiveness is agreeing to live with the consequences of another person's sins. "But that isn't fair," some protest. Of course it isn't, but we will have to do so anyway. Everybody is living with the consequences of somebody else's sin. We are all living with the consequences of Adam's sin. We have the choice to live in the bondage of bitterness or in the freedom of forgiveness.

GETTING TO THE EMOTIONAL CORE

Just before you lead a person to pray through his or her list of names, you may want to read to them the following sentence:

> Stay with each individual until you are sure you have dealt with all the remembered pain—what he or she did, how he or she hurt you, how he or she made you feel (rejected, unloved, unworthy, dirty, etc.).

This is important because facing those specific issues enables people to get down to the emotional core where the damage was done and where the healing can take place. Forgiving generically results in generic freedom and healing.

Many people have sincerely tried to forgive but were not able to because they did not understand the real source of their bitterness and the subsequent lies that they have believed about themselves. Feelings of abandonment would fit into this category. Forgiving someone for hurting you may only be dealing with the symptom. You may need to ask the counselee, "What specifically happened to you?" "How did you respond at the time?" and "How has it affected you today?" Anger, sadness and depression are the emotional consequences of what happened.

Physical, emotional, spiritual and sexual abuse can also severely damage counselees' self-concepts. Their identities become wrapped around the abuse. A rape victim may feel like a whore, and the emotionally battered person may feel worthless. Forgiving the person for making her feel like a whore or feeling worthless may not be enough. She would do better by saying something like the following (and more will be said about this kind of renunciation in Chapter 14):

> *Lord, I forgive that man who raped me, for forcing me to have sex with him against my will and for violating my body, which is a temple of God, when I wanted to glorify God in my body. And I renounce the lie that I am a whore or that my body is dirty.*

Or they may need to pray:

> *Lord, I forgive my mother for saying I will never amount to anything and for constantly putting me down by saying* [state specific words], *because it made me feel* [state how it made you feel; i.e., incompetent, inferior, worthless and so on].

I renounce the lies that I have believed about myself. I am not the terrible person my mother said I was. I am a child of God, and I choose to believe what God says about me.

Hurtful experiences in early childhood shape our self-perceptions. Over and over again, we hear people tearfully pray, "Lord, I forgive my father (or mother) for beating me, for never caring about what was happening in my life, for not believing me when I told him about the sexual abuse. I forgive him for what he said and did that caused me to feel dirty, unloved and worthless." Such negative programming contributes to a distorted sense of self. Forgiving others connects them to a loving Father who sees them as His children, cleansed by the blood of the Lamb.

Mental strongholds are torn down as people forgive those who have offended them. They have lived under the condemnation of those labels for years. "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1, *NIV*). Now the lies can be exposed, so they can live according to the truth of who they really are in Christ.

PREPARING THEIR HEARTS

Bitterness is to the soul as cancer is to the body. If you knew that you had a form of cancer that could be removed by surgery, you would say to the doctor, "Go for it! Get it all!" Bitterness, like cancer, affects every part of our being. Forgiving from your heart those who have hurt you is God's way of removing the cancer.

Tragically, this cancer of the soul is a communicable disease that can be spread to others. That is why the Word of God says, "See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many" (Heb. 12:15, *NIV*). Entire families and churches can be defiled by roots of bitterness.

Having covered the main points of forgiveness, you should say something like the following:

> God may bring to mind offending people and experiences you have totally forgotten. Let Him do it, even if it is painful. Remember, you are doing this for your sake. God wants you to be free. Don't rationalize or explain the offender's behavior. Forgiveness is dealing with your pain and leaving the other person to God. Positive feelings will follow in time; freeing

yourself from the past is the critical issue right now.

Don't say, "Lord, please help me to forgive," because He is already helping you. Don't say, "Lord, I want to forgive," because you are bypassing the hard-core choice to forgive, which is your responsibility. Stay with each individual until you are sure you have dealt with all the remembered pain—what they did, how they hurt you, how they made you feel (rejected, unloved, unworthy, dirty, etc.).

You are now ready to forgive the people on your list so that you can be free in Christ with those people no longer having any control over you. For each person on your list, pray aloud:

Lord, I choose to forgive [name the person] *for* [what they did or failed to do], *which made me feel* [share the painful memories].

After I have written down all the names they give me, I write on the top of the page the above statement, which is in Step 3.

PRAYING FOR FREEDOM

Most people realize they need to forgive and that failing to do so will rob them of the freedom they desire. So they pray through their lists and immediately begin to experience a sense of release or freedom. Occasionally, some may express opposition during forgiveness, especially regarding those who have hurt them deeply. One young lady said, "I can't forgive my mother. I hate her!"

I responded, "Now you can. The Lord isn't asking you to like your mother. You can't deny or play with your emotions that way. The Lord wants you to forgive so that you can put a stop to the pain you have experienced."

Some are reluctant to forgive others for the wrongs they have done because they think they are judging people by forgiving them. When a young anorexic girl came to her father on the list, she said, "I feel like I need to ask him to forgive me." I told her, "Maybe you do, but that is not what we are dealing with here. We are dealing with your pain."

Sometimes people are torn between feelings of love and loyalty for their parents and the need to face the pain they caused and to forgive them for it. Help these individuals understand that forgiving their parents for being something less than perfect is not condemning them. We do not blame our parents for their imperfections; we are parents who are imperfect, too. Facing the truth and

forgiving their parents is what stops the cycle of abuse that continues on from one generation to another.

As they work through their lists, make sure they stay with each person until they deal with every painful memory that God brings to their minds. Many people have tried to shove these painful memories down into their subconscious. Such suppression is considered a conscious denial. Others cannot honestly recall what happened to them. I believe the Lord is involved when that happens. The pain was too great to deal with at the time, so I believe the Lord has made it possible for them to dissociate. He will reveal it at a later time when there is enough maturity, adequate support and the means to resolve it. The Lord frequently brings back repressed memories during this process. Some people attempt to deal with their pain by denying that anything bad ever happened or by pretending that it did not really bother them. Since you have heard their stories and know some of the offenses, you will need to help them face reality for their sake. Denial and cover-up are never God's way.

WORKING WITH VARYING EMOTIONS

Forgiving from the heart will be an emotional catharsis for many, while others will remain emotionally blocked and unable to feel anything. A missionary lady looked at her list and slowly pushed it away. Then she pulled it back and then pushed it away again. She said, "My counselor has been trying to get me to cry for three months." I had said nothing about crying. Finally, she took the list and started with the first name. "Lord, I forgive …" and collapsed in tears. Years of emotional pain surfaced as she forgave one person after another.

Some may work through their lists rather stoically. We have to allow for different temperaments. Shedding tears is not the only way of expressing grief and pain. I have seen some consciously and deliberately come to terms with their abuses and painfully choose to forgive from their hearts without shedding a tear. However, they may have never identified the true sources of their pain. In such cases, you could ask, "How did that make you feel at the time?" or "When you think about it now, how does it make you feel?" You may see a flood of emotions unleashed. Some may forgive without showing any emotion until they come to a particular name, and then the release comes. We all need to rely upon the Lord to discern whether the forgiveness is genuine or contrived. There is no substitute for experience and spiritual maturity on this issue, but we cannot wait until we are perfect before we attempt to help others.

They cannot be right with God and not be real.

FACING THE PAIN AND MOVING ON

The primary objective to keep in mind as people go through forgiveness is not the question of who was right or even God's justice; it is helping them face the truth, acknowledge the pain, forgive the offenders and move on. For many, this may be the first time they have ever acknowledged, understood or faced the root of their pain. Allow them to experience the pain and express their emotions. They have chosen to stuff their feelings and live in denial for the fear of expressing their pain, but that is exactly what must happen. They cannot be right with God and not be real.

We often hear people say, "I've never told this to anyone before," because they are embarrassed about it. We must believe and accept without judgment the feelings and perceptions of the people we are trying to help, because that is what they have to deal with, whether their perceptions were right or not.

Nobody is more emotionally inhibited than victims of satanic ritual abuse. They have been programmed that way. They were told, and it was probably demonstrated, that if they cried someone would be hurt. I have seen tears form in their eyes and roll freely down their cheeks when they renounce the lie that their crying would cause the death or injury of another. Until they break that stronghold, they cannot forgive from their hearts. Do not think for a moment that Satan does not know that.

Even some people with "ordinary" childhoods have learned not to express their emotions, especially negative ones. They were told, "Real men don't cry" or "Being emotionally expressive is wrong and a sign of weakness." If the person you are trying to help is emotionally inhibited, ask, "Were you ever told that it was wrong or weak to express your emotions? What happened to you when you were emotionally honest in your home? Do you believe it is wrong to be emotionally honest?" To be free in Christ, individuals must forgive those who mistrained them and renounce the lies that they have been taught concerning their emotional nature. The one who is experiencing his or her freedom in Christ will be emotionally free as well.

One woman had never been able to feel emotional sadness for herself but could weep for others. Her father had molested her when she was a child, and to guard his secret, he threatened her with more harm if she ever cried or told

anyone. When this surfaced while going through forgiveness, she was encouraged to renounce the lie that she should not feel her own emotions and to announce the truth that God created her with the emotional ability to experience joy, sorrow, laughter and tears. As she did that, a tear began to form in the corner of her eye. “Now you can cry,” I told her. Immediately she began to weep, and she continued to sob for some time, which moved me to tears.

As I said before, some people are like bananas. The peel is removed and all their problems are resolved the first time they go through the Steps. Not everyone, however, will cover their entire past in one session. Many are like onions. The first time through, they will take off the first outer layer. They may feel a great sense of joy, as though a weight has been lifted. They dealt with all they knew, but they may recall other things in the coming days. They will know what to do when painful memories surface or new offenses take place. We need to help them resolve what they do know. If there is more, the Lord will surface it at the right time. When He does, there will always be someone to forgive and/or something to renounce.

KEEPING THE FOCUS

Help the counselee to stay focused on the people and specific offenses that need to be forgiven. Offering lengthy explanations for what happened can be nothing more than a verbal excursion or a subtle form of rationalization. Discourage people from offering excuses for the offender. Whenever I hear something like “Lord, I forgive my father because I know he didn’t mean it,” I interrupt. They are trying to justify the abuse, or excusing the abuser, instead of acknowledging their own pain, facing the truth and forgiving from the heart. They may wrongly believe that they have to lie and cover up in order to protect the family name or that they deserved the abuse.

It is extremely important to remain nonjudgmental, regardless of what is revealed. Many women fear condemnation when they admit they have had abortions. Men are often afraid of admitting failure or need. Many people are ashamed to confess that they have harbored anger toward God because of unfortunate circumstances or losses. A positive, affirming and nonjudgmental attitude is paramount to enable them to be open and honest about specific issues.

Although you want to stay focused, allow this process to be unhurried. This is not a timed exercise. After making his list, a pastor said, “You don’t have enough time.” I said, “I’ll stay all night if I have to,” and I meant it. This 43-

year-old man began to cry. “You are the first person who has ever said that to me,” he said.

It is critical that we never start this Step without finishing it.

Expressing Compassion

You may be surprised at your own feelings as an encourager. Listening to the person you are helping may surface strong emotions in yourself. It is normal and acceptable to feel empathy toward experiences of loss or personal violation. The individual’s stories may arouse feelings of anger in you. Be sure that you do not pick up their offenses. You are there to help them get rid of their anger and bitterness. I console myself by remembering that there will be a day when Christ will bring justice to all.

If someone’s story brings tears to your eyes, use the tissues yourself! Romans 12:15 tells us to “weep with those who weep.” I am not ashamed of that. I am ashamed of myself when I do not care or empathize with the person’s pain. But use discernment—do not get bogged down in pity because that does not help them.

As I mentioned earlier, I often say, “I’m so sorry that happened to you.” But I do not say, “I know how you feel.” After all, I cannot know exactly how the person feels, and to indicate that I do might bring a rebuttal. I try to sit silently and pray while the individual works through the list because I want the process of forgiving to be only between God and that person. I openly share my own painful experiences when it is appropriate, but not during this time.

Developing An Identity List

As they work through their list, it can be very helpful to quietly make a “before and after” identity chart. Take a clean piece of paper and draw a line down the center of the page. At the top of the left column, write the words “Old Identity.” Under that column write down every negative thing they said about themselves or was said about them. At the top of the right column, write “New Identity in Christ.” Work together with counselees and write down what is really true about them in Christ.

During the process of forgiving, listen for words that describe their beliefs about themselves as a result of abuse. In the left-hand column, record such words as: “dirty,” “unloved,” “abandoned,” “not worth anything” and “can’t do

anything right." Especially record those words associated with the people of influence in their early years (mother, father, siblings, etc.). Such labels influenced their belief system and behavior patterns.

You may need to help them identify those feelings with the first few people on their lists. Some will do that quickly; others are just beginning to be in touch with their emotions. If they forgive an offense but seem to be at a loss for words, you could ask, "How did that offense make you feel about your value or character? How do you think that person felt about you then? How do you think they feel now?"

When they have finished praying, you may choose to put that chart aside until the end of your session when you can explain it more carefully in the context of their identity in Christ. Or you may choose now to read the list of feelings that describe how they viewed themselves. The impact of hearing those words will help them see how they have been victimized by lies. The following is an illustration you might want to use before reading the list:

> When you go to a store and buy a can or package of food off the shelf, it has a manufacturer's label describing the contents. As you and I go through life—the bad experiences, the things done to us, the things said to us, the wrong things we were involved in—Satan is there with paper and pencil writing a label for our lives. But now that you are in Christ, you are no longer a product of your past; you are a product of the work of Christ on the cross. All the old labels of the world don't describe the contents of who you are anymore.

SPECIAL RENUNCIATIONS

If you are just beginning to help others, do not be intimidated by the following information. It is not imperative that you use it. As you become experienced, you will more readily discern where there are bondages, and this might be a time when you would lead them in one or several renunciations, addressing the most significant lies they have believed about themselves and God. Some examples follow:

- For those who have been betrayed by a parent and transferred that mistrust to their heavenly Father—"Lord, I renounce the lies I've believed about You because of the way my earthly father treated me. I

announce the truth that You are not like my earthly father. You are perfectly loving and faithful."

- For those who think they are responsible for holding their dysfunctional families together and for being a parent's emotional support—"Lord, I renounce the lie that I am responsible for being a savior to the people around me or that I must always be responsible for others by being the strong one. Thank You, Lord, that it's all right for me to be honest about my own need. Thank You that when I am weak, You are strong within me" (see 2 Cor. 12:9, *TLB*).
- For those who have been constantly put down by the authority figures in their lives—"Lord, I renounce the lie that I am unworthy and insignificant. I announce the truth that I am your special child and I am precious to You." Or "Lord, I renounce the lie that I am a helpless victim as I felt when I was a child. I announce the truth that I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (see Phil. 4:13).

Do not be concerned about exact wording. The Holy Spirit is the wonderful counselor, and He will lead both you and the person you are helping to understand and know the truth.

SEEKING FORGIVENESS FROM OTHERS

Some are reluctant to forgive others because they believe they have to go to those people. The prospect of facing their abusers is too traumatic to even consider. To forgive others, they only need to go to God. They have confused the issue of forgiving others with the need to ask for forgiveness, which is spelled out in Matthew 5:23-26. The Lord requires us to go to others before we go to Him and seek reconciliation if we know that someone has something against us.

The important thing to remember is that *if we have hurt someone else*, we need to go to that person first before we go to church. But *if we have been hurt* by others, we need to forgive them by going first, and in some cases only, to God. Forgiveness must precede reconciliation. To understand the theology and process of reconciliation, see the book *Blessed Are the Peacemakers*.[1]

It could be argued that God has forgiven all mankind because Christ died once for all; but not all have received that forgiveness, and therefore, all are not reconciled to Him. That is why the Church has been given the ministry of reconciliation. Paul wrote, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace

with all men" (Rom. 12:18), but it does not always depend on you. You cannot be reconciled with someone who does not want to be reconciled. We want to help people be free from their abuses and their abusers. Reconciliation may come—and I would pray for it—but only if the abusers will own up to their abusive ways and honestly seek forgiveness. Always remember that the freedom of the abused is never contingent upon whether the abuser will own up to it. They must be willing to forgive from their hearts regardless of what the abuser does, or they will be controlled by abusers all their lives.

A young missionary had worked through all our material and was helping others find their freedom in Christ. Then during a period of engagement to his future bride, he began to experience major spiritual difficulty. He went through the Steps on his own several times. Nothing he did seemed to help. I encouraged him to ask the Lord what was keeping him in bondage. When I asked him if there were some people he needed to go to and ask for forgiveness, there was immediate confirmation.

MOVING FORWARD

Forgiveness is often a draining experience, even for you and the prayer partners. Spiritual strongholds have been identified and renounced. A major conflict has been resolved between the person you are helping and God, so Satan has no right to torment this person anymore. The individual usually feels exhausted. You all may be a little weary, but a word of encouragement: A brief break, a stretch, a glass of water, and you will be ready to go on to the next Step.



CHAPTER TWELVE

OVERCOMING REBELLION

Jane came to her appointment thinking her greatest need was to resolve a relational issue in her family, but what surfaced during the Steps was an extremely abusive marriage that had ended in divorce and a second marriage, which found Jane in the same cycle of abuse. Her past training and the pressure of family and friends had taught and reinforced the belief that submission is being passive to physical and emotional abuse. Her strategy for survival was crumbling, as was her ability to cope.

Many of the people you help will come from abusive backgrounds, and most victims are women. Some have made a conscious choice never to be pushed around again and have become rebellious. Others spend the rest of their lives accommodating their abusers, hoping someday they will finally live up to their expectations and receive the acceptance and affirmation they believe they must have in order to be worthwhile people. I have asked hundreds of such people, "What if your mother, father or spouse never accepted you or gave you the affirmation you believe you need?" Both the rebel and the codependent must find their acceptance and identity in Christ, not the people around them.

WHO IS IN CONTROL?

While sharing the plan of salvation, I asked a man, "Who would you say is in

control of your life right now?"

"I am," the man replied, "and I like it that way."

God never designed our souls to function as masters. At any one time, we are either serving God or "mammon" (Matt. 6:24, *NKJV*). But poet William Henley, says, "I am the master of my fate. I am the captain of my soul."[1] Oh, no we aren't! Self-seeking, self-serving, self-justifying, self-glorifying and self-centered living is in actuality serving the world, the flesh and the devil. And all the while we are being deceived into thinking we are serving ourselves.

Denying ourselves is the way of the Cross. Saying no to ourselves and yes to God is the ultimate struggle in life. Believing we *are* God is to buy the biggest lie of all. It originated in the Garden of Eden when Satan said, "You will be like God" (Gen. 3:5). Trying to play God is the biggest mistake we can make. It seems so sacrificial to surrender all to God, but what are you really sacrificing? You are sacrificing the lower life to gain the higher life. It seems to be the great ambition of humans to seek happiness as animals instead of being blessed as children of God.

You are sacrificing the pleasure of things to gain the pleasure of life. What would you exchange for love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control? A new car? A better home? A higher position? The belief that those things will give you love, joy and peace is the lie of the world, even though there is nothing inherently wrong with having titles and physical possessions. You are also sacrificing the temporal to gain the eternal. Some sacrifice! In reality, dying to self is the magnificent defeat. Only when we come to the end of our resources do we discover His resources. Lordship is not a negative doctrine. We are liberated when Jesus is Lord.

LEARNING TO TRUST GOD

Beth was raised in a legalistic, churchgoing family. When she met and married Todd, who was a Christian, she fully expected that her life would be satisfying and that he would be able to meet all of her needs. Her fantasy faded as the marriage failed. Disillusioned and angry with her parents and husband, Beth developed a deep distrust of God. This led to open rebellion and despair. She dabbled in false religions and adopted a worldly lifestyle.

She was given some of my books and audiocassettes, but for months she was afraid to read them and listen to them. Through loving persuasion, she eventually called one of our staff couples, who befriended and encouraged her. Later, she

was taken through the Steps to Freedom.

The changes in her life are beautiful to see. The rebellion is gone, and she says, “I feel like I’m in love.” And she is in love—with the lover of her soul, Jesus. Before, she used to “make things happen” by trying to control people or situations in the hope that her needs would be met. But she gave up her struggle for self-fulfillment, and now the Lord is filling her with a growing sense of peace and security. She says, “I no longer *want* the things I craved before; I just want to know Jesus better.” She was encouraged to read *Who I Am in Christ*, and she began to understand how Jesus meets the needs of our lives.[2]

When we take things into our own hands, we have the feeling of being in control. But what or whom do we really control? Did we have control of when we were born? To whom we were born? Where we were born? What will we have control of when we die? Do we have the right or ability to control other people and the circumstances of life so that everything becomes beneficial to ourselves? No, the only real control we have is deciding whom we will serve. Paradoxically, only when we surrender completely to God do we have self-control (see Gal. 5:22-23).

