

Introduction

In this Booklet – and in the next one - we want to explore Jesus Christ’s answers to some of life’s most troubling questions. We find these Prescriptions of Christ in the Bible. God’s Word provides prescriptions for us all, but we must admit that we need His help – we must admit we are “sick”. When we are very sick, the doctor will give a prescription for medicine to treat our illness. Jesus said, “It is not the well who need a doctor, but the sick... (Matthew 9:12)

The problems of believers range from tensions in relationships to struggles with sin. Before we can fulfill our mission objective, therefore, we must help believers find solutions to their problems. Those solutions can be found in the Scriptures, which contain inspired prescriptions for the problems we face. As we apply those biblical prescriptions to our lives, the church becomes more than a place where believers work out their salvation and are equipped for ministry (Philippians 2:12; Ephesians 4:12). The church becomes a place where believers find solutions for their problems that make them fruitful ministers to the glory of God.

In this first booklet on biblical prescriptions, we are going to study God’s prescriptions; for difficult relationships, anger, communication with God and man, sin and guilt. It is my prayer that this booklet will get you into God’s Word and God’s Word into you,

MINI BIBLE COLLEGE

INTERNATIONAL BOOKLET TWENTY

PRESCRIPTIONS OF CHRIST
(Part 1)

because it is in His Word that we can find Christ's prescriptions for our most difficult problems.

Chapter One

Biblical Prescriptions for Difficult Relationships

“Foolish and ignorant questions avoid, because they only lead to arguments. And the servant of the Lord must not strive but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient; in meekness instructing those who oppose themselves; that God may give them the spirit of repentance, so that they might acknowledge the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him at his will.” (II Timothy 2:23-26)

While many people believe the church should function like a hospital, treating and making all who enter its doors well, , we learn from the letter of Paul to the Ephesians that the church should be a place where believers are to be equipped for ministry. Paul writes the vision statement of a church in one verse. When we meet as a church, our objective should always be: “The equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry.” (Ephesians 4:12) Blocking the way of effective ministry, however, are the many problems we face as human beings and as believers. The equipping of believers for the work of the ministry must address those problems.

The prescription in the passage quoted above is addressed to a believer in a difficult relationship. That relationship could be with their spouse, their children, parents, another believer, or what we consider today a counseling relationship. Paul was actually writing this prescription for Timothy to show him how to pastor difficult believers in his ministry as a young pastor.

When He was teaching us how to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world our Lord taught that we should put our relationship with God on hold until we reconcile our relationship with a fellow believer (Matthew 5:24). It may be that Jesus shared that value with us because He knew that, we cannot win the world if we lose each other.

Perhaps, that is why we consistently find prescriptions in the New Testament that address the problems believers have in their relationships with their brothers and sisters in Christ (Matthew 18:15-18). “To live above with the saints we have loved, oh that will be glory. But, to live below with those we know, that is another story!” The challenging relationships among believers that make these prescriptions necessary have existed since Cain slew his brother Abel, and they continue to challenge believers today.

If you examine this prescription carefully, you will see that the beloved Apostle Paul is telling Timothy that the devil is the source and the power behind the problems that create these difficult relationships that believers must work out in their spiritual

communities. Ultimately, the evil one is the reason relationships between believers can be so very difficult.

This passage, in Paul's second letter to Timothy, is telling Timothy how he should respond to those he was teaching, for most teaching in the first-century churches was done in the context of relationships. New Testament teaching took place in the context of one-on-one discipleship, or small house churches. Rebellious and difficult people would often enter into those small house churches and seriously disturb those who were part of those intimate bodies of believers. This is obvious from reading the letters of Paul to his churches, and the general letters that are written to churches by apostles like the beloved Apostle of love, the Apostle John (III John 9,10).

Pastors like John and Timothy were faced with difficult relationships, both with those who were causing this disturbance, and those who were disturbed by them. Paul's letter to Timothy explained how this should be done, and has given the church of Jesus Christ an inspired prescription for a godly response to a difficult relationship.

If you find yourself in a difficult relationship, consider this prescription one step at a time. Paul first told Timothy that to be part of God's solution, in a difficult relationship, you must make the commitment to be a humble servant of the Lord. Only God can resolve these relational problems, but God uses a servant of the Lord as the vehicle of His solution.

When you wake up every morning, you may be confronted with your most challenging and difficult relationship – your relationship with your spouse. They very well may consider you their most difficult relationship. According to Paul, the question is, which one of you is going to be the servant of the Lord and which one of you is going to be the servant of the devil?

Paul writes to Timothy that there are certain things you can do which will open the door for God to work in that relationship and slam the door closed on the devil, and, there are certain things you can do that will slam the door closed on God and open the door for the devil. That is why he prescribes that the servant of the Lord must not quarrel. If you are drawn into an argument in your difficult relationship, if you get angry, that slams the door closed on God and opens it for the devil (II Timothy 2:23-26).

If both people in the relationship are spiritual, you must realize this: we all have an awesome double potential. We can be the servant of the Lord or the servant of Satan. James writes that, "The wrath of man does not work the righteousness of God." Do you know what that means? That means when you are striving, when you are angry, you are not going to be an instrument through whom God is going to work. Satan is going to work through you when you are angry.

You see, just like Peter, we all have the potential to say in one breath, "You are the Christ, the Son of God," and the next moment, we can say something that will make it necessary for our Lord to turn

to us and say, “Get behind me, Satan!” (Matthew 16:23) Satan can work through us just as God can. So, the first application we find in these four verses Paul prescribed for Timothy is that we must make the commitment to be the servant of the Lord in our difficult relationships.

If the other person is not a believer, this simply must be, because if God is going to work in that relationship, He obviously must work through the believer. If you are both believers, the question is, which one of you is going to commit to be the servant of the Lord in that relationship?

A second step in this prescription involves focusing the precise nature what the difficult person’s problem. Paul uses some intriguing terminology here. In the original Greek he writes that they are “opposing themselves” (II Timothy 2:25).

The word “self” is a very interesting word in the Scripture. It is often misapplied. The dictionary defines “self” as “the individuality, the uniqueness of any given person that makes him distinct from every other living person.” That is your true “self”. When you have that definition in your mind, observe the way the word is used in the Scripture. Jesus said that if somebody offered you the whole world in exchange for your true self, you would be a loser if you accepted that offer. You should never ever forfeit your self, according to Jesus (Mark 8:36). You should never sell your self for a bowl of soup, as Esau did (Genesis 25:29-34). Never give up

that unique individuality God gave you, that person God means you to be, distinct from every other person on the face of the earth.

Paul writes that part of the difficult person’s problem is, they are opposing themselves. They are opposing the individuality, the uniqueness God wills for them. They may be conforming to what everybody thinks they should be and do with their life in Christ. They may be imitating the life of another believer they admire and with whom they compare their self. They may be dominated and controlled by strong people who will not give them the freedom to be the unique person God wants them to be.

In all these ways they are living in opposition to what Paul calls elsewhere, the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God (Romans 12:1,2). They are also the captives of Satan. According to Paul they are the captives of Satan. They are in a dungeon of the devil, and only God can free them. Only God can make it possible for them to recover themselves.

So then, what is the objective of this prescription? The objective must be that the captive person might “recover himself” and be set free. Since only God can do that, the most you could hope to be in that relationship is the servant of the Lord through whom He delivers them.

In this instruction, Paul prescribes, that if you want to be the servant of the Lord in a difficult relationship, you must also make the commitment to be the agent of the Holy Spirit. Observe that he mentions three fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22,23). He mentions

gentleness, meekness, and patience. He writes that if you will take step one and be the servant of the Lord in this relationship, and if you will take step two by being gentle, and meek, and patient, you can be the vehicle He will use to set this person free.

Focus the three fruit of the Spirit he prescribes. Think of meekness. This is quite possibly the most misunderstood word in the Bible. Meekness is not weakness. Meekness is tameness. Meekness is like a powerful horse being broken and finally yielding to the control of the bit in its mouth. Imagine a horse pulling against the bit and tearing up its mouth. When the horse is pulling against the bit, it is refusing to submit to the control of the rider.

When Paul asked, “Lord, what will you have me to do?” he “took the bit” and submitted to the control of Christ. He spent the rest of his life responding to the control, or the will of his Lord, Jesus Christ. Have you had that kind of crisis? Have you surrendered to the yoke of Christ and do you live in daily submission to His will?

Meekness is a fruit of the Spirit, not spiritual character we develop as a result of our spiritual disciplines. The meekness Paul is prescribing is the Holy Spirit working in our difficult relationship. Since it is critically important that we not strive, or become angry with this difficult person, we must respond to our Lord’s invitation to take His yoke upon us and enter into this difficult relationship with Christ controlling our own emotions.

Patience and Gentleness

Paul prescribes two more fruit of the Spirit – gentleness and patience. Human beings are very fragile. If you are going to be the vehicle the Holy Spirit uses to deliver a captive of Satan, you must be gentle. Do you know what gentleness is? Gentleness is profiled in the Thirteenth Chapter of First Corinthians. Verses four through seven of that great love chapter profile fifteen virtues that spell out how love, the first fruit of the Spirit, behaves. If you do a thorough study of those virtues, you will see that being gentle is simply a matter of loving that difficult person.

And what is patience? In our relationship with God, “Patience is faith waiting.” In our relationship with people, “Patience is love waiting.” We are instructed to imitate the patience of Job who suffered patiently and came through his suffering with an even stronger faith. The patience of Job was faith waiting. When we are nurturing children into godly adults, or seeking to be the servant of the Lord in a difficult relationship we must learn the patience that is love waiting.

If you closely study the prescription in the passage of Scripture with which I began this chapter, you will see that Paul is telling Timothy the difficult person has a role to play in his or her deliverance. They must meet two conditions - they must acknowledge the truth, and they must experience what Paul calls, “the spirit of repentance.” Until they meet those two conditions, the

servant of the Lord must have a supernatural patience, which is another the fruit of the Spirit.

There is more to this prescription for living in a difficult relationship. As part of this prescription, which is addressed to “the servant of the Lord,” we read: “... in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves, that God may give them the spirit of repentance so that they will acknowledge the truth.” What Paul is prescribing here is not a matter of forcing a difficult person to face the truth they need to face. We are not being told to shout or preach at them the truth they must acknowledge.

Paul prescribes that if we maintain the fruit of the Spirit in this relationship, we will win our hearing. When we win our hearing, there is such a thing as “the teachable moment.” If we are vehicles of the fruit of the Spirit, in terms of meekness, gentleness, and patience, the teachable moment may come when we can place before this person the truth they must understand - the truth that can set them free.