LIVING UNDER AUTHORITY

According to 1 Samuel 15:23, “Rebellion is as the sin of divination [witchcraft], and insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry.” Defiance against authority places us in the camp of the enemy and subject to his influences. The god of this world, the prince of the power of the air, is roaring around like a hungry lion “seeking someone to devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). God says, “Get in ranks and follow Me. You are under My protection if you are under My authority.” Satan was the originator of rebellion, so when we rebel, we are following his lead. If people truly understood the reality of the spiritual world and the choice they are making, they would immediately renounce any rebellion and submit to God.

We live in a rebellious age. Everyone sits in judgment of those who are in positions of authority over them. We go to church and critique the choir or the music instead of entering into the experience of worshiping God. We sit in judgment of the sermon instead of letting the sermon sit in judgment of us. How many times have you heard people coming out of church criticizing the music or the message? We bad-mouth our president, our governors, our pastors, our teachers, our spouses and our parents. I had an elder in my church years ago who was critical of everyone he knew and could not figure out why his children were

all rebellious.

Defiance against authority places us in the camp of the enemy and subject to his influences.

We are commanded by God to submit to and pray for those who are in authority over us. Romans 13:1-2 says,

> Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.

God's desire is that we yield ourselves to Him and demonstrate this allegiance by being submissive to those He placed in authority over us. We surrender our right to rule and trust God to work through His established lines of authority for our good. It is a great act of faith to trust God to work through less than perfect people.

Scripture does teach that there are times when we must obey God rather than man. When governing authorities require us to do something that God commands us not to do or when they try to prevent us from doing something that God requires us to do, then we must obey God rather than man. The members of the Early Church did this in special situations (see Acts 5:29). We also have no obligation to obey people who try to exercise authority outside their jurisdictions. Your employer or schoolteacher has no right to tell you what to do in your own home. A policeman cannot tell you what to believe or where to go to church, but he can tell you to pull your car over and give you a ticket if you are breaking the law.

RELATING TO AUTHORITY

Daniel gave us a powerful example of submission. It could be argued that King Nebuchadnezzar overstepped his authority by requiring Daniel and his people to do something that went against their faith (see Daniel 1:5-16). Notice how

Daniel responded. He showed respect to the king and those who carried out the king's commands. Nebuchadnezzar wanted those who were in his service to eat the food he chose. Daniel did not want to defile himself with the king's food, so he sought permission from his immediate superior to eat as God required, as long as he remained healthy enough to be a servant of the king, which is all the king really wanted. Because he was neither defiant nor disrespectful, "God granted Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the commander of the officials" (Dan. 1:9). Daniel offered a creative alternative that allowed the commander to save face in the sight of the king and also to fulfill the wishes of the king to have wise and healthy servants.

The Lord's Prayer (see Matt. 6:9-13) is a model for how we are to appeal to those who are in authority over us. First, we must have a right standing, which is reflected in the phrase, "Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name" (v. 9). In our judicial system, we must approach the judge in a court of law with respect. It would be considered contempt of court if we did not. We respectfully address the judge as "your honor."

If there are any unresolved personal issues between yourself and the one to whom you wish to make an appeal, you'd better get those resolved first. That is true for God as well as the judges in courts of law or supervisors at work. We could not approach God until He found a way to forgive us, and any judge who is personally biased toward or against the accused must remove himself from the case. If a teenager has been disrespectful and disobedient to his father, he'd better get that straightened out before he asks for the keys to the car.

Second, we must be committed to the success of those who are in authority and willing to do their will as long as it does not violate who we are in Christ. This principle is reflected in the phrase, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (v. 10). We must do nothing that would hinder them from carrying out their God-given responsibilities. People in leadership cannot accomplish much without the loyal support of those who are under them. Those who are in a supporting role will not prosper in rebellion. Scripture says, "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you" (Heb. 13:17).

One of Satan's more potent strategies is to discredit spiritual leaders. I will guarantee that your loyalty to those who are in authority over you will be tested. This is especially true in Christian ministries and in the home. Everybody will be tempted with subtle thoughts such as *I don't like the way he did that. I could do it*

better than that. This is what I would do if I were in that position. I'm the one who should be running the show around here. It does not make any difference if those thoughts come from the pit, from other disloyal members or from your own flesh; they are wrong according to James 3:13-18:

> Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Most leaders will listen to our appeals if they know we are concerned for their responsibilities and their reputations. The Lord withheld judgment upon the Israelites when Moses petitioned Him. He based his appeal on the reputation of God (see Num. 14:13-19). God can only bless us if we are submissive (see 1 Tim. 2:3-6), and in doing so, we find favor with God (see 1 Pet. 2:18-20). Life will be more difficult for us if the ones we are serving are failing in their responsibilities. Every passage that commands us to be submissive ends in a promise for the ones who obey—and condemnation for those who do not.

Third, our appeals must be based on legitimate needs. This principle is reflected in the phrase, "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matt. 6:11). Every leader is subject to the needs of those he serves, and the Lord will bring conviction upon those who do not hear the legitimate cries of their people. However, requests for selfish desires may justifiably go unanswered. Few things can turn off a parent more than an ungrateful child who demands more than what is needed.

Fourth, our appeals must come from hearts that are free from bitterness. This principle is reflected in the phrase, "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (v. 12). Anyone who has allowed a root of bitterness to spring up and to defile others should not expect favor from those who are in authority. When Simon requested authority from the apostles, Peter refused saying, "You are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity" (Acts 8:23).

Fifth, our appeals should be for proper direction in life, which is reflected in the phrase, “And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (Matt. 6:13). Every human institution has been given its authority by God “for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right” (1 Pet. 2:14).

Trusting God’s Protection

Daniel also taught us to trust in God’s protection and provision when we cannot in good conscience do what is commanded. King Darius was persuaded to “establish a statute and enforce an injunction that anyone who makes a petition to any god or man besides you, O king, for thirty days, shall be cast into the lions’ den” (Dan. 6:7). Daniel could not honor that decree and continued to pray and give thanks to almighty God (see v. 10). He ended up in the lions’ den, and you know the rest of the story.

If your boss wants you to lie, do not be disrespectful. Appeal to him or her as outlined above and offer an alternative. What if the boss will not accept your alternative and says, “If you won’t do what I tell you to do, then I will get someone in here who will”? Then let him or her get someone who will, and trust God to provide for your needs.

Dealing With Abuse

What if the authority figure is abusive? Is it being rebellious to turn him in? Absolutely not! It sickens me when I hear of Christian leaders who tell battered wives and abused children to go home and be submissive. “That is what Scripture requires,” says the abuser. That is not all Scripture says on the issue. God has established governing institutions to protect battered wives and abused children. The heart of God goes out to the weak and the defenseless. “Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress” (Jas. 1:27).

Turn the abusers in to the authorities whom God has established. I do not say this vindictively. I say this for two reasons. First, abusive leaders have obviously abdicated their responsibility to provide for and protect those whom they were charged by God to watch over. Leaders abusing those under their authority have doubled their offense. They are not only hurting people, but they are betraying their God-given role as protectors.

Second, you will never help abusers by allowing them to continue in their

abuses. They are hurting people who need help. If they are not stopped, the cycle of abuse will just continue on. I take this position because I also care for the abusers. They have a right to find their forgiveness and freedom in Christ like anybody else, but many will not take that opportunity if they are allowed to continue in sin. If you were abused by your father and your mother knew about it but would not do anything to help you, who would be harder to forgive? Everybody knows it would be the mother.

When counselees forgive an abusive authority figure, help them set up scriptural boundaries that protect them from future abuse and that stop the cycle of abuse. A word of caution: I am not saying that we do not have to be submissive to people in positions of authority simply because they are not perfect. If that were the case, nobody would be submissive to anyone but God. I am saying that there is a biblical means by which we can appeal to those less-than-perfect people who are in authority, and there are times when we must obey God rather than man. Determining when to reject human authority requires discernment and a deep, inner conviction—based on truth—that cannot be compromised regardless of the consequences. You are, however, acting rebelliously if you refuse to submit simply because you would prefer to do it your way.

UNDERSTANDING BIBLICAL SUBMISSION

Because of abusive authority and legalistic teaching, the term “submission” has a negative connotation for many people. To them, a submissive person is a doormat who never questions those in authority. Some accept the doormat role and identity, while others deeply resent all authority figures, including God. But God is not like the abusive authority figures they have known; He has our best interests at heart. Submitting to His will and His way is the only means by which we can have any sense of social order. Little would be accomplished in our marriages, families, churches, businesses and governments without some authoritative structure. When none exists, there can only be anarchy. The authority of God provides for the peaceful coexistence of His people, who are called to live and work together.

In Ephesians 5:21, before Paul instructs wives to be submissive to their husbands, he says that we are all (both men and women) to “be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.” This means that all Christians are to be willing to cooperate in their relationships under God-given authority structures. Because

we are all under the authority of someone (or something) and we are all called to love one another, we must be subject to the needs of one another.

SUBMISSION, REBELLION AND THE SEARCH FOR SIGNIFICANCE

What do Paul and Peter mean when they teach that wives are to be submissive to their husbands (see Eph. 5:22-24; 1 Pet. 3:1-6)? Why do some women rebel against the idea of submission? Why do some men abuse the authority God has given them in the home? Why do Peter and Paul remind men of their responsibility to lovingly meet the needs of their wives (see Eph. 5:25-33; 1 Pet. 3:7)? These are critical questions that we all encounter when treading into the minefield of role relationships in marriage. Much of the confusion and virtually all of the emotional energy that fuels the debate comes from buying into a wrong view of the source of our identity and significance. People tend to get their identity from the things they do and their significance from their positions and titles. They wrongly conclude appearance, performance and status equals significance.

Our identity is not determined by what we do; it is determined by who we are in Christ. It is not what we do that determines who we are; it is who we are that determines what we do. Before coming to Christ, we did get our identity from our natural heritage, professional work and social status. But now that we are in Christ, "There is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all" (Col. 3:11, *NKJV*). Galatians 3:28 adds, "neither male nor female." These passages do not eradicate social roles or eliminate authoritative structure. They do, however, clearly teach that our essential identity is found in Christ, and we are to live out our roles in life as children of God.

Our significance is not determined by our worldly positions and possessions but by our position in Christ and the riches we possess in Him. When the mother of the sons of Zebedee was trying to get her sons seated next to Christ, our Lord used the occasion to instruct us concerning positions of ministry.

> You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave (Matt. 20:25-27).

Every leader is subject to the needs of those who serve under him. Headship in the home is not a right to be demanded; it is an awesome responsibility, and the same holds for any role of social responsibility.

IDENTITY DETERMINES SIGNIFICANCE

The world says that we are nothing; therefore, we'd better scheme, achieve and get ahead, which leads to malice, guile, hypocrisy, envy and slander (see 1 Pet. 2:1). The Bible tells us that we are something; therefore, we should be submissive (see vv. 2-17). The scriptural commands concerning roles in relationships are given in a context where the significance question has already been settled by our identity and position in Christ.

> But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (vv. 9-10).

The biblical formula reads that our position in Christ and our identity as children of God equals significance. If a wife's sense of significance flows from her relationship with God, she can respond to her husband's leadership because in fact she is equally significant in God's plan for her personally, for her marriage and for her family. As a man I do not need to demand respect or lord it over others to have any sense of worth. I am already significant as a child of God, and I am secure in Christ. I am free to be the true servant-leader God has called me to be. The fruit of the Spirit is not staff control, nor spouse control, nor child control; it is self-control. Both the husband and wife can respond with grace to a less-than-perfect spouse because they do not need the other person to meet their need for significance (see 1 Pet. 3:8-12).

The fruit of the Spirit is not staff control, nor spouse control, nor child control; it is self-control.

Submission, authority and control do not apply only to husband-wife issues, parent-child issues or employer-employee issues. Submission is a relational

matter between the creature and the creator. When we know who we are as children of God, we do not have to rebel; we do not have to dominate and control. We yield to the lordship of Christ, secure in our position in Him, and we relate to others with love and forgiveness.

DEALING WITH REBELLION

God's order is: "Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (Jas. 4:7). Submitting to God enables us to resist the devil. The prayer that begins this Step is a commitment to forsake rebellion and choose a submissive spirit:

Dear heavenly Father,
You have said in the Bible that rebellion is the same thing as witchcraft and as bad as idolatry [see 1 Sam. 15:23]. *I know I have not always been submissive, but instead I have rebelled in my heart against You and against those You have placed in authority over me. I pray that You would show me all the ways I have been rebellious. I choose to adopt a submissive spirit and a servant's heart. In Jesus' precious name, amen.*

IDENTIFYING AREAS OF REBELLION

When the people you are helping have finished praying, call to their attention the following list of possible areas of rebellion and ask the person to place a check mark by any that apply:

- Civil government including traffic laws, tax laws and attitude toward government officials (see Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Tim. 2:1-4; 1 Pet. 2:13-17)
- Parents, stepparents or legal guardians (see Exod. 20:12; Eph. 6:1-3)
- Teachers, coaches and school officials (see Rom. 13:1-4)
- Employers (past and present) (see 1 Pet. 2:18-23)
- Husband (see 1 Pet. 3:1-4) or wife (see Eph. 5:21; 1 Pet. 3:7) *A note to husbands: Take a moment and ask the Lord if a lack of love for your wife could be fostering a rebellious spirit within her. If so, confess that now as a violation of Ephesians 5:22-23.*
- Church leaders (see Heb. 13:17)
- God (see Exod. 20:1-7; Dan. 9:5,9)

It will not be necessary for counselees to explain the acts of rebellion. You have heard their stories and know most of their issues already. They need to know that rebellion is not primarily an act, but it is an attitude that reflects a belief. Some may be standing up on the inside while sitting down on the outside.

If you are counseling a man, you may want to suggest that he consider whether he may have been defiant or rebellious toward his wife. We are to "submit to one another" (Eph. 5:21, *NIV*), and a husband should be listening to what God might want to say to him through his wife and his children. In some instances, a wife may have a more discerning spirit toward God than a husband does. The common phrase in our ministry is "Men, listen to your wives." In a similar fashion, children often pick up things that parents overlook.

CHOOSING TO BE SUBMISSIVE

The next prayer is an opportunity for the person to submit these areas of rebellion to God:

> *Lord, I agree I have been rebellious toward* [name], *by* [say what you specifically did]. *Thank You for forgiving my rebellion. I choose now to be submissive and obedient to Your Word. By the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, I pray that all ground gained by evil spirits in my life due to my rebellion would be cancelled. In Jesus' name, amen.*

As in Step 2, the person does not have to repeat the prayer for each item. When they come to the blank, they should read the items they checked and then complete the prayer.

Be careful that the individual does not brush over any deep roots of rebellion. This Step may require more counseling to help the person live under authority, especially if there is a long history of rebellion or authoritative abuse. Learning to be assertive will be difficult for people who have been passive for years, as learning to be submissive will be for those with a rebellious nature.

UNCOVERING ABUSE

A distinction needs to be made between spiritually setting oneself free from a rebellious spirit and taking responsible action against abuse or harassment. Choosing to be submissive and forgiving an offender does not mean that people

should remain in abusive situations or that they should refrain from seeking professional counsel or legal protection if necessary.

If you discover that they are presently experiencing abuse or harassment, assure them that you will talk further on this issue after you complete the Steps. Then help them set up scriptural boundaries to protect themselves from further abuse.



CHAPTER THIRTEEN

OVERCOMING PRIDE

In the northern reaches of Canada, a story is told of two geese and a turtle that developed a deep friendship. As the nights became shorter and cooler, the geese started talking about flying south for the winter. One evening as the three animals huddled together, the geese wondered openly about their friend the turtle.

“We’re sure going to miss you,” said one goose. “Since you can’t walk south for the winter, what are you going to do?”

“I have an idea,” said the turtle. “Why don’t we find a sturdy stick that the two of you can hold in your mouths. I will hold on to the stick in the middle with my powerful teeth. Then when you fly south for the winter, I will fly with you.”

“Do you think you are strong enough to hold on for that long?” asked the other goose.

“Sure, I’m very strong,” said the turtle.

Several weeks later, somewhere over Montana, a farmer looked up and spied the most incredible thing he had ever seen. He rushed into the house to tell his wife. When she ran outside and saw two geese flying overhead with a stick in their mouths and a turtle hanging between them, she cried out, “What an incredible idea! Who thought of that?”

Knowing it was his idea, the turtle could not resist saying, “I did!” And down went the turtle.

THE UGLY FIVE-LETTER WORD

Pride is a killer. It comes before a fall. Pride is a five-letter word with *I* in the middle. Pride says, "It was my idea, and I can do it by my strength and resources." Pride is the origin of evil. Scripture says of Satan:

> But you said in your heart, "*I will* ascend to heaven; *I will* raise my throne above the stars of God, and *I will* sit on the mount of assembly in the recesses of the north. *I will* ascend above the heights of the clouds; *I will* make myself like the Most High." Nevertheless you will be thrust down to Sheol, to the recesses of the pit (Isa. 14:13-15, emphasis added).

Hell is where people say, "My will be done." Heaven is where we say, "Thy will be done."

Notice the connection between pride and spiritual warfare in the following two passages:

> But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you (Jas. 4:6-7).

> All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him (1 Pet. 5:5-9).

THE PRICE OF SELF-SUFFICIENCY

After Jesus fed the 5,000, He sent the disciples across the Sea of Galilee while He went up to the mountain to pray. In the middle of the sea, the disciples encountered a storm: "Seeing them straining at the oars, … He came to them, walking on the sea; and He intended to pass by them" (Mark 6:48). I believe the Lord intends to pass by the self-sufficient. Go ahead and row against the storms of life. He will let you row until your arms fall off, but those who call upon the

name of the Lord will be saved.

The only answer the world has for those who are caught in the storms of life is “Row harder, or give in to the pressure and learn to live at sea!” The devil says, “You can do it by yourself; but if you need a little extra power, I can arrange that for a small price.” Pride says, “I think I can get out of this by myself. All it requires is a lot of hard work, human ingenuity and maybe a little luck.” God says, “I won’t interfere with your plans. If you want to try to save yourself, solve your own problems or meet your own needs, you have My permission. But you won’t be able to because in the final analysis, you absolutely need Me, and you necessarily need each other.” Fallen humanity is on a sinking ship that is going nowhere without God.

Pride can sneak up on the best of us. King Uzziah was a godly man who reigned for 52 years (see 2 Chron. 26:3), and “he did right in the sight of the LORD” (v. 4). His accomplishments were exceptional. He built a strong army and fortified the city. “Hence his fame spread afar, for he was marvelously helped until he was strong. But when he became strong, his heart was so proud that he acted corruptly, and he was unfaithful to the LORD his God” (vv. 15-16).

The more we are able to accomplish by the grace of God, the more susceptible we are to pride. More than one Christian leader has fallen when he started receiving glowing accolades. “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall” (1 Cor. 10:12).

FALSE AND TRUE HUMILITY

What is humility? Is it groveling around in poverty, proclaiming our worthless state? No, that is counterfeit humility that leads only to defeat. Paul says, “Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement” (Col. 2:18).

Humility is not proclaiming God to be everything and ourselves nothing. That is false humility. Christ did not die on the cross for nothing. He was crucified to redeem a fallen humanity. Throughout the New Testament, we are admonished to build up one another and are strongly warned against any attempt to tear one another down.

Paul tells us, “For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith” (Rom. 12:3). That is not a call for self-abasement; it is a call for sound judgment. Paul

says of himself, “By the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me” (1 Cor. 15:10).

Humility is confidence properly placed.

All of us are what we are by the grace of God! To deny that would be to discredit the work that Christ accomplished on the cross. To believe that we are more than we are or to believe that we are products of our own doing is to join the ranks of the deceived millions who have fallen victim to pride.

Humility is confidence properly placed. So Paul says, “Put no confidence in the flesh” (Phil. 3:3). But our confidence in God and in what He can do through us should exceed all bounds. I personally want myself and every child of God to reach our highest potential in Christ. “My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples” (John 15:8). Pride says, “I did it.” True humility says, “I did it by the grace of God.”

Cowering in some corner in unbelief or groveling around in mock humility in utter defeat brings no glory to God. Instead, “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16).

The glory of God is a manifestation of His presence. When we glorify God in our bodies, we manifest His presence in the world. The only way we can do that is to live victorious lives and bear much fruit. And the only way we can do that is to abide in Christ (see John 15:5). That is why we are trying to help people come to terms with their pride—so they can be established in Christ, “in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him” (Eph. 3:12).