We must then accept the limits of our limitations and the boundaries of our responsibility. Do you know that your responsibility in a relationship has a place where it begins and a place where it ends? Paul tells us elsewhere that in as far as our own responsibility goes, we are to live in peace with everyone (Romans 12:18). That means that our responsibility has a point at which it begins and it has a point where it ends.

Once you have stood in the gap in this relationship and have been the servant of the Lord and the agent of the Spirit, been sensitive to the teachable moment and placed before them the truth they need to hear, you need to realize this: God may give them the spirit of repentance so that they will acknowledge the truth and recover themselves, or He may not. Or, they may receive the spirit of repentance, which means to think again, or they may not.

You cannot acknowledge the truth for them and you cannot repent for them. Their deliverance now depends upon their meeting those two conditions, and God giving them the spirit of repentance. So, once we have reached this point in this prescription for a difficult relationship, we must accept the limits of our limitations. We must then acknowledge the reality that their deliverance is not a matter of what we can do, but what only God can do and their freedom to accept or reject what God is trying to use you to accomplish in and through their life. This is the time to apply a spiritual secret I express this way: “I can not, but God can.”

Chapter Two

Biblical Prescriptions for Sinful Anger

“This is my instruction, then, which I give you from the Lord. Do not live any longer as the Gentiles live. For they live blindfold in

a world of illusion, and are cut off from the life of God through ignorance and insensitiveness. They have stifled their consciences and then surrendered themselves to sensuality, practicing any form of impurity which lust can suggest. But you have learned nothing like that from Christ, if you have really heard His voice and understood the truth that Jesus has taught you.

“No, what you learned was to fling off the dirty clothes of the old way of living, which were rotted through and through with lust’s illusions, and, with yourselves mentally and spiritually re-made, to put on the clean fresh clothes of the new life which was made by God’s design for righteousness and the holiness which is no illusion.

“If you are angry, be sure that it is not out of wounded pride or bad temper. “Never go to bed angry – never give the devil that sort of foothold. Let there be no more resentment, no more anger or temper, no more violent self-assertiveness, no more slander and no more malicious remarks. Be kind to one another, be understanding. Be as ready to forgive others as God for Christ’s sake has forgiven you.

“As children copy their fathers you, as God’s children, are to copy Him. Live your lives in love - the same sort of love which Christ gives us and which He perfectly expressed when He gave Himself up for us in sacrifice to God.” (Ephesians 4:17-27, 31, 32; 5:1,2)

Have you ever struggled with anger? Most people do. Most believers do. They may not show it to anyone and it may be locked

safe inside their hearts, but sooner or later it comes out. It cannot stay locked inside forever. It should not be there at all in the life of a believer. But it often is, and that is when we need to search the Scriptures for prescriptions on how to cope with the sin of our anger. There are prescriptions in the Bible that show us how to enable Him to change us from the inside out, and get rid of our anger.

There are two kinds of anger: righteous anger and sinful anger. Righteous anger, sometimes called, “righteous indignation,” is what moved Jesus to overturn the tables of the moneychangers in the temple courtyard because they were turning the Lord’s house into what Jesus called “a den of thieves.” (Matthew 21:12, 13)

In the passage of Scripture with which I began this chapter, Paul uses an inspired, profound metaphor. He writes that, as a believer, every morning you should go to your “spiritual closet,” and you should “get dressed” spiritually. On one side in this spiritual closet Paul tells us about, you have the rags of the old life. He writes that the rags you used to wear when you were “the old man,” as he calls him, are rotten through and through.

On the other side of the closet, you have what he calls “the robes of the new life.” He writes that as you get dressed, spiritually every day, you must put off the rotten rags of the old life, and put on the robes of the new life. He labels them, and you know what? Anger is one of the rags. He writes that anger is a rotten rag that the “old man” wore. He therefore writes, “Let all anger be put away from you.” (Ephesians 4:31)

Some translations of the Bible seem to say that you should be angry. However, the best translations available actually say, “In your anger do not sin.”

Two Kinds of Anger

When the work and the will of God are being blocked, that surfaces a righteous indignation in the life of a devout believer against those who are hindering or thwarting the will and the work of the Lord. It is not wrong to feel this type of anger, so long as it does not lead to sin. But the second type of anger - sinful anger - is the kind of anger that dwells inside most of us believers and should have no place in the life of a born again disciple of Jesus Christ. Sinful anger is anger that rises in our hearts when something or someone is blocking our own way. In this chapter we will find prescriptions in the Word of God for sinful anger in the life of a believer.

Biblical Prescriptions for Sinful Anger

A biblical definition of anger is demonstrated in a familiar verse of Scripture: “All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his own way.” (Isaiah 53:6) If you are determined to turn to your own way, and an obstacle blocks your way, you have several options. You can climb over it, you can go around it, and you can tunnel under that obstacle. The most infantile thing to do about that obstacle is to lie down on the road, have a temper tantrum, and simply be angry. If you want to see that kind of

anger, observe a little baby while it is having what we call a “temper tantrum.” That is an accurate profile of much of our anger – it is simply infantile.

There is another profile of anger in the Old Testament in which we find a prescription for sinful anger. When Cain beat his brother Abel to death, God questioned Cain. His questions were essentially, “Why are you angry?” and “Why are you depressed?” Then He asked, “Where is your brother?” Those questions were followed by, “What have you done?” and “If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? If you do not do what is right, this sin is going to destroy you.” (Genesis 4:1-7) When you study the context, the real questions seem to be: “What or who is the source and the true object of your anger?” or “With whom are you angry?” and “What were you really doing when you beat Abel to death?”

There was nothing wrong with Abel. Why was Cain angry with him? The true object of Cain’s anger was himself. When his offering was unacceptable to God it was because he was unacceptable. The real issue in this story is not the two offerings, but the two men. The most important question God asked Cain was the question that showed Cain how to become acceptable to God and to himself. That question showed Cain that he had two choices. He could get right and become acceptable, or he could attack Abel. He chose to attack Abel.

There are people in this world who are making that same choice today. They are venting their anger against people who are

not really the true object of their anger. What is the real source, center, and cause of anger? In other words what are the dynamics involved in sinful anger? This dynamic story in the fourth chapter of the Bible profiles those dynamics and a profound prescription for sinful anger. The prescription is to get right, do right and be a person who is acceptable to God, to himself, and to others. That is much better than going through life blaming and attacking others because we ourselves are unacceptable.

Jesus taught this same truth using a humorous metaphor. He asked the question, “Why are you looking for the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye while you have a log sticking out of your eye? You hypocrite! First, get the log out of your eye, and then you will be able to help your brother get the speck out of his eye.” (Matthew 7:1-5)

I once heard a woman say, “My children make me so angry!” I responded by asking, “Are your children putting that anger in you, or are they bringing that anger out of you? The responsibility for your emotional climate is a big responsibility to assign to small children. You are either going to be mad, sad, or glad depending on those little children? Do they really make you angry?” Are they the true object, source, and center of your anger? That is not true, of course. The true object of her anger could be that her husband slammed the door when he left for work. The children are simply the “Abel” against whom she is venting her anger.

As I searched the Scriptures for help with my own sinful anger, I came across a question God asked the prophet Jonah. Jonah was angry; he was furious! God came to Jonah when the prophet was angry and asked him, “Do you do well to be angry?” (Jonah 4:4)

That is a profound question. When you are angry, are you doing well? Think about it for a minute. Some people are angry all the time. They have an anger seething under the surface of the way people see them every day. Anger, especially suppressed anger, can cause strokes, heart attacks, and many kinds of medical problems. The truth is that you, yourself, do not do well when you are angry.

When you think of the emotional climate that surrounds you when you are angry, you will realize that other people do not do well when you are angry. How many evenings are devastated because somebody is angry? Have you ever had that happen? It can even happen at the dinner table. Even special holiday family meals are sometimes ruined emotionally because someone became angry.

James writes: “Dear brothers, let every man be quick to listen but slow to use his tongue, and slow to lose his temper. For man’s temper is never the means of achieving God’s true goodness. Have done, then, with impurity and every other evil which overflows into the lives of others, and humbly accept the message that God has planted in your hearts, and which can save your souls.” (James 1:19-21)

In other words, God is not working through you when you are venting sinful anger. As we learned in our last chapter, when we are angry, we slam the door on God and open it for the devil (II Timothy 2:23-26). We must identify anger for what it is. We must call it what it is. Anger is a sin and God does not want anger in the life of a believer. We will not begin to cope with our problem of anger until we confess that our anger is a sin.

The passage of Scripture with which we began this chapter gives us a prescription for anger when it prescribes: "... with yourselves mentally and spiritually remade." What the Apostle Paul is telling us is that it is possible for God to remake us from the inside out. This is the way we get the log out of our eye and give up our hypercritical pattern of venting our anger by going through life attacking the "Abel's" in our lives.

The apostle gives other good prescriptions regarding our anger. He is writing to married couples when he instructs us to never go to bed angry. The principle here is that we should never suppress, or stuff our anger. In the closing verses of this chapter, he teaches that suppressed anger leads to a long list of negative and destructive emotions.

Contrary to what many believe, in this passage Paul does not tell us to be angry. He is realistic enough to acknowledge the hard reality that there are times when we will be angry. He actually writes, "If you are angry, be sure that it is not a sinful anger." (Ephesians 4:26) He clearly teaches that there should be no more

anger when he closes this chapter by writing: "Let all anger be put away from you!"

The mother of all sins is pride, and you will nearly always find somebody's pride at the heart of sinful anger. Unless our anger is righteous indignation, because the work of God is being blocked, we must confess our sinful anger, and apply these biblical prescriptions to this sin.

Chapter Three

Biblical Prescriptions for Righteous Anger

It may be that while you were reading the last chapter, you asked yourself, "Could there be such a thing as righteous anger?" The answer to your question is emphatically, "Yes!" Anger is not always sinful. We know this because the emotion of anger is attributed to Jesus more than once in the four Gospels. Jesus was angry when He saw that the Temple of Solomon, which was to be a house of prayer, had been turned into a corrupt market place. The religious leaders had turned the liturgy of the worship prescribed by Moses into a religious racket that exploited Jewish pilgrims who visited Jerusalem from all over the world for the special Holy Days that were mandated in the Law of Moses.

They charged them seventy-five times the going value of the animals these pilgrims had to purchase for their offerings, and they forced them to buy their overpriced animals. They also accepted only a Temple currency which they had created, and charged the pilgrims heavily to exchange their currencies into that Temple currency.

When the Romans destroyed the Temple forty years later, they found the equivalent of seven million dollars in the Temple Safe. No wonder Jesus was angry when He flung over the tables of the moneychangers, and cleared an almost 6.5 hectares Temple Courtyard while shouting that what the Temple was to be was clearly written in the Scripture, but they had made that Temple a den of thieves. The anger of Jesus was righteous anger because His anger was driven by the reality that the will and the work of His Father was being blocked by a corrupt regime of religious leaders.

The words for “anger” are found about three hundred times in the Bible. Ninety-eight percent of the time they are describing the anger, or the wrath of God. If God gets angry, there has to be such a thing as righteous anger. Consider these two good definitions of the wrath of God: “The wrath of God is the annihilating reaction of perfect holiness toward that which is not holy,” and, “The wrath of God is the annihilating reaction of a loving God toward anything that is destroying His love objects.”

When a man who had raped and killed a seven-year-old little girl was brought into a police station, it took eight policemen to

restrain that little girl’s father. Her father was a gentle, loving husband and father, but he was filled with wrath toward that which had destroyed his love object. Is it possible to be loving and also capable of wrath? Oh, of course it is!

If you love God, you will be called according to His plan into His work (Romans 8:28). If that very familiar verse of Scripture profiles the way you express your love for God and your passion for living, what emotion consumes you when you see the will, the plan, and the passion of the God you love blocked and blasphemed by the wicked people of this world?

If you will read history, you discover that some of the people, who were used most by God to accomplish the will and the work of God on earth, were very devout, spiritual, holy people. When Abraham Lincoln saw slaves being sold like animals in a marketplace, he was angry! He believed that slavery was not the will of and he was very angry. That is righteous anger.

There were other great believers, like the great spokesman against slavery Wilburforce, who belonged to a group called the “Clapham Group” in England. The group, devout followers of Christ, in that spiritual community who brought about the abolition of slavery because they believed slavery grieved and angered the heart of their loving God. They were convinced that the heart of God was grieved and angry, because slavery was destroying the objects of His love.

There are devout believers today who are consumed with righteous anger because of worldwide abortion. They hold the strong conviction that the millions of babies who are cruelly vacuumed from the wombs of their mothers, or destroyed by other methods of abortion every year, is a greater injustice than the slave trade of previous centuries.

Do you get angry when you see those that God loves being abused? Have you ever seen abused children, or battered women? If you have, were you consumed with anger when you saw those innocent and defenseless victims of violence? Well, if you were, that was not sinful anger. That was righteous anger.

According to the Bible, there is righteous anger and there is sinful anger. When you are one of those victims profiled above, your anger can be sinful, and your anger can be righteous anger. You find prescriptions for both kinds of anger in the Scripture. As a pastor, I have learned how accurate and important these prescriptions for anger are in my life and in the lives of the people who have called me their pastor.

One example, I shall never forget, was the anger of a very spiritual lady who came to share a problem with me. She and her husband had three children. The youngest was an adorable little girl, three years old. This woman had a compulsion to kill their third child.

Even though she gave no evidence of being angry with anyone, I said to her, “I would like to see you again, and before you

return, will you make a list for me of any people in your life with whom you might be angry, especially if you have never really expressed your anger to them?” I was shocked when she came back the next week with a list of more than thirty people! She was boiling under the surface with anger toward these people, and she had good reason to be angry with them.

Over the next two years, I exhorted her to express her anger correctly, and the reasons for her anger, in a way that would not be sinful. Since most of the people on her list were from her church, I challenged her and helped her to reconcile the relationships with all the people on her anger list. As she did that over the next two years, her compulsion went away, like air coming out of a tire. Her dreadful compulsion simply left her.

I learned some very valuable lessons about anger from her. The primary lesson was that it is never good to suppress anger. That is why in the passage of Scripture at the beginning of this chapter, the Apostle Paul prescribes, that when we are angry, we must never let the sun go down on our anger. We must never store away our anger. If we do suppress our anger, it will come out in some other way, perhaps in a perverted way, such as a compulsion to kill a beautiful little child.

I also learned that a vital part of a biblical prescription for righteous anger, when a victim is a spiritual person, is to forgive those who have abused them. This lady was spiritual, and she did

find the grace from God to forgive all those people who had wronged her.

One of the greatest hindrances to inner healing for victims of abuse is that people who have been victimized will not forgive those who have abused them. It takes supernatural grace to forgive as we have been forgiven, but assuming that God will give us the grace, a literal translation of a petition Jesus taught in the Disciples Prayer gives us this prescription for righteous anger: “Forgive us our trespasses as we have already forgiven those who trespass against us.” (Matthew 6:12)

Ten Critical Words

There are words that simply must be said by spiritual people in the context of their relationships. Those words are: “I was wrong. I am sorry. Will you forgive me?” (Many languages it will be 6 or fewer words because the verb connotes also the person, like in Greek “I was wrong” can be expressed by one word.) That is the first version of those words. The second way those words sometimes must be spoken is: “You were wrong. I was hurt. But, I forgive you.” Those words have saved many marriages, and the lack of those words has dissolved many marriages and relationships.

Righteous anger and its prescriptions come in many forms. But no matter whether we feel indignation at society’s departure from the things of God, or personal grief at being victimized, we must always examine the source of our anger, the true object of our

anger, and then apply the prescribed biblical actions. We must look inside ourselves to determine the motive for our anger. We must ask God to search our hearts and determine if the cause of our anger is that His will and His work is being violated, or if we are angry because an obstacle is blocking our own self-driven agendas.

Once those dimensions of our anger have been determined, we must ask God to channel our righteous indignation into a constructive force that He can use to reverse social injustices like slavery and abortion. We must confess our sinful anger, and seek the forgiveness of those who have been hurt by our anger. Sometimes, we must forgive those who have abused us, and begin the process of inner healing, in ourselves and in their lives, through reconciliation with God through Christ, and with each other.

If you need further help or know someone who is dealing with this problem, please study these verses. They will help you understand better how God’s prescription for anger and forgiveness contributes to your own spiritual inner healing. Psalm 7:11, Ephesians 4:26, 31, 32, 2 Chronicles 7:14, Matthew 18:21-35, Colossians 3:13, Matthew 6:12,15

Chapter Four

Biblical Prescriptions for Communication with God

In the first three chapters of this booklet, we have considered biblical prescriptions for our problems with difficult relationships, and for sinful and righteous anger. A common thread that runs through each of those prescriptions is the theme of communication.

When we find ourselves in difficult relationships, the prescriptions we have considered teach that we need to cultivate the fruit of the Spirit in our lives so that we may eventually gain a hearing with the other person in those difficult relationships. In those teachable moments, the ability to communicate is the critical part of the prescription. We will never resolve those conflicts or help set those people free if we do not effectively communicate with them God's prescriptions.

When it comes to anger, both sinful and righteous, I said the most important words are these: "I was wrong, I am sorry, will you forgive me?", or "You were wrong, I was hurt, but I forgive you." When those words have been spoken they have saved many marriages; the lack of those words being spoken has led to the break-up of many marriages and relationships, especially difficult relationships.

There are people who will never say, "I was wrong," and they will never say, "I am sorry." To them, admitting they are wrong is a sign of weakness, and so they never admit they are wrong. For the

same reason, they never say they are sorry. They would certainly never say, "Will you forgive me?" They believe that would be putting them beneath the other person. They simply will not do that and so, their relationships fail. But, these simple words: "I was wrong, I am sorry, will you forgive me," or, "You were wrong (whether they admit it or not), I was hurt, but I forgive you", can save a marriage; they can save relationships. Saying those words, or not saying those words, is obviously a matter of communication.

When we are dealing with anger, we must be able to communicate. If we have selfish anger, we simply must speak those vital words, and seek the forgiveness of those we have harmed by our sinful anger. When we have righteous anger, we must communicate as we cry out against the injustice that is violating and blocking the will and the work of God. When we are the victims of that violation, we must communicate forgiveness to those who have hurt us even as Christ did. (Luke 23:34)

Communication with God

The relationship we have with God is the relationship in which we must first learn to cultivate our communication skills. The biblical model for communication in this relationship is found in the third chapter in the Bible, where God speaks with Adam and Eve after they have sinned. We read: "They heard the of the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God

among the trees of the garden. Then the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ He said, ‘I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself.’ And He said, ‘Who told you that you were naked?’” (Genesis 3:8–11)

As we begin to read the Bible, we learn two very important principles about proper communication with God. First, we learn that when we sin, God immediately pursues, and initiates communication and to restore a relationship with us. We also learn that we often run from the sound of His voice.

The amazing truth presented in this allegory is that God communicates with His creatures. A voice communicates. We read that they heard the voice of God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid themselves from the presence of the Lord. His voice manifested His presence, or was an expression that came out of His presence.

In the very beginning of the Bible, we have a miraculous phenomenon, as it was and as it is today. God wants to communicate and have a relationship with mankind, and mankind hides from that beautiful and eloquent expression of the unconditional love of God. The first four things God said to man were questions. The first one was: “Where are you?” Why did God ask that question? Did He not know where they were? Of course He knew. He knew that they needed to confess that they did not know because they were lost.

The first thing lost people need to know is that they are lost. So, God asks them, “Where are you?” And they essentially respond: “Well, we will tell you where we are. We hear your voice. We are not so far from you that we cannot hear Your voice. But, when we hear Your voice, it troubles us greatly because like a bright light it shows us that we are naked. We know that if we keep listening to Your voice, You are going to expose our nakedness. We do not want that, so, we are hiding. That is where we are.”

When we read: “They heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day,” that may puzzle us a bit. Have you ever seen a voice walk or heard a voice walk? Which would it be? Would you see it or hear it? This has to be allegorical language that is presenting profound truth about how God communicates with us, establishes a relationship with us, and about how we communicate with God and establish a relationship with Him. When I call this story an allegory, I do not mean it is a myth. An allegory is a story in which people, places, and things have a deeper meaning.

A voice communicates. They heard the voice of God. They hid themselves from the presence of the Lord. His voice manifested His presence, or was an expression that came out of His presence. What they really hid from was not the voice; they hid themselves from the presence of God.

God came into the garden to pursue a relationship with Adam and Eve. Because He knew they had sinned, He initiated

communication and a relationship with them. This is an allegory, like it was, and like it is, of how God pursues us today, initiating communication and a relationship with us, despite, and really because the sin in our lives means that we desperately need that relationship with our God, Who loves us unconditionally. This profound and beautiful story is a magnificent allegory of the unconditional love of God for us sinners, as it was and as it is.