AVENUES OF PRIDE

We come from diverse backgrounds, but pride, rebellion and self-sufficiency are global consequences of the Fall and common to all humanity. The whole aim of Satan is to get self-interest recognized as the chief end of man. Satan is called the prince of this world because self-interest rules this world. The iniquity that is passed on from one generation to another is a distortion of, and preoccupation with, self-rule. This is the chief characteristic of false prophets and false teachers. Peter says they “indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise

authority. Daring, self-willed, they do not tremble when they revile angelic majesties" (2 Pet. 2:10). They operate from independent spirits and will not answer to anyone. An even more sober scenario is given in Matthew 7:20-23:

> So then, you will know them by their fruits. Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?" And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness [iniquity]."

Strongholds of pride are not only passed on from one generation to the next, but each new generation will also develop its own basis for pride by seeking fame and fortune in the worldly system in which it is raised. Self-glorification can come by accumulating wealth, garnering social status, acquiring academic degrees and even obtaining biblical knowledge. There is nothing wrong with having wealth, social status, academic degrees or biblical knowledge—if they are accepted and lived out by the grace of God for the purpose of doing His will.

Pride is the chief characteristic of the world: "For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world" (1 John 2:16, *NIV*). All temptation is an attempt to get us to live our lives independently of God. Under such temptation, people unwittingly serve the world, the flesh or the devil. They have been deceived into thinking they are benefiting themselves, but such temporal gratification quickly fades away. Jesus counters by sharing the way of the Cross, the foundational principle for our lives in Christ, which is the repudiation of the old natural life and embracing the new joyful union with the resurrected life of Christ.

Though the immediate evidence of pride is self-centeredness, the root of pride is self-exaltation. It is at this point that we are most like the god of this world. Though no legitimate Christian would identify with such blatant blasphemy, self-exaltation expressed by subtle attitudes of pride and self-righteousness will keep a person from humbly admitting the need for Christ's righteousness. Such pride is an open invitation to the god of this world, which may render impossible the ability to carry out even the best of our intentions. Notice how this proved to be true in the life of Peter.

Jesus said to Peter, “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers” (Luke 22:31-32). Notice that Jesus did not say He would not permit Satan to sift Peter like wheat. He just said He would pray for him, so he would be able to help others if he repented.

What right did Satan have to ask permission of God? The previous context reveals that a dispute had arisen among the apostles regarding who was the greatest (see v. 24). Such pride can coexist with the best of intentions. Peter said, “Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!” (v. 33). Sadly, he had already forfeited his right. Before the cock crowed, Peter denied his Lord three times.

A Biblical View of Our Worth

A proper sense of self-worth comes from recognizing and appropriating the biblical fact that we are loved and valued by our heavenly Father. Our value is based not on our own merit but on the fact that we are His precious children for whom Christ was willing to die. We are blessed with every spiritual blessing, chosen in God, holy and blameless before Him and predestined to adoption as sons; we have redemption and forgiveness, and the riches of His grace are lavished on us (see Eph. 1:3-14).

The problem is not that we do not have tremendous riches in Christ; the problem is that we do not fully appropriate them. So Paul says, “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints” (v. 18).

Going Through Step 5

The flow from Step 4 to Step 5 is generally smooth, since you will have already dealt with pride from the standpoint of control and rebellion in Step 4. The two Steps are closely linked because the source of a rebellious attitude is often pride. To introduce this Step, it is sufficient to simply paraphrase or read the paragraph preceding the prayer.

If necessary, you may choose to briefly explain the need to face the issue of pride by saying something like the following:

> "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (Jas. 4:6). By acknowledging pride, we are declaring what Satan refused to declare —that we are dependent on God. By exposing and confessing pride, we are acknowledging our desire to be free from a self-centered and a self-sufficient life. Then we will be free to begin living by the grace of God and deriving our spiritual strengths and identities from God, through Christ.

The person you are helping then prays as follows:

Dear heavenly Father,
You have said that "pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before stumbling" (Prov. 16:18). I confess that I have been thinking mainly of myself and not of others. I have not denied myself, picked up my Cross daily, and followed You. As a result, I have given ground to the devil in my life. I have sinned by believing I could be happy and successful on my own. I confess that I have placed my will before Yours, and I have centered my life around myself instead of You.
I repent of my pride and selfishness and pray that all ground gained in my members by the enemies of the Lord Jesus Christ would be canceled. I choose to rely on the Holy Spirit's power and guidance so that I will do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit. With humility of mind, I will regard others as more important than myself. And I choose to make You, Lord, the center of my life. Please show me now all the specific ways in which I have lived my life in pride. Enable me through love to serve others and in honor to prefer others. I ask all of this in the gentle and humble name of Jesus, my Lord. Amen.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF SPECIFIC AREAS OF PERSONAL PRIDE

After praying this prayer, counselees have the opportunity to check areas of pride that may be present in their lives. You may want to prepare them by saying something like this:

> The Lord may bring several things to your mind that rob you of the blessings of God because of pride. In addition, I'm handing you a list of some of the more common ways that people choose to live their lives independently of God by trusting in their own wisdom and resources.

Most of us have done each of these things at certain times in our lives, but just identify the ones that may be a tendency in your life—a stronghold that would keep you in bondage to pride instead of humbly drawing on God's resources.

Then wait quietly while the individual checks those areas that apply (some leaders choose to read the statements aloud).

- Having a stronger desire to do my will than God's will
- Leaning too much on my own understanding and experience rather than seeking God's guidance through prayer and His Word
- Relying on my own strengths and abilities instead of depending on the power of the Holy Spirit
- Being more concerned about controlling others than developing self-control
- Being too busy doing *important* things to take time to do little things for others
- Having a tendency to think I have no needs
- Finding it hard to admit when I am wrong
- Being more concerned about pleasing people than pleasing God
- Being concerned about getting the credit I feel I deserve
- Thinking I am more humble, spiritual, religious or devoted than others
- Being driven to obtain recognition by obtaining degrees, titles or positions
- Often feeling that my needs are more important than another person's needs
- Considering myself better than others because of my academic, artistic or athletic abilities and accomplishments
- Other ways I have thought more highly of myself than I should

It is important to allow people to take whatever time is needed, but they should not feel they have to explain their past for your benefit. Subjective people may have difficulty making a decision here as with the other lists, debating whether they should check an item or not. Help them stay focused by reading a statement and then encouraging them to go with their first impression, trusting God in the process.

When they have finished checking the issues that apply to their lives, encourage them to pray the short prayer that follows and commit those areas of

pride to God. As before, they can pray the prayer only once. When they come to the blank, they can read the list of things they checked and then complete the prayer.

Lord, I agree I have been proud in [name the area]. *Thank You for forgiving me for my pride. I choose to humble myself before You and others. I choose to place all my confidence in You and none in my flesh. In Jesus' name, amen.*

PREJUDICE AND BIGOTRY

A subtle form of pride is prejudice and bigotry. In appendix F of *The Steps to Freedom in Christ* is an exercise that helps people come to terms with their prejudices. We have an all-inclusive God who loves each of His children the same. Sexism, racism and elitism of any kind are an affront to God, who created us all equal in His sight. We are all one in Christ. Unity can only be found in our common spiritual heritage. The unity in His Body—that Christ is praying for—is already here. That is why Paul teaches us to be "diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). We are brothers and sisters in Christ.

HEALING FOLLOWS HUMILITY

The following letter, which we received from a man who was caught in a sexual addiction, is a powerful illustration of the truth of James 4:6, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." It is a humbling thing to share such personal problems, but he was not about to let pride keep him from his freedom. He wrote: Realizing that I needed to be accountable to someone and to bring these urges to "light," so as to break their power over me, I shared these feelings with my wife and the men in my Bible study group, so they could pray for me and hold me accountable.

They were all very supportive, though a little shaken that someone in ministry would share such a personal matter with them. I expressed that I am only a brother in Christ and not superior to them in any way and that if we were ever to be of one mind and one accord, we would need to be open with one another.

I must admit that it was easy to be open because *I know who I am in Christ*. I believe now that this temptation will soon be a thing of the past. My past no longer has a hold on me. I am accountable to others, and I have prayer partners. Victory is mine!



CHAPTER FOURTEEN

OVERCOMING HABITUAL SIN

Suppose you could see the reality of the spiritual world and, like God, knew what people were thinking. In your observation, you see a dark brooding angelic figure lurking outside the door of a young Christian named Danny.

Disguised as an angel of light, this demon subtly suggests to Danny that he open the door to sin: *Why don't you take a peek at that Playboy magazine? You know you want to. You will get away with it. Who would know? Everybody else does it.*

The Spirit of God within Danny brings immediate conviction and offers a way of escape. Also within Danny is an appetite for food and sex, as well as preprogrammed thought patterns that operate independently of God. The flesh, or old nature, in Danny wants to be satisfied and offers an argument against the Spirit of God: *What's wrong with looking at pornography anyway? After all, who created me to have all these desires? Wasn't it God? How could He create me a certain way and then condemn me for it?*

The battle in the mind is intense, "For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another" (Gal. 5:17). But Danny failed to take the way of escape by "taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). At first, the pictures are a

delight to the eyes, and the body responds with a euphoric explosion of feelings. But the pleasure is only for a moment because "each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death" (Jas. 1:14-15).

CONSEQUENCES TO WRONG CHOICES

The brooding figure takes advantage of the open door because Danny acted independently of God by choosing to sin. Satan's role as the tempter changes immediately to the role of the accuser, saying, "You will never get away with this. How can you call yourself a Christian and do what you do? You're pathetic!"

Overcome by guilt, Danny cries out to God, "Lord, forgive me; I'll never do it again." Two days later, Danny sins again, which precipitates another cry for forgiveness. As the downward spiral of sin, confess, sin, confess and sin again continues, another pathetic event takes place. Danny is caught in his sin by another "Christian" who knows nothing of compassion.

Instead of responding as a minister of reconciliation, he joins with the brooding figure in a "ministry" of condemnation.

"You're a pathetic example of what a real Christian is supposed to be!" he exhorts Danny. "How can you do that and call yourself a Christian? You're an embarrassment to the Church. You'd better confess it and beg God's forgiveness." Too many legalistic, controlling Christian leaders are in league with the accuser of the brethren and they do not even know it.

They do not seem to know that Danny is already forgiven by God and that he has probably confessed his sin a hundred times before. Their merciless and insensitive responses will only drive Danny to greater depths of despair. Adding guilt and shame does not enhance mental health. The world, the flesh and the devil have brought another saint to his knees. How does one break this cycle of defeat? Is confession enough?

To confess means to agree with God or to walk in the light as He is in the light (see 1 John 1:5-9). Confession is the critical first step in repentance, but it is not complete repentance and will not be *until* there is a demonstrated change. We must agree with God and face the truth, but that alone will not deal with sin's entrapment. You have submitted to God if the confession was genuine and accompanied by a commitment to do His will, but you have not yet resisted the devil (see Jas. 4:7).

Complete repentance means to submit to God, resist the devil and close the door. The door will be closed when all the bondages have been broken, all the mental strongholds have been torn down and the harmful relationships and sources that feed the problem have been cut off. The latter includes renouncing the lies we have believed, which contributed to the sinful behavior, and then choosing the truth. This Step is intended to break the bondages and tear down the strongholds, making possible the process of renewing the mind. It would also be helpful to read *Overcoming Addictive Behaviors,* which I coauthored with Mike Quarles.[1]

This Step is intended to break the bondages and tear down the stongholds, making possible the process of renewing the mind.

RESPONDING TO THOSE CAUGHT IN SIN

How we should respond to those who are caught in sin is spelled out in 2 Corinthians 5:16-20:

> Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh…. Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

Several critical issues stand out from this passage. First, these people are new creatures in Christ, children of God; they need to know the truth and choose for themselves "to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6:11). Most defeated Christians, however, do not know their identity and position in Christ.

I asked a middle-aged lady, "How do you perceive yourself?"

"I'm evil," she said.

“You’re not evil,” I responded. “You are a child of God.”

Others have said, “I just hate myself,” or “I’m no good.” These people have been victimized by the accuser of the brethren and probably by significant others in their lives.

Second, we need to understand our ministry. It troubles me to see self-righteous (pharisaic and legalistic) Christians going after other brothers or sisters in Christ. Why are we joining ranks with the accuser of the brethren when Romans 8:1 says, “Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”? Why are we counting their trespasses against them when even Jesus does not? What sickness lies within us that wants to expose the sins of others, when Scripture says, “Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all transgressions” (Prov. 10:12)?

The fact that the Christian’s ministry is reconciliation not condemnation is the second gem that must be mined from the above passage. Notice the first practical application that follows after the admonition to live the Spirit-filled life: “Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another. Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted” (Gal. 5:26—6:1). The ministry of a spiritual Christian is reconciliation and restoration. If that is not your motive in confronting another person in regard to sin, then it is best that you do nothing at all.

The charge to be ambassadors for Christ is the third nugget that must be panned from the above passage. We do not speak or minister to others on our own behalf; we do so as representatives of Christ, “as though God were making an appeal through us” (2 Cor. 5:20).

Dining with sinners brought judgment upon Jesus from the religious community. Have you ever noticed from the Gospels that sinners loved to be around Jesus, and He waged war against the hypocrites? Today, the Church is accused of being full of hypocrites, and sinners stay away. That is not totally true, but there is enough truth in that statement to cause us to weep before God. Only an ambassador for Christ through whom God can work will be effective in helping people through this Step.

THE EFFECTS OF ADDICTION

People caught in addictive and immoral patterns of behavior are subjected to some of the cruelest harassment of the enemy. First, Satan tempts them to sin,

and then he mercilessly condemns them for sinning, and then he attacks their sense of worth. A common statement heard in recovery groups is “Don’t pay attention to that committee in your head.” If you are helping those who are in bondage to sex, alcohol or drugs, I encourage you to read *A Way of Escape*[2] and *Freedom from Addiction*,[3] which I coauthored with Mike and Julia Quarles. These two books give the biblical basis for breaking the bondages and tearing down the strongholds of sex and substance abuse, and they include many illustrations and practical applications.

People do not have a sexual problem or chemical problem; they have a life problem. You will not be successful just trying to eliminate bad behavior. If abstinence were the goal, then Ephesians 5:18 would read, “Do not get drunk with wine; therefore, stop drinking.” It says we must be filled with God’s Spirit. I do not even try initially to take away their flesh patterns until I have helped them resolve their personal and spiritual conflicts and find their identity in Christ. If you take away the alcohol from an alcoholic, all you have done is take away their wrong means of coping, and you will be left with a miserable, dry drunk. That is true for any habitual sin. Just telling people to stop doing it is a law concept that will not work. Instead, help them get right with God, and then the life of God will be manifested in them. If they “walk by the Spirit … [they] will not carry out the desire of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16).

Sincere Christians who are unable to break free from their sins often question their salvation, wondering if they really are new creations in Christ and if the Holy Spirit really does live within them. But if they were not Christians, why would these moral issues even bother them, and why would they be seeking help from the Church? Many think they have committed the unpardonable sin, which is not something a Christian can do.

If they have never been caught sinning, then their sins remain dark secrets that even their closest companions may not know (such as abortion, homosexuality, child abuse, incest or molestation). They attempt to cope by living a lie. They are often in denial about the gravity of their sin. Many rationalize their sins for years, which is the opposite of confession. Some alcoholics say, “I can stop anytime I want to.” But the only way they could prove it to themselves or anybody else is by stopping. Some are church and community leaders. The possibility of exposure is very threatening to them. They believe there is too much to lose to walk in the light, so they live with the deception that it is more painful and damaging to tell the truth than to maintain a lie. How wrong is that?

Some have resigned themselves to live in bondage, hang on until the rapture and hope God's forgiveness will prevail in the end. In desperation, many ask the question that Paul raised: "Who will set me free from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24). Paul answers his own question in the next verse: "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" There *is* hope and a way of escape for the person who is willing to face the truth and walk in the light.

NO CONDEMNATION

Christians in bondage do not need any more condemnation! They would love to be free, since nobody likes to live imprisoned, but they are desperately fearful of rejection. Church leaders fear losing their positions and/or their credibility.

As you help people through the Steps to Freedom, you will find that this Step is the most difficult one for people to be totally honest about and potentially the most embarrassing, especially concerning sexual sins and abortion. Therefore, it is important not to register shock or come across in a judgmental way.

After coming to terms with one sexual sin after another, one lady said, "Oh, I forgot you're here. What do you think of me?"

I said, "I love you even more because of what you have just shared." When I know better what they are struggling with, I am more able to help them with their needs—and that is being more loving.

What a relief it was for her—and everyone—to discover that she had finally found a safe place where she could deal with hidden sins without the fear of rejection. What a joy it is for us to see the hope in people's faces when they begin to understand that resolution is possible and that they no longer have to be mastered by sin.

It is important to emphasize again that as counselees go through the Steps, it is not simply saying the words and praying the prayers that brings them freedom. It is what the individuals do concerning their relationship with God. Jesus is the bondage breaker who brings freedom as they honestly connect with Him.

GOING THROUGH STEP 6

From *The Steps to Freedom in Christ*, introduce Step 6 simply by reading the material preceding the opening prayer. I tell people that we are going to do this Step in two parts. The first is dealing with habitual sins of the flesh. I am not too concerned about an occasional sin of the flesh. The goal is to uncover flesh

patterns, those sins that they seem to repeat again and again. The second part deals with sexual sins. The person you are helping should then pray this prayer aloud:

Dear heavenly Father,
You have told us to put on the Lord Jesus Christ and to make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lust. I confess that I have given in to fleshly lusts that wage war against my soul [see 1 Pet. 2:11]. *I thank You that in Christ my sins are forgiven, but I have broken Your holy law and given the devil a chance to wage war in my body* [see Rom. 6:12-13; Jas. 4:1; 1 Pet. 5:8]. *I come to You now to confess and renounce these sins of the flesh so that I might be cleansed and set free from the bondage of sin* [see 1 John 1:9]. *Please reveal to my mind all the sins of the flesh I have committed and the ways I have grieved the Holy Spirit. In Jesus' holy name, amen.*

Do not try to dig up old dirt that has been acknowledged before. The conviction of God is all they need. What we are looking for are habitual flesh patterns. Our goal is to help them come to terms with some sins that they have never really acknowledged. You could turn in your Bible to Galatians 5:19-21, which lists the sins of the flesh. Generally, I trust the Holy Spirit to bring conviction, but sometimes it is helpful to ask some questions when you sense the Lord is prompting you, such as Have you ever struggled with telling the truth? or Are there any issues that you are just too ashamed to admit before God or before me? Usually they are very honest about stating the items on the Step 6 bondage list that apply to them.

God knows all about us, and yet He loves us.

God is "able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do" (Heb. 4:12-13). God knows all about us, and yet He loves us. He is not out to get us; He is out to restore us if we will just let Him by our being honest.

They complete the first part by praying:

Lord,

I confess that I have committed the sins of [name all the sins]. *Thank You for Your forgiveness and cleansing; I now turn away from this sin and turn to You, Lord. Strengthen me by Your Holy Spirit to obey You. In Jesus' name, amen.*

UNDERSTANDING SEXUAL BONDAGES

Space will not permit me to cover all the material included in *A Way of Escape*, but permit me to point out the essential passages and the core truth we must know to help people break sexual bondages. One such passage is 1 Corinthians 6:15-20:

> Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be! Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with her? For He says, "The two shall become one flesh." But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him.
>
> Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

Scripture seems to place sexual sins in a category by themselves, classifying every other sin as being outside of the body. Why this is so I am not totally sure, but I do know that it is my responsibility not to let sin reign in my mortal body and not to obey its lusts (see Rom. 6:12). The next verse tells us what we must do and not do in reference to the use of our bodies. "Do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God" (v. 13).

There is no way that you could commit a sexual sin and not use your body as an instrument of unrighteousness. If you do, you will allow sin to reign in your mortal body, according to Scripture. Confession alone will not resolve this.

I have learned that helping others accomplish complete repentance requires them to pray and ask the Lord to reveal every sexual use of their bodies as instruments of unrighteousness. As the Lord brings each one to mind, they renounce every sexual use of their bodies as instruments of unrighteousness and

ask God to break the sexual and emotional bond with those people. They conclude by presenting their bodies to the Lord as living sacrifices. We are urged by the mercies of God to do that (see Rom. 12:1).

SEXUAL BONDING

Bonding takes place when unholy sex is committed. The person has become one flesh with his or her partner. Tragically, that is true even in the case of incest or rape. The body is used as an instrument of unrighteousness. The temple is violated. But that is not fair! Of course it's not fair, and I cannot promise that it will not happen to you or anyone else. But I can tell you how to resolve it in Christ so that you do not have to stay in bondage to the sexual abuse. We have observed that if there is voluntary compliance with the sexual abuser, the victim usually will become very sexually active. In cases of rape and incest, a woman will usually shut down sexually, even if she is now married to a Christian husband. Sex is dirty in her mind, so she cannot stand to be touched.

We are warned to flee from any form of immorality because it is a self-destructive sin that we commit against our own bodies. God and Satan both know our weakness to sexual passions. Satan plays on that weakness, but God provides a way of escape. In truth, we have already died to sin, and our lives are hidden in Christ (see Col. 3:3). But it is necessary to affirm the truth that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit and that in Christ we are free from the bondage of sin.

People may be willing to share one or two sexual struggles, but when they pray the previous prayer, you may hear many other experiences. You may also hear comments such as "That would be embarrassing," "You'll think I'm a terrible person," "I can't even remember a lot of them" or "I was bombed most of the time." Try encouraging them by saying something like the following:

> You are not going to cause me to think less of you because of anything that you have done. There's no condemnation in this room. The details of your life may be different from mine, but we are all just people who need Jesus. I'm only interested in helping you establish your freedom in Christ. The Lord wants you free—that's why He is bringing all these experiences to your mind. For your sake, be sure to be totally honest about every sexual sin from your past or present. Wouldn't you love to leave this room with all of that behind you?

BREAKING SEXUAL BONDING

A young woman with a desire for God and wanting to find freedom came to one of our conferences. She was living with a man, and they were not married. She wanted to break the relationship, but even after six months of counseling she was not able to do it. She came with her counselor for an appointment. While going through Step 6, she revealed a sexually promiscuous lifestyle and renounced 40 or more sexual relationships. Two days later, she joyfully told us that the man she had been living with was out of her home and she was free!

Another young woman had prayed for a Christian husband. In college she met a fellow student whom she thought to be God's answer to her prayer. There was talk of marriage, and while they did not have intercourse, there was heavy petting. Then he revealed that he had homosexual interests, and their relationship began to change. After months of struggle, she felt she no longer loved him but somehow still felt compelled to marry him. Her parents and friends tried to convince her that she did not have to, but she felt bound. After going through the Steps, she knew she was free from that bond and no longer felt obligated to marry him. Even without intercourse, when the body is given to, or violated by, another in intimacy, bonding can occur.

Some have bought into the lie that their acts of adultery or abortion were justified. To illustrate, one person said that he and his wife were virgins when they were married, giving the impression that there had been no sexual involvement. But when his wife went through the Steps later, she indicated that there had been oral sex. That may have been a deliberate intent to be deceptive on the husband's part, or he may have actually been blinded by believing that oral sex is not a sexual use of the body in the same way as intercourse.

Many married couples have been involved in premarital sex, either with each other or other partners, and that has robbed them of the joy of their relationship in marriage until the past experiences have been renounced. We have also seen people helped who could not consummate their marriage even after therapy and medical treatment. The problem was solved after dealing spiritually with past situations by going through the Steps to Freedom. This further illustrates how the spiritual dimension of our problems affects the whole person: the body, the soul and the spirit.

DEAL WITH SPECIFIC ISSUES

After a brief explanation of sexual bonding, ask the person to pray.

Lord, I ask You to bring to my mind every sexual use of my body as an instrument of unrighteousness so that, in Christ, I can renounce these sexual sins and break their bondage. In Jesus' name, amen.

Then share with the counselee:

> As the Lord brings to your mind every sexual use of your body, whether it was done *to you* (rape, incest or sexual molestation) or willingly *by you*, renounce every occasion by praying this prayer:

Lord, I renounce [name the specific use of your body] *with* [name any other person involved]. *I ask You to break that sexual and emotional bond with* [name].

The person prays that prayer for each person and/or activity as God brings it to mind. For example, "Lord, I renounce having sex with George and ask You to break that sexual and emotional bond," or "Lord, I renounce the molestation by my uncle and ask You to break that bond."

If counselees cannot remember the names of the individuals, they should just say "the guy in the bar," or even "that girl whose face I see in my mind"—whatever would identify the experience. It is not a matter of admitting something to God that He is not already aware of but of bringing into the light something performed in secret in order to break the bondage.

A number of deviant sexual behaviors may surface at this time. Because of the sensitivity of this area, when counselees tell their past history, they may not readily share involvement in activities such as pornography, voyeurism, bestiality, anal or oral sex, transvestism, cross-gender dressing or transsexuality. Encourage the person to deal with whatever the Lord surfaces by renouncing it specifically.

You do not want to usurp the Holy Spirit's ministry, but because of what you have already heard of the person's life, you may want to give suggestions if they appear to be needed. The types of unrighteous sexual uses of the body that should be renounced include the following:

- Premarital sexual activity
- Extramarital affairs

- Homosexual behavior
- Pornography (books, magazines, movies, videos)
- Sexual perversions and compulsive behavior (inordinate sexual appetite, masturbation, sexual fantasies, anal or oral sex, use of devices)
- Prostitution (heterosexual and homosexual)
- Sexual perversions (bestiality, sadomasochism, transvestism, transsexuality)
- Pedophilia (sexual preoccupation with young children)
- Rape (any sexual use of someone's body without consent)
- Child sexual abuse or incest (molestation)
- Abortion
- Sexual spirits (this would include any kind of sexual experience they had at night that seemed to be with another personality, but no physical presence was observed; this can be very frightening and degrading)

FORMS OF INTERFERENCE

When people have been sexually promiscuous, they could possibly lie to save face. Emphasize that it is truth that sets us free. You may never know whether or not they have been totally open. You can only do your best and make sure that you have not been a barrier to honesty by exhibiting a judgmental attitude. They could also go through this Step on their own when they leave your office.

Some may argue that those sins were in the past and do not need to be dredged up anymore. This is a dodge to save face. Others may sincerely say that they have already confessed their sexual sins. That may be true, but as we noted earlier, simple confession is only the first step toward repentance. This is especially true with people caught in addictive sin. I can certainly see why some would not want to share their sexual sins. It is embarrassing, but I think we should pay heed to James 5:16: "Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much." They need to follow James's twofold instruction: to confide in a trusted and compassionate person who can help them and to have spiritually mature people pray for them.

Do not be curious and press for vivid details. That is nothing more than voyeurism. Specific actions *must* be renounced, but discourage explicit description that does not really help them and can do you harm. On rare occasions you may encounter a person who seems to enjoy recalling sexual

experiences in graphic detail. You should stop that by saying kindly, “You don’t need to give that kind of detail. Just stay focused on the issues that you need to renounce.” If necessary, you could lead them in a renunciation, such as the following:

I renounce the influences of Satan and sexual spirits that would cause me to want to relive and exploit my past sexual experiences. I announce the truth that my body is a temple of the Holy Spirit and that You, Lord, want my entire mind and body to be clean. I again commit myself to You for the renewing of my mind.

If you become sexually stimulated by their confessions, there is a good chance that you have some issues yet to be dealt with. At the least, you should be warned by Galatians 6:1: “You who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.”

LIES THEY BELIEVE

You may hear or discern a lie that needs to be addressed. For example, a girl was told she was special by her abuser. After being sexually molested as a child, she chose to become sexually promiscuous. She was encouraged to say:

I renounce the lie that I need to give my body to someone so that I can be accepted and special. I announce the truth that I am accepted and loved by Christ just as I am.

When people are molested as children or teenagers, they often feel dirty or guilty, perhaps feeling revulsion toward a legitimate sexual relationship in marriage. You could help them pray as follows:

I renounce the lie that I am evil or dirty as a result of my molestation. Thank You, Lord, that You know I was only a little child, and I needed love and acceptance. Therefore, I receive Your forgiveness for any way I might have cooperated, and I choose to forgive myself.

The following is also an appropriate prayer for many to renounce the lies they believe:

I renounce all of the ways that Satan has perverted my attitude toward sex as a

result of my past involvement. I specifically renounce [pornography, masturbation, oral sex, other forms of perverted sex, homosexuality, etc.]. *I announce the truth that I don't have to continue to be bound by these past experiences. You are the God who makes all things new. I ask You, Lord, to renew my mind so that I am free to enjoy sex and my sexuality in the way you intended.*

A Prayer of Commitment and Affirmation

When they have finished dealing with specific sexual issues from the past, ask them to pray the following prayer:

Lord,
I renounce all these uses of my body as an instrument of unrighteousness, and I admit to any willful participation. I choose to present my eyes, mouth, mind, heart, hands, feet and sexual organs to You as instruments of righteousness. I present my whole body to You as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable. I choose to reserve the sexual use of my body for marriage only.
I reject the devil's lie that my body is not clean or that it is dirty or in any way unacceptable to You as a result of my past sexual experiences. Lord, thank You that You have totally cleansed and forgiven me and that You love and accept me just the way that I am. Therefore, I choose to do so, to accept myself and my body as clean in Your eyes. In Jesus' name, amen.

After this prayer, one woman wept and said joyfully, "I have wished all of my life that I could say that."

Special Prayers for Specific Needs

The last portion of Step 6 is a list of prayers covering other specific issues that may need to be addressed (divorce, homosexuality, abortion, suicidal tendencies, drivenness and perfectionism, eating disorders and self-mutilation, and substance abuse). I remember a time when I was going to bypass these prayers, and the person interrupted, asking to pray one of them because it was an area of concern. By this time, most people want to be thorough. If they are trying to speed up the process so that they can get out of the room, chances are the session was not successful.

Simply say to them, “Consider if these issues need to be addressed.” If there are concerns, give them the opportunity to pray through the issues.

The prayers for specific needs (from *The Steps to Freedom in Christ*) can be adapted or expanded to include any area of sin and the underlying deception they may have believed as a result of being involved in the activity. For example, some may not have had eating disorders or cut themselves intentionally, but they may have purposefully tried to punish themselves or cause pain by hitting themselves or pounding their head against the wall. You could ask them to pray the following prayer:

Lord, I renounce the lie that my worthiness is dependent on my appearance or performance. I renounce hitting myself, pounding my head against the wall, or purposefully trying to punish myself as a means of [name the reason].

Renouncing the lie that their worthiness is dependent on performance is very important to many Christians. There was one woman whose entire life was characterized by drivenness. She believed that she needed to excel to compensate for her failures. Though she was a gifted person, she never felt that she was accepted by her parents. She was encouraged to pray, “I renounce drivenness and the compulsion to perform as a means of gaining approval or cleansing myself of evil, and I announce the truth that I am totally accepted by Christ just as I am.” Afterward, she felt as though a weight had been lifted from her.

The lies of Satan are subtle. Many people believe that they must be their own saviors and make themselves acceptable. The truth is, we are already accepted, approved and forgiven through the shed blood of Christ.

CONCLUDING THIS STEP

Once you have dealt with the relevant areas covered by these prayers, you are ready to conclude this section. The following illustration has been meaningful to many as a summary statement:

> You’ve heard the expression, “A skeleton in the closet.” Well, suppose I have a skeleton in my closet—something that I’ve done wrong that I have never addressed with God. What does the liar, the deceiver, the accuser of the brethren do? He knocks at my door and says, “I want to talk with you

about the skeleton in your closet." Immediately, I feel anxious, guilty and condemned, because I know there is a skeleton there. If I were to open the door, everyone would be able to see it.

Many people believe that they must make themselves acceptable. The truth is, we are already accepted.

Now suppose that I have completely repented of my sin. There is no longer a skeleton in my closet. The Bible tells me that God totally cleanses and forgives me and that He will never again bring up that sin and use it against me. But Satan doesn't give up easily; he continues to knock at the door and tell me that he wants to talk about the skeleton in my closet. This time, however, I don't feel the same anxiety and guilt. I still remember that there used to be a skeleton in the closet, but I know it's not there anymore.

There is a big difference between an unresolved conflict from our past and only the memory of the conflict. On the basis of Scripture, what you have done in going through the Steps is to reduce those experiences to memories. You are free from the past and the sin that entangled you. It no longer has any hold on you!

After using that illustration, you may sense God's leading to ask, "Are there any skeletons in your closet that we have missed?" Sometimes the Lord prompts people to name something, such as lying, cheating or stealing. But one person exclaimed, "The door is open, the light is on and the closet is empty!"

INSIGHT INTO OTHER AREAS OF BONDAGE

The following comments on the other prayers are for your information. It usually is not necessary to give all of these explanations to the person you are helping.

Homosexuality

There is no such thing as a homosexual. There are, however, homosexual thoughts, feelings and behaviors. God created us male and female in His image. During the Olympics authorities tested the sexuality of women by using a small swab and getting a sample of moisture from their mouths. You can also

determine sexuality by getting a molecular sample of skin. People are not born homosexual. Because of the Fall, they may have been predisposed to certain strengths and weaknesses, but that did not make them homosexual. Those thoughts and feelings came from living in this fallen world. Many have been sexually abused, have lived in an abusive home where the roles were reversed or had a father who was overbearing. Others have just struggled with tempting thoughts, thinking that they were their own. If homosexual thoughts were their own, then they would start to believe that they are one of them. The downward spiral started to intensify when they believed this lie. When they acted upon their homosexual thoughts, they used their bodies as instruments of unrighteousness and sin was allowed to reign in their mortal bodies. They do not need any more condemnation. These people have condemned themselves for years, trying to find a place of love and acceptance where they can be helped or fit in. They need to be reminded that God is not only the creator, but He also re-creates, heals and restores.

Abortion

Since God entrusts parents with the life of the child they conceive, He expects them to assume responsibility for the protection and care of that child. Most women who have had abortions feel remorse, and some continue grieving for years. Some will need to forgive the person who coerced them into getting the abortion. Sometimes praying the prayer and forgiving themselves (actually receiving God's forgiveness) gives great relief, and the final closure of entrusting that child to God may be very tearful and meaningful.

Abortions do not apply only to women. If you are helping a man who parented a child and did not assume responsibility for that life, he would need to confess and pray the abortion prayer as well. Many people have repeatedly asked forgiveness for an abortion but have never felt a final resolution. Resolution comes through choosing to accept God's forgiveness, by forgiving oneself and by committing the child to God for His care in eternity.

Suicidal Tendencies

This includes both actual attempts to commit suicide as well as suicidal thoughts, such as wishing to die because of feelings of condemnation or wanting to drive his or her car into another car, and so on. Suicide is the final expression of control over one's own life. The deception is the belief that death is the solution, the escape or the end of everything. The prayer is a paraphrase of John

10:10 and rightly describes Satan as the thief, liar and destroyer that he actually is. It also gives the person the opportunity to announce aloud his or her decision to choose life in Christ and trust Him to bring beauty from ashes (see Isa. 61:3).

Drivenness and Perfectionism

There are many Christians who cannot seem to grasp the grace of God. They often understand that they are saved by grace, but they strive to be perfected by the Law. This is the Galatians heresy mentioned in Galatians 3:1-3. Appearance, performance and status are the means by which they strive to be accepted and affirmed. This is a powerful stronghold for some. Their parents have probably pushed them in that direction and rewarded them for perfectionist behavior. Some have been blessed by good looks, social status and the ability to perform; consequently, all their affirmation has come from those values, and those things become their focus instead of developing character. Their blessings can become a curse if they take them off the path of sanctification.

Eating Disorders or Self-Mutilation

Eating disorders and other forms of self-abuse are all based in deception. Eating disorders have virtually nothing to do with food. People caught in this bondage are overwhelmed by condemnation and negative criticism. Their identity and sense of worth are based primarily on their appearance. After finding their freedom in Christ, many will say, “I can’t believe the lies I have believed.” These practices become secret rituals unconsciously designed to rid themselves of evil for the purpose of gaining a sense of worth.

Some forms of eating disorders may be expressed by frequent over-consumption of food that results in obesity, as a means of insulating themselves from others or of comforting themselves. Some have believed the lie that if they get too attractive, men will take advantage of them. It might involve self-denial of food because they see themselves as being too fat and thereby imperfect. They may binge on food and then purge their bodies from the guilt with laxatives or vomiting. They may cut themselves with razor blades, knives or other sharp objects. All of these conducts (defecating, purging, cutting or punishing) should be renounced as a false means of cleansing themselves. They believe that there is evil present in themselves (see Rom. 7:21-23), but defecating, vomiting and cutting themselves will not purge them of evil. Finally, they should announce the truth that Jesus is their only means of cleansing.

Substance Abuse

Denial is the most common defense of an addict. All people with addictive behaviors lie to both themselves and others. Many are tired of living lies and would love to walk in the light. The dysfunctional use of substances such as alcohol, drugs (either street or prescription), nicotine, caffeine and food becomes a means of coping and escape for them and usually controls their time, money and relationships.

Assuming responsibility by confessing those self-destructive behaviors and renouncing the lies they have believed will free them so that they can begin to respond to life in a healthy way. Obviously, the recovery process for substance abusers will take a lot more work.

These prayers only begin the process of tearing down strongholds. We all have to learn how to overcome our flesh patterns. That is part of our growth process. The devil will leave when we resist him, but the flesh remains. “Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Gal. 5:24).

STAYING FREE

We do not want to leave people with the impression that they have completely dealt with every issue in their lives and will never again struggle with some of these issues. There is no such thing as instant maturity. It will take us the rest of our lives to renew our minds and conform to the image of God. It is also possible that every issue that needed to be resolved did not surface in one session. Other occult issues may surface later, and they need to be dealt with as was done in Step 1. After the session, other names of people they need to forgive may come to their minds, as in Step 3. The same would apply to this Step. Many people take the Steps home and go through them again on their own, and some find themselves dealing with new issues. The following testimony illustrates this point:

> A church leader had been faithful to his wife for more than 30 years. However, he had been deeply involved in sexual activity during his time as a bachelor in the military many years earlier. He dealt with some of the sexual memories when he took himself through the Steps.
>
> Then about a year later, during prayer, his sordid past came back again, and he felt great remorse. It took three hours for him to list every name and

wrongful sexual act he could remember. He acknowledged his willful sexual sins against God and renounced each name and event. Then he not only claimed God's forgiveness, but he also forgave himself. He later reported that certain sexual fantasies that had plagued him all his married life immediately disappeared and that his intimacy with his wife improved dramatically.

Because of the addictive nature of these sins, any freedom gained must be maintained. Some may need ongoing help to solidify the ground they have recovered. This does not undermine or minimize what they have done by going through Step 6. Mountains of anger, guilt, condemnation and hopelessness will be replaced with peace, joy and freedom. But it is one thing to get free, and it is another thing to stay free. This applies particularly in the sexual arena and other addictive areas. There are many lifestyle issues that should be worked out in a good follow-up program.

We absolutely need God, and we *desperately* need each other.

If counselees choose to end an affair during the counseling appointment, have them call that person and end the relationship while in your presence. If they have used drugs and dealers know their phone number, have them call the phone company from your office and change the number or disconnect the line. You will have to help them disconnect from the sources that could pull them down again.

If they have addressed deep issues in this Step, you need to alert them to the fact that the enemy tempts people in their areas of weakness, trying to entice them back into bondage again. Remind them that they are not victims, and they are not powerless. They would be wise, however, to have a friend to whom they can be accountable and count on for prayer support. All of us need to be a part of a support group for regular encouragement and prayer support. As mentioned in Step 5, we absolutely need God, and we *desperately* need each other.



CHAPTER FIFTEEN

OVERCOMING ANCESTRAL SINS

The last issue that needs to be resolved is ancestral sins that are passed on from one generation to another and the related spiritual attacks that come from the enemy. This is a crucial Step for those people who come from dysfunctional families or families involved in cults or the occult. It is breaking the final links of bondage that have chained them to their past. We cannot passively take our places in Christ; we must actively choose to accept ourselves as new creations in Christ and take our places in the family of God.

After a conference, I noticed one of my seminary students sitting rather dazed in his chair.

"Are you all right?" I asked.

"Yes," he responded.

"You look rather perplexed. What happened when you went through this last Step?" I asked.

"I had to literally hang on to my chair to keep from running out of here," he said. It turned out that his mother was a psychic.

This last Step is most significant for those who have cult or occult experiences in their family heritage. An ex-Mormon I was helping suddenly stopped in the middle of the declaration in total fear.

“What’s going on in your mind?” I asked.

She cried out, “You mean you don’t see him there?”

“Who?” I asked.

“My father, standing right there,” she said, pointing her finger at the space beside me.

I did not bother to look because I knew I would not see anything. So the image was not real? Oh, yes, it was, but the problem was not in the room—it was in her mind.

“Tell me about your father,” I continued.

“I’m responsible for my father,” she said.

I told her that was not true. We have a responsibility *to* one another, but not *for* one another. So she renounced the lie and picked up where she had left off. This time her grandmother showed up! These demonic images were not her father or her grandmother but a deceptive battle for her mind.

The story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:26 clearly teaches that this is a present-day impossibility:

> Between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.

A lady who oversaw the women’s ministry in her church came to see me with her husband, who was an elder. They were responsible people and pillars in their community, but their marriage was continuously in turmoil in spite of previous counseling. When she said her mother and grandmother were deeply involved in Christian Science, I asked if she would like to go through the Steps. She was a little indignant at first because I suggested she go through the Steps and not her husband. I explained that anybody who has a family history of involvement with the cults is a prime candidate for the Steps. We were progressing rapidly and without interference until she came to this last Step. While making the declaration, she suddenly exclaimed, “Why, I have had a curse put on me! What do I do about it?”