When the first man and woman told God where they were, God responded with, “Who told you that you were naked?” If you read the story, you will find that God put them in the garden and told them not to eat from certain trees. We read that the minute they did, they knew they were naked. Even though God had not started His communication with them yet, they knew they were naked.

With His second question, God is referring them back to that moment when they knew they were naked. He was saying, “Back there when you knew something about yourself spiritually, that you were naked, who do you think told you that?” (The Hebrew is not literally, “Who told you?” It is, “Who made you know that you were naked?” Who do you think revealed that to you?) He was asking, “Do you not realize I was communicating with you then and you did not even realize that great miracle was taking place?” In the same way, God communicates with us today and we do not realize that miracle is happening. Like it was, and like it is, in the third chapter of the Bible, God is profiling the miracle of the communion, or relationship human beings can have with their Creator.

Do you value communication with God enough to set aside a time for that communication? D. L. Moody said, “If you are going to have quiet times alone with God, you must have them before people get up or after they go to bed.” Is it worth getting up early before people get up, or staying up late after people go to bed, to communicate with God?

In John chapter four, where we read that Jesus met a woman at a well, He told her something that was an extraordinary truth about worship to a Jew, or to a Samaritan. They were discussing the differences between the Jewish approach to God and the Samaritan approach to God. The woman had said, “You Jews claim you have God in your temple in Jerusalem. We say we have Him out here on Mount Gerizim. Now, who is right?” In our day, that question is asked this way: “There are so many different denominations of Christianity today. Which one is right?”

When Jesus responded to her question, He essentially said this: “Nobody has a monopoly on God. God is a Spirit and those who truly worship Him, worship Him in Spirit. God is seeking people who will truly worship Him in Spirit.” The late A. W. Tozer often said, “God is not especially looking for workers; He has plenty of them. He is looking for worshippers; He has very few.”

The Jewish worship liturgy referenced by the Samaritan woman goes back to the beginning of God’s worship instruction to His people, when God told Moses how His people should approach Him in worship. Moses gave that instruction in the Book of Exodus.

God told Moses to construct a little tent of worship. The tent of worship had a Holy of Holies, an inner chamber where the Ark of the Covenant was kept. God said to Moses, “My presence is going to dwell in the Ark of the Covenant.” People like David were continuously in the tent of worship seeking to approach the divine presence of God. The Shekinah glory of God literally dwelt in that sacred article of furniture. That was why, when Daniel was in captivity, he always faced Jerusalem when he prayed. The divine presence of God literally resided in the Temple in Jerusalem.

Jesus essentially told the woman at the well, “It is not like that any more. God is anywhere you want to come to Him, approach Him, worship Him, and know Him in Spirit and in truth.” Perhaps, He was prophetically profiling the most dynamic truth in the New Testament: “Do you not know that your body is the temple of God?” and “Christ in you, the Hope of glory.” (I Corinthians 6:19; Colossians 1:27) So, for us today, communication with God means that all we have to do is make time and realize we can communicate with God no matter where we are and we should set aside a place for communication with God.

Nathaniel, when hearing of Jesus, had asked, “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” When Jesus met Nathaniel, He said, “Behold an Israelite indeed in whom there is no guile.” (John 1:47) Nathaniel asked, “How do you know me?” Jesus astonished him by essentially saying, “I am the One you have been talking with under the fig tree.”

Nathaniel exclaimed: “You are the Son of God, you are King of Israel!” Nathaniel was a godly man. He apparently worshipped God every day under a fig tree. It may be that nobody knew about that but God and Nathaniel. Do you have a fig tree? Do you have a place and do you have a time when you commune with God?

My favorite definition of prayer is that prayer is a conversation with God. If you are considered a good conversationalist that means you know that every conversation has two dimensions: When you are talking and when the other person is talking. That is intensely true when we are in a conversation with God. There are things God wants to hear from us, like when we confess our sins and when we worship Him. But, we never tell Him anything He does not already know, or that surprises Him. When He communicates with us, however, He makes us know many things we would not otherwise know. He also makes us know things that really do surprise us.

In Genesis three, God is saying, “I am communicating with you and I want you to communicate with Me. I want to have a relationship with you. I know you, and I want you to know Me. I communicate with you and I want you to communicate with Me. Come into My presence, communicate with Me, get to know Me and establish a relationship with Me. I will meet with you if you will set aside a time and a place for your relationship with Me.”

What Moses has profiled here is the most important relationship and the most important communication in the world.

What is the purpose of that communication? The purpose of that communication is to get to know God and to worship God. To know Him is to love Him. Worship is simply expressing your love for Him. The purpose is also to pray to Him, to come and, as Peter said, “Cast all your care upon Him,” and then discover that He cares for you. The purpose of this communication is to come to His throne of grace that you might receive mercy for your failures, and grace to help you in your time of need (I Peter 5:7; Hebrews 4:17).

Communication with Ourselves

A man, who lived like a hermit in solitude, visited a post office near the humble cabin where he lived. There, he met a man who was leaving the post office with a handful of letters, and was obviously overjoyed to have received so many letters. He asked him, “How long has it been since you have heard from yourself?”

Is that not interesting? How long has it been since you have heard from yourself? You hear from other people, but how long has it been since you have heard from yourself? Is it possible to hear from yourself? Do you believe that if you talk to yourself you are crazy? I once heard a man say, “I talk to myself because that is the only time I talk with an intelligent person or about an intelligent person.”

The question of the man who lived in the woods, profiles the spiritual discipline of hearing from yourself and of being aware of what is going on in our own heart and mind. It falls in line with

some words written by David: “Meditate in your heart upon your bed, and be still.” (Psalm 4:4) When we meditate in silence, quieting our hearts within us, we are able to reflect on the things God wants to make us know, and we are able to prepare a reflective response to those things. If we do not practice these times of quiet and of solitude, we will not live with an understanding of the place where God wants to make us know we are to be for His glory.

Seriously, David, in Psalm Four, exhorts you to talk to yourself - to have a little meeting with yourself in the middle of the night. David is obviously in distress when he writes this Psalm. He is not able sleep, so he has some communication with himself. He communes with his own heart upon his bed. What is the purpose of that communion? We call it meditation; we call it reflection. David has to think about how he is going to respond to the things God is making him know when he hears from God.

There is another dimension of communication with God profiled in Psalm Four. David tells us that he has already discovered the human dimension of a conversation with God. He writes: “Know that the Lord has set apart him that is godly for Himself. The Lord will hear when I call unto Him.” David knows and he has experienced the part of a prayer conversation that is man talking to God.

He has also made this discovery: “The Lord has enlarged me when I was in distress.” When do we really commune with God? Is it not when we have a problem and we simply do not know what to

do? That is when most of us talk to God. I do not discourage that kind of communion with God. I thank God for what some would call, “storm theology – theology that seeks for God when the storms of life come.”

Any crisis or calamity that turns us toward God is a divine intervention and a spiritual opportunity for God to grow our faith. I have met many devout people who will tell you that such an intervention was the most significant event of their life. The most genuine communication with God that is experienced by human beings usually takes place in the context of a time of great stress. The essence of what David is telling us in this Psalm is: “When I was in distress, that is when you made Yourself real to me. You really communicated with me and I communicated with You when I was hurting.” (Psalm 4:1) If you are familiar with the biographical profile of David’s life we learn from the history books, and from these Psalms of David, with a sanctified imagination, you can find many places in his spiritual journey where this Psalm could have been prayed by David.

David tells us that he has discovered those things, but he goes on to tell us about another vital dimension of a conversation with God when he writes: “Offer the sacrifices of righteousness and put your trust in the Lord. There are many who say, “Who will show us something good?”” (Psalm 4: 4-6)

We can assume that David is struggling with one of those decisions we often face. He can do the right thing, or he can do what

is expedient and beneficial. If he does what is right, he is convinced that the consequences will be disastrous. In fact, he does not see how he can survive if he does the right thing. So, he has decided to do the expedient thing - but then he is not able to sleep, because he is a man after God’s own heart and he is committed to moral absolutes and to moral integrity. He is therefore not able to sleep. That is the context of this conversation David is having with himself and with God.

After getting in touch with God, and his own heart, he decides to make whatever sacrifices he must make and continue to put his trust in the Lord. One of the motivations that drives his decision is that he is surrounded by people who are looking for someone who has enough faith and integrity to do what is right, and not do the expedient thing everybody else is doing. If we were to ask David the second question God asked Adam and Eve, “Who told you?” he would undoubtedly tell us that God made him know that he must make whatever sacrifices it takes to do the right thing and trust God for survival.

Throughout the Psalms, you will find examples of prayers like this prayer of David’s, which are conversations with God. As you read the Psalms, make the observation that the pattern of the Psalmists is frequently to declare their petitions to God and then receive a word from God as His part of their prayer conversation. Psalm Twenty-two is an extraordinary example of one of these prayer conversation Psalms.

The Psalmists are good conversationalists because they know the most important part of a prayer conversation is when God is speaking to them in answer to their prayers. This makes them know that God has heard their prayer, that they are experiencing the most important dimension of their conversation with Him, and that they simply must do what God has made them know they are to do. When you pray, are you a good conversationalist with God? The mother of Jesus gives us an absolute rule to follow when we hear God's part of a conversation with us. Mary told the servants at the wedding in Cana, where Jesus turned water into wine: "Whatever He says to you, do it."

Chapter Five

Prescriptions for Communication with People

Recently, I have been sharing a series of messages with you, which I have called, "Biblical Prescriptions for Problems." In this series of messages, we have discovered together that God has given us sixty-six inspired, holy little books, because He knows we have all kinds of problems. If we will open the Word of God with expectancy and confidence, we will discover that God has indeed written practical prescriptions in His inspired Word for the many problems we have.

In this series of messages, we have considered together biblical prescriptions for difficult relationships. Are you living in a difficult relationship? Are you making a relationship difficult for someone else? The Scripture has much to say to you if you are. Then, we looked at the problem of sinful anger. Anger is very often a factor in a difficult relationship. We also considered prescriptions for righteous anger, or righteous indignation, as it is sometimes called. There are times when it is right to be angry, according to the Bible.

There is a common thread that runs through those prescriptions. That common thread is communication. In the prescription, which showed us how to cope in a difficult relationship, we considered and were instructed, that in a difficult relationship, we must maintain the fruit of the Spirit, because that keeps the door open for God to work in that relationship. If we keep the door open for God, we earn a hearing with that difficult person, and that may give us the opportunity to instruct those who "oppose themselves". We can then instruct them, in what is sometimes called, "the teachable moment". We can now place before them the truth from the Word of God that can set them free (II Timothy 2:23-26).

These prescriptions are directing us to communicate our way through our difficult relationships. When it comes to anger, both sinful and righteous, I shared with you that the most important words in any relationship are these: "I was wrong, I am sorry, will you forgive me," or, "You were wrong, I was hurt, but I forgive you."

Those words have saved many marriages and other kinds of relationships; the lack of those words has led to the break-up of many relationships.

There are people who will never say, “I was wrong.” They simply never say those three words. There are people who will never say, “I am sorry.” To them, that is admitting they are wrong – and they are never wrong. They will never say, “Will you forgive me?” As they see things, that would be putting them beneath the other person in their relationship. They simply will never do that and so, the relationship dissolves and fails.

These simple words: I was wrong, I am sorry, will you forgive me, or, you were wrong (whether you admit it or not), I was hurt, but I forgive you, can save a marriage; they can save a relationship. Saying those words, or not saying those words, is a matter of communication.

What is Communication?

A college speech professor decided to use an unusual object lesson to teach his class about the principles of communication. He purposely arrived late to class one day, and as he expected, found his students in an uproar of conversation. He moved quickly to the front of the classroom and slammed his opened hand on his desk. “I want absolute pandemonium!” he shouted, as he slammed his hand on the desktop with a noise that cracked like a pistol shot. The noisy students immediately became completely silent.

He had made his point, and explained to his students that experts agree and tell us that only seven percent of what we communicate is conveyed by words. Forty-four percent is conveyed by our body language, and forty-nine percent is communicated by the inflexion we place on the words we speak. The professor taught his students that what he said to them - “I want absolute pandemonium!” - was only seven percent of his message. The remaining ninety three percent of his message was communicated through his angry gesture and loud tone of voice, both of which carried the message, “Stop your talking!”

These same principles of communication are every bit as true in marriage, or in any other relationship. Many couples tell their pastor or a marriage counselor, “We have no communication. We simply do not communicate at all.” But, based on the object lesson we learned from the professor, you can bet that a husband and wife are communicating - even when they are not talking. Their communication may be a matter of how they are communicating and what they are communicating, but a husband and wife are almost always communicating.

The Dictionary defines communication as “the giving and receiving of information, messages, and ideas by talk, gestures, or other means.” It is through these “other means” that communication happens within a marriage, or other relationships. A smile can communicate volumes of positive thought and affection; a frown, or a sneer can convey volumes of sarcasm and rage. When a woman

slams a door, or a man punches his fist through a wall, are they not communicating?

When a man or a woman stop talking to each other, when they treat each other with silent contempt, are they not communicating? I once heard a wise woman say, “When my man is not talking, you have to listen very carefully to hear what he is saying.”

Turn on the Light

While bacteria multiply in the dark, most bacteria cannot live in the light. If a husband and wife want to build and maintain a strong marriage relationship, their good communication can be thought of as a bright “light” they can turn on the “bacteria” of their communication problems. When they do, most of those “bacteria” will die, and with good communication, they can address those that do not die. This principle is true in all relationships.

Based on this definition of communication, a second observation I can make is that there are always two dimensions to communication. My working definition of communication informs us that communication is “the giving and receiving of information, messages, and ideas.” It follows that communication in a marriage relationship, or any other relationship, has a giving dimension and receiving dimension. According to this definition, I can also conclude that there are two dimensions to communication problems in relationships. Sometimes the source of the problem is the giver,

and sometimes the source of the problem is the person who is receiving the communication.

One lady described the communication problem in her marriage this way: “It is as if my husband were living on a mysterious island and I have been circling that island for twenty years trying, without success, to find a place to beach my boat.”

Imagine that you and your spouse are actually living on separate islands and your only means of communication is by radio. For the two of you to communicate, two things must happen; one of you must decide to turn their radio on and send a message to the other. And the other spouse, to whom that message is sent, must decide to turn their receiver on, find the right frequency, and receive that message.

As we learned in the last chapter, even the communication we have with God has two dimensions: giving and receiving. The communication in a marriage or in any relationship has two dimensions that are as distinct as they would be if you were on separate islands.

Sometimes, the source of a marital communication problem is that the sender will not turn on their radio and send a message. When they do, there are times when the message is distorted and confusing. A wife once explained to her husband, “I know you think you understand what I said, but what you need to know is that what I said is not what I meant.” There are also times when the source of the problem is that the receiver is not turned on, or it is not tuned to

the right frequency.

Through more than four decades as a pastor, I have asked couples, who told me they had no communication, if they ever did have anything like good communication. Since people seldom get married who are not talking to each other, most of these couples responded to my question by telling me they did indeed have very good communication when they were first married.

When we agreed that something had obviously happened to break down their lines of communication, I gave them an assignment. I asked them to make a list for me of all the reasons why they believed their lines of communication had been damaged. From those lists, I discovered two obvious and typical symptoms of a marriage communication problem. Those two symptoms were that one or both of them had stopped talking, and the other was that there were times when one or both of them had become angry when they tried to communicate.

If their communication problem was that one or both of them had stopped talking, I asked the silent one(s) to make a list of all the reasons why they had stopped talking. If the problem was that one or both of them had become angry when they tried to communicate with each other, I asked the angry one(s) to make a list of all the reasons why communication with their partner made them angry.

I told them that the reasons why they stopped talking, or became angry when they attempted communication, were communication “circuit breakers”. A circuit breaker is a device that

shuts off the electricity when circuits are nearing overload and there is danger of a fire, or damage to the electrical system in homes or buildings. I asked them not to discuss their lists of “circuit breakers” until we could discuss them together when we met for our next counseling session.

When I discussed their “circuit breakers” with them, one at a time, I challenged them to think about what they thought it would take to restore each one of these breaks in their communication. This process focused for me, and for those couples, the undeniable reality that good communication is a giving and a receiving proposition. These “circuit breakers” were frequently all about how the communication of one spouse was being received by the other.

For example, a wife wrote down, “not listening” as the reason why she stopped talking. She said that when she was telling her husband, “The baby spoke some new words today,” she realized her husband had tuned her out and was not listening to her. Since communication is not supposed to be a monologue, she had stopped talking. Before she dissolved into tears, she told me, and her husband, that his not listening meant that he was not interested; not being interested meant that he did not care, and not caring meant that he did not love her and the baby!

A husband recorded that when he shared something that was really important to him, like the thought that he would like to go to seminary, his wife laughed at him. He then announced that he would never share the deep feelings of his heart with his wife again.

When you share your heart with another person, it is as if you have placed your heart in their hand. When they hold your heart in their hand, they can do anything they want to do with it. They can squeeze it; they can throw it down and step on it, or they can laugh at it. The worst thing they can do with your heart is to ignore it, because the opposite of love is not hate. The opposite of love is indifference.

To ignore another person is the opposite of loving that person. It is possible to respond to the attempts of your spouse to communicate with you by simply ignoring their heart-felt attempts to communicate with you. You are ignoring your marriage partner's heart when your spouse is trying to communicate with you and you are not listening.

One husband wrote that his wife was "an oral sharp-shooter". According to him, when he made himself vulnerable by attempting to communicate at a deep level of communication, she would often exploit his vulnerability by "shooting him in the back". I found it very interesting that in that same counseling session, his wife recorded on her list of "circuit breakers" that her husband was "an oral assassin." She was afraid to communicate with him about many things because he would "assassinate" her orally if she tried to tell him something he needed, but did not want to hear.

There is a common insight into the dynamics of communication between a husband and wife running through all these examples. Communication is not only a matter of the way it is

given; communication in a marriage relationship, or in any relationship, also involves the way communication, on the part of one person, is received by the other. In each of these examples, the way one spouse received communication from their marriage partner was a communication circuit breaker. As we apply biblical prescriptions for communication in our relationships, this basic communication fact of life shows us that we need to discipline ourselves to become good receivers, or good listeners.

The Turtle Syndrome

As I discussed these communication "circuit breakers" with couples, I told many of them they were acting like a couple of turtles. If you abuse a turtle, that turtle withdraws into its shell and will not show itself for a long, long time. When our communication is not properly received, like turtles, we withdraw into our shells. Many married couples live together like two turtles, desperately needing to understand that communication has two dimensions: a giving dimension and a receiving dimension.

Both these dimensions of communication are critically important and must be acknowledged, appreciated, and addressed if a married couple, or believers in any relationship want to have the tool that makes it possible for them to maintain their oneness in Christ.

The Porcupine Syndrome

There is a quaint little poem about two porcupines that are trying to express love and affection on a cold night. When the question is asked, “How do porcupines embrace?” The answer is, “very carefully!” They both have a strong determination to express their love and affection for each other, but every time they try to get close to one another, they get stuck.

The essence of the application of the poem is obvious. When we try to communicate on an intimate level as husband and wife, or as believers, we often get stuck on the “needles” of the way our spouse, or another believer receives our attempts to openness and communication. The application of the beautiful metaphor of this poem is that we should not withdraw and distance ourselves from relationships because we have been pricked by the way they have received our attempts to express communication. That is why it takes courage to communicate!

In Summary:

Communication is not only what is said; it is what is heard.

Communication is not only what is said; it is what is felt.

Communication is not only what is said; it is what people want to hear.

Communication is not only what is said; it is the total proposition that is conveyed, by talk, gestures, or other means.

THE GOLDEN RULE OF COMMUNICATION

In His Sermon on the Mount, the essence of the truth Jesus taught about human relationships was summarized when He taught: “All the things you would like people to do for you, go and do all those things for those people.” (Matthew 7:12) This teaching of Jesus is known as “The Golden Rule.”

There is a sense in which all the examples I have described of spouses receiving communication from their husbands or wives inappropriately, can be traced to one source and expressed in one word - selfishness. The same truth applies to the communication we have with our brothers and sisters in Christ, and in all our relationships in this world. The Golden Rule is the general solution of Jesus to the communication problems we encounter in all our relationships, difficult or otherwise.

When you get serious about applying the Golden Rule of Jesus, you will discover that, before you can apply this great summary teaching of Jesus about relationships, you must first put yourself in that other person’s place.

For example, to become a good receiver as you communicate with your wife, husband, a believer, or in a secular relationship, put yourself in the place of the person who is trying to communicate with you. Ask yourself, “If I were that other person and I were trying to say what they are trying to communicate to me right now, how would I want them to receive my communication?” When you know the answer to that question do it. Simply do it, because your answer to

that question is the Golden Rule of relational communication.