“You just took care of it,” I said.

“How do I know?” she asked. I had her make the declaration from *The Steps to Freedom in Christ* again, but this time there was no interference. Her marriage took a turn for the better, and a year later, this dear lady had led 25 others to freedom in Christ.

THE INFLUENCE OF HERITAGE

Unless we make concerted efforts to do otherwise, we will perpetuate the habits, customs and traditions passed on in our families for generations. We will discipline our children the way we were disciplined. The families we were born into and the way we have been raised will shape our present beliefs and behaviors. Some of those family traits can be very good and others not so good. Conventional wisdom has recognized to some degree that we are chips off the old block and spittin' images (spirit and image) of our parents. Jesus said:

**Unless we make concerted efforts to do otherwise,
we will perpetuate the habits, customs and traditions
passed on in our families for generations.**

> A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher (Luke 6:40).

Our personalities and temperaments have been mostly established by the time we are five years old, and nobody has contributed more to our early development than our parents.

This generational connection is clearly observed in cycles of abuse, which is a well-attested social phenomenon. The abused become abusers. Whether this cycle is passed on genetically, environmentally or spiritually is the question. I believe the answer is, Yes! All three can affect us.

Genetically Predisposed

First, I believe that we can be genetically predisposed to certain strengths and weaknesses. For instance, it is known that some people are more prone to becoming alcoholics than others. The average person may drink socially for many years and never develop an addiction, while others can be hooked in just a few years, or maybe even months. However, that does not mean they were born alcoholics. They became addicted to alcohol by choosing to drink as a means of coping, reducing stress, dealing with pain or ridding themselves of inhibitions so that they can party.

In a similar fashion, some boys have higher levels of testosterone than others. They will develop beards by the time they are 14 years old, whereas others will

not have full beards until they are 21 years old. Having lower levels of the male hormone does not make a boy a homosexual, but it may make him more vulnerable. Boys who develop late may experience more teasing, which may affect their self-perception.

Environmentally Predisposed

Second, the environment we were raised in is the biggest contributor to our development. This process of learning is far more caught that taught. The actions of our parents speak louder than their words. If you were raised in a home where pornography was left around the house, you will struggle with lust more than the person who was raised in a morally responsible home. Mental strongholds are formed primarily from the environments in which we were raised. By environment, I mean the friends we had, the neighborhoods we played in, the churches we went to (or did not go to) and the parents (or single parent or guardian) who raised us.

Spiritually Predisposed

The third contributor to our development is spiritual. In giving the Ten Commandments, God said:

> You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments (Exod. 20:4-6, see also Exod. 34:6-7; Num. 14:18; Deut. 5:9-10; 7:9-10).

These citations affirm that God blesses those who are obedient to His covenant to the thousandth generation, but the iniquities of those who are disobedient are passed on only to the third and fourth generations.

CAN SIN BE INHERITED?

We are not guilty because of our parents' sins. Yet because they sinned, we are vulnerable to what they have taught and modeled for us. Jeremiah 32 offers more

insight:

> Ah Lord GOD! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and by Your outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for You, who shows lovingkindness to thousands, but repays the iniquity of fathers *into the bosom* of their children after them, O great and mighty God. The LORD of hosts is His name (vv. 17-18, emphasis added).

Whatever is being passed on intergenerationally is not due to the external environment because it occurs in the bosom of the next generation, and there is no genetic explanation for the passing on of iniquities.

Leviticus 26:38-42 offers some valuable insight:

> But you will perish among the nations, and your enemies' land will consume you. So those of you who may be left will rot away because of their iniquity in the lands of your enemies; and also because of the iniquities of their forefathers they will rot away with them. If they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their forefathers, in their unfaithfulness which they committed against Me, and also in their acting with hostility against Me…. I will remember My covenant.

Confessing the iniquities of our fathers will not have any effect on us genetically, but it will help us spiritually.

A Need to Confess Sin

In the Old Testament, the people were to confess their sins and iniquities and those of their ancestors. Iniquities relate more to a rebellious spirit or strong will. Somehow these iniquities are passed on from one generation to another. Old Testament scholars note the following:

> An important consideration is the distinction between corporate and individual responsibility for sin. In its early development Israel was very much influenced by a dynamic concept of corporate sin. … The family group was a much more significant entity than the individual person. When the head of such a group transgressed, he transmitted guilt to every member of it…. Thus, according to the Decalogue (see Exod. 20:5; Deut. 5:9; cf. Exod. 34:7; Num. 14:18), the iniquity of the father is to be visited

upon the children.[1]

In the context of idolatry, Hosea mentions demonic spirits affecting children, which are related to parents' sins:

> They consult a wooden idol and are answered by a stick of wood. A spirit of prostitution leads them astray; they are unfaithful to their God. They sacrifice on the mountaintops and burn offerings on the hills, under oak, poplar and terebinth, where the shade is pleasant. Therefore your daughters turn to prostitution and your daughters-in-law to adultery (4:12-13, *NIV*).

The cause of the children's sin of adultery and prostitution is not only the parents' sin of idolatry, but also the demonic "spirit of prostitution." Notice the following examples of how to deal with ancestral sins in the Old Testament:

> Those of Israelite descent had separated themselves from all foreigners. They stood in their places and confessed their sins and the wickedness of their fathers (Neh. 9:2, *NIV*).

Nehemiah prayed:

> I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's house, have committed against you (1:6, *NIV*).

Jeremiah prayed:

> O LORD, we acknowledge our wickedness and the guilt of our fathers; we have indeed sinned against you (14:20, *NIV*).

Daniel prayed:

> We have not obeyed the LORD our God or kept the laws he gave us through his servants the prophets. All Israel has transgressed your law and turned away, refusing to obey you. Therefore the curses and sworn judgments written in the Law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against you (9:10-11, *NIV*).

God had spoken and the prophets had warned the people about generational sins. In the early sixth century B.C., the prophet Ezekiel had to correct a misunderstanding of the generational curse:

> The word of the LORD came to me: "What do you people mean by quoting this proverb about the land of Israel: 'The fathers eat sour grapes, and children's teeth are set on edge?' As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, you will no longer quote this proverb in Israel" (Ezek. 18:1-3, *NIV*).

The popular proverb was neither from the book of Proverbs nor from the mouth of God. The problem Ezekiel was trying to correct was a fatalistic response to the Law and the abdication of personal responsibility. Children are not guilty because of their parents' sins, and they will not be punished for their parents' iniquities, which are visited upon them, if they are diligent to turn away from the sins of their parents. Scholars have shown this to be the case:

> The corporate involvement of sin deeply impressed itself upon the people, however. The prophets proclaimed that it was not only a few wicked individuals, but the whole nation, that was laden with sin (see Isa. 1:4). Generation upon generation treasured up wrath. Thus it was easy for those who were finally forced to bear the painful consequences to protest that all the effects of corporate guilt were being visited upon them. The exiles lamented: "Our fathers sinned, and are no more; it is we who have borne their iniquities" (Lam. 5:7). They even had a proverb: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." Against this both Jeremiah and Ezekiel protested (see Jer. 31:29,30; Ezek. 18:10-20). No son was to be held accountable for his father's crimes. "The soul who sins shall die" (Ezek. 18:4). In saying this, they did not mean to deny corporate sin: this was beyond dispute. Their purpose was to accentuate individual responsibility, which was in danger of becoming submerged in a consciousness of overpowering national calamity. Even though the nation was now suffering a bitter corporate punishment, there was hope for the individual if he would repent.[2]

Under the Old Covenant, all of God's chosen people were called to repent of their sins and iniquities regardless of whether the scope of their offenses was

personal or national. National or corporate repentance cannot happen without individual repentance. We have seen in the Old Testament the transmission of sin from one generation to the next and how the prophets called the people to confess their sins and the sins of their fathers. This is not just an Old Testament concept. Paul wrote:

> Just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned (Rom. 5:12. *NIV*).

Failure to Recognize Sins of the Past

A television documentary illustrated how iniquities can be passed on to the next generation if not dealt with. A high school girl in a small hamlet in southern Germany decided to do a report on the role her town played in World War II. She had always been told that her town had resisted Hitler and that the Catholic Church had instructed its people not to pray for him.

What she discovered in the local library was just the opposite. The town had acquiesced to Hitler's regime. Her report brought quick disclaimers from town leaders and warnings not to dig up any more dirt. She felt betrayed by her ancestors. After high school she married and did much more extensive research. She printed her report in the local paper. The whole town turned against her when she reported her findings. Her husband left her, her family deserted her and she was eventually run out of town. She is now living in North America.

If you have been reading your paper, then you know that racism is rising again in Germany. How can that be? Haven't they learned anything from their past? How could something so sinful be on the rise again? There could be other reasons, but I believe part of the cause is due to a lack of complete repentance. They covered it up. Some even deny the Holocaust took place! Those who will not acknowledge the sins of their fathers may be doomed to repeat them.

After the nation of Israel split, every king in Israel continued in the sins of Jeroboam. None of them had to continue in the sins of Jeroboam. Any one of them could have said, "Jeroboam was wrong, we should go back to Jerusalem and worship God the way He instructed David." But none did.

A mother with a child in her arms and a husband by her side approached me at a conference. She had read almost all of my books and worked through the Steps to Freedom on her own. She believed that one more issue needed to be resolved.

"My parents and their parents bad-mouthed every pastor in every church we

ever went to, and I have done the same," she told me. "I don't want my child to repeat this same sin, so I am confessing my sin and the sin of my ancestors to you as a member of the clergy. Would you forgive me?" What a courageous and marvelous thing she did for herself and for her child!

Jesus said to those who were carrying on the sinful traditions of their forefathers:

> Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, so that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation (Matt. 23:34-36).

Jesus tells the Pharisees and teachers of the Law that upon them will come all the righteous blood from Abel to Zechariah. This was a Genesis to Revelation prophecy that was fulfilled in the destruction of the Temple and the scattering of the Jewish people. The phrase, "Fill up, then, the measure of the guilt of your fathers" (Matt. 23:32), implies that God's toleration is self-limited, after which both ancestral and present sin overflow together in divine judgment. Jesus' words about multigenerational guilt cannot be ignored.

NEW CREATURES BUT PERSONALLY RESPONSIBLE

Some have questioned the need to confess ancestral sin because we are new creatures in Christ and Jesus paid the penalty for all our sins. Indeed, He did, but when we were born again, were our minds instantly transformed? Had we fully repented at the moment of conversion? I cannot imagine anybody believing more strongly than I do about our new identity, position and security in Christ. It is the basis for all that I am, all that I do and all that I teach concerning evangelism and discipleship. It is because we are new creatures in Christ that we can actively choose to confess and renounce the sins of our ancestors and stop the cycle of abuse.

The sins and iniquities of our parents are not separate issues or mutually exclusive from personal accountability. The power of sin and the curse of the Law were broken at Calvary, but the effects of what Christ has accomplished are

not realized without faith and repentance on the part of the believer. We are positionally sanctified by faith the moment we are born again because of what Christ has already done for us. We are progressively sanctified by faith when we are transformed by the renewing of our minds, which requires repentance and faith. Progressive sanctification is making real in our experience what has already happened to us in our new birth. Every born-again Christian is a liberated child of God, but how many are living like children of God—living free productive lives in Christ? Regeneration at the time of salvation makes it possible, but overcoming our own sins and the sins of our ancestors is part of our sanctifying process.

There are numerous kinds of iniquities that can be environmentally and spiritually passed on from one generation to another. Such sins and iniquities can be the roots of sexual addiction and perversion, alcoholism and drugs, violent behavior, and more. There are also family traits such as pride in achievement, materialism, intellectualism, social prestige, independence, control and unforgiveness. It is not my purpose to place blame or to categorize the root cause of every problem. Many of these strongholds have already been dealt with in previous Steps.

What people need to know is that they can be free in Christ from inherited or acquired bondages linked to generational sin if they will repent. We have new lives because of the great work that Christ accomplished for us on the cross and in His resurrection.

ELIMINATING CURSES

A curse is a blasphemous pronouncement, oath or swearing intended to bring injury to a person. Another person could swear at you, but it would have little effect on you unless you believed it. Saying to a child that he or she will never amount to anything can be nothing more than words said in anger, but it can have a devastating effect if the child believes that he or she will never amount to anything.

Spiritual curses are common in Third World countries that practice spiritism, voodoo, magic and pagan rituals. Curses are also present in North America when people get involved in the dark side of the supernatural. Summoning and sending demons are a central part of satanic rituals. If you have ever been abruptly awakened at a certain hour of the night, like 3:00 A.M., you have probably been targeted. In every conference I have conducted in the United States, a third of

those attending say that has happened to them. It is no sin to be targeted, and it will have no lasting negative effect on you if you just ignore it and go back to sleep. If the attack persists, then submit to God; resist the devil, and he will flee from you. We often hear reports of witches and satanists who are praying for the downfall of Christians—especially Christian leaders.

Predictions given by a medium, or even things unwisely said or done by a parent, can be *used* by Satan. His accusations will function like a curse on your life if you believe it. When playing with a Ouija board or magic eight ball, a message or response is often believed. The person may—either consciously or unconsciously—feel helplessly bound to its assessments or predictions. (Hopefully, this was dealt with in Step 1.)

Unless the Lord specifically brings something to the minds of people we are helping, we do not deal with any specific curses, hexes or pronouncements. We encourage them to take their place in Christ, put on the armor of God and stand against all assignments and weapons formed against them. Christ is our defense, and we should never let the devil set the agenda. We want those we are helping to come under the protection and authority of Christ and, by the grace of God, to break any link to the bondages of generational sins and curses. They do not have to be victims of their past anymore.

GOING THROUGH STEP 7

You can begin this Step by reading the opening paragraphs in *The Steps to Freedom in Christ* or using your own words to explain what has been covered above. Then have counselees pray, asking for the Lord's guidance:

Dear heavenly Father,
I ask You to reveal to my mind now all the sins of my ancestors that are being passed down through family lines. I want to be free from these influences and walk in my new identity as a child of God. In Jesus' name, amen.

Give counselees enough time to write down anything that comes to their minds. In Asian cultures, ancestor worship is very common and should definitely be included here if not dealt with in the Step 1. Some Asians and others are reluctant to say anything negative about their parents publicly. Remind them that nobody has perfect parents, and they are not being disrespectful if they acknowledge their parents' imperfections. They cannot deny the truth about

themselves and their heritage and become free in Christ. When their list is complete, have them read the following declaration quietly to themselves first to see if they have any questions. You want them to know the authoritative stand they will be taking when they read the following declaration aloud:

Many actually look different. I encourage them to take a good look in the mirror.

I here and now reject and disown all the sins of my ancestors. I specifically renounce the sins of [name the areas of family sin the Lord reveals to you]. *As one who has now been delivered from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of God's Son, I choose to believe that all the sins and iniquities of my ancestors have been confessed, and I now stand forgiven and cleansed in Christ. I choose to believe that Jesus has broken every curse that Satan and his workers have put on me. I announce to Satan and all his forces that Christ became a curse for me when He died for my sins on the cross. I reject any and every way in which Satan may claim ownership of me. I belong to the Lord Jesus Christ who purchased me with His own blood. I reject all blood sacrifices whereby Satan may claim ownership of me. I declare myself to be fully and eternally signed over and committed to the Lord Jesus Christ. By the authority I have in Christ, I now command every enemy of the Lord Jesus to leave my presence. I commit myself to my heavenly Father to do His will from this day forward. In Jesus' name, amen.*

DEALING WITH SPECIFICS

When they finish the declaration, have them pray:

Dear heavenly Father,
I come to You as Your child, bought out of slavery to sin by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. You are the Lord of the universe and the Lord of my life. I submit my body to You as an instrument of righteousness—a living and holy sacrifice that I may glorify You in my body. I now ask You to fill me to overflowing with Your Holy Spirit today and every day. I commit myself to the renewing of my mind in order to prove that Your will is good, acceptable and perfect for me. All this I pray in the name and authority of the risen Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Once complete, the person has accomplished a fierce moral inventory. The impact on some is dramatic. Many actually look different. I have encouraged them to freshen up in the rest room and take a good look at themselves in the mirror.

"Why? Do I look that bad?" some have asked. They usually feel emotionally drained and tears have muddied the mascara on many ladies.

"On the contrary, you look that good," I respond. One young lady looked in the mirror and said, "Why, I'm pretty!"

I usually have people close their eyes and share with me what is going on in their mind. Many experience a peace and quietness that they have never known before. One lady said, "How did you know that would happen?" Another one said, "I'm normal!" There really is a peace of God that surpasses all understanding that will guard our hearts and our minds (see Phil. 4:7).

A good way to launch people in their walks of freedom is to read the final paragraphs of Step 7 in *The Steps to Freedom in Christ*, which follow the prayer. They need to know how to maintain the freedom they have gained. They have submitted to God and resisted the devil in a comprehensive way. Now they must understand that staying free is a lifelong process. See the aftercare suggestions that are included in *The Steps to Freedom in Christ*.

FACING LINGERING CONCERNS

If people do not sense complete resolution, we encourage them to pray and ask the Lord to reveal what it is that is still keeping them in bondage. Allow them to sit in quiet deliberation for a few minutes. After that you might ask, "What is the *first thing* that came to your mind?" We have often seen God bring to mind something specific that still needed to be addressed.

Rarely, a person may say, "It is almost completely quiet, but there are voices way off in the distance" or "I hear laughing in the background." You can help them learn to walk in the authority of Christ by leading them to say: "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I command you to leave my presence. I am a child of God and the evil one cannot touch me." When they have done this, the person usually exclaims, "It's quiet!"

A pastor's wife finished the declaration and prayer, but she was not free, and we both knew it. Sensing her struggle, I said to her, "Tell it to go!" There was a slight pause, then she said, "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I command you to leave my presence." She was instantly free. There was some reluctance to

completely get rid of her spirit guide.

If you are working with severe cases of satanic ritual abuse (SRA), there is a good chance the person will have a multiple personality disorder, or dissociative identity disorder (DID). In such cases, they may hear the voices of other personalities, but they will sense a great difference, even though there will likely be much more work to do before total integration takes place.

If counselees had difficulty working through a portion of the Steps, you may want to have them go though that part again. This is particularly true of the doctrinal affirmation in Step 2. Many experience difficulty reading through it the first time, but they immediately sense an amazing difference between the two readings. When they experience this difference, they will sense that something significant really happened.

EVALUATING FREEDOM

Highly subjective people are the most difficult people to work with. They have never fully learned to assume responsibility for their own thoughts. They are easy targets for deceiving spirits, because they have little mental discipline. Some expect others to do their work or thinking *for* them. Others are looking for some elusive experience or emotional high rather than assuming their own responsibility to think and live responsibly. Subjective people often lack the assurance that their resolution is complete. If this is the case, neither you nor they should trust their feelings. We walk by faith according to what God says is truth. You may want to say:

> We know that God answers prayer. If you were honest and sincere as you went through the Steps, then I believe that God has answered the prayers you have prayed today and that many personal and spiritual conflicts have been resolved.
>
> When you leave today, don't trust your feelings; instead, choose to believe what God says is true. Remember that the battle is for your mind. Saturate your mind with scriptural truth about God's character and His love for you. Don't get bogged down with what didn't happen. Rejoice in what did happen. You have faced and worked through a lot of issues today. You must learn to recognize the lies that cause you to doubt. Take every thought that comes into your mind captive to the obedience of Christ. That means evaluate what you are thinking according to the Word of God. It is

His truth that sets you free (see John 8:32).

We are thankful for the hundreds of testimonies that we receive, and we are grateful that the Lord allows us to be used to help others. You will receive letters as well, as you gain experience in helping others. None, however, are more rewarding than those we get from the survivors of satanic ritual abuse. The following testimony was very special:

> I waited a while to write to be sure that my freedom didn't "wear off." That doesn't sound like I was trusting God, but *He* understood that I wanted to write you at the proper time. Then, too, my Christian encourager said, "I'll give you one to two weeks to be back where you were! And if you are, don't beat yourself up for a lack of faith."
>
> God had great things in mind, however, for my encourager and me. She is now using your Freedom in Christ materials, as she has seen wondrous changes in several of her patients! We now pray together as I continue to remember the details of my incest and ritual abuse.
>
> I am awakening less now at 3:00 A.M. than ever before, and I have had the tools of God's Word to combat the demonic voices. Twice these battles literally wore me out, but at the end of them, God gave me a song of praise on my lips—actually a "joyful noise" since I'm tone deaf. The joy of knowing the depth of my identity *in* Christ is hard to explain. I pray that it will show on my face and lead others to Him.



CHAPTER SIXTEEN

How to Set Up a Discipleship Counseling Ministry in Your Church

The Vision

Suppose you carefully and prayerfully select 20 potential encouragers. For the next 16 weeks, you provide them the training they need to help others resolve their personal and spiritual conflicts. Freedom in Christ Ministries will supply all the books, study guides, videocassettes and syllabuses. With proper supervision, suppose all 20 trained encouragers agree to help another person every other week. In one year, your church would help 520 people.