If you will discipline yourself to think that way, you will realize that you would want them to receive your communication appropriately. For starters, you would want them to listen until they really heard what you were trying to say. Obviously, you would not want your spouse, or another person to receive your communication in any of the inappropriate ways I have profiled in the examples I have given. You would not want them to be contentious and ready to fight, an oral sharp shooter, or an oral assassin. You would not want your spouse or a believer to tune you out and not listen to you, because they are not interested in what you have to say, because they do not care what you have to say, because they do not love you.

As you identify your communication “circuit breakers” and consider what it would take to restore the broken circuits in your communication with other people, let The Golden Rule of Jesus guide you. If you are really serious about applying this great principle, this summary relational ethic of Jesus, then you must be others-centered. To be others-centered you must be God centered, Christ centered, and Holy Spirit centered because, to be others-centered goes completely against your human nature. When you decide to make the commitment to be others-centered rather than self-centered, remember that you are attempting the impossible, unless you are expressing the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22,23).

There is another teaching of Jesus that supplements and

complements The Golden Rule. This teaching should also be applied to our communication with our spouses, and in all our relationships. Paul tells us that Jesus said: “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” (Acts 20:35)

Since communication is a giving and receiving proposition, we should carefully and prayerfully consider the communication those to whom we relate need to hear. Then we should take the initiative and contribute that communication as our gift to them. According to Jesus, we will enjoy more happiness (blessedness) in giving the right kind of communication, than we will experience by simply reacting to the communication of others. (Ephesians 4:21 - 25, 29, 31, 32)

Communication Principles from Paul

As we consider the quality of communication we should present as a gift to others, we should consider some words Paul wrote to the Ephesians when he instructed them to be conduits of the grace of God every time they opened their mouths. Paul exhorted them to use words that edify, or build up the recipient of their communication. He also challenged them to never let any word come out of their mouths that would corrupt, or tear down those to whom they speak (Ephesians 4:29).

There are several profound passages in the second letter of the Apostle Paul to the believers in Corinth that profile the two vitally important dimensions of giving and receiving communication.

For example, Paul writes: “We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. As a fair exchange - I speak as to my children - open wide your hearts also.” (II Corinthians 6:11-13)

To paraphrase and summarize this passage of Scripture, Paul is telling the Corinthians, and you and me by application, that it is as if we have communication “flaps” on our hearts. Paul is telling the Corinthian believers that he is heart to heart toward them, with his communication heart “flap” open, but they have closed the communication “flaps” of their hearts toward him, and they have turned their backs on him.

As a man and woman whom God has joined together and made one, and as believers who are to be one in Christ, God wants us heart to heart, with our communication “flaps” always open. Sadly, the truth is that we spend too much of our time as married couples, and as brothers and sisters in Christ, back to back and “flaps closed”.

Paul also writes: “If I make you sorry, who will make me glad but the one who is made sorry by me?” (II Corinthians 2:2) This passage can also be applied to the two dimensions of giving and receiving communication in a relationship. If you consistently give and receive communication in a way that gets others down, who do you think is going to lift your spirits? You might spend two thirds of your life with your spouse, and you are going to spend eternity with your brothers and sisters in the Lord. From here to eternity, it is a

good idea to cultivate good communication with those you love now and will love forever.

Your partner and your fellow believers have been charged with the responsibility of communicating with you in a way that will contribute to your personal happiness and you are responsible to build them up.

Paul shares another insight into communication with us that should be applied in the communication we have as believers and as married couples. He tells these same Corinthians that he has renounced the hidden things of dishonestly and that he is not walking in craftiness as he communicates with them (II Corinthians 4:2). He challenges them to do the same as they communicate with him.

I must sound a word of warning here. It is possible to devastate your spouse, or another believer in the name of honesty, when you are actually addressing the problem of your own guilt. Here is an example: A couple once asked me if they should speak the truth in love, and tell their teenage daughter that she was conceived before they were married. I responded by asking them if they were addressing their daughter’s need to know something, or their own guilt. We can do the same thing to our spouse or our fellow believers in the name of honesty.

There are times when we should withhold honest communication from others because they have a health problem, like a bad heart. They may also have emotional problems and not be emotionally stable enough to handle our honesty. We should pass

our guilt, or our need to be known as an honest person, through the prism of our love for others, and our commitment to their well being, before we devastate them with our honesty.

Having cited these concerns, able bodied, spiritually and emotionally stable believers should strive to have relationships that are honest and open. What I have called “bacteria”, the Apostle Paul calls, “the hidden things of dishonesty”, and “walking in craftiness”. I call, walking in craftiness, “playing communication games”. When we are certain that we are addressing the well being of others rather than our own guilt, and we have the courage to communicate, we should “turn the light on” the hidden things of dishonesty, and never walk in craftiness when we communicate.

Chapter Six

Prescription for Sin

The biggest problem I have is sin, and whether you know it or not, the biggest problem you have is sin. The biggest problem the people in this whole world have is sin. In a sense, the difference between believers and unbelievers is that those of us who believe know our biggest problem is sin, and the people of this world, who have not believed and been born again, do not know that sin is their biggest problem.

The many different words the Bible uses for sin define sin for us. These words are concepts like breaking a rule, missing the mark, falling short of the goal, turning to our own way, and acting independently from God. The issue is, will we do the will of God, or are we determined to have our own way?

One of the most profound biblical prescriptions for the solution to the problem of sin is found in Paul’s letter to the believers in Rome (Romans 7:15-8:13). The last half of Romans chapter seven, records Paul’s famous discourse about the struggle he himself is having with the problem of sin. He focuses the problem of sin in his own heart and mind. In this passage, he takes the lid off his heart, he takes the lid off of his mind, and with remarkable transparency, lets us see the struggle he is having with sin in his heart and mind. By doing that, he gives us insight into our own hearts and minds and the struggle we are having with sin.

Before we look at Paul’s discourse and God’s solution, we must make this observation: Paul is not primarily dealing here with sin in the life of an unbeliever. He has already addressed that problem and its solution in the first four chapters of his letter to the Romans. In the second four chapters of that letter, he is focusing the issue of sin in the life of the believer. I might also add this observation: he is addressing the problem of sin in the life of a believer who desires to be holy.

God’s Word tells us we are to be holy because God is holy. Only the believer who desires to be holy appreciates the awesome

force and power of sin. If you are not trying to live a holy life, you do not think much of sin; it is not much of a problem for you. But, you gain a great appreciation for the problem of sin if, like Paul, you earnestly desire to be holy. Although Paul's teaching on this subject is long, I want to quote the entire discourse and the prescription for sin that follows it. I have paraphrased, summarized, and translated this passage, because I believe there has never been a time in the body of Christ when we have needed to understand these issues as much as we do today. We have so many people today, who profess to be followers of Christ, who know nothing of this profound prescription Paul is sharing with us in this great passage of Scripture (Romans 7:14 – 8:13).

A Symphony of Inadequacy

“I do not understand what I am doing. I do not do the good things I sincerely want to do, but the evil things I hate to do, are the very things I actually do. Now, if I do not want to do these evil things, if, in fact, I hate to do them, if my conscience bothers me when I do them, then, I must believe that the laws of God I am breaking when I do these evil things are good and just laws.

“If I am not doing what I want to do, but what I do not want to do, in a sense, it is not I doing these things but sin which is resident in me. I have convinced myself, through shameful and painful experience over many years, that there is nothing good at all in me - that is, in my flesh, and by that I mean my human nature

apart from God, or unaided by God. Oh, I can will to do what is right, but I cannot find within myself the power to perform what I will to do. I simply go on day after day, not doing the good things I want to do, but what I promised myself I am not going to do, these sinful things I hate, I simply go ahead and do them anyway.

“I can no longer live in denial of the hard reality that I am not in control of my life. I find it to be a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me. In my mind, I delight to obey the law of God, but when I do, I discover another law in my members. This other law is at war with the law of my mind and makes me a captive to sin, which is very much alive in me.

“So then, it comes down to this: In my mind, I profess to be, and I truly desire to be a slave to the law of God. But, the painful reality is that in my flesh, I actually am a slave to the law of sin. ‘Oh, wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?’ I thank my God that question has been answered for me. Jesus Christ my Lord has delivered me from the painful tension and conflict of this spiritual agony.

A Symphony of Adequacy

“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own

Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is in opposition to God. It is not subject to God’s law. Indeed it cannot be and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

“But you are not in the flesh, brothers and sisters, you are in the Spirit since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Those who do not have the Spirit of Christ do not belong to Him. But if the Spirit of Christ dwells in you, even though your body is dead because of sin, your spirit is alive because God has declared you righteous. And if the Spirit of Him Who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, then He Who raised Christ Jesus from the dead can give life to your mortal body also through His Spirit Who dwells in you.

“So the conclusion to it all is, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation and we must make a commitment, not to the flesh to live our lives controlled by the flesh, (because if you live your life controlled by the flesh, you will die,) but if, through the Spirit you have put to death the work of the flesh in your body, you will live.”

Described more beautifully than anywhere else in the Scripture, Paul profiles the problem of sin and God’s great prescription for the solution to the problem of sin in the life of a believer. You might say the whole Bible could be called “A Prescription for Sin.” The cross is a symbol of God’s prescription and solution for the problem of sin in the lives of unbelievers, and continues to be the key to the believer’s victory over sin. That is what the Bible is all about.

The prescription for sin in the lives of believers, who want to live holy lives, is described in many ways and in many places in the Bible, but you will never find it more beautifully described and prescribed than in this passage I have quoted here. One of my favorite scholars, Dr. William Barclay, who for forty years was a professor of Bible at Edinburgh University in Scotland, calls Paul’s teaching about sin “A Symphony of Inadequacy.” I think that is a wonderful insight into Paul’s honest confession.

As this beloved apostle shares, in such a transparent, honest way, his struggle with sin, he is telling us that certain prescriptions for sin are inadequate. This passage shows us, for example, the inadequacy of a purely physical prescription for sin. When Paul uses this expression, “in my flesh,” or “in the flesh,” William Barkley tells us he means, as we have already noted, “in my human nature, apart from God, or unaided by God.”

After I started this series of messages on prescriptions for problems, I invited my listeners to turn in requests for problems they

would like me to address. Somebody requested that I address the problem of the “carnal Christian”. Their question actually was: “Why is it that so many professing Christians today are carnal Christians?”

The expression “carnal Christian” is an apparent contradiction in terms. The word “carnal” comes from the Greek word for flesh. The word, “Christian” literally means, “Christ-like one.” If a person is Christ-like, they will not be carnal, or living in their human nature unaided by God. We could never apply that concept to the life Jesus Christ lived here on earth.