A key to having a fruitful ministry is to understand the role of pastors, which is to equip the saints for the work of service (see Eph. 4:11-12). That has to happen if we are going to effectively minister to our people because there are not enough pastors and encouragers in our country to help more than five percent of our population, even if that is all they did. I am convinced that well-trained laypeople can be used of God to resolve 95 percent of the problems people face. That can only happen when Jesus is understood to be the wonderful counselor. Another key to effective ministry is the selection and proper training of lay

encouragers.

THE RIGHT FOUNDATION

For any ministry to succeed, the right foundation must be laid. That means you have to begin with the right people (see chapter 4). This ministry has to be under the authority of the local church leadership. Timing is also critical. A careful and patient introduction of Freedom in Christ materials and its ministry principles is an essential first step toward building the ministry. A critical attitude of the current ministry or an arrogant pushing of the materials as the only way will invite resistance and damage possibilities for future ministry. I encourage you to adopt a servant's heart—let God work in your life first, and be willing to wait for His timing. You cannot move any faster than you can educate. Someone once said, "If you are one step ahead of your people, you are a leader. If you are 10 steps ahead of your people, you are a martyr."

Pastoral Resources

If you are a senior pastor, you have many opportunities to gently help your congregation recognize the importance of establishing their identity and freedom in Christ. Several pastors have used the 36 chapters of *Who I Am in Christ* as the basis for an extended series on a believer's identity in Christ. You could have your board and your staff members read and discuss some of the books or view some of the videocassettes produced by Freedom in Christ Ministries. You could have a supply of the basic books *Victory over the Darkness* and *The Bondage Breaker* available for loan or purchase. *Breaking Through to Spiritual Maturity* is an adult curriculum based on the above two books that can be used for Sunday School or small groups. Many churches are using the *Freedom in Christ Bible*, which has 260 daily studies (five studies per week for one year). People are encouraged to do the daily study on their own at home as a family devotional. Then small groups and Sunday School classes discuss the materials and the pastor preaches on the same subjects. Discussion questions can be obtained from the home office of Freedom in Christ Ministries. Finally, there is nothing to stop you, as a senior pastor, from using the materials to help people in your personal counseling ministry. There is nothing like seeing the Lord set a captive free and bind up the brokenhearted right in front of you.

Additionally, there are youth editions of the essential Freedom in Christ books for youth pastors interested in helping young people find their freedom in

Christ. As the lives of their younger brothers and sisters in Christ are changed, other church members will want to find out how to experience that freedom.

An associate pastor sought and received permission from the church board to lead studies based on our books and videocassettes during weekend seminars at his church. He began taking people through the Steps to Freedom himself. Word of God's work in people's hearts and lives began to spread throughout the church. As people's lives are changed, you will have many opportunities to expand the ministry if you have not burned any bridges by pushing too far too fast. Powerful testimonies will come from laypeople whose lives have been transformed by the freedom they have found in Christ. God can work mightily when these people share what they have experienced with other members of the church.

Additional Resources

One of the tests of your own freedom and maturity, however, will be whether you can be patient and remain at peace when you do not get your way or it does not happen in your timing. Remember, it is your responsibility to pray for and obey those in spiritual authority over you (see Heb. 13:17). Use the materials in your personal ministry and sphere of influence, and trust God for the fruit. You are being a good leader when you:

> Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven (Matt. 5:16).

Seldom will you get any positive results by suggesting that some present ministry or method is not working. How do you get an old bone away from a dog? You don't do it by grabbing the bone. All you will end up with is a dog fight. Throw the dog a steak, and he will voluntarily spit out the old bone. That is why we have never pushed our ministry on anyone. We have never gone where we have not been invited or spoken where we have not been asked. Every legitimate ministry grows in God's way and in His timing.

As the materials gain acceptance among people at your church, plan to participate in a nearby conference, or schedule one of your own. Freedom in Christ has several communicators available to lead a live conference or facilitate a videoconference at your church. These conferences cover the materials of the basic 16-session course and provide initial encourager training. You also can conduct your own conference using our videocassettes and resources. Call our

office for details and we will supply the materials. A conference exposes more people to the concept of freedom in Christ and helps to identify those who have an interest in the ministry.

Pray that God will plant the desire and vision for an ongoing discipleship counseling ministry in the hearts of church leaders and members. Every church and every legitimate Christian ministry should have the goal and desire to see all their people live free and productive lives in Christ. The rest of this chapter will provide the guidelines you need to establish an ongoing discipleship counseling ministry in your church.

MINISTRY OVERVIEW

The purpose for having a discipleship counseling ministry is to help believers find their identity and freedom in Christ by resolving their personal and spiritual conflicts through genuine repentance and faith in God. If that purpose is fulfilled, they will grow in the grace of God and glorify Him by bearing much fruit (see John 15:8). To fulfill that purpose, certain objectives must be accomplished.

First, you must have adequate staff supervision and be able to work under the authority of the church governing body. Laypeople can do most of the work, but if they lack staff support, the ministry will flounder.

Second, there must be an effective means of recruiting and training encouragers who are capable of leading others to freedom in Christ and discipling them. Do not ask for volunteers because some of the most hurting people in your church will show up desperately looking for answers for themselves. Those are the people we ultimately want to help, but you need the most mature people in your church to help them. The right people need to be carefully selected and trained. This development process involves the screening, training and oversight of encouragers. Whatever you do, take the time to do it right.

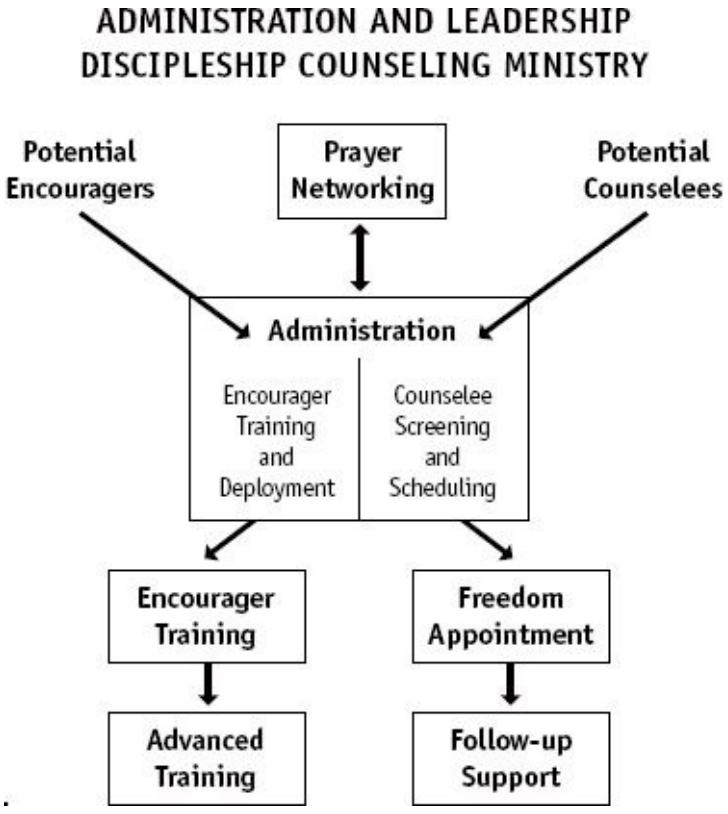
Third, the administration of the ministry involves screening, scheduling and shepherding those seeking help. Diagram 16.1 illustrates the structure of the Freedom in Christ program and identifies the major areas of ministry that need to be developed. A small church may have one person who oversees the entire ministry, but a large church may need a team of several people working together.

As you undoubtedly know, competent, spiritual leadership is critical for any fruitful ministry. Gifted and talented people who are not spiritual will destroy the

credibility of the ministry when their own faith falters or they fall into sin. Spiritual people who are not competent will destroy the ministry through mismanagement, misunderstanding and neglect. Unfortunately, dedicated incompetence is still incompetence. Leaders need to experience their own freedom in Christ before they can help others find that freedom. We simply cannot impart what we ourselves do not possess.

Identifying the spiritually mature *and* gifted people who can be leaders in this ministry may take some time, but this step is the most critical part of starting the ministry. The Lord spent all night in prayer before He chose the Twelve, and we would do well to follow His example and pray. Even with careful selection, you will soon discover that many potential leaders have unresolved issues. Invest the time to help them first before launching them into ministry.

Diagram 16.1



Let us look briefly at each area of ministry highlighted in diagram 16.1 and see who and what is needed to make the ministry fruitful.

Administration

Our experience has taught us that someone with leadership skills and administrative ability needs to function as the overall director of a discipleship counseling ministry. This person may not be the best encourager or the most gifted teacher, but this individual must have the organizational and motivational skills to lead the ministry. Maturity and discernment are important personal qualities for the person in this position. This person also needs to be able to get along with people, recruit others into the ministry and deal tactfully with problems that always arise in a volunteer organization.

Training

In the training program, potential lay encouragers read books, watch and discuss videocassettes, and observe freedom appointments as prayer partners. Someone who understands the content of the materials and is experienced in leading people through the Steps needs to lead the videocassette discussions. However, another person may organize the training sessions and track people as they move through the process of becoming encouragers.

Screening

People who want to be involved in the ministry and are familiar with the materials do not automatically qualify to become encouragers. Allowing the wrong person into this ministry can undermine all of your best efforts.

After much prayerful screening on your part, those people who are officially designated as encouragers must complete the first 16 sessions of basic training and receive from those in authority the recommendation to continue. They then sit in on several freedom appointments as a prayer partner. In addition, one of the trainers should watch them conduct a freedom appointment. After the potential encourager completes these assignments, the director will interview him or her and decide whether that person is ready to start leading freedom appointments. Some people will discover in the process of training that this is not their ministry. Again, it is important that people going through the basic training understand that they will not automatically qualify to serve as an encourager.

Freedom Appointments

At the heart of the ministry are freedom appointments. During these meetings, an encourager leads a counselee through the guided prayer and process of repentance outlined in the Steps. Since the average appointment lasts between two and four hours, these appointments need to be scheduled for an entire

morning, afternoon or evening. Difficult cases will take longer.

Encouragement Groups

Following their freedom appointment, counselees often need the encouragement of other believers to learn how to maintain their freedom and grow in the grace of God. The leaders of these groups need to be mature Christians who can disciple others. *Breaking Through to Spiritual Maturity* is the curriculum that many group leaders use to disciple counselees in their newfound freedom. Rich Miller and I have put together a 21-day devotional for follow-up entitled *Walking in Freedom*, which takes the person through one Step every third day. This reinforces what they have done and sometimes surfaces new issues that they did not address before. In addition, we recommend that counselees read a chapter a day in *Who I Am in Christ* for 36 days and then use the devotional *Daily in Christ* for one year or the *Freedom in Christ Bible*. What counselees learn in their freedom appointments needs to be reinforced. Getting free in Christ is one thing; staying free is something else.

Prayer Support and Networking

Prayer is the spiritual foundation for this ministry. Those who are committed to intercessory prayer need to intercede for everyone involved—counselees, encouragers, group leaders and administrators. A Freedom in Christ ministry can indeed be a battleground for spiritual warfare, and prayer is crucial to victory and freedom. Alongside this commitment to prayer, another priority is to make this discipleship counseling ministry available to all believers in your community by networking with pastors and inviting people outside your church to attend your training sessions.

ADMINISTRATION AND LEADERSHIP

As I mentioned earlier, someone with leadership skills and administrative ability needs to direct your discipleship counseling ministry. This motivated, competent and spiritually gifted person should coordinate the overall ministry. If already-busy church staff members are assigned this responsibility and their hearts are not fully in it, the ministry will fly like a turtle. Unless yours is a very small church, the senior pastor probably cannot oversee the ministry because of other responsibilities, and the fact that this task could be overwhelming. Be forewarned! Once you have helped a few people find their freedom in Christ,

you will be hooked. The difficulty will be saying no to those people who you know, by the grace of God, you could probably help, because you cannot help everybody.

The director needs to oversee—but not necessarily do—several major tasks:

Be forewarned! Once you have helped a few people find their freedom in Christ, you will be hooked.

- Recruit and train encouragers.
- Schedule freedom appointments.
- Recruit and train group leaders for follow-up discipling.
- Coordinate support groups.
- Order all necessary materials.
- Reserve facilities for training, counseling and support groups.
- Represent the ministry to the leadership of the church.

Depending on the size of the church and the ministry personnel available, a discipleship counseling ministry can be structured in a variety of ways. In a smaller church, for instance, all the leaders will, out of necessity, be volunteers. In larger churches, several of the administrative jobs listed above can and should be delegated to responsible people (perhaps a combination of staff members and volunteers) who comprise a leadership team. This team should meet regularly to evaluate the ministry, formulate policy decisions, pray for one another and plan for the future. We also strongly suggest that you appoint a prayer coordinator who maintains close contact with the director. Whatever the structure of the ministry, leaders must be careful not to let demand for the ministry dictate the hours spent in the ministry. Leaders must pace themselves and those under their authority to prevent burnout.

Leaders also must keep the ministry before the hearts and minds of the congregation so that new leaders and encouragers can continuously be recruited. It helps to schedule testimonies by those finding freedom in Christ for worship services, Sunday School classes or other group meetings. These personal accounts not only give glory to God, but they also encourage other people to seek help.

A word of caution: Care needs to be taken that the people sharing these testimonies do not overstate what God has done. Creating false hope or implying

instant maturity will damage the credibility of the ministry. However, people who are struggling can be greatly encouraged when others testify that God's truth does set people free and that Jesus Christ is the way to a vital spiritual life. It is important that people sharing their stories make it clear that the Steps to Freedom do not set us free. Christ is the One *who* sets us free, and our response to God in repentance and faith is *what* sets us free.

TRAINING OF ENCOURAGERS

The materials for training encouragers includes books, study guides (which greatly enhance the learning process by helping people personalize and internalize the message) and several videocassette and audiocassette series (each series comes with a corresponding syllabus). Trainees receive the most thorough training when they watch the videocassettes, read the books and complete the study guides. Overviews of basic training and advanced training are provided below. The materials should be presented in the order listed.

Basic Training

Sessions 1-4

Videocassette/Audiocassette Training

Victory over the Darkness (Regal Books, 2000)

Reading

Victory over the Darkness and *Victory over the Darkness Study Guide* (Regal Books, 2000)

Supplemental Reading

Living Free in Christ (Regal Books, 1995)

Sessions 5-8

Videocassette/Audiocassette Training

The Bondage Breaker (Harvest House Publishers, 2000)

Reading

The Bondage Breaker and *The Bondage Breaker Study Guide* (Harvest House Publishers, 2000)

Supplemental Reading

Released from Bondage (Thomas Nelson, 2002)

Sessions 9-16
Videocassette/Audiocassette Training
Freedom in Christ Discipleship Counseling (Regal Books, 1999)
Helping Others Find Freedom in Christ Video (Regal Books, 1997)
Reading
Discipleship Counseling (Regal Books, 2003)
Supplemental Reading
Leading Teens to Freedom in Christ for Youth Leaders (Regal Books, 1997)
Christ-Centered Therapy (Zondervan, 2000), for licensed professional counselors

Successful completion of the basic training also requires that trainees do the following:

- Go through the Steps to Freedom with an encourager.
- Participate in two or more freedom appointments as a prayer partner.
- Meet the leadership qualifications established by the church.
- Be recommended by the director of the discipleship counseling ministry.

A trainee is only ready to help others after he or she completes the coursework, gains some hands-on experience under the observation of the ministry's leaders and is recommended by the leaders as a new encourager.

Basic Training Schedules
A 16-session format requires 16 two- to three-hour weekly meetings. Showing two videocassette lessons each night requires about 12 sessions for the first three videocassette series. During each of the last four sessions, you use one of the four 45-minute videocassettes in the *Helping Others Find Freedom in Christ* videocassette training program series. This four-part series shows how to lead a person through the Steps with dramatization and instruction. During these four weeks, you also should be covering chapters 9-15 in this book. This schedule does not include much time for discussing the books, the inductive studies or the content of the videocassette series. Such discussion could take place at another meeting time (Sunday morning has worked for some people), or you could discuss the materials after showing the videocassette.

Another possible schedule involves showing one videocassette series on a

Friday night and Saturday each month. With this approach—which requires only one facilitator giving one weekend each month—you cover all the materials in four weekends. Generally, however, there is less time to discuss the videocassettes with this schedule, but trainees could meet Sunday morning or one night during the week to discuss the books and the inductive studies.

Advanced Training

Books

The Bondage Breaker series: *The Bondage Breaker* (Harvest House Publishers, 2000); *Praying by the Power of the Spirit* (Harvest House Publishers, 2003); *Finding God's Will in Spiritually Deceptive Times* (Harvest House Publishers, in press).

The Christ-Centered Marriage (Regal Books, 1997). Defines the purpose for marriage and steps to set your marriage free.

Freedom from Addiction (Regal Books, 1997). Discusses the nature of substance abuse and how the bondage can be broken in Christ.

Freedom from Fear (Harvest House Publishers, 1999). Discusses the nature of anxiety disorders (i.e., fear, anxiety and panic attacks) and how they can be overcome in Christ.

Getting Anger Under Control (Harvest House Publishers, 2002). Discusses why people get angry and how it can be managed by the grace of God.

The Seduction of Our Children (Harvest House Publishers, 1991).

Spiritual Protection for Your Children (Regal Books, 1996). This book and the previous book include what children are experiencing, parental discipline, parenting styles, how to pray for your children and how to lead them to freedom in Christ.

Victory over the Darkness series: *Victory over the Darkness* (Regal Books, 2000); *Overcoming Negative Self-Image* (Regal Books, 2003); *Overcoming Addictive Behaviors* (Regal Books, in press).

A Way of Escape (Harvest House Publishers, 1998). Defines how people get into sexual bondage and how that bondage can be resolved in Christ.

Book and Videocassette Combinations

Finding Hope Again (Regal Books, 1999). Defines the causes and cures of depression.

Setting Your Church Free (Regal Books, 1999). Discusses principles of leadership and management and how to resolve corporate conflicts through corporate repentance.

There are no shortcuts to effective ministry. However, there are people all around the world using these materials without any formal training, and they are leading others to freedom in Christ. This is possible because Jesus Christ is *the* bondage breaker, and the process is not a matter of technique but of truth, character and humble dependence on God. The kind of basic and advanced training outlined enhances the Spirit's work; it does not replace it. Such training helps people overcome their fears and gain confidence in their ability to lead others to freedom, but there is no substitute for Spirit-dependent living.

Be aware that this training brings to the surface a lot of issues in people's lives. Some folks will find it very difficult to even read the books. Be prepared to lead many potential encouragers through the Steps to Freedom while their training is in progress.

Furthermore, it would be naive to think there will be no spiritual opposition to this ministry. Satan hates the truth and deplores the light, and unfortunately, so do people who have something to hide. Therefore, any ministry that calls people to walk in the light and speak the truth in love is going to encounter opposition. If someone feels the threat of being exposed, that person will either flee the light or try to discredit the light source just as the Pharisees did in their confrontations with Jesus. The subtle attacks appear to be theological: Someone will take issue with a point of the law. Yet the real problem is usually petty jealousy, selfish ambition or personal issues that have not been resolved. In every case, do not be defensive. Instead, handle the opposition with gentleness, patience and truth.

This inevitable spiritual opposition to the work of Christ underscores the importance of having your team of encouragers meet regularly for prayer, instruction and feedback. Ongoing, on-the-job training is essential for any ministry. We have seen cases become more difficult as encouragers mature. About the time that you think you have heard it all, a case will come along and shatter all your preconceived ideas. This pattern definitely keeps us from becoming complacent and relying on our own cleverness. The key is to rely on God. This pattern also points out the need for encouragers to have each other's support.

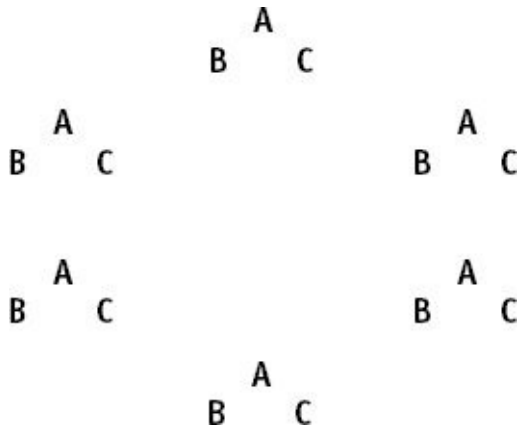
SETTING UP THE ENCOURAGER TRAINING CLASS

You must begin this ministry with the most mature and caring people available because a chain is only as strong as its weakest link. You will sabotage the ministry if you invite people who do not have a good reputation in the church. Credibility is critical for the success of the ministry. Therefore, if you decide to allow anyone to participate in the training, state up front that attendance alone does not qualify a person to be an encourager for the church.

Since no ministry can be more productive than it is personal, the initial training meeting should be a time to get acquainted. Furthermore, because the materials bring to the surface a lot of issues in people's lives, a lot of personal ministry will be going on among your group of trainees. Take the time to develop trusting relationships. This is a frontline ministry that will be contested; therefore, take the time to pray.

When I taught at Talbot School of Theology, I always began my pastoral counseling class with the following exercise. This exercise is a good start for an encourager training class. It is designed to help people begin to get to know as many people as possible in a meaningful way. It is a timed exercise, and many will not finish sharing before their time is up.

Divide the trainees into groups of three and designate each person as A, B or C. The triads make up a larger circle as follows:



Person A always stays in the same seat, but after each sequence, person B moves counterclockwise to the next group in the circle and person C moves clockwise to the next group in the circle. One person is designated to share, and the other two must remain silent and listen. The leader times the exercise, giving each person in the group two minutes to respond to the first set of questions. After all three people have responded, each individual has two minutes to respond to the second set of questions. Each of the following sequences should

take 12 minutes:

First Sequence

1. Describe where you lived between the ages of 7 and 12. Did you enjoy those years? What good memories do you have of that period of your life? Can you recall any particular bad experience during that time?
2. Describe your church experience during your junior high and senior high school years. What public or private school teacher did you most easily relate to during those years?

Rotate

Second Sequence

1. What room in your home was the center of human warmth for you when you were between the ages of 10 and 15? Describe your relationship with your parents. Were you sure of their love? How did they show their love to you?
2. Were there many fights in your family? How did you feel when people were fighting? Which member of your family did you get along with best and why?

Rotate

Third Sequence

1. What is your favorite way to spend your spare time? What would you like to do in your spare time if you had the time and the money? What book other than the Bible has had the greatest impact on your life?
2. When did God become more than a word to you? Describe the time you felt closest to God.

Rotate

Fourth Sequence

1. Describe your present family situation (i.e., parents, spouse, brothers,

sisters and children). How have you worked professionally or vocationally? What schools have you attended?

2. What does the verse, “Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2) mean? What is the law of Christ?

Rotate

Fifth Sequence

Every member of the triad is to complete each sentence before the next person begins. This sequence is not a timed exercise.

1. When I am in a new group, I …
2. I feel most rejected when …
3. I feel closest to God when …
4. The greatest thing I fear is …
5. I feel the most satisfied when …
6. My greatest need right now is …

Conclude this exercise by praying for one another in your triad.

As outlined in the five sequences, this entire exercise should take less than two hours. Although the exercise may appear a little forced or canned, you will be amazed at what it accomplishes. I usually have the participants close their eyes afterwards and silently be aware of how they are feeling. Then I ask them to describe that feeling in one word and share that word with the group. Most people will be very positive about the experience, but some will feel a little threatened or intimidated. Chances are these people have some unresolved issues in their past.

Having completed this exercise, members of the class can form their own groups of three at the beginning of the second meeting. These triads will remain together for the duration of the training for the purpose of prayer and role playing.

At the initial meeting, the leaders also should hand out copies of the training schedule and make the required materials available. Everyone should fill out the Confidential Personal Inventory (see appendix B). They need to do this if they are going to go through the Steps to Freedom with a trained encourager, and they should do it anyway to gain a better understanding of their own history and

experience. You also may consider asking them to share their own story at some point in the training process. If sharing with the whole group is too intimidating, then people could tell their story to the other two members of their triad. After eight weeks of praying together, they should have developed enough trust to be able to do that.

THE SCREENING AND DEPLOYMENT OF ENCOURAGERS

Commitment to the training program described above constitutes a major part of the encourager screening process. Completion of the training narrows the field of potential encouragers to those very familiar with the content of the materials and willing to invest time in the ministry. Being an effective encourager requires more than being familiar with and enthusiastic about the materials. Many enthusiastic people who have been set free using our materials have suffered from bondage for so long that they need time to mature both spiritually and relationally. While they may have dramatic testimonies of gaining freedom in Christ, their own sense of discernment may not be well developed due to years of believing lies. Leaders of the ministry therefore need to make sure that those people recommended to serve as encouragers are trustworthy and mature in their faith.

Several churches are partnering with Freedom in Christ Ministries to train encouragers in their church and surrounding community. Everyone interested in becoming an encourager must go through a careful screening process. The following is a composite of what churches require of their encouragers and the forms they use:

1. Attend a 16-week training session that uses the four videocassette series produced by Freedom in Christ, or attend a Living Free in Christ conference and take the advanced workshop on discipleship counseling.
2. Read the following books by Neil Anderson: *Victory over the Darkness, The Bondage Breaker, Released from Bondage* and *Discipleship Counseling.*
3. Complete an Encourager Application, which in addition to basic information, asks about spiritual experience and counseling experience.
4. Have your pastor complete a Pastoral Recommendation form.

5. Attend a personal freedom appointment with a member of the encouragement team (required even if the applicant has worked through the Steps to Freedom on their own or in a group). Having a similar experience gives you deeper compassion for counselees as well as the confidence of knowing that you are not asking others to do something you are not willing to do.
6. Sit in on at least two freedom appointments as a prayer partner. Besides seeing two different encouragement styles, you will be able to recognize the necessity of prayer in a freedom appointment and to experience its power.
7. Meet with two members of the discipleship counseling ministry leadership team in an Encourager Interview. In a warm, friendly and supportive manner, both team members will ask questions about your motivation and understanding of this ministry. Whether you are ready to serve as an encourager is determined at the close of the interview. Those applicants whom the team feels are not ready will be notified in person and given honest feedback in a loving manner. In obedience to Scripture and for the good of the applicant, the truth must be spoken in love (see Eph. 4:15).
8. Sign an Encourager Covenant once you have completed all the training, passed the interview and been invited to become an encourager. You are required to do this and are agreeing to serve in the ministry for six months and to attend the monthly encouragers' meetings.

With certificate in hand—ready to be an official part of the ministry—the new encourager talks with the director about when he or she is available for freedom appointments. Since these appointments can take from three to four hours, the encourager must be realistic about his or her schedule and availability.

The encourager also is expected to attend monthly meetings for support, accountability and advanced training. At these meetings, he or she will learn how to recognize when a counselee may need additional help or professional intervention. The encourager also will address issues such as establishing healthy boundaries with counselees and setting personal limits to avoid burnout.

ENCOURAGER APPLICATION

This data is solely for the confidential use of Freedom in Christ Ministries. Information, provided voluntarily, will not be released to any agency or organization.

Date of application _____

Personal

Name _____
Last First Middle

Address _____
Number Street City State Zip

Telephone (____)_____(____)_____
Area code Home number Area code Work number

Birth date _____ Sex ( ) Male ( ) Female

Vocation

Name _____
Last First Middle

Address _____
Number Street City State Zip

Telephone (____)_____(____)_____
Area code Home number Area code Work number

Birth date _____ Sex ( ) Male ( ) Female

Family

Marital status ( ) Married ( ) Never been married ( ) Widowed ( ) Divorced

If married, spouse's name _____

Children's names and ages _____

_____

Education

Last grade of high school completed _____

College _____ Degree _____ Date _____

Graduate school _____ Degree _____ Date _____

Counseling Experience

Counseling program _____ Years of participation _____
Name of program

Professional practice _____ Years of practice _____
Clinic name

Prior training through Freedom in Christ Ministries? ( ) Yes ( ) No

Describe

_____

Why do you want to be trained by Freedom in Christ Ministries to be an encourager? _____

_____

_____

Spiritual Experience

Church currently attending

_____

Current ministry or areas of service (if applicable) _____

How long have you been a Christian? _____ How did you become a Christian?

_____

_____

_____

Signature _____ Date _____

Office Use Only
Evaluation date _____ Evaluated by _____
( ) Approved as an encourager ( ) Redirected to another ministry

PASTORAL RECOMMENDATION

Dear Pastor:

The person named below has applied to become an encourager in Freedom in Christ Ministries and has been trained to guide others through the Steps to Freedom in Christ. Encouragers need to be spiritually mature, free in Christ, living a balanced life and committed to the authority of Scripture and the study of God's Word. As the next step in the application process, we would appreciate receiving from you an honest assessment of the candidate. All information will be held in confidence.

Name
_____

Address
_____

Telephone (_____) _____

Church name
_____

Church telephone _ (_____) _____ Pastor's Name
_____

1. How long have you known the applicant?
2. Is the applicant now or has he or she recently been under church censorship or discipline? Explain.
3. As far as you know, has the applicant ever been involved in the occult?
4. How long has the applicant been a believer?
5. From your perspective, what is his or her level of spiritual maturity? Support your answer.
6. Does the applicant have problems submitting to leadership or the authority

of others? If so, describe.

7. In conclusion, I
   ( ) Strongly recommend
   ( ) Recommend with some reservation
   ( ) Do not recommend at this time that this applicant be accepted to minister in guiding others through the Steps to Freedom in Christ.

Signed _____ Position _____

Date _____

ENCOURAGER INTERVIEW

Date _____

Candidate's name _____

Marital status ( ) Married ( ) Never been married ( ) Widowed ( ) Divorced

Interviewer _____

Interviewers introduce themselves and welcome the candidate. Open with prayer.

Explain to the candidate that this interview does not determine whether or not he or she will participate in the ministry. The interview helps the candidate and the leadership committee discern if this is the right time for the candidate to begin this type of encouragement ministry.

1. Why do you want to become an encourager?

2. Tell us a little about your spiritual journey (i.e., salvation, significant times of growth and so on).

3. What do you do to keep yourself spiritually healthy?

4. In what capacities are you involved in your church?

5. Neil Anderson defines strongholds as “mental habit patterns of thought burned into our minds over time or from the intensity of traumatic experiences.” What have been some strongholds in your life? (Look for issues like self-esteem, absentee father and God’s love.)

5a. To what extent are you free of these strongholds? And how have you come to this point?

6. What areas are you struggling with personally at this time? (Look for attitudes toward God, self and others.)

7. In the past, how have you resolved anger, marital discord, bitterness and/or resentment? Give a specific example.

8. Have you been involved in the occult?

8a. Have you had any experience in a cult? If so, when?

8b. How did you remove yourself from the situation(s)? How have you dealt with the consequences of your involvement? (Be sure the candidate is completely free from these experiences.)

9. If divorced: Was your divorce recent? What were the issues around your divorce?

9a. How did you deal with these issues?

10. Have you read *Victory over the Darkness* and *The Bondage Breaker*? What did you learn from these books?

0a. What was your opinion of the messages?

11. What personal qualities, abilities and spiritual gifts will help you be an encourager?

12. What aspects of this ministry might be difficult for you? Explain.

13. What is your view of:

    a. Homosexuality

    b. Promiscuity

    c. Depression

    d. Abortion

    e. Sexual abuse

    f. Satanic ritual abuse

    g. Multiple personality disorder (i.e., dissociative identity disorder)

14. When did you first become aware of the reality of Satan and his forces at work in the world?

15. What experience(s) have you had in spiritual warfare?

5a. How do you deal with spiritual attacks?

16. Explain what Neil Anderson means by the phrase “truth encounter” as opposed to “power encounter.”

17. Are you willing to use the truth-encounter model of ministry as an encourager? Why or why not?

18. Are you willing to submit to the authority of the leadership of the discipleship counseling ministry?

19. Are you willing to commit to the encouragement ministry for six months and attend a monthly meeting for support, accountability and additional

training?

Conclude the interview by thanking the person for his or her time and for answering the questions openly and honestly. After the candidate has left the room, make your recommendation.

Based on this interview and my experience as an encourager, I recommend that _____[applicant's name]

___ be an encourager without reservation.
___ be an encourager with some reservation. (Please explain.)
___ not be an encourager at this time. (Please explain.)

_____

_____

_____

Signed _____ Date _____

THE FREEDOM APPOINTMENTS

Freedom appointments are opportunities for Jesus Christ, *the* bondage breaker, to touch people with His truth and free them from whatever bondage they have experienced. During the freedom appointment, an encourager carefully guides the counselee through a process of prayer and repentance. A prayer partner may be present for training and support. These appointments should be scheduled either by the director or another leader who is able to match each counselee with an appropriate encourager. This central scheduling prevents encouragers from burning out and screens out counselees who are not serious about taking personal responsibility for their own attitudes and actions.

Scheduling the Appointment

To schedule a freedom appointment, a counselee first completes and returns a Confidential Personal Inventory (see appendix B). Filling out the inventory makes counselees begin to take responsibility and brings to the surface areas they need to deal with in a freedom appointment. The director then contacts counselees to make sure they are reading *Victory over the Darkness* and *The Bondage Breaker* or watching the video-cassettes. This investment of time and energy is essential preparation for the freedom appointment. In some cases, people experience interference while they are reading the books or watching the videocassettes. In those cases, working through all the materials before the appointment may not be possible. The critical factor is to know that the counselee is making an honest effort to prepare for the appointment.

While the counselee is getting ready for the freedom appointment, the director will be matching counselee and encourager according to gender, age, life experience and the severity of the problems. Preferably men should work with men and women with women. On the occasion where it is not possible, the counselee should agree in advance to having someone of the opposite sex as an encourager. When that is the case, it is best—for a variety of reasons (e.g., comfort, accountability, liability, etc.)—to have a prayer partner of the same sex as the counselee. Obviously, when counselees feel they are talking to people who understand and accept them, they will find it easier to be open and honest.

To help match counselee and encourager, the director uses the Confidential Personal Inventory to get an idea of the nature of the counselee's problems and find an appropriate encourager who has the necessary experience.

In general, freedom appointments should be scheduled for times that do not have a fixed end point. Hurrying will short-circuit the process, which usually takes between three and four hours. I have done many in less than two hours, but that requires experience and a very cooperative counselee, as well as an individual who does not have a great deal of conflict. Very difficult cases can take up to eight or nine hours, so beginning in the morning is usually preferable. Since the process can be emotionally draining for everyone involved, schedule some breaks. The freedom appointment should be scheduled in a private, comfortable room with access to rest room facilities. For liability reasons, churches try to use their own facilities.

Once the match has been made, the director fills out a Record of Freedom Appointment Card (see sample at conclusion of section) and gives it, along with the Confidential Personal Inventory (see appendix B), to the encouragers, so they will know the time, location and any other general information they might

need in order to prepare for the appointment.

Before the Freedom Appointment

The encourager and prayer partner should plan to arrive 15 minutes before the start of the freedom appointment to pray and make sure the room is adequate. The encourager needs to either bring the following items or make sure they are present before the appointment begins:

1. The counselee's Confidential Personal Inventory (CPI), to be returned to the counselee after the session.
2. The Record of Freedom Appointment Card to be completed after the session and returned to the director.
3. The Statement of Understanding (release form) to be completed before the session.
4. A copy of *The Steps to Freedom in Christ* for each person present.
5. A Bible, some tissues and a notepad.
6. A Freedom Appointment Prayer Card to be completed—with the counselee's permission—at the end of the session.
7. A Who Am I? card to be given to the counselee at the conclusion of the appointment.
8. A schedule of possible encouragement groups for the counselee to consider joining.

You will find samples of some of these items at the end of this section.

Beginning the Appointment

After introductions and some friendly small talk to set the counselee at ease, the encourager briefly describes what will take place during their time together. The encourager then asks the counselee to fill out the Statement of Understanding for liability reasons. (Minors need to have a Parental Permission Form filled out prior to going to a freedom appointment.) If a counselee refuses to sign the form, the encourager explains that the freedom appointment cannot proceed and politely suggests that the counselee seek professional help for his or her problems. After the Statement of Understanding is signed, the encourager moves on to a brief discussion of the counselee's Confidential Personal Inventory and begins to discuss the counselee's family background.

Taking the Counselee Through the Steps
This process has been discussed earlier in this book, but the following are a few helpful reminders for the encouragers:

- Reassure the counselee that everything he or she says and everything that happens will be kept confidential.
- Pray through any resistance to the truth and help the counselee assume responsibility for what he or she believes and affirms to be true.
- The process is intense. Take breaks as needed.
- Commit to finish—if at all possible—all seven Steps of the process during this one appointment.
- Stay on track. Listen carefully, but do not let the freedom appointment become merely a time for emotional venting or giving advice.

Concluding the Appointment
The encourager reminds counselees that freedom is their birthright as children of God and also that maturing as God's children takes time and effort. To facilitate the maturing process, encourage counselees to do the following:

- Read through the passages listed on the Who Am I? card (included in *The Steps to Freedom in Christ*).
- Read *Who I Am in Christ,* which explains in detail each statement about our identity in Christ that appears on the Who Am I? card (see chapter 3).
- Get involved in an encouragement group or some other support group within the church where they can find the ongoing support needed to stay free and grow in Christ.
- Seek professional help if they are dealing with persistent defense mechanisms or if complex issues surface during the session.

Finally, counselees fill out a confidential Freedom Appointment Prayer Card so that others can pray for their continued freedom. Above all, the encourager needs to remind counselees to keep taking every thought captive and affirming the truth of their identity as God's child no matter how the enemy attacks.

After the Appointment
At the conclusion of the appointment, the encourager returns the Confidential

Personal Inventory to counselees to reassure them of the confidentiality of the meeting. The encourager completes the Record of Freedom Appointment Card and returns it and the counselee's Statement of Understanding to the director. The director keeps these forms on file in a secure place for liability reasons. If counselees fill out a Freedom Appointment Prayer Card, this is forwarded to the prayer coordinator who gives it to an appropriate prayer partner committed to praying regularly for people seeking freedom.

The following forms included here serve only as examples. You may want to consult an attorney in your state before using or modifying any of these forms.

Record of Freedom Appointment Card

Name

_____

Telephone Day _____Evening _____

Appointment scheduled for

Day _____ Time _____

Location _____

Encourager _____

Issues to deal with include _____

_____

_____

Office Use Only

Appointment completed ( ) Y ( ) N Completion date _____

Encourager _____

Prayer partner(s) _____
Encouragement group ( ) Y ( ) N
Professional counseling advised ( ) Y ( ) N

Statement of Understanding

I understand that the staff of Freedom in Christ Ministries, this ministry, [name of ministry] and those associated with them are not professional or licensed counselors, therapists, or medical or psychological practitioners.

I understand that everything I share during this encouragement experience will be kept confidential and that I alone hold the right to release any information that comes from this session. I am also aware that [name of encourager] is mandated by law to intervene if he or she suspects that a child (under the age of 18 years) or an elder (over the age of 65 years) is currently endangered by abuse or if I am a danger to myself or others.

I understand that I am free to leave at any time, that I am here voluntarily and that I am under no financial obligation.

I deem the persons leading this to be encouragers in the Christian faith who are helping me assume my responsibilities for finding freedom in Christ.

(Please print)

Name
_____

Address
_____

Telephone Day _____Evening
_____

Signed _____ Date
_____

Parental Permission Form

I, _____, the parent or guardian of _____, a minor child (under the age of 18), do hereby grant my permission for my child to be helped by the discipleship counseling ministry of this church. I understand and deem the persons leading this ministry to be encouragers in the Christian faith who are helping my child to assume his or her responsibilities for finding freedom in Christ. I further understand and agree that my child is here voluntarily, is under no financial obligation and is free to leave at any time. I understand that no one in this process is functioning in a professional capacity, and I completely release them from all liability.

(Please print)

Name of minor child _____

Name of parent or guardian _____

Address _____

Telephone Day _____Evening _____

Signed _____ Date _____

Freedom Appointment Prayer Card

Dear Freedom Ministries Prayer Coordinator,

Please ask your team to confidentially pray for the following:

_____

_____

_____

Name (optional) _____

ESTABLISHING ENCOURAGEMENT GROUPS

After going through the Steps to Freedom with an encourager, many people find new freedom from distorted and deceived thinking. Their newfound freedom enables them to absorb God's truth as never before. The enemy, however, will seek to draw them back to the lies they have believed. Encouragement groups are one way to make sure each person who finds freedom has the support and input needed to renew his or her mind in truth.

An encouragement group usually meets weekly under the guidance of a leader who has completed all the encourager training, met all the requirements to be an encourager and has the ability to facilitate a group. The goal of these groups is to provide a secure environment where maturity can develop through accountability, teaching, discussion and prayer support. *Breaking Through to Spiritual Maturity* is usually the curriculum for these groups. Covering in detail the materials included in *Victory over the Darkness* and *The Bondage Breaker* and accompanied by a leader's guide and reproducible worksheets, these materials are organized into 1¼- to 1½-hour blocks and can be used in a series of 13, or up to 24, sessions. At this critical time in the life of a counselee, reinforcing basic truths about freedom in Christ is much more important than covering new material.