What we call a carnal Christian is a professing Christian who has not yet discovered God’s prescription for the solution to the problem of sin in the life of a believer the way Paul describes it. If they have discovered it, they do not understand it. If they understand it, they do not know how to apply it. It may be they have not even discovered that the greatest problem they have, even as a believer, is the problem of sin.

Acknowledging his struggle with sin the way Paul does in this passage is a problem to many scholars, who say that Paul could not possibly have been talking about himself when he wrote this honest personal confession of his struggle with sin. They reason that the spiritually mature Apostle Paul could never have written the things he did here about the battle he is having with sin.

This passage is one of the most misunderstood and misapplied passages in the writings of Paul. I have heard people say,

after reading this passage, that if Paul had such a hard time with sin, then when we are tempted to sin, we should give in immediately and avoid the struggle. Others who read this passage say that based on this statement of Paul, it is impossible to rise above sin. I can see how they could reach that conclusion if they stopped reading at the end of chapter seven. Chapter seven presents the bad news. The good news begins with chapter eight.

To me, the operative word here is that word “flesh”. Paul is simply saying, “Apart from God, unaided by God, my struggle with sin brought me to the place where I considered myself wretched.” If you are not an achiever spiritually, it may be easier for you to learn some of these things. It is harder for achievers. Paul was an achiever, a super achiever, that is why it took Paul so long. That is why it was such a struggle for him.

Nobody every tried harder to achieve righteousness, holiness, and salvation apart from God, and unaided by God, than Saul of Tarsus. But, as he tried to solve his sin problem apart from God, unaided by God, he found himself in a terrible tension and an awful dichotomy that brought him to the place where it led him to call himself “a wretched man.”

He uses a very grotesque metaphor. He cries out, “Who will deliver me from this body of death?” In the area around Tarsus, where Paul was raised, the ruthless Roman conquerors practiced a horrible form of capital punishment. If a person was convicted of murder, they stripped him naked. Then the naked corpse of the

murdered person was chained to the body of the murderer - back to back, with shackles or chains at the ankles, knees, thighs, and all the way up the body. Then they sent him out into the wilderness. The decomposition of the dead body infected the body of the condemned person until he died. It was an indescribably horrible death.

That is what Paul is saying at the end of this passage in chapter seven. He is trying to tell us how he tried, apart from God and unaided by God, to be holy and win his battle with sin. He said, "Who will deliver me from this body of death?" Literally, he meant, "This dead body that is chained to me?"

According to Paul's teaching on sin or symphony of inadequacy, which leads him to his symphony of adequacy, the solution to the sin problem is not going to be found within us; it has to come from outside ourselves. Paul's insight into sin in this passage shows us the inadequacy of a purely physical prescription for overcoming the problem of sin. True victory over the power of sin can only be found in God's prescription, "There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk after the flesh, but after the Spirit." (Romans 8:1)

If you have, like Paul been trying to take care of the sin problem in your own strength, then accept God's prescription today and each day.

Chapter Seven

Prescription for Guilt

Nobody ever had a greater need to solve the problem of guilt than David. If you want to appreciate the cause of his guilt, read the story of the darkest chapter in David's life in the historical book of Second Samuel chapters 11 through 18. David was the second king of Israel and he was the best king Israel ever had. He was the king for forty years and after being king for fourteen years, we all know that he sinned. He committed the sin of adultery with a woman named Bathsheba, and then he orchestrated the murder of her husband in battle.

When his life is reviewed in First Kings fifteen, we read: "David did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and had not turned aside from anything that God commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite." As God looked back on this dreadful episode in David's life, the worst part of his sin was what he did to Uriah, not what he did to Uriah's wife.

In the history books that give us our biographical information about the life of David, you will find numerous references to the mighty men of David. David was a great leader of men. The Hebrew word "hesed" is a word, which describes the covenant of loyalty, and commitment David made to these men and these men made to David. Uriah was one of these mighty men. When David

sinned against Uriah, he betrayed the hesed between himself and Uriah.

David thought nobody knew about his awful sin. For a whole year after his sin with Bathsheba, and the arranged death of Uriah, David thought he had put in place a successful cover up of his sin. It must have been the unhappiest year of his life because he experienced terrible guilt. In Psalm Thirty-two, he tells us the guilt was so intense, that all day and all night his strength evaporated like water on a sunny day. In other words, he experienced physical illness because of his guilt.

But when a courageous prophet named Nathan came into David's court and accused him of his sin, David said immediately, "I have sinned against Jehovah." And the prophet said, "The Lord God Jehovah has put away your sin." (II Samuel 12:13) The forgiveness was automatic; it was a given immediately when David confessed the sin.

We can assume that it was after the confrontation by the prophet Nathan that David prayed the prayer of Psalm Fifty-one. It is in this beautiful prayer confession of David that we will find our biblical prescription for guilt.

If you are struggling with guilt, and you do not know how to confess your sins, I challenge you to memorize this Psalm. Even if it takes you a year, memorize it, and then pray it day and night until you find the blessedness of forgiveness David expresses as he begins Psalm Thirty-two. If you will do this, you will have discovered

God's prescription for guilt. This is the most profound prayer of confession and repentance that has ever been written:

"Have mercy upon me, Oh God, according to Your great love and compassion; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin, for I know and I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against You and You only have I sinned and done this evil in Your sight, that You may be justified when You speak and blameless when You judge.

"Look at me. I was a sinner when I took shape in iniquity in my mother's womb. I was a sinner when my mother conceived me. You want me to know the truth about what I am in my inner man, and in my secret heart you will make me to know and apply the truth You are teaching me about myself." (Psalm 51:1-6)

In the opening verses of this profound and eloquent prayer of confession, David appeals to the mercy and the great love and compassion of God. He appeals to the multitude of the tender mercies of God. Mercy is an expression of the unconditional love of God. In his great Shepherd Psalm, David concludes by writing that the goodness and mercy (unconditional love) of God will follow (pursue) him all the days of his life (Psalm 23:6).

This shows us that David really does know God. Anybody who really knows God, knows that God loves them anyway, or unconditionally, and that His love for them was not won by a positive performance and is not lost by a negative performance. That

is what the word “grace” means and that is what the word “mercy” means. The mercy of God withholds from us the punishment we deserve, and the grace of God lavishes on us all kinds of blessings we do not deserve. Since David really knows God, he appeals to “the great love and compassion,” and “the tender mercies” of God, as he confesses his sin.

He confesses sinning against Jehovah, not Bathsheba, and not even Uriah. As David sees it, he had sinned against Jehovah and Him only. Although David had grievously sinned against Uriah, and Bathsheba, his love for God was so fervent and intense that the hurt he had caused Jehovah was so much greater than the hurt he had caused one of his most loyal soldiers, and his wife. A godly woman of another century prayed, “God, I would rather go to Hell than to grieve Your Holy Spirit one more time.” That expresses the spirit of what David meant when he prayed, “Against You and You only I have sinned and done this evil in Your sight.”

David knows there is going to be forgiveness with God. We hear him as he goes on with his prayer exclaim, “I will be white as snow again. I will be clean again. I will be filled with the joy of my salvation again. I will teach transgressors Your ways again. Sinners are going to be converted to You again.” David knows that God is going to restore him because he really knows God.

In the last chapter, I shared some biblical words for sin that define sin. If you are interested in further defining sin, then observe the way David knows and confesses the truth about his sin. We hear

him pray, “My iniquity, my sin. I have sinned. I acknowledge my transgressions. I have done this evil.” He does not justify himself; he does not make any excuses for himself. He describes his sin in three ways. He calls it “transgression”. That means a willful disobedience, the deliberate breaking of a rule. He describes it as “iniquity”. That means there is something crooked about me. The arrow misses the target because the arrow is crooked. There is something about me that is bent out of shape and as a result I continuously miss the mark and commit iniquity. Lastly, when he prays, “my sin”, he means, my failure, my total failure.

When he prays for cleansing, he asks for a thorough cleansing as when a soiled garment is bleached white by continuous washings. “Wash me” is a Hebrew word that means to trample or pound. The way they washed garments then, and still do in that part of the world, was to beat them on the rocks. They would put them in the river, soap them up, trample them, beat them against the rocks, and then put them back in the river again. He is saying, “God, trample all over me. Pound the sin and the iniquity out of me.”

I think it is so touching when he prays, “Hide your face from my sins.” Imagine the sorrow and grief of that prayer. “Oh God, please do not look upon my sins.” The truth is, there is no way God cannot look upon David’s sin, or yours and mine. He cannot really hide His face from our sins. Everything we do is open before the eyes of God. He sees it all (Hebrews 4:13). If we really know God, if we really love God, and we want to glorify and please God, at the

heart of our guilt, or conviction of sin will be the undeniable reality that we have sinned against Him, before Him, and He has seen it all!

Also observe the way David knows himself. He essentially prays, “God, I have a problem and You want me to know the truth about my problem. You want me to know the truth about what I am in my inner man. My problem is that I am a sinner. I have always been a sinner. When I took shape in my mother’s womb, I was a sinner from the very beginning. When my mother conceived me, I was a sinner. A dog barks because it is a dog, and I sin because I am a sinner. That is my problem.”

That is the way David perceives himself, and that leads him into the next part of his prayer, which is a record of the petitions of David. There are several parts to every prayer, but a prayer is not really a prayer unless there are petitions. The word “pray” means to petition, or to ask. Carefully consider the petitions of this magnificent prayer of confession:

“Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean. Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear the sounds of joy and gladness again, and the bones that you have broken will dance. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all of my iniquities. Cast me not away from your presence and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a spirit of holiness within me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and sustain in me a spirit that wills to do Your will.

“Then I will teach transgressors Your ways and sinners will be converted to You. Deliver me from the awful guilt of shedding innocent blood, Oh God, the God of my salvation. And my tongue will sing aloud of Your righteousness. Oh Lord, open my lips and my mouth will show forth Your praise.” (Psalm 51:7-15)

These beautiful petitions give us the heart of God’s prescription for sin. They also eloquently demonstrate the guilt that comes with the conviction of sin. These are the kinds of petitions with which we should address God when we want to solve the problem of guilt because we have grievously sinned. This is not an attempt to cover our sins. This is not a superficial bandage applied to a malignant tumor.