Organizing the Groups

Each group of 7 to 10 people should have a leader and coleader who match the makeup of the group (i.e., men leading men's groups, women leading women's groups). If possible, the leader and coleader should both be experienced encouragers who are committed to discipleship. These group leaders report

regularly to the discipleship counseling ministry leadership for prayer, support and advice in dealing with difficult people or problems.

Groups should meet in private, secure settings where confidentiality is assured. Rooms in the church, professional offices or homes without children work well. Participants in the group should fill out an Encouragement Group Statement of Understanding about the nature of the group and be committed to the group. Having them sign an Encouragement Group Covenant is one way of both encouraging commitment to the group and establishing the group's ground rules. Most group members will have read *Victory over the Darkness* and *The Bondage Breaker,* but those who have not finished them should commit to completing them.

Running the Groups

One of the most critical issues in facilitating effective groups is helping the group understand and respect boundaries. Group leaders need to address the following issues:

- Let the participants know your level of commitment to them (e.g., whether or not group members should expect a call from you if they are absent) as well as your boundaries and any limits to contact outside of the group (e.g., no phone calls at home after 8 P.M. or on Thursdays).
- Trust takes time to develop. Caution members not to get too personal too fast.
- Keep group relationships in perspective. Don't expect everyone to meet your needs—and don't try to meet the needs of everyone in the group.
- If someone does not respond to your initiation of friendship, don't take it as rejection. Choose to respect a person's boundaries in love.

As a general rule, once a group has met once or twice, newcomers should be assigned to new groups instead of being added to existing groups. This policy will enable intimacy and trust to develop in the groups. At the designated conclusion of the encouragement groups (13 or more weeks), participants should be encouraged to join other ongoing groups or Bible studies within the church.

If you have an existing group or support-group structure within your church, you do not need to develop a new structure for discipleship counseling ministry counselees. Instead, you could train some existing group leaders in the materials and then designate their ongoing groups as follow-up groups for your

discipleship counseling ministry. Do what works best in your church.

The following form included here serves only as an example. You may want to consult an attorney in your state before using or modifying this form.

Encouragement Group Statement of Understanding

I understand that those leading this group, [name encourager] and [name supervisory staff], are not professional or licensed counselors, therapists, or medical or psychological practitioners.

I deem those people leading or present in this encouragement group, including [name encourager and prayer partner(s)] to simply be fellow Christians and encouragers who are volunteering to help me grow in the Christian faith. Within the encouragement group, they are not serving in a professional capacity as a therapist, counselor, or medical or psychological practitioner, and I release them from all professional liability or responsibility for my experience in the encouragement group.

I understand that I am free to leave the group at any time, that I am here voluntarily and that I am under no financial obligation other than the materials fee.

(Please print)

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone Day _____Evening _____

Signed _____ Date _____

Office Use Only
Encouragement group leader _____

Telephone Day _____Evening _____

PRAYER SUPPORT AND NETWORKING

We have seen vivid examples of the importance of prayer to the Freedom in Christ Ministries. That is why we encourage weekly prayer meetings to be held in advance of our conferences. At these meetings, groups of people pray for the specific needs of the conference in order to establish a prayer shield around it. Additionally, others go on prayer walks through the facilities where the conference will be held. The commitment to pray in advance and throughout the week of the conference often determines the quality of the conference, and most churches have learned the hard way not to stop these prayer meetings after the conference.

The Bible teaches that repentance and prayer precede impact and harvest, which is the work of a discipleship counseling ministry.

Similarly, in your church, weekly prayer meetings of people committed to pray for the discipleship counseling ministry will keep the ministry centered in Christ and led by the Holy Spirit. Several churches have reported that when prayer was resumed after a dry season, the ministry ran more smoothly, counselees no longer responded negatively to delays in scheduling freedom appointments and quality facilitators were more easily found. At these churches, ongoing prayer groups meet to pray for the ministry as a whole and for those who turn in a Freedom Appointment Prayer Card.

FREE TO REACH YOUR COMMUNITY

The Bible teaches that repentance and prayer precede impact and harvest, which is the work of a discipleship counseling ministry. Personal revival does take place when God's children are touched deeply with the life of Christ. People

who are free in Christ will be salt and light in a dark and decaying world (see Matt. 5:13-16). As you seek to develop an ongoing ministry that will help individuals find their freedom in Christ, recognize that a discipleship counseling ministry also helps lay the foundation for community impact. It is my prayer that you will find great joy in establishing and being part of a ministry that helps people find their true identity and freedom in Jesus Christ.

APPENDIX A

RELEASE FORM

The following is a suggested Statement of Understanding. If you plan to use it, please adapt it to your own church ministry by using your own letterhead. This statement is not endorsed by us as being legally adequate for your ministry. You may choose to create your own statement in consultation with your church's leadership or attorney.

STATEMENT OF UNDERSTANDING
(ADULT CONSENT FORM)

I understand that the staff of [name of organization] and those associated with them are not professional or licensed counselors, therapists, medical or psychological practitioners, unless otherwise indicated.

I deem the persons leading these sessions to be encouragers in the Christian faith, who are helping me assume my responsibilities in finding freedom in Christ. I am also aware that my encourager may need to intervene if he or she suspects that a child (under the age of 18) or an elder (over age 65) is currently endangered by abuse or if I am a danger to myself or others.

I understand that I am not being advised to alter any prescription medication I am currently taking. This is a matter between myself and my physician.

I understand that I am free to leave at any time and am here voluntarily. I understand that I am under no financial obligation. I am also aware of my right to ask for clarification of any part of this statement of understanding.

(Please print)

Name _____Date _____

Address _____

City _____State _____Zip _____

Telephone Day _____Evening _____

Signed_____ Date_____

APPENDIX B

CONFIDENTIAL PERSONAL INVENTORY

I. Personal Information

Name _____ Age _____

Address _____

City _____State _____Zip _____

Telephone Day _____Evening _____

Church affiliation

Present _____

Past _____

Education

Highest grade completed _____

Degree(s) earned _____

Marital status ( ) Married ( ) Never been married ( ) Widowed ( ) Divorced

Previous history of marriage/divorce _____

_____

Vocation

Present

_____

Past

_____

II. Family History

A. Religious

1. Have any of your parents, grandparents or great-grandparents to your knowledge ever been involved in any occult, cultic or non-Christian religious practices? Please describe.
2. Briefly describe your parents' Christian experience (i.e., if they were believers, did they profess and live their Christianity?).

B. Marital Status

1. Are your parents presently married or divorced? Explain.
2. Was your father clearly the head of the home or was there a role reversal where your mother ruled the home? Explain.
3. How did your father treat your mother?
4. To your knowledge, were your parents or grandparents ever involved in an adulterous affair? Any incestuous relationships?
5. Were you adopted or raised by foster parents or legal guardians?

C. Sibling Data

1. Please identify the sex and age of your sibling(s) and place yourself in birth order.
2. Please describe the emotional atmosphere in your home while you were growing up. Include a brief description of your relationship with your parents and sibling(s).

D. Health

1. Are there any addictive problems in your family history (alcohol, drugs, etc.)?
2. Is there any history of mental illness? Please describe.
3. Please indicate if you have any history of the following ailments in your family:
   ___ Tuberculosis
   ___ Heart disease
   ___ Diabetes
   ___ Other(s)
   ___ Cancer
   ___ Ulcers
   ___ Glandular problems
4. How would you describe your family's concern for

   a. Diet:

   b. Exercise:

   c. Rest:

E. Moral Climate

Rate the moral atmosphere in which you were raised during the first 18 years of your life.

	Overly Permissive	Permissive	Average	Strict	Overly Strict
Clothing	5	4	3	2	1
Sex	5	4	3	2	1
Dating	5	4	3	2	1
Movies	5	4	3	2	1
Music	5	4	3	2	1
Literature	5	4	3	2	1
Free will	5	4	3	2	1
Drinking	5	4	3	2	1
Smoking	5	4	3	2	1
Church attendance	5	4	3	2	1

III. History of Personal Health

A. Physical

1. Describe your eating habits (i.e., Do you lean toward eating only junk

food or only eating healthy food? Do you eat regularly or sporadically? Is your diet balanced? etc.).

2. Do you have any addictions or cravings that you find difficult to control, such as sweets, drugs, alcohol, food in general, etc.?
3. Are you presently under any kind of medication for either physical or psychological reasons? Explain.
4. Do you have any problems sleeping? Describe your sleeping patterns (i.e., do you have restful sleep?). Are you having any recurring nightmares or disturbances?
5. Does your schedule allow for regular periods of rest and relaxation?
6. Have you ever experienced any type of trauma (i.e., physical, emotional or sexual abuse, involvement in a severe accident, death of family member, etc.)? Explain.

B. Mental

1. Describe briefly your earliest good and bad memory.
2. Do you have periods or blocks of time in your past that you can't remember? Please describe your circumstances.
3. Please indicate any of the following with which you have struggled or with which you are presently struggling:
   ___ blasphemous thoughts
   ___ compulsive thoughts
   ___ daydreaming thoughts
   ___ dizziness
   ___ doubts
   ___ fantasy
   ___ headaches
   ___ inadequacy
   ___ inferiority
   ___ insecurity
   ___ lustful thoughts
   ___ obsessive
   ___ worry
4. Do you spend much time wishing you were somebody else or fantasizing that you are somebody else or possibly imagining yourself living at a different time, place or under different circumstances? Explain.

5. How many hours of TV do you watch per week? _____ List your five favorite programs.
6. How many hours do you spend a week reading? _____ What do you read primarily (newspapers, magazines, books, etc.)?
7. What type of music do you listen to, and what is the amount of time spent listening?
8. Would you consider yourself to be an optimist or a pessimist (i.e., do you have a tendency to see the good in people and life, or the bad?)?
9. Have you ever thought that maybe you were "cracking up," and do you presently fear that possibility? Explain.
10. Do you have regular devotions in the Bible? When and to what extent?
11. Do you find prayer difficult mentally? Explain.
12. When attending church or other Christian ministries, are you plagued with foul thoughts, jealousies, other mental harassments? Explain.

C. Emotional

1. Please indicate which of the following emotions you have or are presently having difficulty controlling:
   ___ anger
   ___ anxiety
   ___ depression
   ___ fear of abandonment
   ___ fear of committing suicide
   ___ fear of dying
   ___ fear of going to hell
   ___ fear of hurting loved ones
   ___ fear of losing your mind
   ___ fear of _____
   ___ frustration
   ___ hatred
   ___ loneliness
   ___ worthlessness
2. Which of the above-listed emotions do you feel are sinful? Why?
3. Concerning your emotions, whether positive or negative, please indicate which of the following best describes you:
   ___ readily express them

___ express some of my emotions, but not all
___ readily acknowledge their presence, but reserved in expressing them
___ tendency to suppress my emotions
___ find it safest not to express how I feel
___ tendency to disregard how I feel since I cannot trust my feelings
___ consciously (or perhaps subconsciously) deny them since it is too painful to deal with them

4. Do you know someone in your life with whom you could be emotionally honest right now (i.e., you could tell this person exactly how you feel about yourself, life and other people)?
5. How important is it that we are emotionally honest before God, and do you feel that you are? Explain.

IV. Spiritual History

A. If you were to die tonight, do you know where you would spend eternity?
B. Suppose you did die tonight and appeared before God in heaven and He were to ask you, "By what right should I allow you into My presence?" How would you answer Him?
C. First John 5:11-12 says, "God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life."
   1. Do you have the Son of God in you? (see 2 Cor. 13:3)
   2. When did you receive Him? (see John 1:12)
   3. How do you know you have received Him?
D. Are you plagued with doubts concerning your salvation? Please explain.
E. Are you presently enjoying fellowship with other believers and, if so, where and when?
F. Are you under the authority of a local church where the Bible is preached, and do you regularly support it with your time, talent and treasure? If not, why?

NON-CHRISTIAN SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE INVENTORY

Check any of the following with which you or your ancestors have had any involvement. Place a check mark before each one in which you have participated

in fun, out of curiosity or in earnest.

___ Astral projection/travel
___ Astrology
___ Attended or participated in a séance
___ Attended or participated in a spiritualist meeting
___ Automatic (spirit) writing
___ Been hypnotized
___ Cabala/kabala
___ Card laying
___ Clairvoyance
___ Crystal ball
___ Dream interpretation
___ ESP (Extrasensory Perception)
___ Fetishism (objects of worship/idols)
___ I Ching
___ Levitation
___ Magical charming
___ Magic eight ball
___ Materialization
___ Mental suggestion
___ Metaphysics
___ Mystical meditation
___ Ouija board
___ Palm reading
___ Practiced self-hypnosis
___ Practiced yoga
___ Psychic readings
___ Read or follow the horoscope
___ Self-realization
___ Speaking in a trance
___ Sorcery
___ Table lifting
___ Children of God
___ Christian Science
___ Church of the Living Word
___ Jehovah’s Witnesses

___ The Local Church
___ Masonic orders
___ Mormonism
___ Swedenborgianism
___ Unification Church
___ Unitarianism
___ Unity
___ The Way International
___ Other

___ Bahaism
___ Black Muslim
___ Eckankar
___ EST/The Forum
___ Hare Krishna
___ Hinduism
___ Inner Peace Movement
___ Islam
___ Mind-control philosophies
___ New Age
___ Rosicrucianism
___ Science of Creative Intelligence
___ Science of the Mind
___ Spiritual Frontiers Fellowship
___ Theosophical Society
___ Transcendental Meditation
___ Zen Buddhism
___ Other
___ Tarot cards
___ Tea leaves
___ Telepathy
___ Water witching (dowsing) rod and pendulum
___ Witchcraft
___ Other

___ Had a spirit guide.
___ Read or possessed occult literature, especially the *Satanic Bible, Book of*

Shadows, Secrets of the Psalms, Sixth and *Seventh Books of Moses*.

___ Read or studied parapsychology.
___ Practiced black or white magic.
___ Possessed occult or pagan religious objects that were made for use in pagan temples or religious rites, or in the practice of magic, sorcery, witchcraft, divination or spiritualism.
___ Seen or been involved in Satan worship.
___ Sought healing (either as a child or as an adult) through magic conjuration, charming, psychic healing or New Age medicine.
___ Tried to locate a missing person or object by consulting someone with psychic powers.
___ Encountered ghosts or materializations of persons known to be dead.
___ Entered into a blood pact with another person.
___ Been the object of sexual attacks by demons.
___ Been involved with heavy metal or allied kinds of rock music.
___ Heard voices in your mind or had compulsive thoughts that were foreign to what you believe.
___ Have periods in childhood or the present when you cannot remember what happened.

1. Have you ever attended a New Age or parapsychology seminar, or consulted a medium, spiritist or channeler? Explain.

2. Do you or have you ever had an imaginary friend or spirit guide offering you guidance or companionship? Explain.

3. Have you ever heard voices in your mind or had repeating and nagging thoughts that were foreign to what you believe or feel as though a dialogue was going on in your head? Explain.

4. What other spiritual experiences have you had that would be considered out of the ordinary (such as sensing an evil presence in your room at night as a child)?

5. Have you been a victim of satanic ritual abuse? Explain.

ENDNOTES

Introduction

1. Neil Anderson and Steve Russo, *The Seduction of Our Children* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1991). n.p.
2. We use the term "encourager" rather than "counselor" for legal reasons, and we will do so throughout this book, except when specifically referencing professional or secular counselors.
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4. Neil Anderson, Fernando Garzon and Judith E. King, *Released from Bondage* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2002).
5. Neil Anderson and Michael Jacobson, *A Biblical Guide to Alternative Medicine* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2003).
6. Neil Anderson, Terry Zuehlke and Julie Zuehlke, *Christ-Centered Therapy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000).
7. Neil Anderson and Hal Baumchen, *Finding Hope Again* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1999). See also the video edition of this book available from Regal Books.
8. Neil Anderson, *The Steps to Freedom in Christ* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2000). *The Steps to Freedom in Christ* can be purchased at any Christian bookstore or by calling a Gospel Light representative at (800) 4-GOSPEL.
9. Neil Anderson, *Victory Over the Darkness* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2000).
10. Neil Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2000).
11. Neil T. Anderson, *Praying by the Power of the Holy Spirit* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2003).

Chapter One

1. *BBC News*. "Potter Film Prompts 'Occult' Warning." November 18, 2002. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/2488745.stm (accessed May 15, 2003).

Chapter Two

1. Neil Anderson and Rich Miller, *Freedom from Fear* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1999).

Chapter Three

1. Robert Jewett, *Paul's Anthropological Terms* (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill), p. 313.
2. Neil Anderson and Robert Saucy, *The Common Made Holy* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1997), p. 42. Note: This book has been revised and is now entitled *God's Power at Work in You* (Harvest House Publishers, 2001).
3. Sinclair Ferguson, "The Reformed View," in *Christian Spirituality,* ed. Donald L. Alexander (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988) n.p.; James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 630-631.
4. John Stott, *Romans: God's Good News for the World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), p. 187.
5. To see how we apply the message of Freedom in Christ to chemical addiction, see *Freedom from Addiction* (Regal Books, 1997), which I coauthored with Mike and Julia Quarles.

6. Neil Anderson, *Who I Am in Christ* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2001).
7. Neil Anderson and Robert Saucy, *God's Power at Work in You* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2001).
8. See my book on depression *Finding Hope Again* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1999). Two other books merit attention: Martin Seligman, *Learned Optimism* (New York: Pocket Books, 1990); and Demitri and Janice Papolos, *Overcoming Depression* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1992).
9. Albert Ellis, "Can Rational Counseling Be Christian?" *Christian Counseling Today,* vol. 5, no. 1 (1997), pp. 13, 48-49.
10. Neil Anderson and Rich Miller, *Freedom from Fear* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1999).
11. Dr. Edmund J. Bourne, *The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook* (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, 1995).
12. Dr. Edmund J. Bourne, *Healing Fear* (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, 1998), p. 2.
13. Ibid., p. 3.
14. Ibid., p. 5.

Chapter Four

1. Multiple personality disorder (MPD) has been redefined as dissociative identity disorder (DID). You can be sure that people with dissociative identity disorder have severe trauma in their past. Those who do not dissociate are usually worse off than those who do. I have never helped a person who has multiple personalities and also does not have deep spiritual bondage. They all have voices in their heads, and they cannot usually distinguish between the voice of a personality and that of a demon. The pastor's mistake is to think the personalities are demons and try to cast them out. The encourager's mistake is to try to integrate a demon into their personality, thinking that it is another personality. I do not believe a truly biblical counseling model has emerged yet for helping those with DID. It is the ultimate challenge of integration, because it requires an extensive understanding of the spiritual, psychological and neurological. Those with the most success utilize large blocks of time in each session. We have had some tremendous results taking people through the Steps, but I am not suggesting it can be done in one session.
2. Neil Anderson and Robert Saucy, *The Common Made Holy* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1997), p. 143.

Chapter Five

1. Neil Anderson, *Victory over the Darkness* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2000), pp. 218-219.
2. In the *Freedom in Christ Bible* (Zondervan Publishing House, 2002), I have completed a one-year study that covers all the issues on the two charts.

Chapter Six

1. Mark McMinn and Timothy Phillips, eds., *Care for the Soul* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), p. 10.
2. Neil Anderson, Fernando Garzon and Judith E. King, *Released from Bondage* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2002), pp. 142-146.
3. Neil Anderson, *Finding God's Will in Spiritually Deceptive Times* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, in press).

Chapter Eight

1. I strongly recommend *Released from Bondage* (Thomas Nelson, 2002) as a supplement to this book for

training encouragers in churches.

Chapter Ten

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Chapter Eleven

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Chapter Twelve

1. William Ernest Henley, "Invictus," *Poets' Corner*. http://www.theotherpages.org/poems/henley01.html (accessed May 14, 2003).
2. Neil Anderson, *Who I Am in Christ* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2001).

Chapter Fourteen

1. Neil Anderson and Mike Quarles, *Overcoming Addictive Behaviors* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, in press).
2. Neil Anderson, *A Way of Escape* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1998).
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Chapter Fifteen

1. *Interpreters' Dictionary of the Bible*, s.v. "Sin, sinners."
2. Francis Brown, S. Driver, and Charles Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), n.p.

Books and Resources by

Dr. Neil T. Anderson

Victory Over the Darkness
(Regal Books, 2000)

The Bondage Breaker
(Harvest House Publishers, 2000)

Discipleship Counseling
(Regal Books, 2003)

Steps to Freedom in Christ
(Regal Books, 2004)

Helping Others Find Freedom in Christ DVD
(Regal Books, 2007)

Beta: The Next Step in Your Journey with Christ
(Regal Books, 2004)

The Daily Discipler
(Regal Books, 2005)

Who I Am in Christ
(Regal Books, 2001)

Free with Dave Park
(Regal Books, 2005)

For ministry information, visit
www.discipleshipcounselingministries.org

Contact Freedom in Christ Ministries at the following:
Freedom in Christ Ministries
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