The word for “confess” in the Greek language is a compound word that is a combination of the Greek words for “sameness” and for “saying.” This word teaches us that to confess means to say the same thing God says about our sin, or to agree with God about our sins. When you pray these petitions, you are saying the same thing about your sin that God says about your sin. If you have the faith to trust the mercy and grace of God to respond when you pray this prayer, you will discover the greatest prescription for sin and guilt that have ever been written.

When he prays, “Purge me with hyssop,” he is referencing the practice of the priests to reserve hyssop for sins like murder for which the death penalty was prescribed. So David is telling us what he thinks of his sin again as he offers that petition.

Many of the definitions I have given for the various words David uses to describe his sin, are quoted from a book by David Swartz on this Psalm entitled, Dancing with Broken Bones. This is an extensive quote from his commentary on this Psalm:

“David loved to dance. David was very expressive in the way he worshipped. He would be considered a charismatic today because he literally danced when he worshipped God. I do not think it took too much wisdom on Nathan’s part to realize there was something wrong with David because he did not do that for a whole year. He did not go into the Tent of Worship for a whole year. You did not have to be a prophet to realize that something was wrong with David.

“But what David is saying here is, ‘Make me to hear the sounds of joy and gladness again, and the bones that you have broken will dance.’ The illness he experienced because of his guilt, made him feel as if all of his bones were broken. That is what he was saying. Broken bones. But those broken bones will dance again, he says, and you can make me hear the sounds of joy and gladness again.”

Make the observation that David mentions his guilt. “Deliver me from the awful guilt of shedding innocent blood.” That is obviously referring to the murder of Uriah. And he predicts, “My tongue will sing aloud of Your righteousness.”

Even though he sees himself as the worst sinner that ever was, the hope, and the confidence David has in the absolute assurance that God is going to forgive him, is expressed by this

prayer, which essentially says, that God never throws anybody away. Realize this. David was a king for forty years. He had been the king of Israel for only fourteen years when he sinned. He continued as the best king Israel ever had for twenty-six more years after he sinned. God did not throw him away. All these inspired petitions of David were answered.

If you will pray this prayer from your heart, God will answer these petitions for you and make this Psalm your personal prescription for sin and guilt.

When we are introduced to David, he is described as “A man after God’s own heart, who will do all the will of God.” (I Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22) People often say, “Can you believe that a man as holy as David could commit these awful sins?” I have a better question for you. Can you believe that a barbarian like David, who lived sixteen hundred years before the Huns settled Europe, could write Psalm Twenty-three? Can you believe that a man who lived a thousand years before Christ could confess his sin the way David confesses his sin in this inspired Psalm?

When you seriously study the petitions of David, and you realize he lived a thousand years before Christ, you soon realize that he is either far beyond his time in his theology, or he is speaking prophetically. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter described David as a prophet. (Acts 2:30) To demonstrate several examples of David being ahead of his time and functioning as a prophet in this prayer of confession, consider the following: When David prays, “Blot out my

transgressions,” this is literally, “Unsin my sin.” He is not asking for forgiveness. He is asking God to make his sin as if it never happened. Because Jesus died on the cross that is exactly what one of the most beautiful words in the New Testament tells us God does with our sin. Jesus taught in The Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican that anyone who will pray the sinner’s prayer will be “justified”. (Luke 18: 9-14)

The letter of Paul to the Romans is the most comprehensive statement of the Gospel in the Bible. That theological masterpiece of the Apostle Paul is really an explanation of the Good News that is wrapped in this one beautiful Gospel word. The word justified can be paraphrased: just-as-if-I-had-never sinned. In addition, the word means that we are declared righteous, as righteous as if we had never sinned. David prophetically profiles this great New Testament word in this Psalm of inspired confession.

Another example is when he prays, “Deliver me from this awful guilt of shedding innocent blood, and my tongue will sing aloud of Your righteousness,” not mine! That prophetic insight is foreshadowing what we call substitutionary atonement. We are not declared righteous by God because we are righteous. We are declared righteous (justified) because Christ died for us on His cross. God literally imparts the righteousness of His Son to us when we believe the Gospel. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to us because of the death of Christ. David saw that a thousand years before Christ even came.

When he prayed, “Create in me a clean heart, Oh God, and renew a spirit of holiness within me,” he was prophetically profiling what Jesus and the Apostles will refer to as being “born again”. He knew that he did not need a superficial spiritual repair in his heart. He knew he needed a supernatural act of creation in his heart. He is essentially praying, “Because I am a sinner in my inner man, in my heart, unless You do a miracle work of creation right there at the core of my being, I am only going to sin again and again. You simply must do a miracle in my heart.”

The answer to that petition is what Jesus told a rabbi about the new birth, and in the commentary of the Apostle Paul, which describes what Jesus meant when He told Nicodemus, “Marvel not when I tell you that you must be born again, because that which is born of the flesh is only flesh. Only that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” (John 3:6,7) The commentary of Paul describes the new birth this way. “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (II Corinthians 5:17) We are created in Christ Jesus, according to Paul. An act of creation is performed within us when we are born again. In the final analysis, the new birth is the only solution to the problem of sin and guilt.

David continues to show prophetic discernment when he prays: “The truth is, you have no pleasure in animal sacrifices. If I thought you did, I would gladly offer them. You take no delight in burnt offerings. The sacrifices that please you, I now offer to you; a

broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart. These things, Oh God, You will never despise.

“When it pleases You, do good unto Zion. Build the walls of Jerusalem. Then You will be pleased with the right kind of sacrifices, with burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings. Then they will offer bulls upon Your altar.” (Psalm 51:16-19)

The prescription for sin and guilt in the time of David was to take an animal down to the Tent of Worship and have it sacrificed for your sins. The priest would intercede for you and go through a ritual that prophetically symbolized God’s ultimate prescription for the problems of sin and guilt. David again shows that he can see far beyond His day when he essentially prays, “Lord, if I thought You were really pleased with animal sacrifices, I would drive a whole herd of animals down to that Tent of Worship. But I know that is not what You want. You are not pleased with animal sacrifices. You do not delight in these burnt offerings. What You really want, the sacrifice that pleases You, is what I now offer You; a broken spirit, a broken heart, and a contrite heart.”

The word “contrite” means, “to be exceedingly sorry for sin.” When Jesus came He spelled out the attitudes that make us part of His kingdom and show that we have His kingdom values. What is the first attitude He profiled? “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” “Poor in spirit” means, “broken in spirit.” The first beatitude could be translated, “Blessed are the broken in spirit.” (Matthew 5:3)

Do you know what brokenness is? God places great value upon brokenness. There are different kinds of brokenness. We can be broken in our spirit before God by our sin, by our failures, by sickness, tragedy, and an infinite variety of crises. It does not have to come that way but it often does. When we are broken before God we are open to anything He wants. We say to God: anything, anywhere, any time, Oh God; I am simply broken to do Your will. That is what David means when he tells us, that what God wants from us when we confess our sin, is a contrite heart and a broken spirit.

How do you feel when you sin and grieve the heart of God? David really knew God. His heart was broken because he had grieved God through his sin. He had a broken spirit and a broken heart, and he had “broken bones” to prove it. The “broken bones” were a symptom of his broken heart and broken spirit. He is essentially telling us as we listen to him confess his sin: “Oh God, that is the kind of sacrifice You want!”

David had a project that he considered to be the work of God. It was building the walls around the city of Jerusalem. Nehemiah was not the only one who did that. Nehemiah repaired them and rebuilt them. David did the same because they continuously needed attention, and because they protected the city. He felt that was something God wanted him to do and he shows discernment when he prays, “Now God, when those walls have been built, You can bless Zion.” Zion means the spiritual community. “When those walls have been built, then you will be pleased with the right kind of

sacrifices.” By application, this is suggesting that sometimes, restitution, or other practical demonstrations of what John the Baptist called; “the fruits of repentance” are in order (Matthew 3:8).

The Details and the Results

The important thing about a spiritual experience is not the details of the experience, but the results of the experience. Psalm Fifty-one records the experience of David when he confesses his terrible sins of murder and adultery. In the Thirty-second Psalm, which also relates to the confession of his sin, describes the results of the experience of his confession, contrition, and repentance.

The physical symptoms he describes so graphically obviously relate to that awful year of cover up when he thought nobody knew about his sin. In his confession, he prays that he might have the joy of his salvation restored because he wants to praise the Lord again. In his sequel to that Psalm of confession, we see God answer that petition.

“What happiness for those whose guilt has been forgiven! What joys when sins are covered over. What relief for those who have confessed their sins and God has cleared their record. There was a time when I would not admit what a sinner I was. But my dishonesty made me miserable and filled my days with frustration. All day and all night Your hand was heavy on me. My strength evaporated like water on a sunny day until I finally admitted all my sins to You and stopped trying to hide them. I said to myself, “I will

confess them to the Lord,” and You forgave me! All my guilt is gone!” (Psalm 32:1-5)

As the consequences of guilt, if you are suffering the emotional anguish, and the agonizing physical symptoms David describes in this Psalm, I challenge you again to pray Psalm Fifty-one. Then, read Psalm Thirty-two and realize what you should experience as a result of using David’s inspired words to confess your sins.

If you have prayed David’s inspired prayer of confession and you are not experiencing the blessedness of forgiveness, you need to forget what God forgets and remember what God remembers. God forgives and forgets our sins. We have God’s Word for that. He clearly tells us, “For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” (Jeremiah 31:34) However, God remembers that we are sinners. We forget we are sinners. That is at least one reason why we fall into sin again and again. We must remember that we are sinners, and forget our sins once we have confessed them.

If you will use these two Psalms to lead you into an experience of confession and repentance, you can experience the blessedness of forgiveness David so eloquently describes, as the total absence of guilt, and the absolute assurance of the forgiveness of your loving heavenly Father. When you experience what David is describing in this Psalm, which is the sequel to his prayer of confession and repentance, you will discover as David did, that God is actually pursuing you with His goodness and unconditional love.

That is what moved you to pray your prayer of confession, contrition, and repentance. His mercy will withhold from you the punishment you deserve, and His amazing, saving grace will lavish upon you marvelous blessings you do not deserve.

Conclusion

We have only been able to study God's prescriptions for a few of our problems in this booklet. Our next booklet will cover even more prescriptions, but the most important truth I wish to share with you is that no matter what your problem is, God has a divine prescription for it. My prayer is that this booklet will encourage you to study God's Word and that you will grow in your faith. Come to Him with an open heart, ask Him to give you His wisdom and show you His prescription for your problems, then prayerfully study His Word and He will be faithful to guide you into His truth that will set you free." (James 1:5, Proverbs 3:5-6, John 8:31, 32, 36)